

ART, TRUTH, EVENT
POSITIONING THE NON-REPRESENTATIONALIST PARADIGMS
OF PRAGMATIC NATURALISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL
HERMENEUTICS¹

Miklos Nyiro

University of Miskolc

nyiro.miklos@chello.hu

ABSTRACT: *The paper aims at positioning two branches of the 20th century's non-representationalist paradigms of thought, namely, pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, by discussing the pertaining views of John Dewey and Justus Buchler, and in turn, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger. The first section examines Dewey's views on practice, cognition, and truth, and in turn, Buchler's theory of judgment as an attempt at improving on Dewey's theory of experience. Since it is primarily Buchler's approach that shows considerable affinity to that of Gadamer, the second section proceeds by comparing their respective views on scientific inquiry and art. In order to map in more depth the similarities and differences between their approaches, a short historical genealogy of their versions of non-representationalism follows, as well as a discussion of the two pivotal points of such a genealogy, namely, Heidegger's idea of ontological difference and the Buchlerian notion of nature. These considerations lead to different conceptions of spatio-temporal relations as well as to different senses of the notion of "event." For that reason, the third section begins with a short discussion of a specific linguistic phenomenon, namely, the middle voice, by means of which some basic features of hermeneutic philosophy pertaining to the mentioned notions are to be highlighted. The paper concludes with summing up the common and different traits of pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, especially with respect to the issues of truth, justification, event, and interpretation.*

I. Introduction

In this paper I consider two trends within a more comprehensive orientation in the Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophical movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Namely, I concentrate on two branches of what I call here non-representationalist paradigms of thought, namely, on pragmatic naturalism, and philosophical hermeneutics. In particular, I discuss the views of several representatives of these schools, those

of John Dewey, Justus Buchler, and in turn, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Martin Heidegger. My aim is to position their approaches in the light of one another, and that can be done most readily along the issues of art, truth, and event.

This way of posing my topic has been inspired by John Ryder's recently published volume (2013) titled *The Things in Heaven and Earth: An Essay in Pragmatic Naturalism*. In this book Ryder develops the comprehensive idea as well as the metaphysical and epistemological implications of a contemporary version of pragmatic naturalism—a philosophical stance that reconciles, among others, pragmatist constructivism with naturalist objectivism—and he also demonstrates the explanatory power and fruitfulness of such an approach when applied to issues pertaining to “social experience,” namely, topics related to democracy, national and international politics, and education. Although Ryder explicates the proposed pragmatic naturalist standpoint mostly by referring to more or less contemporary issues and debates in philosophy, his endeavor is primarily informed by the views of two major representatives of The Columbia School Naturalism.² It is Justus Buchler's metaphysics of natural complexes and his thoroughly relational notion of nature that inspire most the metaphysical and epistemological sides of the version of pragmatist naturalism Ryder advocates, and it is John Dewey's thick conception of democracy that guides—beside the epistemological insights gained from Buchlerian naturalism—the author's approach to diverse aspects of social experience.

Nevertheless, the views of these two major philosophical heroes of Ryder's volume clash on one point with one another according to the author's presentation, and that point concerns above all the cognitive import of art, and by implication the issue of truth as event – two topics

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² The four major figures of Columbia School Naturalism were Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, John Dewey, John Herman Randall, Jr., and Justus Buchler.

which, in turn, pertain to the very heart of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, namely, to the ontology of art developed in *Truth and Method*. Dewey figures here as having much more comprehensive notions of knowledge, truth, and human interaction with the world in general, than those addressed in most of the more recent—or, for that matter, more traditional—epistemologies, notions broad enough for comprehending the whole spectrum of human experience. Yet, Ryder also points to several aspects of his thought which are less satisfactory, especially when at stake is that truth which artworks are able to convey. In turn, Buchler is presented as having developed a theory of judgment which successfully improves on Dewey's conception of experience, in such a way that it is able to do justice to the cognitive dimension of art, among others. Although in his discussion of the issue of art and knowledge the author does not refer to Gadamer and his ontology of art, it is striking just in how many important respects the views he presents—following Buchler—converge with those of Gadamer, although the remaining crucial differences are not to be overlooked, either.

Thus, one of my primary interests in this paper is to map, compare, confront with one another, and position the main features of these approaches, in particular the various ways they conceive the basic manner in which humans comport themselves toward their external world, and thereby achieve meaning in their life. This concerns first and foremost an issue regarding to which one can observe a clear affinity between the overall philosophical outlooks of the investigated approaches, indeed, a common feature of pragmatism in general, and philosophical hermeneutics. Namely, both attempt to overcome the traditional representationalist paradigms of conceiving the basic nature of the relation between humans and their environing world. As opposed to the strict line, of Cartesian origin, drawn between the subject and its objective world—which is to be bridged again via methodological means—both of these

philosophical trends entertain a more elementary and much more comprehensive idea of how humans relate to the world. Such a non-representationalist orientation is carried out in both camps by appealing to the primacy of—although diversely conceived, nevertheless basic notions of—practice, over against the traditional representationalist privileging of methodologically secured theoretical world-comportment. Thereby they are also compelled to offer newly construed accounts of knowledge and truth, as in fact they do.

All these appoint the main issues I'll concentrate on. First I examine one-by-one the pertaining views of the two discussed representatives of The Columbia School Naturalism, namely, Dewey and Buchler. Here I'll address in particular their respective conceptions of interaction, cognition, and truth, all of them obviously being informed by their respective notions of practice. Since it is primarily Buchler's approach that shows considerable affinity to that of Gadamer, I proceed by sketching and comparing their respective views on scientific inquiry and art. Furthermore, in order to map in more depth the similarities and differences between the mentioned two versions of pragmatic naturalism, on the one hand, and the hermeneutic philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer, on the other, I offer a short historical genealogy of their non-representationalist paradigms of thought. Having done so, I concentrate on the two pivotal points on which these philosophical stances seem to converge with, and at the same time diverge from, one another, namely, on the pragmatist notion of nature, and in turn, on the fundamental Heideggerian concept—followed also by Gadamer—of the so called ontological difference. Since the pertaining considerations will lead us to different conceptions of spatio-temporal relations as well as to some sense of the notion of "event", as a next step I insert a short discussion of a specific linguistic phenomenon, namely, the middle voice, by means of which some basic features of hermeneutic philosophy pertaining to the mentioned notions, and thereby its specificity within the non-

representationalist paradigms, are to be highlighted. Finally, I conclude by focusing on and summing up the common and different traits of pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, especially with respect to the rather epistemological issues implied by them.

The structure of the paper is the following, accordingly:

I. Introduction

II. The Pragmatic Naturalism of Dewey and Buchler

II.1. Dewey on Practice, Cognition, and Truth

II.2. Buchler's Theory of Judgment. An Attempt at Improving Dewey's Theory of Experience

III. Positioning Pragmatic Naturalism and Philosophical Hermeneutics

III.1. Positioning Buchlerian Naturalism and Gadamerian Hermeneutics along the Issues of Scientific Inquiry and Art

III.2. Overcoming Modern Subjectivism. A Genealogy of the Discussed Non-representationalist Paradigms of Thought

III.3. Heidegger's Idea of Ontological Difference and the Buchlerian Notion of Nature

IV. Truth and Event

IV.1. Medial Events, Middle Voice, and Philosophical Hermeneutics

IV.2. Epistemological Consequences. Truth, Justification, Event, Interpretation

II. The Pragmatic Naturalism of Dewey and Buchler

II.1. Dewey on Practice, Cognition, and Truth

As it is well known, Dewey's pragmatism departs from the long-standing Western tradition of privileging theory over against practice, and he does so by developing a non-dualistic account of experience, and of nature as it is experienced. His departure concerned both basic historical forms of privileging theory, namely, the high esteem for the theoretical way of life (originating in ancient Greece), and the modern representationalist view of the relation between cognition and world (originating primarily from Descartes). As an illustration of Dewey's non-representationalist agenda I quote only one short passage, from 1908:

"The issue is no longer an ideally necessary but actually impossible copying, *versus* an improper but unavoidable modification of reality through organic inhibitions and stimulations, but it is the right, the economical, the effective, ... the useful and satisfactory reaction *versus* the wasteful, the enslaving, the misleading, and the confusing reaction" (Dewey 1908a, 134).

This orientation entails a shift away from the primacy of theory within the theory-practice opposition, to the alternative between good or less satisfactory actions and reactions. By this move theory becomes understood as a particular practice, namely, a tool in the service of action within an overall primacy of practice.

The primacy of practice has been foreshadowed in the history of philosophy at least from Kant's so called anthropological turn onward, who discerned the real role of reason in its being constitutive of morality, rather than cognition. In fact, such a primacy became a recurring topic in the form, e.g., of Fichte's concept of "I" in which being and acting overlap one another; or in the views of Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, according to which being is ultimately willing; or in Marx notion of production, etc. It is peculiar to Dewey's metaphysics, however, that practice for him is to be

understood as “the practical machinery for bringing about adaptation of the environment to the life requirements of the organism” (ibid., 133), in short, as the functioning of organic human life. In such a context, everything receives its determination through the function it has, namely, the role it plays in the overall operation of the human organism.

Accordingly, cognition for Dewey is itself an organic process, fully derivative of practice:

“[...] the appropriate subject-matter of awareness [i.e., cognition] is not reality at large, a metaphysical heaven to be mimeographed at many removes upon a badly constructed mental carbon paper which yields at best only fragmentary, blurred, and erroneous copies. Its proper and legitimate object is that relationship of organism and environment in which functioning is most amply and effectively attained; or by which, in case of obstruction and consequent needed experimentation, its later eventual free course is most facilitated” (ibid., 136).

The function of cognition is to help overcome whatever obstacle arises in the ongoing flow of precognitive, practical activity (see also Blattner 2000, 232-34). Ideas are, similarly, to be regarded as what their functions are, namely, they are intentions to get practical organic activity back under way in some definite fashion, they are plans or rules for action. As Dewey puts it: “ideas are essentially intentions (plans and methods), and [...] what they, as ideas, ultimately intend is *prospective*—certain changes in prior existing things” (1908b, 99). The purpose of knowing is to secure the undisturbed flow of practical life, and for that end, to assist the controlling of the environment. The truth or falsity of a particular idea or a unit of knowledge is to be determined according to its success or failure at fulfilling *that* function. A true idea is an operational one: one that works, one that is a solution to a problem, one that “corresponds,” that is, answers—like a key to the conditions set by a lock—to the functional demands. Success in solving that problem which gave rise to the idea of how to solve it, makes that idea warranted assertable, and in that sense true.

As Ryder points it out in his volume, Dewey’s understanding of what counts as knowledge and truth is much more comprehensive than most approaches to that issue developed in more recent epistemologies, analytic or otherwise. The fact that cognition is treated by Dewey as a functional element of a general, creative process of evolving experience seems to be a conception broad enough for comprehending the whole spectrum of the various ways in which humans comport themselves to the world. Yet, there are less satisfactory aspects of Dewey’s approach, too, which may become explicit and especially pressing with regard to the question of the cognitive import of art—and Ryder does not fail to point them out. He enumerates two of the possible obstacles to “building into Dewey’s sense of logic the cognitive dimension of art” (2013, 7/15).³ The first is that for Dewey science remained the paradigmatic instance of knowledge, and even if he conceived scientific inquiry in broad, non-representational terms, “it is not clear,” Ryder writes, “that it can accommodate knowledge that results from query of the sort that characterizes the arts” (ibid.). Furthermore, insofar as Dewey equates true knowledge with warranted assertability, to that extent he tends to privilege knowledge in the form of propositional truth. But such a conception is “likely to be too restrictive to handle cognition in the arts, simply because the arts are not for the most part about assertions, warranted or otherwise” (Ryder, ibid.).

