

The Hermeneutic Phenomenon and the Authenticity of Discourse

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Since the publication of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, hermeneutical theory has played an important role in investigations of language use. A major issue in these investigations is the question of "authentic discourse." This term points to the ability of a writer or a speaker to perform communicative acts whereby language is used to reveal Being in a truthful manner. The purpose of this essay is to suggest what such an act of revelation entails and how the meaningfulness of this act is a function of a person's poetic and rhetorical abilities.

The phenomenon of understanding and of the correct interpretation of what has been understood is not just a problem proper to the methodology of the human sciences....The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all.
Hans-Georg Gadamer

The above quotation from Gadamer's *Truth and Method* reflects the well-known shift in hermeneutical theory that occurred with the publication of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*.¹ This shift takes form in the recognition that hermeneutics is more than a theory and a corresponding method of interpretive understanding, a conception associated with textual-philological analysis and made famous in modern times by both Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. Rather, hermeneutics shows itself primarily on an ontological level; it defines the process of interpretive understanding itself wherein human beings construct a linguistic and historical relationship with the experiential world. The nature of this relationship, especially as it marks out the tradition of historical consciousness that unfolds in and through language, constitutes the hermeneutic phenomenon *par excellence*. Displaced from its theoretical-methodological foundations rooted in the world of the literary text, hermeneutics now finds its origins in the primordial world of man's socio-historical existence, what Calvin Schrag has termed "the text of everyday life."² Within this textual milieu,

human communicative practices warrant special attention; for such practices both produce and display the unfolding of language and thus the tradition of historical consciousness. The hermeneutic phenomenon is revealed when the discourse characterizing these practices interprets and makes intelligible (i.e., meaningful) those past and present concerns which direct the performance of the discourse in its projection of future understanding.³

This relationship between the hermeneutic phenomenon and its revelation in the discourse of communicative practices has become today a focal point for various scholars (e.g., Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel, and Jacques Lacan) who have concerned themselves with the status and utility of hermeneutics as both an ontological feature of human existence and a methodological (scientific) tool for critical reflection. Although important differences exist among these scholars regarding how the hermeneutic phenomenon should be approached for the purposes of assessing the discourse of communicative practices, each of their approaches shares a major interest in the investigation of what Heidegger termed the "authentic" (*eigentlich*) function of discourse.⁴ As suggested throughout Heidegger's writings, authentic discourse is exhibited in communicative acts that are able to disclose and thus make-known the truth of an intended object's Being. To comprehend fully how discourse performs this function requires that the notions of Being, truth, and authenticity be examined and appreciated first from the perspective of hermeneutic ontology. Later in this essay I will offer such an examination. For now, I wish only to point to the ontological nature of these notions as they relate to the performance of discourse: Being reveals itself to a person as the presencing of that which is experienced in a person's existence. The truth of this presencing is set forth when presencing is disclosed, that is, interpreted and made meaningful through discourse. In this making-known of meaning discourse functions authentically as it succeeds in performing the following two related tasks: 1) The discourse shows that the meaning of an intended object (i.e., the truth of its Being) is more than what historically it was thought to be. Here, discourse functions poetically; it creates a new and original understanding of what is. 2) The discourse prevents the meaning of an intended object from becoming forgotten or distorted in present understanding. Here, discourse functions rhetorically; it preserves the truth of what has been disclosed.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role played by authentic discourse in the hermeneutic phenomenon. At least three reasons for the worth of such a study can be offered: First, as suggested above, the topic is receiving special attention in the contemporary literature of hermeneutics. Second, the topic is associated with specific notions (i.e., Being, truth,

authenticity) that necessarily are germane to all forms of hermeneutical experience. Finally, the notion of authenticity and its occurrence in discourse continues to be misinterpreted by those who are critical of the ontological shift in hermeneutical theory and whose criticism, I believe, reflects an invalidity (by their own standards) because of this misinterpretation.⁵ In what follows, then, I first elucidate the specific sense of authenticity found in Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology. I next examine how discourse functions in accordance with authenticity to create and to preserve meaning and thereby to display the hermeneutic phenomenon in an authentic manner. Issues raised throughout this examination are summarized in the concluding section.

