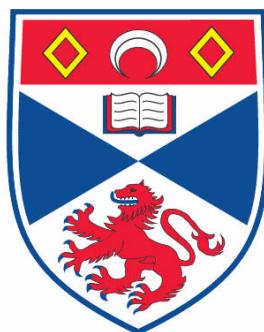


**SHROUDED IN DARKNESS : A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PATH
TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL ONTOLOGY IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS**

Torsten Michel

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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Shrouded in Darkness

A phenomenological path towards a new social
ontology in International Relations

A Thesis submitted to the School of International Relations of the University of St Andrews
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Torsten Michel

21 April 2008

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At first sight it seems rather easy to write the acknowledgments for a PhD thesis. One of the first lessons one is taught when embarking upon this journey towards a doctorate is the certain fact that this endeavour will be a rather lonely one – not in social but in intellectual terms. At the end of the journey one is supposed to be one of the leading authorities in the specifically carved out niche of scholarship in which one was laboriously involved for the period of three or four years. And yet, the Acknowledgements is probably the hardest part to write of all.

In true Moltkean fashion it is true that the first outline of the PhD does not (nor do many subsequent ones) survive the encounter with the ‘enemy’. The first and foremost ‘enemy’ in this respect is certainly one’s supervisor who relentlessly and unfortunately very convincingly reminds one time and again of the finitude of one’s knowledge and the problematic fringes of one’s arguments. And yet, at the same time one realises that his role is in fact more that of an ally that tries to channel one’s ideas and helps to unfold the potential of the chosen topic. In this respect I was fortunate enough to receive this intellectual and personal support from Nick Rengger, who stoically endured the various (and sometimes wacky) intellectual advances over the years and, rather than setting limits by pointing out their shortcomings, always opened new horizons by raising questions as towards the frame in which the argument was presented. To him must go the biggest ‘thank-you’ for getting me and the thesis where it is in its current form (obviously without blaming him for any remaining shortcomings inherent in it).

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"It will be like the first step into a flowering garden by a man kept for years in a dark prison. This prison will be our human environment bounded by a reason directed solely at what can be measured or mechanized, and the civilization of such an environment. And the garden will be God's colourful world that – albeit at a distance – we long to salute and have open up to us. And the prisoner will be European Man of today and yesterday, who, sighing and groaning, strides under the burden of his own mechanism and who, his eyes turned earthward and heaviness in his limbs, has forgotten his God and his world."

Max Scheler

*I needed a truth which was not my creature,
but whose creature I would be.*

Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

ABSTRACT

The thesis sets out to critique recent accounts dealing with the notion and role of ontology in IR theorising as it can be found, for instance, in Alexander Wendt and more recently in the writings of critical realists. The main aim of these treatises on ontology is to provide a new perspective for IR theory that is in line with a more general critique of epistemological foundationalism and strict empiricism. Thereby these accounts rely upon an interpretation of scientific realism as it can be found in the Philosophy of Science.

The thesis shows how these approaches to ontology on the one hand overcome epistemological foundationalism but, on the other hand, reaffirm a form of ontological foundationalism through the apodictic positing of ‘intransitive objects’ that exist outside and independent of the human mind. Such an approach, rather than leading to a new and better conception of ontology, reifies the same biases of Cartesian subjectivity, the designative nature of language, a correspondence theory of truth and the problem-laden concept of freedom as it was conceived in Kant’s third antinomy. In response to these approaches whose general aim at reconceptualising ontology must be welcomed, the thesis develops a new approach that does not recreate the same problems in a different fashion but tries to overcome them through a reconceptualisation of the term ontology itself. The basis for the thesis is to be found in post-Husserlian phenomenology, a body of literature that has so far been widely ignored in IR theorising. By explicating the main tenets in the thought of such eminent philosophers as Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur the thesis reconstructs the notion of ontology on the basis of an enquiry into the meaning of being in general and human being in particular. From this perspective a new approach to the notions of agency, language, truth and freedom becomes possible without recreating the rifts and foundationalisms that characterises many approaches to social and political relations.

I, Torsten Michel, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a previous degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in International Relations in September 2005; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2004 and 2008.