In sum, although Dewey redefined the whole epistemological issue of cognition and, indeed, the very relation between humans and their environment in general in an anti-Cartesian and non-representationalist manner, namely, in terms of the factual practice of organic human life (rather than sheer thought), he nevertheless tended to think along the model of scientific inquiry and its propositional truth. And even if

³ I refer to Ryder’s volume by the formula: chapter number / page number *within that chapter*, for I have access only to a chapter by chapter division of the book.

he recognized the warrant of such a truth in its practical, operational, functional success, the enumerated doubts pertaining to these and similar issues are reasons good enough for exploring the ways and possibilities in which Dewey's conception of experience and interaction may be improved.

II.2. Buchler's Theory of Judgment. An Attempt at Improving Dewey's Theory of Experience

With that purpose in mind, Ryder turns to Justus Buchler's pertaining considerations, who was explicit on the point that Dewey's tendency to think of knowledge in terms of inquiry was a major shortcoming of his conception of experience in general. Buchler developed his theory of judgment and his resulting concept of query as an attempt to correct just that Deweyan tendency and, indeed, the traditional view of knowledge prevailing in it, namely, knowledge understood as the result of inquiry. The aim of Buchler's approach is to recognize and acknowledge the *various* ways in which humans interact with, and thereby may learn about, their environment. Whenever some kind of selection governs an interaction, a selection in the sense of "a more or less systematic organization or manipulation of complexes toward some end or [...] result" (Ryder 2013, 7/22), such an interaction is a judgment according to Buchler. Judgments, then, are purposeful orderings of the complexes that surround us, and they are classifiable in three basic groups: they are either assertive, or exhibitive, or else, active judgments.

So called assertive judgments are generally propositional statements, and they are evaluable regarding their truth-value. It is noteworthy that assertive judgments need not necessarily be linguistic (Ryder's example here is a mathematical equation). And, of course, the sheer fact that an utterance is linguistic does not already render it assertive—consider e.g. a linguistic performance, a recitation, which is a case of exhibitive judgments. As such, it does not so much state something factually true

or false, but rather reveals some novelty about its subject matter, as works of art generally do. The evaluation of exhibitive judgments differs from how we evaluate assertive judgments, namely, according to their (referential) truth-value. For an exhibitive judgment is rather suggestive and evocative, and it is evaluable "for example by the deeper understanding and appreciation it enables or by the expanded possibilities it reveals," Ryder explains (*ibid.*, 7/18). Finally, so called active judgments manipulate their surroundings by acting upon them, by doing something with them to some effect. A typical case of assertive judgments is a declarative sentence; that of exhibitive judgments is any work of art; and an activity of producing something or just doing something (not assertive or exhibitive) falls in the category of active judgments.⁴

These categories of judgment are only ideally distinguishable in a clear cut manner, practically they often overlap one another. Nevertheless, all of them may yield some kind of knowledge: they may highlight, explore, or reveal in one way or other the complexes they are to judge. Furthermore, when judgments of any kind are developed in some methodic or systematic way, they become sharpened and interrogative procedures, that is, instances of query. Insofar as such interrogative procedures may yield real knowledge, the results of query of any of the enumerated kinds are to be regarded as of cognitive value. The obvious aim of Buchler's theory of judgments and his concept of query, in which such a theory culminates, is to make room for a notion of cognition wider than that implied by scientific inquiry (which is a specific form of query, one properly to be associated with assertive judgment). Science, art, but

⁴ It may be of some interest to note that Buchler's classification coincides to a remarkable extent with the pertaining division introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey (1927). Within the so called objectifications of life (*Lebensausdrücke*) Dilthey differentiated between the following three groups: concepts, judgments, patterns of thought; acts or actions; and expressions of life-experience (*Erlebnisausdrücke*).

also perfecting of any kind of activity—all of these are forms of query for Buchler.

The claim that knowledge results from such a comprehensive notion of query, which in turn is not exhaustible by any procedure of inquiry associated with assertive judgment or propositional truth, demands of course that the concept of truth be broad enough to cover non-propositional forms of truth. Ryder in fact develops a pluralistic notion of truth claiming that:

“[...] truth itself has a multiple meaning [...] In some cases [...] truth is a matter of accurate depiction or reflection, in others it is a matter of insightful evocation, and in still others it has to do with having an impact on us. All of these and no doubt other senses of truth have in common the fact that they enable us to carry on, to move on to the next proposition, belief, insight, or experience” (ibid., 7/27).

In order to broaden, accordingly, Dewey’s definition of truth as warranted assertability, Ryder introduces the notion of truth as “warranted actionability,’ whatever its source and in whatever orders of our experience it is relevant” (ibid.). It must be stressed, furthermore, that the author emphasizes here the fact that “truth has something to do with the moving forward” and that it has a verbal sense such as depicting, enabling, engendering something, etc., rather than a static sense of reflecting some state of affairs (ibid., 7/26-7). It is especially this verbal sense of truth which I’d like to address below, comparing it with a similar notion in the context of hermeneutic philosophy (part IV.). Before that, however, I’ll try to position the two discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought in several different respects.

III. Positioning Pragmatic Naturalism and Philosophical Hermeneutics

III.1. Positioning Buchlerian Naturalism and Gadamerian Hermeneutics along the Issues of Scientific Inquiry and Art

On this point it is quite a natural step to turn to that philosopher, namely, to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who devoted most of his energies to the philosophical justification of both the cognitive import of art and the scientific value and dignity of the humanities.⁵ On a point of his volume Ryder makes the following suggestion: “epistemology generally would do well to re-examine its principles with the cognitive capacity of art in mind” (2013, 7/25). In fact, this is almost exactly the task we find carried out in Gadamer’s magnum opus, except that—for reasons to be explained later on—his investigation takes the form of ontology, rather than epistemology.⁶ If we now begin to compare the kind of Buchlerian pragmatist naturalism Ryder advocates with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, we find the first important similarity, accordingly, in their very orientation. Namely, both of these philosophical approaches are motivated by the task of legitimizing forms of cognition beyond that implied by scientific inquiry.

⁵ The fact that Gadamer has been preoccupied by these themes is immediately reflected in the very titles of the first two (out of three) parts of his *magnum opus*: “Part I. The question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art,” and “Part II. The extension of the question of truth to understanding in the human sciences.”

⁶ Ryder writes: “Imagine how differently naturalist epistemology might have developed had it begun with the [...] reasonable assumption that because art results in understandings and insights that we have every reason to count as knowledge, we may therefore regard the knowledge generated by art as among the paradigmatic instances of knowledge. That this has not occurred is clear from the fact that one is hard pressed even to find the word ‘art’ in the indexes of major epistemological studies” (ibid., 7/24). Yet, in Gadamer’s case experience of art is the paradigmatic instance of knowledge drawn from any kind of non-methodical, hermeneutic experience.

Attacks on objectifying knowledge have been launched on the Continent most explicitly perhaps by Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre. Husserl regarded objectivism as untenable within the phenomenological framework of the immanency of intentional consciousness, insofar as objectivism implies the “transcendent moment” of adequacy to a mind-independent reality and as such it is to be “bracketed” in the process of so called phenomenological reduction. In turn, Heidegger and Sartre criticized objectivism mainly as an escape from the existential concern for authenticity. In *Truth and Method*, however, Gadamer advocates a more relaxed position toward objectifying knowledge—similar to that reflected in Buchler’s theory of judgment—insofar as he defends the truth claim of hermeneutic query beyond—and not instead of—that acquired methodologically. This, then, is a second similarity between the discussed two positions. Gadamer, no less than the Buchlerian version of naturalism, does acknowledge a certain validity of scientific knowledge. What he refuses, though, is the sciences’ hegemonic claim that methodologically secured and in that sense objective knowledge would be the only, or even primary, form of truth. It is for that reason that in his magnum opus Gadamer aims at exploring the whole breadth of the so called “hermeneutic phenomenon” (namely, experience of art; experience of history—especially, but not exclusively—in the humanities; and linguistic world-experience in general, also in its philosophical refinement), defends the peculiar truth claim of such kinds of hermeneutical experience, and highlights their role within the *Bildung* of individual and communal life.⁷

⁷ It is striking how similar the setting, the terms, and the description of the significance of the arts and the humanities offered by Ryder are: “Modernism has emphasized objectivity to such an extent that it has obscured the many respects in which people in fact do create our lives, our societies, and most importantly the respects in which our lives have meaning. This is done implicitly in daily life. More formally, it is done through the arts and the humanities, more than anywhere else. Literature, music, the visual arts, the performing arts, history, and even philosophy [...] have one important

Nevertheless, Buchler and Gadamer apparently conceive the defining characteristics of scientific inquiry in somewhat different terms, and this seems to inform to a considerable extent the rest of their theories. For Buchler, the peculiarity of science is that it utilizes the human capacity for producing assertive, propositionally fixed judgments. In turn, the peculiarity of science for Gadamer is that it aims at producing objectifying, de-contextualized knowledge through methodological rigor.⁸ For Gadamer, the opposition between scientific and other kinds of cognition rests on the difference between practices that are methodologically secured and those interpretive ones which—for a number of reasons discussed below, the so called hermeneutic circularity being only one of them—escape methodology; whereas for Buchler the corresponding opposition between assertive and the other two kinds of

trait in common. They all select aspects of their subject matter and relate them in new ways, whereby they generate, and reveal to an audience, new relationships, new meanings, and new experiences. These activities are all creative of our world precisely in that they bring to our attention ways of seeing and thinking that had not been available before. Furthermore, in doing so they are not simply revealing something that has all along been hidden, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, they are creating new properties of the world, novel characteristics of the subjects they study and of the lives of those of us who interact with them, as either observers or participants” (2013, 5/11).

⁸ For sake of clarity, it is advisable to differentiate between the possible meanings of the term “objective.” In its strongest sense “objective” refers to either the notion of reality-in-itself, or the ideal case of knowledge representing such reality-in-itself, apart from any subjective moment within such knowledge. In turn, objective knowledge in the Kantian sense pertains to the world of phenomena and obtains its objective validity—not so much from mind-independent reality, but rather—from the fact that each and every rational subject has the same a-historical a priori constitution of consciousness the proper use of which may produce knowledge valid for all. Today, however, when the notion of such an a-historic structure of consciousness, as well as the possibility of having access to reality as it is in itself, are mostly regarded as untenable, the term “objective” is for the most part taken in a more realistic sense, one that typically refers to results of scientific, methodically secured procedures (such as e.g. an experiment) designed to exclude subjective and other equivocal moments from the inquiry.

judgment rests on the difference between propositional and non-propositional embodiments of judgment, all of them being capable of methodical or systematical refinement.

There are at least two important aspects to this apparent difference. The first is that according to Gadamer the assertive judgments typically produced in the sciences, and philosophy influenced by the sciences, feed on a nominalist grasp of language, namely, language utilized as a system of signs rather than approached as a speculative-mirroring medium of ontologically constitutive reality. Furthermore, methodology and nominalist utilization of language go hand in hand, insofar as methodical procedures aim precisely at excluding—beyond all the subjective factors—linguistic equivocity inherent in non-terminological language usage. To that extent, Gadamer’s distinction between methodological and hermeneutic practices seems also to imply or comprehend the Buchlerian distinction between assertive and other kinds of judgments: methodological practices aim at producing propositional truths, whereas hermeneutic practices may lead to some understanding which is expressible in non-propositional language, exhibitiv artworks, or actions, which nevertheless reflect some truth. But Gadamer’s distinction does not only seem to comprehend Buchler’s insights in this respect, it seems to point beyond the latter—and that concerns the second aspect to be highlighted here.