Authenticity

Approached from the perspective of hermeneutic ontology, the notion of authenticity describes the fundamental way that human beings acquire an understanding of their existence (i.e., of what it means *to be*). The fact that human existence and the question of Being are so related must not be taken for granted; as will be indicated below, their relationship constitutes the primordial phenomenon of truth. Only by maintaining an authentic awareness of the relationship can one learn to experience, to interpret, and to express this phenomenon in a responsible manner. That such responsibility is a prerequisite for sustaining whatever potential human beings possess for promoting the survival of their race through the performance of discourse is a point that must be emphasized time and again.⁶ Hence, the notion of authenticity to be discussed here takes on a crucial importance. As background to this discussion I present an examination of the relationship between human existence and Being, for in examining this relationship I am at the same time offering a description of authenticity--the fundamental way that human beings acquire an understanding of their existence.

The relationship between human existence and Being, as Heidegger made clear, is not metaphysical in origin. Rather, the relationship constitutes the ground from which all metaphysical thinking develops, a ground that the tradition of metaphysics left unthought. Metaphysics approaches the question of Being by restricting its thinking to an investigation of thing-like beings and what these beings consist of in their present existence. Simply put, metaphysical thinking adheres to the following conception for understanding the relationship between existence and Being: As a thing exists, so it is. Being presents itself in this "it is" of the thing's existence. To experience, to interpret, and to express something about the thing's existence is to determine not only what type of being "it is" but also to denote its present status (i.e., its truth) in the order of Being. Metaphysical thinking stops

here. Being is granted the status of the most universal concept, reified as the ultimate ground of all beings, and often times transformed into the concept of God. Metaphysics thus defines Being as something indefinite yet self-evident (i.e., as continuous presence); it thereby leaves the question of the meaning of Being unexamined by terminating its inquiry with the belief that Being is that which determines beings as beings.⁷

In his critique of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger agreed that the meaning of Being lies in its occurrence as "presencing." For Heidegger, however, this occurrence presupposes a conception of temporality that eludes metaphysics and its emphasis on the present existence of thing-like beings. If the meaning of Being is to achieve clarification and not merely to be accepted as an *a priori* enigma, then one must account for its temporality by investigating how Being becomes present and therefore truthful. Heidegger offered such an account by analyzing the Being of that being who necessarily experiences and thinks its existence in and through time. This being, as Heidegger explained, is "man":

Man obviously is a being. As such he belongs to the totality of Being--just like the stone, the tree, or the eagle. To "belong" here still means to be in the order of Being. But man's distinctive feature lies in this, that he, as the being who thinks, is open to Being, face to face with being; thus man remains referred to Being and so answers to it. Man is essentially this relationship of responding to Being, and he is only this. This "only" does not mean a limitation, but rather an excess. A belonging to Being prevails within man, a belonging which listens to Being according to its original meaning, as presence. Being is present to man neither incidentally nor only on rare occasions. Being is present and abides only as it concerns man through the claim it makes on him. For it is man, open toward Being, who alone lets Being arrive as presence. Such becoming present needs the openness of a clearing, and by this need remains appropriated to human being.⁸

This explanation of man's relationship to being provides important directives for realizing how authenticity enables human beings to acquire a fundamental understanding of their existence; for, authenticity is displayed in how human beings are open to Being and how this openness makes possible a responding to the claim of Being. To respond to this claim authentically is to realize and abide by the primordial phenomenon of truth. A clarification of these brief remarks concerning authenticity can be achieved by placing and deciphering the above quotation from Heidegger within the context of his hermeneutic ontology.

Human Being "Is Open to Being"

Human being is always in the temporal and historical process of understanding its existence and thus its Being: What it means to be is an issue that only human beings can and necessarily do raise as they live-out, confront and think about the future possibilities of their existence. For human beings, to be is to become that which they are, their possibilities. This potentiality-for Being, a potentiality that constitutes the not yet of one's futural development, is what opens and refers a human being to Being.⁹ Of all the beings that exist in-the-world, only a human being can question its existence and decide whether or not what was and/or what is will continue to be. When answering this question, human being reveals itself as the place (the there) wherein Being is disclosed and made meaningful.