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in International Relations in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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INTRODUCTION

"At first philosophy hid in her womb the germs of all sciences; but once she had given birth to them and given them motherly care during their infancy, and once they had, under her tutelage, become mature and great, she is not averse to watching them go out into the big world in order to conquer it. For a while she watches them with loving care, perhaps now and again with a soft warning word that neither can nor wishes to restrict their newly won independence; eventually, however, she quietly withdraws to her retirement corner, from where one day, scarcely noticed and scarcely missed, she will have vanished from the world."

Paul Natorp

At the beginning of the 21st century IR theory seems to be as vibrant and diverse as never before in its 90 year old history as an academic field. The traditional theoretical outlooks of realism and liberalism in their different varieties have been supplemented by a plethora of so called critical accounts that draw on different sociological, philosophical and anthropological insights developed through the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. The most prominent and influential among these are post-/neo- Marxist accounts (Cox, 1981; Cox, 1983, Gill, 1993; Rosenberg, 1994; Taylor, 2003), different strands of constructivism (Onuf, 1989; Kratochwil, 1989; Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1999; Fierke and Jorgensen, 2001; Fierke, 2005; Guzzini and Leander, 2006) and post-structuralism (Der Derian, 1987; Campbell, 1998; Edkins, 1999).

One feature that recently developed in the wake of this ‘reflective turn’ (Keohane, 1988) is the renewed occupation with ontological stipulations and concerns regarding the units and structures and their interrelation that constitute the international system. (White, 1997; Wendt, 1999; Wight, 2006; Kurki, 2007) With the rise of constructivist

literature in all its various forms we have learned that the wisdoms of old that relied upon either ideas or material capabilities to explain political outcomes and (state) behaviour are too simplistic and under-socialised in their attempts to grasp the developments and events in international politics. Since the 1980s and especially after the end of the Cold War new approaches rose out of the ashes into which most IR theorising had deteriorated and promised a new take on processes of identity formation and the social dimension and its effects in the international system.

What these critical accounts all share is a general suspicion against the modern scientific project that promised an application of reason and instrumental rationality to face and solve the increasing problems of humankind. Enquiries into the social world, they stipulate, cannot follow a strict scientific agenda modelled on the natural sciences as it was attempted after the second debate in IR between traditionalism and behaviouralism was decided in favour of the latter. Game theory approaches taken over from economics as well as strict quantitative or qualitative research designs dominated the field (especially in the US) throughout the better part of the 20th century. (see for instance Keohane et al., 1994; Jackson, 2008: 130) The hope they exhibited was deeply reliant on and influenced by the modern epistemological project started with Cartesian scepticism and climaxing in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Based on this seminal development of Western thought the natural sciences that prospered since the 16th century could finally be reconciled with a philosophical outlook that fit with their insights and furthermore they were now bestowed with a task of deciphering and dispelling the last remnants of mysticism regarding natural phenomena. (Baumann, 1978: 10-1) Reason was destined to illuminate the dark corners where irrationalism and

superstition had ruled for the last 1000 years. The trial of reason would decide which insights yield knowledge and which can be discarded as mere belief and story-telling. Scientific explanation and experimentation, many were convinced, will gradually reveal the secrets of nature and achieve a total control over its domain.

In the mainstream accounts in IR theory we can clearly identify the ramifications of this radical shift in Western thought. Neo-realism and neo-utilitarianism in general are committed to a ‘scientific’ approach that should wield universally valid and necessary insights into the realm of international politics. The quest for causal explanations and the positing of constitutive features such as anarchy, security dilemma and power politics served and still serve as the basic points for enquiries into the nature of the international system. Surely there were early sceptic voices such as Hans Morgenthau in *Scientific man versus power politics* (1946) but those voices were mainly sidelined by the seemingly compelling insights into dynamics of state action and their underlying determinants. The Cold War was hereby probably the biggest and most favourable playground adherents to a scientific approach to IR will ever get. The dream to conceptualise IR according to this modern epistemological outlook entered a process of decline, however, with the sudden and surprising end of the Cold War. One of the actors within this period of ideological stand-off decided to pursue a way of action that was neither fitting nor really explicable in the terminologies of the then predominant approaches to international politics. The challenge in the form of what is now subsumed under the large umbrella of constructivism was looming at the horizon throughout the 1980s and found early expressions in publications such as Kratochwil’s *Rules, Norms and Decisions* (1989) or Onuf’s *World of our making* (1989). At the beginning of the