Namely, the human capacities for presenting forms of cognition beyond that implied by scientific inquiry are certain non-assertive types of judgment for Buchler, whereas it is understanding for Gadamer. Although there certainly are discernible overlaps between the two notions, of utmost importance here for us are the differences between them. In his sketch of the history of the concept of judgment Gadamer traces it back, first, to the humanist notion of *sensus communis* (not to be equated with Aristotle’s similarly termed concept

developed in *De Anima!*), and in a second step, to the Greek notion of *phronesis*, the Aristotelian elaboration of which offers the very model for Gadamer in articulating his notion of understanding. All these are important here for two reasons. The first is that by means of such a genealogy Gadamer immediately situates the whole of his philosophical approach in the humanist tradition, and this is reflected in the fact that the “organ” of hermeneutic query—that which governs it—is not so much any systematic procedure, but rather, a “universal and common sense” (*sensus communis*). Such a “sense” is not a psychological talent, not something we may or may not have by nature. It is something one may acquire exclusively through *Bildung* (see the chapter on *Bildung* in Gadamer 2004, esp. 15-17). Although such a *sensus communis* includes in itself the capacity of judgment, it points beyond the latter, insofar as it is a disciplined “sense” acquirable only in the process, and as a result, of having become *gebildet*. To that extent, there seems to be a tension on this point between Buchler’s and Gadamer’s views. For the methodic or systematic sharpening of judgment—be it assertive, exhibitiv, or active—is part and parcel of Buchler’s notion of query. As opposed to that, the *sensus communis* governing hermeneutic practice cannot, by any means, be methodized, systematized, let alone being formalized.

The fact that hermeneutic practice resists methodology is also underlined by another, even more decisive aspects, and that is the second lesson to be drawn here from Gadamer’s mentioned genealogy. This concerns the very nature and constitutive moments of understanding, the core concept in hermeneutics which refers to the elemental mode of our being open for whatever is. Nevertheless, I’ll address here several issues regarding the treatment of art in the presently discussed authors, primarily because it is the experience of art—as the paradigm case of hermeneutic experience in general—on which the peculiarities of Gadamer’s ontological conception of understanding can most readily be demonstrated.

As mentioned earlier, Gadamer takes the cognitive significance and truth claim of art for granted, just like Buchler and Ryder do. He would probably subscribe to Buchler's claim that art can most readily be associated with a kind of exhibitiv judgment, too. For Gadamer's central notion for describing "the mode of being of the work of art," that is, what art "does" or is able to achieve, is *Darstellung*, and this concept implies "exhibiting" or "displaying," as well as "presentation" (the term with which *Darstellung* is translated in the English edition of *Truth and Method*). This suggests, already on the level of terminology, a certain proximity of the pertaining views of these authors.

Now, in Dewey's notion of continuously evolving experience there seems to be no clear distinction between making an artifact and creating a work of art. In turn, Buchler's theory of judgment does make room for such a distinction, insofar as creating artworks is a matter of exhibitiv judgment, whereas making artifacts results from a form of active judgment. Nevertheless Gadamer, who in this regard follows the Greek distinction between *techné* and *poiesis*, not only draws the distinction between "making" and "creating," but he does so by referring to a peculiar ontological process. For it is part of the essence of making or producing something that there is a plan (based on an idea of the product) available in advance, and the task is to realize it—which can be done repeatedly. As opposed to that, it is an essential characteristic of artistic creation that it cannot in a strict sense be reproduced. This fact points to an essential feature of works of art, namely, that every truly artistic creation is as much the outcome of an uncontrollable event, of a unique and unrepeatable event of "succeeding," as it is the result of an effort on the artist's part. With this, a notion of event constitutive in the creation of artworks comes to the fore.

Furthermore, in a chapter of his volume titled "Making Sense of World Making: Creativity and Objectivity in Nature" Ryder makes the point that "creativity and

objectivity [...] stand in a symbiotic relation with each other. Objectivity provides the framework in which creativity occurs, and creativity is the developmental process of the world" (2013, 5/13). This amounts to conceiving the basic relation between nature and art in a very similar way as that emphasized by Gadamer. For in that respect, too, Gadamer follows ancient Greek insights according to which there is a sense of continuity between art and nature, namely, art having its place where nature left room for its further perfection. Gadamer underlines such continuity by maintaining that the form of motion which prevails in nature and the verbal sense of the "being" of artworks as they are experienced are the selfsame. Both of them take place in the form of play (*Spiel*), namely, as "self-presentation (*Selbst-Darstellung*) [which] is the true nature of play" (Gadamer 2004, 115). It is for that reason that nature has for long been regarded as the model for conceiving the essence of art:

"[...] the being of the work of art is connected with the medial sense of play (*Spiel*: also, game and drama). Inasmuch as nature is without purpose and intention, just as it is without exertion, it is a constantly self-renewing play, and can therefore appear as a model for art." "[...] self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature" (Gadamer 2004, 105, 108, respectively).

However, for Gadamer the mentioned continuity prevails not merely between art and nature, but indeed, between any mimetic representation and its "original," what it represents. And such continuity is of primary importance for showing the cognitive dimension of art. For art is not to be regarded, as it became customary at least from Schiller onward, as a matter of "beautiful semblance," that is, the opposite of reality. On the contrary: artistic presentation has an essential, ontologically constitutive relation to that what it exhibits. Gadamer shows that for example in the case of pictures which differ from sheer copies precisely in virtue of their standing in such an essential relation to their originals. But more generally, his point is that any

case of mimetic representation is not only an act of highlighting the essential features of that which is being mimetically presented, but such an act of highlighting is made possible by an emanation-like event that guides the process in which one tries to capture the original. Mimetic representation is that *of* the original—in the sense of both subjective and objective genitive, but with a greater emphasis on the latter—it is grounded in a prevailing ontological relation between the representation and what it represents:

“The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original.” “The work of art is conceived as an event of being (*Seinsvorgang*) [...] Its being related to the original is so far from lessening its ontological autonomy that, on the contrary, I had to speak [...] of an increase of being” (Gadamer 2004, 135, 145, respectively).

As we can see, the concept of *Darstellung* is an overarching notion for Gadamer, one that binds together the concepts of art, play (as well as the spectator, who “despite the distance [...] still belongs to play”), but eventually also the concepts of word, and furthermore, speculative language, and Being (namely, the “speculative character of being” as “self-presentation,” where self-presentation “and being-understood belong together”—Gadamer 2004, 115, 427, respectively):

“Obviously it is not peculiar to the work of art that it has its being in its presentation, nor is it a peculiarity of the being of history that it is to be understood in its significance. Self-presentation and being-understood belong together not only in that the one passes into the other [...]; speculative language, distinguishing itself from itself, presenting itself, language that expresses meaning is not only art and history but everything insofar as it can be understood. The speculative character of being that is the ground of hermeneutics has the same universality as do reason and language” (Gadamer 2004, 427).

What is important here for us is that *Darstellung*, especially in its primary sense of *Selbst-Darstellung*, is an utter ontological notion for Gadamer, one that refers to an anonymous process of the emanation-like self-

presentation of Being, a temporal fulfillment in which we are faced with, and our understanding may be enlightened by, whatever presents itself for us. What is primarily “exhibitive” in the context of philosophical hermeneutics is not merely one of the forms of human judgment, as it is the case in Buchlerian pragmatic naturalism, but rather, it is the achievement or fulfillment (*Vollzug*) of something supra-individual, and even—partly—supra-human.

However, the most important question regarding such a result is perhaps this: *How are we to make a somewhat clearer sense of such an opaque, for many even unintelligible, notion, namely, of something like a non-human quasi-agency?* It is this question that leads us, first, to the task of presenting a short genealogy of the discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought; second, to an analyses of the two key notions of these paradigms; and third, to the discussion of a peculiar linguistic phenomenon—the so called middle voice—which is to shed some light on the ontological notion of “event.”

III.2. Overcoming Modern Subjectivism. A Genealogy of the Discussed Non-representationalist Paradigms of Thought

In order to see more specifically the points on which the views of the discussed thinkers seem essentially to converge and/or diverge, I begin with sketching a short genealogy of their non-representationalist paradigms of thought. By the term “non-representationalism” I refer to philosophical approaches which conceive the relation between cognition and world in other than the representational terms of accurate mirroring or reflecting.⁹ In fact, many of the 19th and 20th centuries’

⁹ It is worth of note, however, that such non-representationalist approaches need not at the same time to deny or exclude the possibility that certain world-compartments of ours are able to represent in some sense our environing world. Yet, they certainly do not regard the cognitive acquisition of “objective”

main philosophical initiatives struggled with representationalist conceptions of knowledge, as well as with the formalism and self-referentiality inherent in the modern notion of subjectivity underlying them.¹⁰ The latter notion was introduced by Descartes' *cogito me cogitare* (subject as a reflective, thinking substance), and it was retained also in Kant's concept of a transcendental synthesis of apperception. Nevertheless, if the roots of representationalism are primarily to be associated with the rationalist and empiricist traditions, than the deepest roots of non-representationalism can be found, I would argue, in Kantian transcendental idealism. For according to the so called Copernican revolution "objectivity" is constituted, at least regarding all the aesthetic and rational elements of its form, by subjectivity; and the concomitant results are, on the one hand, that reason has only a regulative role in cognition, whereas its true constitutive role is to be found in guiding moral action, and on the other hand, that a basic distinction must be drawn between things-in-themselves and the way they appear for us, i.e. what is noumenal and what is phenomenal. These results amount to rendering untenable not only the classical notion of metaphysics—as an *a priori* discipline dealing with basic constituents of the mind-independent reality—but also the notion according to which what we can know only *a posteriori*, via rational representations of our empirical impressions about the things-in-themselves, is able adequately to mirror or reflect the things as they are in themselves.¹¹ In short, the Kantian non-

representationalist impulse can be found in his idealist principle of the transcendental "identity of subject and object," or else, his idealist constructivism, regarding cognition and knowledge.

Such a (transcendental) idealism found its continuation on the Continent in various trends, among them the two traditions important here for us, namely, German Idealism, and Husserlian phenomenology of consciousness. The static, a-temporal formalism—but not the ultimate self-referentiality—inherent in Kantian subjectivity has been overcome especially by Hegel's notion of a historically unfolding spirit, and in particular his concept of self-consciousness relying on material work, and in turn, also by Husserl's investigation into the temporal, process-like unfolding of the Kantian transcendental apperception, the process in which transcendental subjectivity constitutes pure consciousness through its intentional acts. Nevertheless, both of these approaches explored a temporal unfolding and self-constitution of some kind of subjectivity—be it an absolute, or a transcendental one, respectively.

The classical pragmatists reached also back to Kantian transcendentalism, but also to Hegelian historicism. They recognized the importance of the notion—of Hegelian origin—that the world-constitutive role of the subject should be extended to historically transformable categories instead of a-historical *a priori* structures of cognition. In that regard they referred primarily to human practices involved in ethically and politically structured networks of human needs and interests, and thereby they explicitly rejected the subject-centered conceptions of knowledge as mere reflection. This is the case in Dewey's approach, too, in which Hegelian historicity and Darwinian naturalism merged with one another, issuing in his all-encompassing concept of a more or less continuous organic process of evolving

representations of the world as the primary form of the relation between humans and their environment.

¹⁰ In this regard, consider e.g. Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Freud in the 19th century, and in turn, e.g. existentialism, versions of Marxism, (post-)structuralism, philosophical hermeneutics, deconstruction, and other French phenomenological approaches in 20th century Continental thought, and the entire tradition of American pragmatism and naturalism.