"Disclosedness" is the fundamental characteristic of human being; Heidegger designated this privileged ontological status of human being: *Dasein*.¹⁰ In its disclosedness *Dasein* is first and foremost authentic. *Authenticity is the condition of being open to the possibilities of Being.* (As a way of simplifying the discussion from here on, I will use the term "Dasein" when referring to human being.)

The Relationship with Being: Responding and Belonging

Dasein relates itself to being in and through the disclosedness of its existence *Dasein* responds to Being as the only being that has a there and thus can use discourse to offer an interpretation of what is (Being). However, because this interpretation of Being always takes form in light of *Dasein's* temporal existence and because *Dasein's* temporality is marked by the not yet of its potentiality-for-Being, an interpretation of Being must be seen as but a possible disclosure of what is. *Dasein's* relationship to Being is one that exceeds the temporal limitations of present understanding. This excess characterizing the relationship between *Dasein* and Being denotes how *Dasein* authentically belongs to Being: *Dasein* is the *witness* for Being. *Dasein* is where the past, present, and future join together as a unitary phenomenon, where what is no longer and what is yet to come can be heard in an interpretation of what is thought to be now.¹¹ Here, Being shows itself and is understood by *Dasein* as "presencing."

Being as Presencing

Being presents itself in how beings exist in-the-world. Only that being having the character of *Dasein*, however, can experience this presencing; for *Dasein* is always in the temporal process of understanding its existence, of understanding what it means to be. *Dasein* is open toward Being in that it provides a clearing (i.e., the "there") wherein Being arrives and becomes present as something that can be interpreted and made-known in discourse.

That Dasein must engage in this hermeneutic phenomenon so that it can structure and know its world in a meaningful way is the claim that Being makes on Dasein. The truthfulness of this meaningful knowledge, however, is contingent on Dasein's responsibility to Being. Such responsibility shows itself when Dasein offers an interpretation that discloses the presencing of Being occurring in something that is. Truth, as revealed in the discourse of a specific interpretive act, happens as disclosure. From this association between truth and disclosure, it follows that *what remains concealed* (i.e., not seen or misunderstood) *in an interpretation's attempted disclosure of Being comprises the "untruth" of the interpretation.*¹² Dasein's relationship with such untruth will be explored in the next section of this paper.

Importantly, what has been said so far about truth presupposes the existence of another, more primordial phenomenon of truth. This phenomenon is characterized by Heidegger as the "authentic temporality" of Dasein's existence, the disclosedness found in that being who understands, who has a there, and who is thus open to the presencing of Being. Hence, in its disclosedness, its privileged way of belonging to Being, Dasein is ontologically already "in the truth."¹³ Only that being having the character of Dasein (i.e., disclosedness) can share in the primordial phenomenon of truth and make it known in the discourse of an interpretation that discloses some truth of Being. The following example taken from the literature of psychoanalysis is offered as a way of clarifying the distinction between the two senses of truth being examined here.¹⁴

A patient seeking a cure for perceived mental problems brings to a psychoanalytic interview a lived experience that the patient has thought about and made meaningful. In the process the patient is victimized by what the meaning suggests about the patient's being. Specifically, during some moment (or moments) in the patient's lived history, the patient's self was understood to be what at the moment was remembered as having-just-been-thus, having-been-thus for a certain period of time, or having-always-been-thus. The patient believes now that what has been will always be. This "what" can be anything disturbing to the patient, anything that suggests to the patient that the remembered behavior is symptomatic of some ailment that will continually be repeated and that the current social mores depict as devious or perverse. Hence, in seeking the help of psychoanalysis, the patient is seeking an answer to the question: Is this symptom my truth, what I desire to become (and to be) as a human being?

Such a question reflects the disclosedness of a Dasein who is experiencing the presence of Being, who is engaged in the process of making present the past while encountering the future. Presencing shows itself simultaneously in all three of these temporal modes: What is now reflects what has been in and through what is yet to come.¹⁵ This temporal process is the primordial

phenomenon of truth—the belonging together of Dasein (as disclosedness) and the presencing of Being (as temporality). Ontologically speaking, Dasein is always in this relationship and thus always in this truth. Dasein, therefore, is always potentially authentic; for, as noted earlier, authenticity is the condition of being open to the possibilities of Being. From this authenticity emerges those truths found happening in a given interpretation's disclosure of what is.