1990s it saw its chance and penetrated the hitherto rather closed discipline. Since then the variety of new, critical or reflectivist accounts, as they have been labelled, increased tremendously and so did their influence in IR, at least in the European approaches. (on the differences between American and European understandings of IR see for example Waever, 1998)

The eventual breakthrough could no longer be ignored when Alexander Wendt with his *Anarchy is what states make of it* (1992) reached for the first time deep into the community of IR and presented a different approach to analyse and indeed understand the processes of change in the international system. Since then the field of reflectivist accounts has been diversified with many different research agendas and competing ontological and epistemological claims. What could be glimpsed here already, however, is a slight shift away from the modern preoccupation with devising methods to establish valid and true knowledge about the international system towards renewed thought about the entities and their conceptualisation that constitute the international system; in other words we could see a renewed emphasis on ontological questions in certain corners of IR theory. Alexander Wendt, for example, whose work will be looked at more closely in chapter I was explicitly concerned with developing a different ontology of IR, stating that the “most important move is to reconceptualise what international structure is made of.” (Wendt, 1999: 20)

Aim and Scope of the thesis

The challenges alluded to above raised new and substantial questions regarding the foundations for research within the study of International Relations. “Recent years have

seen a marked resurgence of debates about the philosophical foundations of empirical inquiry throughout the social sciences. ... the conceptual sophistication of the study of politics has certainly been on the increase.” (Jackson, 2008: 129) One of the most sustained and prevalent discussions in this new-found sophistication relates to the status of the entities we study. As Jackson rightly pointed out the concern with questions regarding the nature and status of the entities towards which our research efforts are directed is closely tied to the demise of the Enlightenment ideal to achieve a presuppositionless and objective science that, relying upon the right epistemological tools, will present a true and accurate mirror-image or representation about how the world ‘really is’. (ibid.: 130) Such a fundamental challenge, even when originally concerning very abstract considerations, must have and already had a profound impact on the study of social and political phenomena. If we overturn the Enlightenment ideal of science and its concomitant focus on epistemological questions, “then we have to fundamentally rethink the ways in which we conduct and evaluate empirical research in IR.” (ibid.: 131)

Exactly here do we find the main concern of this thesis. In light of the challenges expounded against the ideal of presuppositionless science we encountered many different approaches to engage this problem. Fundamental to all of them are the central assumptions about the things and entities we are trying to understand and their relation to human existence. Such an enquiry will therefore necessarily bring us back to the notion of ontology as we have to enquire and conceptualise the beings we are dealing with as well as their nature and characteristics. Following this renewed interest in the status and nature of beings “we should bring ontological considerations to the forefront

of our reflections about the status of the knowledge that we produce in our research.” (ibid.: 132)

The main aim of this thesis is in line with this demand and tries to deliver a reflection on the notion of a social ontology, i.e. a conceptualisation of the nature of beings in the international system and their relation to one another. It is important to note from the beginning that there are basically two different ways to conduct such an enquiry. The first is to reiterate differing ontological positions and develop a new or more elaborate one which fits better with the criticisms outlined above. Such an endeavour, as promising as it may be, would however still posit the existence of beings as given. Of course, this is not to suggest that we should question or even abandon the assumptions that beings exist. What it does require though, and here we reach the second way in which an ontological reconceptualisation can be conducted, is an engagement with the fundamental question of what it means to be. Rather than simply acknowledging that beings are and then try to grasp what they are we should first of all clarify what it actually means to be – in other words it seems even more fundamental to start with the notion of *being* rather than right away with the various beings we encounter and their status and nature. This thesis is therefore not concerned with attempting to conceptualise yet another ‘ontology’ and devise a further ‘theory of international politics’. Arguably, we have seen too many of those already. Rather the thesis will proceed by reflecting on the notion of ontology as such and how it has been conceptualised in IR theory so far. In other words, where scholars like Alexander Wendt were motivated to critique existing ontologies (for Wendt that predominantly meant structural realism) and sought “to explain the latter’s cultural conditions of possibility, and in so doing the basis for alternative, ‘non-Realist’ cultures of anarchy” (ibid.: 15)

this thesis questions the understanding of ontology as such as we find it in these accounts.