¹¹ It can be contested whether such phenomenal *a posteriori* representations still accurately reflect portions of mind independent reality, or they are to be regarded as belonging entirely to an other order than that of mind

independent reality. In any case, the Kantian Copernican turn points out basic difficulties in the idea of representationalism.

experience and nature, a process in which all kinds of traditional dualisms—such as subject and object, or nature and spirit, etc.—dissolve. In other words, non-representationalism takes on a naturalist outlook modeled on the paradigm of organic life processes in Dewey's case—one that has little to do with the mathematized concept of nature in modern sciences—and Buchler shares this naturalist impulse as we'll soon see in more detail, even if in very different, non-biologistic, and much broader terms.

Now, the affinity between these pragmatist traditions and Continental hermeneutic philosophies is largely due not only to their respective departure from modern Cartesian subjectivism, but also from the traditional Western emphasis on essences and substances. Pragmatism represents a "relational" way of thinking, one in which essence is being redefined and dissolved in terms of relations. On the Continent, Husserl's work on intentionality—the correlation of consciousness and its cognized "objects," i.e. the phenomena—has served as a decisive impetus for later developments toward a critical confrontation with, and ultimately temporalization of, classical substance-metaphysics. This was primarily achieved by Heidegger's so called "destruction" of the traditional presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) ontology.

Perhaps the chief novelty in the early Heidegger's thinking is that he gave an ontological—and historicist—turn to Husserlian phenomenology. *Being and Time* carries out such an ontological turn by an investigation that aims at uncovering the meaning of the Being of entities—and ultimately the meaning of Being as such—, and also by the fact that it introduces "understanding" as the ontologically basic constitutive element of the very Being of human *Dasein*. That turn is a historicist one at the same time, inasmuch as Heidegger invests the notion of Being with a temporal, verbal sense, and also because understanding proves to be finite, always already historically-culturally determined, and event-like. The proper subject matter

of such a phenomenological ontology is, then, the meaning of Being—always to be understood as the Being of something: of a certain kind of being, or the sum of beings—where Being is not itself an entity but "what shows itself in itself" (for us). Phenomenological ontology so conceived is "hermeneutic," furthermore, because "what shows itself in itself" for us can only be approached under certain interpretative-hermeneutic conditions, due to our tendency to be preoccupied by beings, rather than by the meaning of their Being. The central idea here, then, is that Being is conceived as a phenomenal and temporal event of self-showing, as opposed to the notion of "Being" understood as the "existence" or presence of some substance or present-at-hand entity. Heidegger captures this idea in his famous notion of "ontological difference." In turn, it is this Heideggerian idea and that of his phenomenological-hermeneutic ontology—but not his fundamental-ontological question of Being as such—that Gadamer follows in his elaborations of the mode of Being of art, or that of history, language, etc.

As the sketched genealogy of the discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought shows, they derive from the idealist and historicist impulses of Classical German Philosophy, and divide into naturalist and non-naturalist-phenomenological branches, regarding which the pivotal points are the pragmatist conceptions of nature and the Heideggerian concept of ontological difference. Now we turn to the exploration of these two issues, contrasting Heidegger's basic concept primarily with the kind naturalism Buchler advocates, for the simple reason that the latter is much more broadly conceived than Dewey's notion of nature, the latter being articulated solely in terms of organic human interactions.

III.3. Heidegger's Idea of Ontological Difference and the Buchlerian Notion of Nature

In this part I proceed by characterizing the central notions of these two thinkers one after the other, and having done so, by relating them along certain common and divergent aspects of them.

Husserl's attack on naturalistic philosophy rests on a notion of nature according to which it is but the sum of the causal relations between entities in space and time (Husserl 1965, 79-122). Naturalism so conceived is unacceptable for Husserl within philosophy, because philosophy as a rigorous science must concern itself with "evidences"—phenomenologically reduced, final intuitions of meaning—attainable within the immanency of pure consciousness, and the basic feature of consciousness is intentionality. Intentionality and causality are the fundamental defining characteristics of two different domains of beings for Husserl, consciousness and nature, respectively, and it is the phenomenological investigation of the constitution of meaning in pure consciousness which is to ground any other sciences, among them the sciences of nature.

In turn, Heidegger points to the fact that in drawing such a distinction between consciousness and nature Husserl relies on a traditional distinction, one that is not justified by phenomenological insight. Instead of relying on inherited concepts taken over uncritically, one must phenomenologically inquire into the peculiar meaning that the very Being of different domains of beings in each case has for us, that is, into the modes in which the fact that such regions of beings "are" is in each case meaningful for us. In such questioning, the Husserlian notions of consciousness and its intentionality are replaced by Heidegger with the rather ontological notions of *Dasein* and its constitutive self-transcendence (its "openness"). This way a path is opened for a phenomenological re-description of the ontological specificity—in the sense of the specific meaning of

Being—of regions of beings referred to by traditional terms, such as nature, history, world, consciousness, ideal entities, etc.

The important point here for us is that Heideggerian phenomenological ontology aims at uncovering—not the metaphysical traits or "categorical" determinants (let alone objective attributes) of different kinds or regions of beings, but rather—the meaning (which is strictly speaking an "existential" and not a category) that the Being of such kinds of beings in each case has for us. This means that notions like that of nature and naturalism can acquire a definite meaning only subsequently, which is to say, by means of a phenomenological investigation into the regional ontology of nature as such, but in turn, such an investigation must rely on and be guided by a fundamental-ontological query into the meaning of the mode of Being of nature—and such meaning is attainable, if at all, only as something that phenomenally "shows itself."

Usually the term "nature" is supposed to refer to a specific region of beings, one which is to be distinguished from "history," or from "ideal beings" such as mathematical entities, etc. As opposed to that, those meanings which the Being of such regions of beings gain for us do not belong to any of these regions, because such meanings are not some kind of objectively or metaphysically determinable beings, but rather, they "appear as," "show themselves as," or "prove to be," such and such, and they do so in the mode of phenomenal "self-giveness" within our relation to or comportment toward the beings in our world. For example, without prior—although for the most part implicit—understanding of what it means that there is such a thing as a tool, no making use of tools would be possible. Such meanings are understood—in a covered up manner, to be sure—prior to any explicit comportment toward beings. And such understanding is neither something "subjective," nor something "objective"—it emerges within, and in virtue of, our

“understanding relation” (our basic mode of self-transcendence) to beings, and meaning so understood emerges as something that “show itself” for us.

The first and final kinds of “givenness” in Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, then, are the different meanings of different modes of Being of different kinds of entities, and they present themselves in each case as a phenomenal self-givenness (in the fashion of Husserlian “evidence,” but conceived in ontological terms, as something not reducible to the intentional acts of consciousness). The fact that such a self-givenness cannot be adequately described as belonging to some domains of beings, be it nature, consciousness, history, or whatever, is expressed by Heidegger’s famous notion of ontological difference. It prohibits that we equate the Being of anything with some being, and thereby it also prohibits that we regard the very phenomenal self-showing of the Being of anything as some kind of being, be it natural, or otherwise.

Thus, an “ontological event” of a phenomenal “self-giving” of meaning (as it is expressed, e.g., in the German sentence “*Es gibt Sein.*”) is strictly speaking neither natural, nor supernatural. It is a mistake, e.g., to equate the Heideggerian notion of Being with some supreme being, such as God, or for that matter, nature. God or nature attain their own meaning of “Being for us,” which are to be distinguished from them as beings having such and such traits. The objective, or even metaphysical traits that are constitutive of beings are something other than what it means for us that there are such beings (and different regions of beings “are for us” in different senses). For example, a tool can have such and such traits, but the meaning of its Being—as Heidegger shows—is that it is “ready-to-hand” (1962, 98); a mere extant object can be such and such, but the meaning of its Being for us is that it is “present-at-hand;” a human can be such and such, but the meaning of her or his Being is that she or he “exists” (both: 1962, 67). The Being of something is always the meaning we

understand by understanding (not merely traits of that something, but) the very fact that it “is,” and thereby the particular meaning it “attains for us.” In turn, whenever such an understanding emerges it does so as an event. It is an event of emerging meaning. As the light makes first possible the visibility of any being, so it is the meaning implicit in a being’s “Being for us” that makes first possible the intelligibility of, and thereby our adequate mode of comportment toward, that being.

Regarding Buchlerian naturalism we start with Ryder’s observation that in the American naturalist tradition—and therefore also in the cases of Buchler and Dewey—“nature” “is broadly and richly enough conceived that there is no philosophical need to posit anything outside nature” (2013, 2/1). Here the conception of nature is broad enough not to exclude, but to comprehend even the notion of divine—whenever felt necessary—but only within the confines of some kind of naturalistic theology. Accordingly, the term nature refers here to “whatever there is,” with “no need to insist that this or any other word have only one meaning” (ibid., 2/3). It is not to be restricted to any specific regions of beings, be they physical or spiritual, real or ideal, found or made, encountered or fictional, and it is not to be equated with the sum total of such spheres of beings, either, insofar as the term nature does not refer here to a closed universe of beings. Furthermore, in Buchler’s case—but as we will see, not in that of Dewey—the conception of nature cannot adequately be circumscribed by referring to any specific means by which one may attain some kind of impression, conception, or knowledge in any sense, about nature, be it sensory perception, experience in the broadest possible sense, logical tenability, or whatever that may be. “Nature” for Buchlerians does not mean the field of scientific inquiry. It is not exhausted by the Husserlian notion of a causal order of spatio-temporal entities, either. It is not merely what is empirically given. It does not refer to the Kantian notion of phenomenal appearances or the laws regulating such appearances. It

is not merely what is experientially given. Nor is it a definite metaphysical entity. Nature is none of these, because it is all of these and even more.

It is with good reason that so far we offered only negative delimitations of this term, namely, delimitations from restricting or limiting modes of conceiving nature. As Ryder also points it out, “no other definition is possible,” for the simple reason that “for the pragmatic naturalist nature does not serve as a category in any normal sense” (ibid., 2/4). One might object that it is a vague concept, then. Indeed, except that one is better off regarding it as a “heuristic” notion—and not in any sense a “representational” one—a notion that primarily functions as “a general perspective or frame of mind [...] prepared to try to understand whatever is encountered or invented as being among the complexes of nature. This is why Buchler [...] ended up describing nature as simply ‘providingness’” (ibid., 2/4; Buchler’s term is from 1990b). The thrust of such a notion of nature in the American tradition of naturalism is that it promotes an inclusive, rather than exclusive, attitude toward every aspect of whatever is, and that it is also able to serve as the basis of a metaphysics, that of “natural complexes” in Buchler’s case (1990a), and of “experience and nature” in Dewey’s case (1958).

Although the central notion of such metaphysics may at first seem to be vague, it nevertheless has contours, and the first and most important one of them is that it does exclude the idea of any kind of non-relationality, i. e. the very notion of ab-solute as (but not the concept of divine as such—see Ryder 2013, 6). One could even say that “naturalism” here means nothing other than this fact, namely, that whatever there is, it must consist to some degree and in some sense of relations, it must be “continuous with something else, i.e., [...] there is nothing that is entirely other” (ibid., 2/4). In that sense nature is “all-inclusive.” Therefore, as long as one asks about the “what” implied in such a conception of nature, one fails to do justice to it. For it is “purposefully to leave

open the full range of actualities and possibilities, realities and imaginings” (ibid., 2/3). The metaphysics of such a factually undefined notion of nature is not concerned with some encompassing “what” of “whatever there is.” Rather, it is concerned with the question of “how,” namely, how anything must necessarily be, provided that whatever there is, it must be natural, i.e. relational. It is for that reason that nature can be conceived in an un-exhaustible manner, in fact, it “is to be understood as pluralistic, which is to say that nature consists of whatever we find in it, and in experience, itself a fully natural process, without any need to reduce one kind of complex to another” (ibid., 7/1).