So far the discussion of authenticity has emphasized its ontological status: Authenticity describes the fundamental way Dasein relates to Being and how this relationship constitutes the primordial phenomenon of truth. In the next section of this paper I look at how authenticity manifests itself in the discourse of Dasein's everyday (ontic) life. This concern was alluded to throughout the first section when noting the role played by interpretation in the making-known of Being. Dasein's use of discourse to interpret Being and make it intelligible reveals Dasein's practical involvement in the hermeneutic phenomenon. As will be indicated below, such involvement imposes a difficulty on Dasein's authentic use of discourse.

Authentic Discourse

The occurrence of authentic discourse in everyday life is made possible by Dasein's own authenticity - its ability to remain open to the presencing of Being and thus to exist in and express the truth through acts of disclosure. Discourse functions to perform this disclosure by creating an original understanding of what something actually is and by preserving this creation from becoming misunderstood or forgotten in the tradition of historical consciousness. These two specific functions of discourse operate dialectically to inspire a people to authenticate their commonsense view of the world by associating it with truth. Only by maintaining this dialectic in its everyday discourse can Dasein keep itself open to the presencing of Being and to the question raised by this presencing: Has past understanding been made present such that future understanding will continue to reflect what is thought to be now? Taking this question seriously, Dasein demonstrates its responsibility to Being by enacting its authenticity and thus its desire to express and remain in the truth. However, if Dasein does not maintain the dialectic between creation and preservation, then a reification of preservation takes place. Such reification not only enhances what was termed earlier the "untruth" but also leads to the occurrence of inauthentic discourse. To comprehend how this transformation from the authentic to the inauthentic mode of discourse unfolds, it will first be necessary to explore in greater depth the above introductory remarks concerning the creating and the preserving functions of discourse and their dialectical relationship.

The Creating Function of Discourse

The creating function of discourse is a poetic activity (*poiesis*), a bringing-forth of truth in the word whereby something is named and established as what it is. The authenticity of this naming, its measure of originality for revealing Being, is marked by Dasein's struggle to engage in a "projective saying" of understanding--a speaking and presenting of something, as opposed to a re-presenting of this something in already spoken terms.¹⁶ Disclosing what this something is (i.e., the truth of its Being), especially when this something is found to be more than what historically it was thought to be, defines the creativity at work in the discourse. This creativity functions to liberate present understanding from the determinancy of the past; it counsels people in the most original performance of freedom of speech and directs them in their appreciation of the future.¹⁷ Functioning this way, discourse offers a lesson in the history of truth: in its uncovering of something that has heretofore been concealed, creative (poetic) discourse teaches that "Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the un-covered, in the sense of concealment."¹⁸ And in showing that the truth of what was no longer is now, creative discourse also shows something more--namely, that the truth of what is now can become something different in the future. Hence, in its relationship with truth and Being, the creating function of discourse instructs humankind to authenticate its everyday life by realizing its potential (i.e., its understanding of what is) in and through the word. As Heidegger put it:

We do not learn who man is by learned definitions; we learn it only when man contends with the essent, striving to bring it into its being, i.e., into limit and form, that is to say when he projects something new (not yet present), when he creates original poetry, when he builds poetically.¹⁹

When building poetically, discourse contributes to the language of Being. In its creative function discourse moves present understanding beyond (*para*) an habitual, commonsense view (*doxa*) of truth that has been preserved in the language of present understanding. By creating this paradox, discourse opens up present understanding to a new linguistic conception of what something is. This new realization of Being, in turn, serves to uncover an untruth found happening in the preserved truth of commonsense. Preservation concedes to creation with this disclosure of untruth; for, what was habitually thought to be a truth has now been exposed by discourse as something in need of further understanding. The language offered by discourse that is functioning creatively encourages this understanding. Such discourse thereby assumes the task of initiating the historical movement of language wherein Being is revealed. In this

revelation an habitual truth is put to rest so that, at least for the time being, a new truth can be brought to life as something worthy of preservation.²⁰