It will argue that for instance Wendt's attempt to conceptualise a different 'culture' of anarchy basically relies upon the same understanding of ontology as does Waltz's structural realism. The only difference consists in an intra-ontology shift towards ideational rather than material factors or from a 'dualist' to a 'monist' conception. (ibid.: 132-4) A reconceptualisation of ontology, if it wants to be successful and not just reiterate the common dichotomies of ideas vs. matter, mind vs. nature or agency vs. structure, needs first and foremost a clear understanding of what ontology is all about in the first place, namely the question of the meaning of being. Before one can ask *what* different beings are and how they are such constituted one must ask what would the conditions for the possibility of such 'what-being' be.

Here we find nothing new in many conceptualisations within IR. The main occupation, as can be seen in Wendt's case for example, lies with a conceptualisation of what specific beings are, i.e. a delineation of entities that we suppose exist and are important for an understanding of international relations. A treatment of beings in their specificity, however, presupposes an at least implicit conception of being. Apparently, what all these different entities that occupy the international space have in common is the fact that they 'are', but what it means 'to be' is completely ignored and subsumed under the modernist umbrella that seeks to fix the meanings of specific entities and then devise methods to establish knowledge of them. In Wendt's case we learn that the international structure is "a social rather than material phenomenon." (ibid.: 20) Subsequently, "this

leads to an idealist view of structure as a ‘distribution of knowledge’ or ‘ideas all the way down’ (or almost anyway)”. (ibid.)

Wendt’s ‘new’ ontology therefore aims at the same outcome as Waltz’s, namely to grasp the ‘what-being’ of entities in the international realm in order to establish knowledge and explain outcomes in the international realm. For Wendt it is time to “rethink the dominant ontology of international structure.” (ibid.: 22) What ontology means for Wendt we learn when he says that “we all have ontologies, since we all make assumptions about what exists in the world: dogs, cats, and trees.” (ibid.) As we can see here again, and we will look at this more closely in chapter I, Wendt stipulates that ontology consists in delineating the different modes of ‘what-being’, i.e. of the ways things are but does not reflect on what it means to be. As will be argued throughout the thesis, the neglect of the question of the meaning of being is a major shortcoming in most forms of IR theory and a remnant of the modern outlook that relied in its quest for certain knowledge on clearly definable and fixed forms of being.

Wight in a very similar fashion is concerned with the renewed focus on ontology which he perceives to lie at the heart of an enquiry into the social and political realm. “Politics is the terrain of competing ontologies. Politics is about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be. [...] If there were no ontological differences there would be no politics.” (Wight, 2006: 2) Wight posits two main arguments in his treatment of ontology as central. First, the real existence of unobservables and secondly the mind-independence of intransitive objects – observables and unobservables alike.

“A commitment to depth realism presupposes that there are things, entities, structures and / or mechanisms that operate and exist independently of our ability to know or manipulate them. [...] Science is possible, then, because the world consists of ‘intransitive’ objects which form the focus of scientific discourses; with the aim of science in particular being the production of

knowledge of mechanisms that in certain combinations produce the phenomena that are actually manifest in experience / appearance.” (ibid.: 29)

Wight, in the same way as Wendt follows hereby the modern conception of ontology as substance-ontology which stipulates the existences of a clear subject-object distinction and the pre-given characteristics of objects that can be observed and represented by the human mind. (Frede, 2006: 44-6) It is this notion of ontology that the thesis tries to challenge by dealing with the meaning of being as such rather than the different beings we can encounter.

The question therefore that will guide this thesis is ‘What is the meaning of being in relation to thought about international politics?’ We agree with Alexander Wendt and the many scholars who have made this claim since, that the notion of the social is crucial in understanding the international system and its many interlocking discourses and outcomes. In order, however, to say something profound about the social we would have to enquire first into the nature of human existence and the formation and meaning of human co-existence. A radically new social ontology for IR as we try to set out here, requires therefore a reflection of the notion of being that does not take for granted *that* we are but investigates more clearly into the question of *how* we are before moving to its different manifestations as entities we can study.