What needs to be shortly mentioned on this point is that Dewey’s notion of nature is not entirely coextensive with that of Buchler. They fit together, however, and that is what Ryder advocates in his volume. Taking primarily Darwinian biology as the paradigm of his own metaphysics of experience and nature, Dewey made an effort to merge the two basic aspects of the interactions of humans with their environment, namely, the rather passive, encountering or “finding” part and the rather active, creative or “making” part. As a result, Dewey conceived a notion of experience in which the ongoing and changing organic interaction between the experiencer and the object of experience is itself constitutive of what is experienced. This way nature is defined in terms of experience, it is but the whole of the thoroughly dynamic and interactional dimension of experience for Dewey. In Buchler’s view, however, nature is a heuristic and open-ended metaphysical notion, something that reaches beyond all the conceivable dimensions of human experience. Dewey’s project of overcoming traditional dualisms in terms of human interactions with their environment, promising as it is, has in this respect a major disadvantage, namely, that it is over-ambitious in “reducing” nature to the experiential dimension. Buchler restores the right proportions here by emphasizing that it is not nature

that should be grasped in terms of experience, but vice versa, it is human experience that is to be understood in terms of “whatever is.” Human interaction with “whatever there is” is but a vanishing aspect of all that is or may be. Yet, the two approaches can be reconciled, and Ryder shows in detail, how. As he points out:

“experience and the rest of nature are related to one another in such a way that the world can be understood as the interconnection of experience and the rest of nature without reducing either to the other. A relational ontology allows us to do precisely this by making it possible to say that complexes of nature are constitutive of experience, and that experience is constitutive of the complexes of nature to which it is related. Thus, the two are integrated without experience being defined away and without nature being inappropriately read through the prism of the human interaction within it” (2013, 2/5).

The results of our survey so far regarding the Buchlerian notion of nature and the Heideggerian idea of ontological difference can be summed up, with some further observations, as follows. None of these notions are in any sense “representational;” none of them is a category; both refer to something that reaches beyond any and all regions of extant beings; and—perhaps most importantly—*both imply something supra-human, regarding to which some sense of relationality is constitutive*. Both notions break with traditional substance-metaphysics, although they differ in their attitudes toward metaphysics as such. The two notions differ, furthermore, in their understandings of the term “there is;” in their esteem of abstraction or formalization; in the terms in which they are respectively conceived; and in the kinds of relationality they maintain, among others.

None of these notions are in any sense “representational.” Buchler’s notion of nature is such because it is not a category, but a heuristic and open-ended metaphysical notion which includes, but also refers beyond, all the regions of extant beings; and furthermore, because—although what it names is, in

fact, in some sense a metaphysical entity, but beyond that—it is the sum of the metaphysical *conditions of “relational existence” as such*, without factual restrictions, and regardless of the question whether such existence is actual or merely possible, as well. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of Being is not a category either, but an existentiale—which is to say that it has nothing to do with traits of objective or mind-independent reality, but rather, it refers to those basic meanings which different kinds of beings (among them human beings) have for us in virtue of their very Being, and by the same token, are constitutive of human existence by making possible our comportment toward such beings. Both notions refer to something, then, that reaches beyond any and all regions of extant beings. Buchler’s notion of nature includes, but also transcends the realm of whatever is extant. Heidegger’s notion of Being is of another order than that of extant beings, altogether. Furthermore, nature for Buchler, as opposed to Dewey, refers to something that reaches beyond all the conceivable dimensions of human experience, too, and in that sense it refers to something supra-human. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of Being refers to an event of self-showing that may become a “given” only to human understanding—it is a self-showing for us, to be sure—but nevertheless an event the fulfillment of which is beyond our control. To that extent, both notions imply something supra-human.

Yet, Ryder’s point regarding Buchlerian metaphysics, namely, that it implies “nothing that is entirely other” (2013, 2/4), is also relevant in Heidegger’s case. Here we find one of the central commonalities between pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics: both of them maintain a certain sense of relationality or contextualism, conceived in naturalistic and phenomenological-hermeneutic terms, respectively. Buchler’s notion of nature does away with every sense of absolute and the metaphysical concept of substance by replacing them with a notion of pan-relationalism. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference calls attention to the fact that even if there is some absolute

being, the very fact that it “is” can reveal itself, or become disclosed, only for a being who is able to understand it—i.e., in their correlation. And the same holds for the Being of substances. Regarding its Being, every kind of being is inevitably correlated to understanding it—understanding the fact that it is, and the meaning of the fact that it is. “Being” is a matter of being understood. In that sense, “Being” is not to be conceived as a substance—recall Heidegger’s prohibitive notion of ontological difference.

However, beyond the fact that both central notions of the discussed philosophers depart from traditional substance-metaphysics, they differ in their stances or attitudes toward metaphysics in general. If the term metaphysics is to refer to all that which reaches beyond physics or “nature” (the latter understood here as a domain of extant beings), in that case both discussed notions, namely, nature and Being, are “metaphysical.” Yet, if one understands metaphysics as the discipline that aims at disclosing the ontological traits of mind-independent reality, than Buchler’s notion of nature is an “affirmative metaphysical conception instead of a conception based on a supposedly necessary structure of knowing and experiencing” (Buchler 1990b, 269). In turn, the Heideggerian notion of ontological difference leads to an utterly non-metaphysical investigation into the question of the Being of beings—and ultimately to that of Being in general—one that is to open anew and revitalize such questions *as questions*, and to that extent it is designed to overcome any sense of a traditional, metaphysical notion of Being. Heidegger follows the Kantian, so called “anthropological turn” in doing philosophy. He raises the question of Being from a perspective prior to, one that precedes, that of metaphysics, namely, from the perspective of our finite, temporal, historical existence.

Thus, Buchler’s enterprise can be characterized as a metaphysical relationalism, whereas that of Heidegger is a temporal-historicist contextualism. Is there a way to

relate them in a more substantial fashion? Are there reasons for their specific manners of procedure, reasons we could assess in the light of one another? What I’d like to claim here is this: yes, there is at least one way to assess the scope, manner of procedure, and result, of these approaches, and it concerns several further interrelated issues, such as that of “existence” and “nonexistence,” abstraction *versus* facticity; creativity and freedom; and also the issue of temporality.

Buchler’s approach comprehends—but it does so only in a certain sense—the kind of (historicist) contextualism Heidegger emphasizes. Within the frames of Buchlerian naturalism all kinds of temporal relations—central as they are in Heidegger’s philosophy—are but specific kinds within the context of a network of other kinds of relations. In a similar fashion, concerning our “creative construction of meaning” Ryder writes: “[...] in our attribution of meaning to a specific event [...] meaning [...] is one among the innumerable constituent complexes that taken together and in their specific relations are the event” (2013, 5/17). Buchlerian naturalism is conceived broadly enough to include any kind of relation or context, be it temporal, or whatever. But it is such in virtue of its procedure of abstraction and utter formalization, and that in turn is carried out at the expense of disregarding some issues, issues that are fundamental in philosophical hermeneutics.

Buchler conceives “existence” in a certain opposition to traditional substance metaphysics, namely, in terms of relations. “To exist is to prevail in an order or orders, whatever they may be” (Ryder 2013, 2/8). Existence is “prevalence” for such naturalism, in whatever context, regardless of the differences between kinds of beings that can be said to exist or prevail. This is a generalized and formalized notion of existence, however, one that goes back to the scholastic distinction between *existentia* and *essentia*, and further of course, to the Aristotelian distinction between *energeia* [*actualitas*] and *dynamis* [*potentialitas*]. Therefore, even if Buchler

does not ascribe existence to substances any more, but only to relations and to relations of relations, the very concept of existence he entertains is, nevertheless, but a continuation of the tradition of substance metaphysics, and it is something that remains unproblematic for him.

This is a question Heidegger addresses explicitly, however, who offers a genealogy of the so called “metaphysics of presence” originating from the Greeks, and criticizes it on the basis of its inadequate understanding of Being, of conceiving Being as something present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*). As opposed to the latter, Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference emphasizes that different kinds of beings “are” in different senses, and therefore the senses in which they “are” cannot adequately be captured by one and the same concept, namely, “existence.” Accordingly, one of his basic distinctions concerns the difference between the modes in which *Dasein* “is,” and the modes in which beings unlike *Dasein* “are.” The reason for drawing that distinction is that “*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather [...] in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it” (Heidegger 1962, 32). For humans, the issue of their existence, of the fact that they are and have to be, is not something they could disregard, something they could possibly escape from—as long as they exist. Humans are “thrown into” their existence, and in existing they cannot but relate to, care about their own existence (Being)—in fact, they are not able not to care about it, even if they fail to care about it in their effort to escape from the task and weight of existing, in their “inauthentic” mode of Being. This elemental fact of “being involved in our own existence” explains why it is that Heidegger reserves the term “existence” for the mode of Being proper to (human) *Dasein*, whereas his terms “ready-to-hand” and “present-at-hand” refer to the modes of Being proper to beings unlike *Dasein*, namely, tools and extant objects (these are the “same beings” regarded as ready-to-hand within their pragmatic context of use, and in turn, as sheer present-at-hand entities looked at in a de-contextualized manner, respectively).

If Buchler’s approach is much more comprehensive in scope than that of Heidegger—who was solely preoccupied with the question of the meaning, truth, and *topos* of Being throughout his life—it is such in virtue of its procedure of *abstraction and formalization*, or—to put it otherwise—its uninvolved, de-contextualizing, extrinsic, almost structuralist (although dynamic) spirit, of his vision conceived in terms of relations and locality, in a geometric temper, about whatever is or may be. These features stand in sharp contrast to Heidegger’s involved, contextualizing, immersed or intrinsic, historicist, existential and temporal manner of conceptualizing the *facticity* of human life and the *meaning* of Being as a question—a contrast that is reflected also in their differing understandings of the term “there is.” Heidegger famously criticized almost our entire philosophical tradition for its theorizing tendency, and its varied metaphysics produced by such a “theoretical gaze.” As opposed to that, Buchlerian naturalism presents a theorizing-metaphysical esteem for an anonymous, dynamic, and entirely relational structure, of whatever is.

How are we to approach such a contrast in an at least somewhat unbiased manner? We have examined one of Buchler’s concepts, “existence,” as it appears in the context of Heidegger’s philosophy. Now I propose to examine one of Heidegger’s central issues, namely, the aspect of temporality, as it appears in the context of Buchlerian naturalism. Our question is: How does the “temporal” figure in such naturalism, how does something new emerge within its pan-relationalism, and what is the place of creativity—in particular human creativity—in it?

Within the frames of Buchlerian naturalist metaphysics, whatever there is, it is defined in terms of relations. There is no absolute involved, no final atomic element, no substance. The constituents of such a pan-relationalism are themselves constituted by relations.

One can talk about complexes, however—reminiscent to some extent of Leibnizian “aggregates”—the traits of which are defined by the relations in which they stand to one another, and the complex itself is defined by its relational locations. This view holds on every level of whatever is. Complexes can be viewed as themselves having traits, as orders locating traits, and again, as themselves being traits of other complexes. The idea is that everything is relational on every level, and the partition is a matter of relational location.¹² In this vein, Buchler emphasizes the “natural definition” of the traits—traits of complexes, or again, complexes as traits of other complexes—where “definiteness” is due to the relational locations in which a trait stands. This way every constituent of “nature,” itself void of substances, is defined “by nature itself,” without recursion to essences, or anything other than locations within an open-ended pan-relational network. Since everything in such a network is defined “by nature itself,” Ryder calls the naturally defined traits and their network as “objectivity.”