The Preserving Function of Discourse

To engage in the preservation of a new (i.e., paradoxical) truth, according to Heidegger, requires that people transform their commonsense and thus restrain themselves from "all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work [of the discourse]. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is."²¹ Enacting such restraint enables people to appropriate the truth offered in the discourse. In this epiphanous moment of appropriation people can display their authenticity by making a truth their own (*eigen*); that is, they can become open toward Being and thus learn how to disclose a presencing of what is. But how does this learning take place? Are people merely expected to abide by the creative function of discourse, restrain their commonsense practices, and thus acquiesce to the paradox that is presented to them? This second question points to the difficulty involved when people are asked to acknowledge the demise of a truth that heretofore has guided the experience of their everyday life. Hence, an affirmative answer to the question would be more the product of wishful thinking than of practical reasoning. For unlike wishful thinking, practical reasoning admits the difficulty reflected in the question by recognizing not only the importance of the paradox for inspiring the truth but also how the paradox must take into account the commonsense that confronts it. An example of such practical reasoning was offered by Richard Whately when he noted that

There is a "presumption" against any thing paradoxical, i.e., contrary to the prevailing opinion: it may be true; but the burden of proof lies with him who maintains it; since men are not expected to abandon the prevailing belief till some reason is shown If a paradox is unsupported, it can claim no attention; but if false, it should be censured on that ground; but not for being new. If true, it is the more important, for being a truth not generally admitted.²²

Implied in Whately's reasoning here is a function of discourse that must necessarily be operative if a truth that creates a paradox is to be preserved by people who feel justified in adhering to their commonsense. Although a paradox serves to extend this commonsense toward what is believed to be an original understanding of Being, it is the commonsense that allows the extension to occur. Without the commonsense of the prevailing opinion there would be nothing to extend, nothing to oppose and contradict when attempting to convey a provocative insight into truth. An argumentative appeal to commonsense is thus necessary if what the creative function of

discourse discloses poetically is to gain support as something worthy of attention and preservation. When discourse functions to make such an appeal it engages in a rhetorical activity; that is, it displays the practical mastery that people have for disclosing to others that which is understood.²³ Functioning rhetorically, then, discourse enhances the communicability of something that is being pointed out and predicated poetically. This communicability, in turn, allows the discourse to enact a preserving function whereby people are directed toward a truth for the purposes of either reinterpreting something that was understood only in a superficial way or experiencing something that was never understood. Only when discourse exhibits this preserving function can people be expected to realize, to share, and to act in accordance with a truth that, as presented in the spoken or written word, imposes a paradox on their commonsense.

Creation and Preservation: A Dialectical Relationship

To be authentic, discourse must concern itself with the truth, with the disclosure of Being. As suggested above, discourse performs this disclosure through its creating and preserving functions: The creating function of discourse discloses an original yet potential understanding of Being; the preserving function of discourse, in turn, discloses this potential understanding so that it can be communicated and shared by others. Only in these acts of disclosure can discourse be performed authentically. That is, discourse must either enact a creating function or, if this creating function is not at work in a discourse, use its preserving function to concern itself with a disclosure stemming from another creative act. In the first case, the authenticity of the disclosure exists only in a potential state; it therefore must remain historically meaningless until disclosed by an act of preservation. In the second case, the authenticity of the discourse would appear to be complete; for, here, the preserving function of discourse is present and thereby could concern itself with, and thus disclose, the truth occurring in the creative act of another discourse. (Later in this essay I will suggest that the conditions noted in this second case can also promote the occurrence of inauthentic discourse.)

As stated here, the two cases suggest that the creating and preserving functions of discourse must operate dialectically if the authenticity of discourse is to be both enacted and made-known in a historically meaningful way: Without the act of creation, the preserving function of discourse would have nothing to direct it toward the truth; and without the act of preservation, the truth occurring in the creating function of discourse would be void of any practicality. What happens, then, when this dialectic is not maintained in discourse? A comprehensive answer to this question can be offered only by investigating further how an act of preservation

functions to make-known the truth found happening in an act of creation. As already indicated, this preserving function must be operative if the creativity displayed by discourse is to serve a practical purpose. My investigation here thus will center on the relationship between the creating and preserving functions of discourse as set forth in the second case above. This specific relationship, I would argue, not only exemplifies how authentic discourse plays a role in the hermeneutic phenomenon but also shows how Dasein's practical involvement in this phenomenon is one that encourages the production of inauthentic discourse.