In order to achieve such a reconceptualisation of the notion of being the thesis will draw on one of the most influential strands of Continental Philosophy in the 20th century – phenomenology. To be fair, although it seems right to claim that so far no conceptualisation of this new ontology has been attempted concerning its major elements, we can already witness scholars, albeit only a few, that seem to open paths

towards such a conceptualisation.¹ The scope of the thesis is, however, broader and more basic than the attempts to conceptualise specific elements of human existence and their relation to international politics. The ontological premises, i.e. the meaning of being lie at present only dormant in these new lines of enquiry – they can be said to be still shrouded in darkness.

In the following chapters this thesis sets out to deliver a peak behind this veil and aims at enquiring into the nature of being that might bring about a truly new social ontology for IR. The focus will hereby lie on the core elements needed to flesh out a basic framework of ontology – agency, language, truth and freedom. These elements will also be delineated more elaborately in chapter I.

It seems important to point out from the outset that the quest of this thesis is not a foundationalist enterprise that seeks to base our understanding of the international system on yet another system of *a priori* metaphysical assumptions be they ideational or materialist in nature. The argument that an enterprise as it is proposed here almost by necessity will present a foundationalist enterprise seems invalid since, as the following chapters will show, this enquiry is not guided by the question for meaning but rather by the quest for understanding. It seems necessary at this stage to develop this distinction somewhat further.

A foundationalist enterprise would aim at defining or allocating fixed meanings to a given set of core terms such as agency, freedom or truth. If, however, the focus lies with understanding it seems possible to enquire more fundamentally into the framework and

¹ The work of the more critically oriented constructivists as well as post-structuralists can be seen in this light.

conceptualisations that lie at the heart of a social ontology and so to say provide the sediment of its practical implications and epistemological commitments. It is in this sense an exposition of the possibilities of experience in the social realm, not in the sense that we try to find what becomes possible to say about the beings in international politics but what makes any attempt to approach this what-being possible itself. This argument, however, seems rather questionable itself since it posits understanding as preceding interpretation. The predominant view on the relationship between understanding, interpretation and meaning would suggest that we encounter a situation or proposition, then we interpret it and by interpreting it we achieve an understanding of it and therefore allocate a meaning to it. This sequence, however, as will become clear in the course of the thesis is itself inherent in a specific kind of ontology, namely substance-ontology. In fact, we encounter any situation or proposition with an understanding (in a practical rather than theoretical way) always already in place. Based on this preconceptual understanding which exhibits our direct, practical and constant involvement in a context informs our interpretation and subsequently the formation of meaning. The sequence therefore would be: understanding a situation or proposition out of an always already existing context, formulating an interpretation of it and then designating a meaning to it. If we follow this line of reasoning, understanding will prove to be the more fundamental condition. (for such a view on the relation between understanding and interpretation see Risser, 1997: 131)

What such an ontological enquiry into the nature of understanding therefore delivers is not an abstract consideration of meaning but a practical exposition of understanding and therefore a way for renewed reflections on the nature of being, especially human being. From this perspective it is clear now that we are not aiming at delineating theoretical

facts about core concepts but praxeological features which condition the practical possibilities of the social ontology subsequently conceptualised. We do not ask ‘What is agency?’ but rather ‘What are agents doing?’, we are not asking ‘What is language?’ but rather ‘How is language used?’, we are not asking ‘What is truth?’ but rather ‘How are practices verified?’ and we are not asking ‘What is freedom?’ but rather ‘What are the praxeological conditions of action?’.