Furthermore, such a network of relational locations is not static, but dynamic. It is such due to the fact—presumably—that an open-ended network can never achieve the state of balance and static order. It is that dynamism which is the source of “creativity in nature.” It consists in the alteration of the relations that define a trait, a complex, or a complex as a trait. Creativity in this sense is a matter of relocation, entering new relations, taking on new traits, partaking in new orders.

Alteration of relations and thereby of traits of natural complexes may as well occur due to humans. In that case humans become constituents of the complexes

they relate to, influencing the natural definition of the traits of those complexes. Humans themselves are part and parcel of nature so conceived, and their interventions into the orders of natural complexes do not introduce anything that is not possible by nature alone. Such an intervention is a matter of rearrangement, alteration, and not a matter of introducing something “entirely new” or “original.” The “birth” or the “perishing” of anything are merely matters of alteration of traits and relational orders with respect to the ordinal location of that specific something. Such alterations are examples of the emergence of relatively new prevailing relational locations, and in turn, of the relative “alescence” of previously prevailing relational orders. The notion of “nonexistence,” of “nothing,” can acquire no sensible meaning within such an open-ended network of relations. These notions qualify as non-relational absolutes with no place in a pan-relationalism.

The fact, however, that the traits of natural complexes are “naturally defined” by their respective ordinal locations, and to that extent they can be regarded as “objective” traits of nature, and furthermore, that humans and their interactions with natural complexes are conceived here as being part and parcel of nature so conceived, seems to imply a deflation or even elimination of the notion of subjective, *human freedom*. First, humans are said to be capable only to influence the natural definitions of traits of complexes, but not capable to originate such traits, if the latter is to mean the introduction of absolute new traits previously not related to any of the naturally defined traits in nature. Freedom as an unprecedented, originary act, qualifies again as an absolute with no place within the frames of a pan-relational metaphysics. Second, although the moment of human freedom seems to be recognizable in the acts of judgment we make, and judgments are selections according to Buchler, such selections seem nevertheless to be understood, again, as themselves ultimately being defined naturally. “Mathematical entities have the properties they do by virtue of natural

¹² “Location” is to be understood here as a metaphysical, as opposed to an empirical, concept. For example, one can justifiably talk about relational locations within semantic instances without recursion to an empirical notion of space, etc.

definition, as do dreams, hopes, and fictional characters” (Ryder 2013, 1/11). As complexes of naturally defined relations of nature, humans and their activities are themselves thoroughly and objectively defined relationally or naturally. Third, freedom might perhaps be considered as consisting in acts that are not contradictory to the dynamics of nature—reminiscent of Spinoza’s “solution” to the problem of freedom. But even in that case, the possibility of not acting in accordance with natural dynamics must be explained, and that seems to be implausible. Therefore, the objectivity of nature seems to comprehend all the moments of creativity, inasmuch as creativity is but the dynamic aspect of objectively defined natural complexes. Considered from the metaphysical perspective of Buchlerian naturalism, human freedom appears as an illusion—as Nietzsche has already pointed to that direction (2000, #19.)—an illusion stemming from the illusion of some notion of an ultimately substantive, non-relational agency. Buchlerian naturalism seems to give voice to a notion of “nature” which refers to an “anonymous dynamics,” namely, that of prevalence and alescence with respect to traits or ordinal locations of “natural” complexes.¹³

One of the observations we can make here is that, for Buchlerians, the notion of nature *comprehends the spatio-temporally* defined order we usually call “nature,” as well as the historical dimension of human cultures, and all the possible others. The anonymous relational dynamics of Buchlerian nature includes as one among the other kinds of its orders the empirically understood

¹³ We might consider the fact, however, that even if ontologically speaking freedom is an illusion, it is nevertheless a meaningful illusion for most humans, and as such a meaningful instance it may be regarded as a constituent of semantic relations, a specific kind within the relational network of nature. But the same can be said about any of the meaningful human notions (among them those which have no place in Buchler’s metaphysics, such as “nonexistence,” absolute, substance, etc.). Here, however, I leave open this train of thought.

spatio-temporal order of our environing “natural” world, just like the cultural-historical ones. One of the consequences of this fact, then, is that there is a continuity between nature and the human order, a continuity that is neither causal-mechanical, nor biologicistic-evolutionary, nor any other in some specific sense, but a continuity of general, metaphysically conceivable structural analogy. This point gives metaphysical support to both Buchler’s claim—mentioned earlier in this paper—that art has a cognitive significance, as well as to the overall view of Buchlerians according to which every kind of judgment leads to some sense of knowledge.

A further, for our purposes even more important observation is this: if Buchlerian naturalism seems to refer to a view about an anonymous dynamics of prevalence and alescence with respect to relational and ordinal locations, then *spatiality and temporality* figure here *in a double sense*. As we just emphasized, in their empirical sense the spatial and temporal relations are only specific dimensions among other kinds of relational dimensions of nature.¹⁴ The spatial as well as the temporal relations, when understood empirically, are comprehended here equally in terms of relational locations and their prevalence and alescence, no less than the a-spatial and a-temporal ones. The metaphysical notions of relationality, locality, and their dynamics, are all-comprehensive in Buchler’s view. It is on this level that spatiality and temporality reappear, already in a metaphysical sense. In their metaphysical—which is to say here, de-factualized, formalized—sense spatiality and temporality surmount and govern, as final metaphysical conditions of the possibility of, the relational locality, and in turn, the dynamics of prevalence and alescence, of the traits of natural complexes. Without a formalized notion of space

¹⁴ One may wonder whether a typology of the factual *kinds* of relations, and thereby a certain ontology, could be developed within the frames of Buchler’s general and formalized relational metaphysics?

no relational locality is conceivable, and without a formalized notion of temporality no dynamics of prevalence and alessence are conceivable.

If we now want to relate this result to some aspect of the approach initiated by Heidegger, it is the following question that may yield some orientation for us: *How, in what different manners, can spatio-temporal relations be conceived at all?* In the next part of my paper I propose to examine a linguistic phenomenon—the middle voice—in order to shed some light on the specific sense of “event” characteristic in Heideggerian-Gadamerian hermeneutic philosophy. I intend to do that as a preparation for answering—only with respect to certain aspects, in the last part—the question posed above, namely: Given the fact that Heidegger’s approach stands in sharp opposition to Buchler’s regarding the issue of traditionally conceived theorizing and also that of metaphysics, how are we to approach such a contrast in an at least somewhat unbiased manner? As I’ll try to show, this question is immediately connected to the question we just posed, namely: *How, in what different manners, can spatio-temporal relations be conceived at all?* In fact, the latter question proves to be the very core of the former one, as we shall see, or—to put it otherwise—the common ground for an unbiased comparison of the discussed approaches is to be looked for in their basic reliance on some understandings of spatio-temporal relations as such.

IV. Truth and Event

IV.1. Medial Events, Middle Voice and Philosophical Hermeneutics

For reasons that will soon be clear, I will use the term “medial event” for referring to the Heideggerian-Gadamerian notion of an anonymous process of self-presentation “of Being.” I use the quotation marks here because the terms “self-presentation” and “Being” are coextensive, they are synonymous in the sense that it is

the “Being” of the different beings that presents itself by itself, or conversely, whatever presents itself by itself is nothing else than the “Being” of beings, whatever kind.

My central claim here regarding such medial events of “self-presentation” is that they are most properly expressible linguistically by the so called middle voice of verbs. For that reason, in what follows I’ll discuss this linguistic phenomenon as well as the philosophical significance of the notion of “event” inherent in it, a significance it acquires within the broad field of anti-Cartesian attempts at overcoming modern subjectivism.

The middle voice is primarily known from ancient Greek, because in most of the major occidental languages it is not expressible by a morphologically distinct form. (Yet, spoken Hungarian, for example, and other non-Indo-European languages also have such a form.) Thus, our occidental linguistic development attests to the fact that the original function and meaning of the middle voice has characteristically been lost, and *thinking in terms of activity and passivity has become predominant*. Such a loss is clearly indicated by the fact that even standard introductions to ancient Greek grammar describe the middle voice as some mixture of the active and passive voices: as they explain, the middle voice “represents the subject as acting either upon himself (reflexive) or in his own interest” (Chase and Phillips, Harvard University, 1961, 90), or else, it “is often used for actions which in some way affect the subject” (Wilding, Oxford, 1986, 68). As it is conspicuous, in such characterizations *the subject remains in the center of the action* expressed by the verb: it is the subject who acts and at the same time is being acted upon.

As opposed to that, the real significance of the middle voice is – when compared to the active and passive voices – that it gives voice to a third, autonomous meaning not reducible to any mixture of the meanings expressed by the active and passive voices. Such reduction is also invalidated by the claim – generally

accepted among linguists – according to which the middle voice is more primordial than the passive voice (e.g. Cline 1983, v). This is also the view of the eminent expert of Indo-European languages, Emile Benveniste (1966, 145). He also offers a delineation of the function and meaning of middle voice according to which it brings to language an “action” of a “subject” standing in the medium of an event, whereby the *subject is displaced, it gets out of the focus in favour of the event taking place.*

Benveniste’s main theses include the followings, among others.

i) The distinction between the active and the passive voices, fundamental as it is in the verbal system of spoken occidental languages, is “inessential to the Indo-European verbal system” (145).

ii) The passive voice stems from the more ancient middle voice.

iii) As the developmental history of Indo-European languages attests to it, the primordial verbal system consisted of two voices, namely, the active and the middle. This was, then, replaced by the triad of active-middle-passive (“only for a given period in the history of Greek” [145]). Finally, the opposition between the active and passive voices replaced the former triad.

iv) However, the usual categorization of the diatheses as well as the terms used for grasping them (active-middle-passive) stem from the Greek grammarians, who gave expression only to a peculiarity of a certain stage of language. Therefore, the meanings and functions of the different diatheses, among them those of the middle voice, should be made accessible in a different, more original way.

v) As Benveniste shows, the principle of a properly linguistic distinction between the two primordial voices, active and middle, turns on the relationship between

subject and process (the subject is either external and therefore active, or internal and therefore middle, to the process).

Several observations are apposite here concerning Benveniste’s claims. First, the Greek notion of *mesotes* should not be construed – in Benveniste’s manner – as “the middle” or “the transitional” between active and passive, but rather, it is to be understood as “*the medial:*” as that verb which brings to expression an “action” of a “subject” *standing in the medium* of a process or event. This suggests both that such an “action” is not a pure action, and that the middle voice is never purely passive. Second, the philosophical significance of Benveniste’s approach can be delineated in a preliminary manner by comparing the (primordial) active-medial opposition to the (occidental) active-passive opposition. Within the active-medial opposition both voices express three aspects: *the (temporal) event expressed by the verb; the subject of the event; and the locality (“spatiality”) of the subject with regard to the event.* It is this latter aspect regarding to which the active and the medial differ from one another: the active is external, whereas the medial is internal to the event taking place. As opposed to that, within the frames of the active-passive opposition both voices express merely two aspects: the action (not any more an event!); and subjectivity—and the difference between the two voices is whether the subject is the agent of the action, or it is the one being acted upon. This is a one-dimensional perspective (subject→action→subject), and in each case the subject stands in the focus. By such a transition two notions inherent in the middle voice, namely, *the locality (“spatiality”) of the subject, as well as that “in which” it could be localized, namely, the notion of a pure event as such (as opposed to some “action”), get lost.* As opposed to that, within the paradigm of the ancient active-medial opposition both diatheses are able to express in a single unit the threefold aspects of *temporal event-“subject”-its locality.*

We may summarize the philosophical significance of the above considerations regarding middle voice as follows. The primordial opposition between active and middle voices represents a kind of *thinking in terms of subject and verb*. As opposed to that, the occidental opposition between active and passive voices represents the predominance of a kind of *thinking in terms of subject and object*. Therefore, the return to the ancient and mostly forgotten insight into mediality may indeed be one of those forms in which the philosophical fixation of such thinking in terms of subject and object, namely, the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy, can be overcome.