From Authentic, to Inauthentic, to Authentic Discourse

When discourse is used to preserve a truth found happening in a past creative disclosure, it inevitably is confronted with a twofold task that, as noted earlier, places the discourse in a paradoxical tension: Displaying its authenticity, the discourse must raise a people's commonsense understanding and guide it toward a truthful understanding of what is. By so doing, the discourse maintains its dialectical relationship with Being; it functions to build poetically and to preserve an original creative act that brought forth Being in the word. Yet, in struggling to preserve the essential word of Being so that it can continue to be interpreted and understood in a meaningful an authentic way, the discourse must also engage in a rhetorical activity whereby it can associate the word with commonsense. As Heidegger put it, "Even the essential word, if it is to be understood and so become a possession in common, must make itself ordinary."²⁴ Here, however, the preserving function of discourse makes itself susceptible to being transformed into mere rhetoric, what Heidegger labeled "the misuse of language in idle talk." According to Heidegger, idle talk is inauthentic discourse that "releases one from the task of genuinely understanding," "discourages any new inquiry and any disputation," and encourages people to follow "the route of gossiping and passing the word along."²⁵ The inauthenticity of idle talk thus places Being in the danger of becoming misunderstood or forgotten; it promotes communicative experiences wherein both the speaker and the hearer are not building poetically but instead are disengaging themselves from the truth of what is so that they can conform their thinking to preserved judgments fostered by the commonsense of people's present understanding. The more discourse adheres to such judgments, the more it associated itself with matters that may not have yet been authentically comprehended ("unconcealed"). By allowing such matters to remain in their current state of preservation, discourse promotes the reification of this preservation and thereby becomes inauthentic as it adds to the untruth of what still remains concealed and permits this untruth to dissemble a past creative disclosure.

Thus, between the truth revealed in a creative disclosure and the conformity bred by commonsense lies the world of the preserving function of discourse. Moving toward the truth, this function makes itself available to the presencing of Being and thus to authenticity; moving toward conformity, it makes itself available to untruth and thus to inauthenticity. yet, what guarantee is there that untruth and thus inauthenticity would still not be present in a piece of discourse that associated its preserving function with an act of creation? Such a guarantee is clearly an impossibility when one remembers that an understanding of truth of what is--the presencing of Being--is marked by an infiniteness, the not yet of the future. Hence, even when discourse succeeds in preserving an act of creativity, it can only offer a possible disclosure of Being; and this disclosure may later prove to be in error. The point is, however, that if the preserving function of discourse is not associated with an act of creativity, then discourse must necessarily fall back upon commonsense in its attempt to say anything at all. That truth can be better served by people who struggle to avoid this fall is a fact that has made possible the intellectual and authentic growth of *homo loquens*.

Conclusion: The Difficulty and the Danger of Authentic Discourse

For a person to perform authentic discourse such that what the discourse is about can be communicated and shared with others, the person must assume the dialectical task of becoming both a creator and a preserver, a poet and a rhetor, a voice for truth and a voice for the prevailing commonsense. The translator of a text, for example, can provide an illustration of what is being suggested here. According to Walter Benjamin, "It is the task of a translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language."²⁶ In other words, the authenticity of a translator's discourse is dependent on the translator's ability to open up the language characterizing the commonsense understanding of his or her culture so that a truth perceived in the pure language of a text can be appropriated by this understanding. If the translator is too much of a poet, then the translation of the text and its truth may remain too far beyond its readers' understanding, thereby serving little or no purpose besides bringing a commonsensical scorn to the translator. If, on the other hand, the translator is too much of a rhetor, then the truth of the text would most likely become lost in the current language preserved by commonsense.²⁷ The experience of rhetorical criticism and the experience of conducting a truthful conversation, as I have indicated elsewhere, can provide further illustrations for appreciating the task of performing authentic discourse in a meaningful way.²⁸

History has shown that such a task is not only difficult but also strewn with danger. When overcoming the difficulty, people take on the responsibility of being great heroes, scholars, politicians, theologians, and so on. In this responsibility, however, lies the danger of authentic discourse. An example of this danger was noted above--that is, incurring the scorn of commonsense. Yet, such scorn is mild when compared to other responses for commonsense. Consider, for instance, the fate of those like Socrates, Christ, or Martin Luther King, Jr. all of whom tried to associate a sense of truth with a specific realm of commonsense.