All this already suggests that apart from these concrete questions dealing with the practical understanding of core terms of a different social ontology, the thesis is in its entirety also an exposition of a much more fundamental revolution in IR theory. What this new social ontology in fact presents is a challenge not just to specific methodological, theoretical or epistemological issues that arise within the field of IR but a fundamental disagreement about the ontology of human existence and social and political interaction that we find in many accounts prevalent today. As was mentioned above, we can already see the first signs in which such a new social ontology is implicit in accounts of language and its role in understanding processes and outcomes in the international sphere. The methodological, theoretical and epistemological disagreements that we face in IR today are in this light just reflections or effects of this deeper challenge. The problem, however, is that this challenge has never been clearly explicated. Instead of spending some energy on clarifying its scope and substance for itself, many accounts got bogged down into skirmishes about particular methods or assumptions. Certainly, these concrete theoretical and methodological debates are an exhibition of a lively field and, likewise, the empirical research agendas connected to it should be pursued. Complementary to these, however, it seems high time to finally get down to the basic conceptualisation of this new social ontology and investigate what

understanding it brings to the study of IR and how it therefore differs on this level from its opponents. In this sense, this thesis will provide a philosophical reconceptualisation of social ontology that on the one hand will explore key concepts such as agency, language, freedom and truth in their practical application as well as provide a broader and substantive re-assessment of the challenge that such an enterprise poses to our understanding of ontology and the meaning of being as we find it currently in most accounts of international relations.

The way to a new social ontology – Post-Husserlian phenomenology

As was already touched upon above, the thesis will in the following lines aim at a philosophical exposition of core elements of a new social ontology. As was hinted at above the real challenge would lie with a radical reconceptualisation of the notion of ontology and therefore the meaning of being that overcomes the impasse of Cartesian dualism.

The ontology developed over the course of this thesis will therefore draw upon the insights of one of the most influential philosophical movements since the late 19th century – phenomenology. In many phenomenological thinkers we find a different approach to the problems connected with Cartesian dualism that does not follow the trodden modern path and its quest for an absolute foundation to resolve the dualism in a form of immanent or transcendental unity. Rather, when seen from a post-Husserlian phenomenological standpoint which will inform the conceptualisation of our new social ontology, the problem of the dualism does not arise in the first place and therefore does not have to be resolved. This, of course, implies a completely different ontology and

therefore a completely different view of the human agent and its relation to his or her environment.

When referring to the movement of phenomenology it soon becomes clear that we will have to deal with one of the most controversial thinkers of the 20th century, namely Martin Heidegger. Given his involvement with the Nazi movement it seems necessary to say something about the relation of his thought to the study of political and social phenomena right in the beginning. If we look around the literature in IR we encounter mostly silence when it comes to Heideggerian or post-Heideggerian thought. Notable exceptions such as Louiza Odysseos' *The Subject of Coexistence* (2007), Richard Shapcott's *Justice, Community and Dialogue in International Relations* (2001) (although we have to say even here that Shapcott's Gadamer is more Habermasian than Heideggerian) or Michael Dillon's *Politics of Security* (1996) are rare. Admittedly, Hannah Arendt's thought finds appreciation among political theorists (see for instance Lang and Williams, 2005; Hayden, 2007 and Owens, 2007) but most of these accounts present Arendt's thought in a very much sanitised and decontaminated way in which direct links to Heidegger are hardly ever made. Why is this so?

The simple and obvious answer is certainly linked to Heidegger's commitment to the NSDAP especially and pre-eminently during his 10-month rectorship of the University of Freiburg in 1933/34 in which he indeed and undeniably was a driving force in the *Gleichschaltung* of the German universities. (for a detailed account see Ott, 1994: 133-263) This complicity also signalled a larger break since “[u]ntil Heidegger no member of the philosophical clan had ever been linked to such a degree of complicity with the history of brutality. This uniqueness underscores all the conundrums of *der Fall*

Heidegger." (Chytry, 1993: 86) Almost worse than his involvement with the Nazis seems his refusal to apologise or regret his allegiance after the end of WWII. He remained defiant until his death in 1976 as towards accepting any responsibility for his political commitment during Germany's darkest hour. (Paskow, 1991: 522) Here it seems that although "[h]is later retraction has been accepted by many, [...] others who watched him at that period have found his words and actions hard to forget and forgive." (Bixler, 1963: 121; see also Pavel, 1988: 887) Even to former friends such as Karl Jaspers he maintained an attitude of innocence retreating most often into the mystical and poetic ruminations that characterised his later thought when it came to the topic of the intertwinement of his philosophical thought and Nazi Germany.