In fact, my claim is—and this concerns the philosophical significance of the linguistic phenomenon of middle voice—that the hermeneutic philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer are basically revitalizations of the ancient insight into mediality, investing it with a far reaching ontological significance. Both Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Gadamer's *Truth and Method* are queries into a single and unitary medial phenomenon: *Dasein* as *in-der-Welt-sein* determined medially by the *Seinsfrage*, and in turn, the so called "hermeneutic phenomenon" with the paradigmatically medial notion of the fulfillment of *Spiel* as self-presentation in its center.

Following the etymology of the term according to which it is derived from the Greek middle-voiced verb φαίνεσθαι, "to show itself," a phenomenon—taken in the strictest phenomenological sense—becomes for Heidegger a pure "event of showing itself" (which is but a synonym of "Being"—Heidegger 1962, 51-55). What is to be emphasized is that this "showing itself in itself" is a *pure medial event*, a temporal occurrence and fulfillment (*Vollzug*) pure and simple. It makes no sense to talk about causes or agents behind such a self-showing, as if there would be something more to the mere process of "showing itself." The "what" in the phrase "what shows itself" refers to nothing else but the unfolding of a medial event of self-showing. Therefore, the thematic field of phenomenological ontology is that of pure

events of "showing itself" (called Being). Furthermore, since the question of Being can only become pressing for a being medially predisposed, *Being an Time* outlines the basic features of such a medial "sub-ject," which is to say, it offers a medial anthropology in which human *Dasein* is exhibited as a "subject" constituted by a medial event (its very existence) at its core—an event into which it is thrown, towards which it is open, about which it cares (or, for that matter, fails to care).

In turn, Gadamer's central notions of play, fusion of horizons, conversation, and above all, the speculative *Selbst-Darstellung* of whatever is, are all instances of medial events. The fact that his notions are medial is made explicit by Gadamer only once, on the example of play:

"[...] the primordial sense of playing is the medial one. Thus we say that something is 'playing' (*spielt*) somewhere or at some time, that something is going on (*im Spiele ist*) or that something is happening (*sich abspielt*)." "[...] if one starts from the medial sense of the word 'playing' [it] clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself" (Gadamer, 104, 105, respectively).

To that extent, there seems to be no question as to the fact that both Heidegger and Gadamer exemplify in a phenomenological-ontological manner what the middle voice means according to Benveniste.

IV.2. Epistemological Consequences. Truth, Justification, Event, Interpretation

We are in a better position now to highlight the presumably most basic affinities and differences between Buchlerian naturalism and Heideggerian (-Gadamerian) ontological phenomenism. The fundamental affinity between these approaches can be found in the fact that both Buchler and Heidegger rely on *respective understandings of an ultimate sense of*

spatio-temporal relations, understandings which in turn define their whole philosophy. It is a consequence of this basic fact that both of these approaches are concerned with something thoroughly relational, and therefore both refuse to make use of any sense of absolute, as well as of any form of classical substance metaphysics. Accordingly, both accomplish some form of overcoming modern subjectivism. Most importantly, both philosophers give up thinking in terms of activity and passivity, and both of them introduce something anonym and supra-human. There is a basic difference, however, in the very manner in which they conceive their specific notions of some ultimate and anonym spatio-temporal constellation. In doing so, Buchler only formalizes, but does not break with, the common sense view of space and time, a view that was predominant also in the metaphysical tradition of the West (at least from Aristoteles onward). As opposed to that, Heidegger—and in his footsteps, Gadamer—introduce into ontology a primordial, medial sense of spatio-temporal relations.

To put it otherwise, the two approaches are in some sense “externalist” (formalized-abstract-metaphysical) and “internalist” (factual-historicist-medial-interpretative-anthropological), respectively. This difference has far reaching consequences regarding their respective understandings of the issues of agency, truth and justification, theory and practice, creativity, and the notion of event.

1) One of the important consequences of this difference concerns the issue of agency. Although both stances break with the paradigm of thinking in terms of activity and passivity, they accomplish such a move in different ways and with different implications. Buchlerian naturalism seems to overcome modern subjectivism via dissolving the agency of human subjectivity in the dynamics and “creativity” of objective, naturally defined relational constellations. In that regard, Buchler moves in the same direction which many of the 19th and 20th

centuries philosophical efforts took in their departure from the central role previously ascribed to Cartesian subjectivity. For in many cases they did so at the expense of giving up the notion of subject as a free and spontaneous agent (think especially of Nietzsche, or of Freudian sub- and unconscious, and again, the postmodern *topos* of the “death of subject”). Yet, to the extent that in Buchler’s case objectivity (i.e., that which is defined by nature and not by us) obtains its meaning in virtue of its contrast to—what would count as—the subjective, his break with the paradigm of thinking in terms of activity and passivity does not seem to imply an overall departure from the modern thinking in terms of the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Buchler thinks in terms of objective relations. He dissolves agency and patiency by referring to such—altering, dynamic—relations. As opposed to that, hermeneutic philosophy thinks medially, in terms of subject and verb (event). Such a thinking is not willing to pay the price of giving up the notion of free—although historically conditioned—human agency, and in fact it offers a way of conceiving “subjectivity” in a non-Cartesian, medial manner, as a full-fledged agent who is sub-jected to, and is constituted by, events of self-revealing and enlightening meaning. Thus, while the Buchlerian project of conceiving the self in terms of objective dynamic relations, as well as the hermeneutic approach of understanding the subject in terms of medial ontology, equally stand in continuity with critiques of modern subjectivism, they differ in the important respect that the latter—as opposed to the former—is nevertheless able to maintain a sense of human freedom.

2) In addition to Buchler’s objectivism, there is at least one more point on which traces of modernism are discernible in his endeavour. It concerns the issue of justification. Namely, Ryder makes the point that the Buchlerian metaphysics of natural complexes “cannot be justified by reason alone” (2013, 2/5). Buchler’s metaphysics definitely has something to do with the spirit of “more geometrico”—not so much in its phrasing

and its manner of textual expression, but rather in its degree of formalization and almost deductively relatable conceptual apparatus—and as a metaphysics it is an a priori, speculative achievement of human reason. Nevertheless, Ryder's point echoes a more or less generally held view in the classical pragmatist tradition, namely, the view that any theory or unit of knowledge can be justified—and thereby regarded as true—only by virtue of its success in the process of its pragmatic valuation. An idea, theory, or whatever of cognitive import, is considered to be successful “if by putting it to work we are able to do things we are not able to do otherwise, and create relatively few new problems along the way” (Ryder 2013, 2/5-6). Truth must be practically enabling.

There is a sense in which such a pragmatic view of truth and justification stands in continuity with the modern notion of theory, as opposed to that of the ancients which resurfaces—as we will see—in Gadamer's case. For in sharp contrast to the ancient privileging of the theoretical way of life in which theorizing was but the highest form of practice, in modernity the relation between theory and praxis altered drastically, so that theory came to be regarded as for the most part independent of, and prior to, practice, and in turn, practice came to be understood to a considerable extent as the application of theory. As we can see, there is some kind of parallelism between that modern development and the point Ryder makes. If theory is in need of a posteriori, experiential, pragmatic justification, then theory and practice are regarded as distinct in some sense.

As opposed to that, one of the basic features of hermeneutic philosophy is that it is concerned exclusively with that kind of knowledge which is not separable from being, or—to put it otherwise—with historically constituted, “embodied reason,” knowledge that is not a noetic construction but “historically real,” knowledge that is not abstract-“technical,” but rather,

“practical-factual-existential” throughout. Regarding Heidegger's notion of Being, e.g., the justification of this notion is in each case a matter of—phenomenologically disciplined—“understanding-hermeneutic intuition,” and to that extent it is neither a metaphysical-“rational,” nor a pragmatic way of justification. Yet, such an understanding is simultaneously both an understanding of some meaning, and at the same time an enabling “capacity,” or better, a “potentiality-for-Being” (*Seinkönnen*—Heidegger 1962, 183), the basic “existential” that opens up possibilities of Being for human *Dasein*. As the basic constituent of our openness toward whatever is, understanding is strictly speaking neither a theoretical, nor a practical “capacity” of ours. It constitutes our very existence in the sense that we “are,” we exist as, understanding (or, for that matter, not-understanding) beings. The term “understanding” refers in hermeneutic philosophy to the very mode of carrying out our existence, and as such it is prior to the theory-praxis distinction. Any theory as well as any praxis stems from understanding. Although the pragmatist maxim according to which truth must be practically enabling is thereby fulfilled also by hermeneutic philosophy, it is achieved here without conceiving theory and praxis as distinct.

3) Accordingly, the pragmatic claim according to which every cognition and every proposition is inevitably involved in some context of practical issues is echoed, all along, in hermeneutic philosophy as well. It is expressed in the basic hermeneutic notion of the so called hermeneutic circle, especially in one of its constituents, namely, the so called “fore-structure” of understanding—discovered by Heidegger, and adopted by Gadamer and their followers. Such a “fore-structure” or “pre-understanding” refers to the fact that understanding is always already conditioned by some previous understanding of the subject matter in question. Understanding begins by the “negative” experience of some disturbance, namely, by facing the fact that our expectations are being negated, something

else than what we have so far assumed seems to be the case. Thus, some prior understanding is the condition of the possibility of any event of understanding. Understanding is always already historically situated and motivated.

In turn, whatever is understood, it is justified in the very event of understanding, and it remains such till it becomes negated by some new encounter. This way our always finite understanding is continuously being provoked, and it goes through a process of formation within the context of the historicity of human beings. To that extent, hermeneutics would wholly subscribe to the pragmatist claim made by Ryder, namely, that “our judgments are provisional and conditional, and [...] they undergo ongoing ramification in experience and query” (2013, 7/25). But it could not agree with the Buchlerian reason offered for that, namely, that all this is “a reflection of the general relationality of nature” (ibid.). Hermeneutics could not agree with that last point simply because it is a metaphysical claim, one that is not in our finite and historically defined power to make, or at least, one that contradicts hermeneutic insights into the historically conditioned nature of every understanding. It is this that explains the “internalist” aspect of hermeneutic philosophy.

4) According to hermeneutic philosophy, the arena of meaning formation is the context of the historicity of human beings. It is for this reason that the horizon-forming powers of language and all kinds of tradition receive decisive importance in hermeneutics. This can be seen more specifically in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. As we have seen, it is the Heideggerian insight into the ontological difference, and the project of phenomenological-hermeneutic ontology issuing from it, that Gadamer follows in his elaborations of the mode of Being of art, that of history, language, etc. Gadamer does not follow Heidegger’s fundamental-ontological question, however, the question aiming at the disclosure of the meaning of Being as such. This is not an arbitrary

choice on the part of Gadamer, but rather, it follows consistently from his orientation and the results attained from such orientation. Namely, in working out the mode of Being and specific temporality of works of art, Gadamer recognizes in that mode a general “pattern,” the very pattern in which the historicity of humans is conceivable. It is the pattern of traditioning (*Überlieferung*) as such, the very manner in which the event of traditioning can take place and achieve its fulfillment. For human existence is ultimately historical, and it is such primarily in the sense that humans belong to, participate in, and thus, (their understandings) are constituted by, events of *Überlieferung*. In turn, such events are in each case an *Überlieferung* “of” some *Sache* (subject matter, issue, question, case).¹⁵ It is in that sense that our historicity consists in participating in handed down *Sachen*.