Authentic discourse is a response to Being, as Being shows itself differently in the changing contexts of history. Authentic discourse discloses this change and thereby asks commonsense to be as truthful and as flexible as that which is making the request. That commonsense is all too often incapable of responding to this request is witnessed in its own biography which, as Vladimir Nabokov so eloquently noted, makes for "nasty reading":

Commonsense has trampled down many a gentle genius whose eyes had delighted in a too early moonbeam of some too early truth; commonsense has back-kicked dirt at the loveliest of queer paintings because a blue tree seemed madness to its well-meaning hoof; commonsense has prompted ugly but strong nations to crush their fair but frail neighbors the moment a gap in history offered a chance that it would have been ridiculous not to exploit. Commonsense is fundamentally immoral, for the natural morals of mankind are as irrational as the magic rites that they evolved since the immemorial dimness of time. Commonsense at its worst is sense made common, and so everything is comfortably cheapened by its touch It is instructive to think that there is not a single person in this room, or for that matter in any room in the world, who, at some nicely chosen point in historical space-time would not be put to death there and then, here and now, by a commonsensical majority in righteous rage. The color of one's creed, neckties, eyes, thoughts, manners, speech, is sure to meet somewhere in time or space with a fatal objection from a mob that hates that particular tone. And the more brilliant, the more unusual the man, the nearer he is to the stake. *Stranger* always rhymes with *danger*. The meek prophet, the enchanter in his cave, the indignant artist, the nonconforming little schoolboy, all share in the same sacred danger. And this being so, let us bless them, let us bless the freak; for in the natural evolution of things, the ape would perhaps never have become man had not a freak appeared in the family.²⁹

Commonsense is the audience that witnesses the performance of authentic discourse. Those who choose to become the actors for this performance must offer more than histrionics if the truth is to be heard and taken seriously. Yet, how much truth can be heard before the performer is

labeled a "freak" and thereby risks the danger of confronting "a common-sensical majority in righteous rage"? Indeed, "let us bless the freak," but let us also hope that he or she has enough commonsense to realize how to enact authentic discourse in a practical and historically meaningful way.

1. For the Gadamer quotation see his *Truth and Method*, eds. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975). Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) was published originally in 1927. The translation used in this essay is that of John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

2. Calvin O. Schrag, *Radical Reflection and the Origin of the Human Sciences* (West Lafayette, IN.: Purdue University Press, 1980), pp. 98-99, 126.

3. This explication of the hermeneutic phenomenon adheres to Heidegger's conception as set forth in his *Being and Time*, see esp. pp. 188-209. Here, however, it should be noted that Heidegger's use of the term "discourse" (*Rede*) is not restricted to the everyday communicative practices of speaking and writing. Rather, Heidegger's sense of discourse is also ontologically oriented; it encompasses the lived-through experience of human existence (*Dasein*) which makes possible all concrete forms of language use. For an interesting discussion of these two senses of discourse found in Heidegger, see Paul A. Bové, *Destructive Poetics, Heidegger and American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 79-81. Unless otherwise noted, my use of the term "discourse" throughout this essay refers to the communicative practices of speaking and writing.

4. For Heidegger, discourse (conceived in a strict ontological sense, see note 3 above) is necessarily authentic because it is equiprimordial with the possibility of existence that characterizes all human experience. This possibility constitutes the basis of what Heidegger meant by the term "authenticity." (An in-depth discussion of the relationship between the possibility of existence and authenticity follows in the next section.) As performed in the communicative practices of everyday life, however, discourse also exhibits an inauthentic nature. This nature of discourse is examined later in this essay.