Several points must be highlighted here. One of them is that by this move the notion of *Sache* takes center stage for Gadamer, in fact, it acquires the position and dignity which the notion of Being had for Heidegger. It is so because Heidegger’s leading question of Being is but *one* among an inexhaustible number of possible *Sachen* “waiting for” *Überlieferung*. Gadamer’s investigations concern the historical conditions of the possibility of *Überlieferung* as such, and in that sense they highlight the historicity or historical embeddedness of the very issue of Being, too.

A further point is that *Überlieferung* takes place as a medial event, as the *Überlieferung* “of” some *Sache*. This genitive is to be understood as a simultaneously subjective *and* objective one, for the “subjectivity” of the human participants is no less constitutive in the event of *Überlieferung* than the very event in which the fulfillment of *Überlieferung* takes place. But even if this

¹⁵ The best discussion of the Gadamerian notion of “*die Sache*” can be found—in my view—in Nicholas Davey’s powerful volume on Gadamer’s hermeneutics (2006, 69–91).

genitive is a simultaneously subjective *and* objective one, in virtue of the fact that such an event falls outside of human control, the emphasis falls on the objective side. Accordingly, when the hermeneutic approach highlights the fundamental mediality of the subject and conceives it in its medial involvement in whatever happens to it, such an approach corresponds to the fact that the *Sache* of understanding is always something that “befalls” the “subject.” But it is not any kind of *Sache* which can do so. The “subject” must be predisposed to the *Sache* that befalls it, it must have some kind of pre-understanding of it, and to that extent it must be involved in it, must belong to it, be subjected to it. Such a subject is not any more an “exclusive subject,” then—not an agent acting in a sovereign manner, not a purely spontaneous subject—it does not control and command the event, from outside, as it is the case with the active voice. Rather, the subject of middle voice is a nonexclusive, participating one: a subject “actively” participating in an event which happens to it.

Furthermore, *Überlieferung* is an utterly “communal,” and not an individual matter. Any *Sache* is that for a community of people, in fact, it is *die Sachen* which bind people together, above all. A *Sache* is something supra-individual, then. It is something that is historically-culturally constituted, something that owes its validity or “Being” for its being handed down. Thus, to the extent that a *Sache* “is” in virtue of the medial event of its *Überlieferung*, a moment of something supra-human and uncontrollable is also constitutive in its “Being”. For the same reason, it is utterly contingent, something that can easily lose its meaningfulness over time.

In turn, our involvement in such supra-individually constituted *Sachen* takes the form of participation—participation in the event of *Überlieferung*, which is not an objectivization in any sense. That, in which one participates, is by no means something objective. For Gadamer, a hermeneutic-

interpretive query is a matter of acknowledging and ultimately understanding the supra-individual meaningfulness and validity of some inherited *Sache* or subject matter.

“Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.” “Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.” “[...] being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding” (2004, 291, 299, 308, respectively).

Thereby theory receives a new meaning for Gadamer, one that he draws from his analysis of the mode of Being of works of art, and that of historicity in general. As he shows, insofar as the spectator belongs to the play of art, his participation in such a play cannot be adequately conceived in terms of subjectivity. Yet, by devoting her full attention to what is being exhibited, the spectator accomplishes a “being outside of herself,” a kind of self-forgetfulness, which in turn is due to its being present at, being wholly with (*Dabeisein*) that which is presented to her. It is constitutive of the role of spectator, furthermore, that she is “set at an absolute distance, a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation,” and at the same time makes possible seeing the play as a whole, which is “a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented” (2004, 124). Such participation may fulfill itself in an event of truth:

“A spectator’s ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning. For it is the truth of our own world—the religious and moral world in which we live—that is presented before us and in which we recognize ourselves” (ibid.).

Based on this model of the spectator who participates in the meaning of what is being exhibited for her, Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of theory within the context of our historicity, our hermeneutic-interpretative world-

comportment in general. As opposed to Heidegger's hostility toward theory (which he closely associated with the traditional metaphysics of "present-at-hand" he resolutely criticized), Gadamer sticks to the temporal sense of Being emphasized by Heidegger, but at the same time he manages to conceive a corresponding non-constructivist notion of theory, and thereby he reconciles the two. Theory is a peculiar form of cognition for Gadamer. It is not the grasp of methodologically secured objective instances of knowledge, not the grasp of discernible regularities and laws, it is not a know-how, either, not something detached from practical life. Theory is first and foremost participation for Gadamer, participation in the event of self-revealing meaning with respect to some supra-individual *Sache*.

"But *theoria* is not to be conceived primarily as subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. *Theoria* is a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees" (2004, 122).

What is contemplated, namely, some *Sache*, is something temporal, as opposed to being substantive. What is understood in such contemplation, is simultaneously some meaningful aspect of the *Sache*, and our selves with respect to that *Sache*. Thus, theory in its specific sense is neither a tool, nor an act of the subject for Gadamer, but rather, it is a matter of participation in meaning-formation, and as such, it is the highest form of practice.

5) As we can see, furthermore, "productivity" or "creativity" here is a matter of some supra-individual—yet, simultaneously human and supra-human—event. Although human activity is not contested in hermeneutics, the creative aspect of human interaction with the world is conceived as the result of such events of participating in some culturally formed, historically contingent and plastic, meaning. Thus, hermeneutic philosophy maintains that there is a

"foundational relation" between the creative moment of meaning formation, on the one hand, and objectivity, on the other. Not because hermeneutics would defend a kind of idealism, which it does not—not with respect to the extantness of beings. On the contrary. Hermeneutics has a robust sense of "realism," and it also upholds the unsurpassable and constitutive finitude of human understanding. Rather, the foundational relation between meaning formation and objectivity is due to the fact that—as hermeneutics maintains—every meaning (even that of "objectivity," which is the precondition of any claim about such objectivity) is something arrived at within the context of our historicity. The contrast with Buchlerian objectivism is decisive here: in hermeneutic philosophy, creativity emerges in the dimension of human historicity, whereas for Buchler it is a matter of objective nature.

6) A related issue concerns the notion of "event" which appears in both discussed schools in close association with their respective concepts of truth. As opposed to certain trends in analytic philosophy which recognize only two kinds of "vocabularies," namely, that of causality and that of intentionality, pragmatic naturalism has no difficulty with making a non-emphatic use of the term "event" in referring to whatever takes place in nature. But pragmatism maintains a more significant sense of this term as well—and Ryder doesn't fail to call attention to this fact, either (2013, 7/26)—a sense that immediately pertains to the issue of truth. As one of the relevant passages from William James puts it:

"True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. [...] The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation. [...] The connexions and transitions come to us from point to point as being progressive, harmonious, satisfactory. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification" (1962, 194).

The sense in which the term “event” is attached here to the notion of truth, then, is that “truth happens” to a unit of knowledge insofar as it “proves to be”—or “doesn’t prove to be”—true in a process in which it is put to work. The notion of “event” is understood here in the manner of common sense, that is, as a process taking place in some practical context. Something is to be regarded as true if it is enabling and workable: “knowledge is a matter not of what we think but of what we can do in relation to our lived environment” (Ryder 2013, 14-15).

As opposed to that, the notion of event in hermeneutic philosophy, where it plays a decisive role, is primarily used in a rather transcendental, or better, medial sense—as an event of phenomenal self-showing of Being (which is “given” for an understanding intuition), the event of understanding, the event of fusion of horizons, or the event of self-presentation of a play, etc. In such contexts, the event is the mode in which truth and meaning is revealed and therefore is attainable for us, in its immediate and convincing evidence. It refers to the event-like character of truth-happening, either in the sense of a sudden and enlightening flash of meaning, or in the sense of a mimetic representation that reveals its subject matter “as it is, indeed,” in its truth. Neither of these senses have anything to do with something that would “verify itself” in a consecutive process in which it proves to be workable. Rather, they have to do with an event of “being revealed.”

7) The final point I’d like to make pertains probably to one of the most important common features of pragmatist naturalism and hermeneutic philosophy, and it is something that John Ryder repeatedly pointed to in our conversations, and the present paper was trying to elaborate in some depth. It concerns the issue of interpretation. For despite the many differences between these two branches of non-representationalist paradigms of thought articulated in this paper, there is a pragmatically and hermeneutically equally important,

even decisive, characteristic of them, one that may well be peculiar to these two philosophical attitudes. It is such precisely in virtue of some of their common and enumerated features, such as their thorough relationalism or contextualism and their concomitant departure from substance metaphysics; their critiques of modern subjectivism; the emphasis they put on human finitude and the practical embeddedness, conditioned and perspectival nature, of all human judgments and understandings; the fact that both make room for acknowledging productivity and creativity beyond whatever is objective in the sense of extantness; and that they do all these in such a way that none of them is advocating any notion of relativism in the nihilistic sense of “anything goes,” but maintain their respective notions of truth, as well as relaxed, non-combative, yet, utterly critical attitude toward cognition and knowledge in general.

The reason for the fact that these features are common to both approaches can perhaps be summarized as follows. Viewed hermeneutically, Buchlerian relationalism is but a general formalization—and metaphysical extrapolation (with some losses, to be sure)—of the contextualism implied in the factual, hermeneutic-historical situation of all understanding and interpretation. Approached from the perspective of Buchlerian metaphysics, hermeneutics and its focusing on the historicity of meaning formation is but a particular dimension—with insufficient attention paid to issues of objectivity—of the universal relationality of nature. Thus, the central issue here is the pan-relationalism or pan-contextualism upheld by the two schools. The pan-relationalism of the Buchlerian metaphysics has been emphasized throughout this paper. The pan-contextualism of hermeneutic philosophy was perhaps less highlighted so far. Such a pan-contextualism is most explicit in one of the basic concepts of hermeneutic philosophy, namely, in the so called hermeneutic circle. Such circularity has been recognized throughout the history of hermeneutics

(Grondin 1994), and it was already part and parcel of ancient rhetoric. Taken in its most general, formalized sense the hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that the parts of a whole can be understood only by relating them to the whole, and vice versa, the whole can be understood only by referring to its parts. In philosophical hermeneutics, however, this notion of circularity takes on an ontological significance, and it comprehends now the whole breadth of the “hermeneutic phenomenon,” namely, our own fore-understanding of the *Sache* or subject matter in question, and the “voices” of contemporary and historic others addressing that *Sache*. Such a *Sache* is therefore something common to the parties of encounter, and it has a plastic and un-exhaustible supra-individual meaningfulness over against any particular view entertained about it. In turn, any view held about a *Sache* proves to be “only” an interpretation, and even apparently opposing views may have their own particular truth with respect to the *Sache*, due to the particular context from which they approach it. This does not mean, however, that interpretations are arbitrary. Rather, the truth of interpretation is a matter of sorting out legitimate and un-legitimate pre-understandings *with respect to the Sache*. In this way the measure of every interpretation is the *Sache selbst*, and the truth of interpretations can be judged in the light of the many voices in which that *Sache* came to language.

“what constitutes the hermeneutical event proper [...] consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation. Thus here it really is true to say that this event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself” (Gadamer 2004, 459).

Something similar is true of Buchlerian relationalism, at least regarding the perspectival, aspectual nature, and the pluralism, of our legitimate descriptions of the world. If nature is thoroughly relational, and if “the creative construction of meaning is a moment [...] of the creative dimension of a relational, ordinal nature”—as Ryder says (2013, 5/18)—then meaning can be construed in as many ways and in as many respects as the un-exhaustible relational network that constitutes nature allows it to do. Here the plurality of legitimate interpretations corresponds to the multiplicity of nature.

Regarding such permissive, but nevertheless critical spirit which characterizes both of these trends of thought, it can be considered as of secondary importance, after all, whether one conceives its ontological background in terms of nature, or in that of historicity.

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