That the issue of authentic discourse continues to be addressed by scholars interested in the hermeneutic phenomenon is suggested, I would contend, in Gadamer's conception of "hermeneutical conversation," Ricoeur's theory of "metaphor," Habermas' reconstruction of "the universal validity basis of speech," Apel's "ethics of argumentation," and Lacan's discussion of "creative subjectivity." For example, see Gadamer, esp. pp. 325-51; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 45-

69; Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, tr. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1979), esp. pp. 1-68; Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trs. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), esp. pp. 225-300; and Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), esp. pp. 68-107. For essays that suggest how these authors approach the issue of authentic discourse, see Michael J. Hyde, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Communicative Experience: The Paradigm of Oral History," *Man and World*, 13 (1980), 81-98; "On the Reifying Tendency and the Liberating Function of Speech," *Eros*, 7 (June 1980), 54-82; and "Transcendental Philosophy and Human Communication," in *Interpersonal Communication: Essays in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, ed. Joseph Pilotta (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1982), pp. 15-34.

5. Here, I have in mind the work of E.D. Hirsch. In his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), Hirsch sets forth a theory of interpretation, based on the idea of "re-cognition," that "assumes that something in the nature of a text requires the meaning to be the stable and determinate meaning of the author" (p. 24). Hirsch, however, fails to realize the consistent and determinate meaning of authenticity, as this term takes form in the writings of Heidegger and those influenced by Heidegger's thought. Contrary to Hirsch, authenticity was not intended by Heidegger to be some ontic designation whereby it assumes the common dictionary definition of genuine or sincere. See Hirsch's essay "The Paradoxes of Perspectivism," paper delivered at the Germanic Section of the Modern Language Association, (December 1967), 1. This definition is but a derivative representation of the ontological status of authenticity discussed by Heidegger. Hirsch's continual misinterpretation of the term is evidenced in his *The Aim of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 45-49.

6. This belief underlies various critical assessments of the scientific-technological world-view and its prevalence in contemporary thought. See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Apel, pp. 225-300; Edward Goodwin Ballard, "On Dialectic: Mechanical and Human," in *Communication Philosophy and the Technological Age*, ed. Michael J. Hyde (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), pp. 13-37; Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Communication: Technology and Ethics," in Hyde, pp. 38-53; and Michael J. Hyde "The Human Component in Technology," in *Phenomenology and the Understanding of Human Destiny*, ed. Stephen Skousgaard (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1981), pp. 31-44.

7. See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, tr. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, 1962); *Identity and Difference*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); and his *On Time and Being*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

8. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 31.

9. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 67-68, 182-186.

10. "Dasein" literally means "Being-there." As discussed in this essay, the significance of Dasein's disclosedness reflects Heidegger's appreciation of the term in his *Being and Time*, esp. pp. 256-273.

11. Dasein's existence, when understood as a unitary phenomenon, is designated by Heidegger as Dasein's "care-structure." Dasein is caring when it takes seriously the issue of its own Being and realizes what it means to be as a Being-in-the-world. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 225 ff.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

14. This example is based on my reading of Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits, A Selection* and his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978). See Michael J. Hyde, "Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66 (1980), 96-108.

15. This is not to say that once Dasein interprets its Being as something (e.g., a symptom), Dasein will necessarily continue to be this something. Rather, the interpretation only shows a possibility of Dasein's existence. As Lacan put it: "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming." See Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection*, p. 86.

16. See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in his *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 73-75.

17. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trs. R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick, in his *Existence and Being* (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1949), esp. pp. 302-10; also see Michael J. Hyde "Rhetorically Man Dwells: On the Making-Known Function of Discourse," *Communication*, (in press).

18. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 60.

19. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 144.

20. For an interesting discussion of how this revelation is fundamentally an act of violence, see *Ibid.*, pp. 157 ff.

21. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 66; also see pp. 67-75.

22. Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric, Comprising an Analysis of the Laws of Moral Evidence and of Persuasion, with Rules for Argumentative Composition and Elocution*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 115.

23. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," trs. G.G. Hess and R.E. Palmer in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 20. For a discussion that suggests how this rhetorical activity also shows itself on an intrapersonal level, see Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen But Unobserved Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (1979), 347-63.

24. Heidegger, "Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry," in *Existence and Being*, p. 275.

25. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 211-214.

26. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 80.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

28. See my "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric . . ."; and my "Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Communicative Experience . . ."

29. Vladimir Nabokov, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," in his *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1980), p. 372.