It is indeed both his stubbornness and his actual involvement with the Nazis that cost him many sympathies in the academic world and so far made the application of his thought in politics or IR departments a minefield. There is hardly any doubt that Heidegger did certainly not represent the average and dedicated Nazi, fiercely anti-Semitic (although there are even voices who utter such a view on Heidegger; see for instance Rubenstein, 1989) and all in all very primitive and profane in his outlooks. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 484) Rather, Heidegger saw the possibility for a new beginning in Nazi ideology, a beginning that would overcome the *Seinsvergessenheit* he always highlights in his thought. (Chytry, 1993: 94) The Nazi movement for Heidegger was not about world domination or the annihilation of the European Jews but about a realisation of being that could help overcoming the predicaments of modern humankind by drawing attention once more to the fundamental ontological rather than epistemological questions. In his view "[a]ll that was merely a ruined revolution and not the great renewal based in the spiritual and moral strength of the people, which

Heidegger had dreamed of and yearned for as the preparation for a new human religion.” (Gadamer, 1989: 429) To be clear, even if we can confirm that these were the motives behind Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis, it does in no way and by no means exonerate his political commitment to the most ruthless and heinous political movement of the 20th century.

From Heidegger’s perspective, however, his commitment had nothing to do with the primitive worldly aims of this movement. As Gadamer pointed out: “But Heidegger was also no mere opportunist. If we wish to dignify his political engagement by calling it a political ‘standpoint’, it would be far better to call it a political ‘illusion’, which had notably little to do with political reality. If Heidegger later, in the face of all realities, would again dream his dream from these days, [...] the later version would embrace his deep disappointment over the actual course of affairs.” (ibid.: 428) In fact, he very soon became disillusioned with the movement and realised around 1934 that the Nazis were not the *Heilsbringer des Seins* (saviours of being) he had hoped for – he nevertheless remained a member of the NSDAP until 1945. (Rubenstein, 1989: 179) To this extent it seems justified to ask “[w]hat would be meant by [his break with National Socialism] – an open statement, public protest, resigning from the party, or something similar to how such things happen in a society of laws and legality?” (Gadamer, 1989: 427) Taking his membership in the NSDAP, his rectorship and his refusal to accept responsibility for his commitments between 1933 and 1945 together, Heidegger in many circles became a *persona non grata*. The story, as always in such cases, is, however, more complex than this.

The question that is hereby of most interest to us and for any attempt to introduce Heidegger’s thought into the realm of politics is simply how intertwined are

Heidegger's political commitment and the thrust of his thought. In other words, does Heidegger's thought cannot but lead to authoritarianism, is his entanglement with the Nazis in line or even worse a logical consequence of his philosophical approach? To clarify this right in the beginning, we cannot hope to settle these questions in a definite manner, given that this discussion is raging for well over 50 years. There will always be scholars who maintain that Heidegger the person is inextricably linked with Heidegger the philosopher which means that a separation of whatever kind remains a dangerous and unjustified split between thought and action that so detrimentally coincide in Heidegger's case. (Farias, 1989; Wolin, 1990) For these voices, Heidegger remains and must remain outside serious philosophical contemplation, with the possible exception for the history of philosophy, since his thought is intrinsically linked with the Nazi rule in Germany and in a wider context an example of authoritarian thought at its worst. (Rubenstein, 1989) "In contrast to what may have been said, Heidegger's involvement is completely consistent with his thought. And the intermixture of 'politics' with 'philosophy' was so strong that, after his 'break' with the party and until 1944, practically all his teaching was devoted to explicating National Socialism, an effort that in reality gave rise to the truth that Heidegger ... believed to have perceived" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 482)

On the other end of the spectrum we find those who maintain that a separation between Heidegger the NSDAP-member and Heidegger the greatest philosopher of the 20th century not only can be made but must be made. (Pavel, 1988: 888) "It is possible to hold that it is one thing to show that Heidegger's political and ideological sentiments share a great deal with the conservative revolutionaries and that it is quite another to argue that the philosophy has been fatally tainted by those sentiments." (Chytry, 1993:

89) After all, Heidegger's magnum opus *Sein und Zeit* was written throughout the 1920s and published in 1927, full six years before the Nazis rose to power in Germany. Additionally, if we read *Sein und Zeit* it seems indeed hard to maintain that this book foreshadows in any concrete way Heidegger's political commitment in the 1930s. The book is inherently philosophical and does not touch on any political issues or subjects directly. "For although it is undeniable that in *Sein und Zeit* there are vague echoes of themes found in Nazi ideology (on community, the hero, history, and destiny), the work is after all a treatise on ontology." (Paskow, 1991: 524) As such it can be seen as a purely philosophical work that is open to many different interpretations and therefore can be misused as was Nietzsche's philosophy during the Nazi reign. (for positions supportive of Heidegger in this way see Fédier, 1988; Derrida, 2004)

Of course, both positions have convincing and less convincing arguments. In respect to the first position, it is certainly true, and that has been reported by Gadamer and Jaspers for instance, that Heidegger's thought as well as Heidegger himself showed inclinations to monological and authoritarian points of view. (Grondin, 2003a: 271, Habermas, 1989: 433) In this respect it seems indeed hard to maintain a separation between person and thought by only hinting at the manifold of possible interpretations. And although it is certainly correct to point to other examples such as Nietzsche's thought that have been misused for political purposes during the Nazi era, the fact still remains that Heidegger joined the Nazi party, executed its doctrines regarding the restructuring of the German universities and remained a member until the end of the war. That goes certainly further than a mere misinterpretation of his thought for Nazi purposes.

On the other hand, it seems awfully one-dimensional and spotlit to simply label Heidegger a Nazi in practice and thought. It is indeed true that Heidegger in his early

career was not interested or engaged in any political activities. His early writings and indeed his main work shows no signs of political conviction in one way or the other. It might be true to say that his style of reasoning tends towards a monological, elitist and maybe even authoritarian proclivity but to deduce from this a necessary and inextricable link with Nazi ideology seems somewhat of a stretch. “If this connection was so firm, why did Heidegger subsequently back away from that philosophical necessity to etch out or reiterate an alternative philosophical position during the period of National Socialism’s greatest advances in the middle and late 1930?” (Chytry, 1993: 89) We can certainly assume that Heidegger in his thought was influenced by or at least remained situated in a particular political and social climate that found its way into his works. To infer from this, however, that his thought cannot but has to be linked to the rise and world view of Nazi Germany seems unjustified. (Paskow, 1991: 524)

As was said above, we cannot hope to resolve this debate especially given the fact that it lies outside the scope of this thesis. What we have to do, however, is to at least develop a standpoint that expresses the views and utility of Heidegger’s thought for the current enterprise. In this line we follow the group of Heidegger scholars and historians who try to situate Heidegger’s thought historically and accept his political involvements without, however, forfeiting the chance to reclaim Heidegger’s thought in a careful and thorough way. (for such a position see for instance Dallmayr, 1993) It is surely true that the circumstances in the Weimar republic, the chaotic and unstable political situation after the humiliating capitulation in 1918 left their mark on Heidegger. He had served in WWI although he was never deployed to the front lines due to its heart condition and found himself in difficult personal circumstances both in a material as well as ideational sense. His constant struggle with Catholicism, his repeatedly disappointed hopes for a

permanent academic position and his peculiar rootedness in the rural life of southwest Germany added to the difficult circumstances under which he developed his philosophical approach. (Gray, 1970: 237; Ott, 1994: 42 and 92-4) Again, this is not to exonerate the later trajectory of his life by pointing at ‘difficult’ circumstances but to point out the conditions under which he matured to become the author of *Sein und Zeit* and subsequently one of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century. “A reevaluation of Heidegger’s place in the context of 20th-century German intellectual life is needed, as is a demonstration that the Heideggerian philosophical horizon is still relevant for contemporary moral and political concerns. But Heidegger’s admirers should realize that, in relation to great philosophers, devotion does not preclude distance.” (Pavel, 1988: 895) Even Habermas, himself certainly not a supporter of Heidegger, notes that “one consideration is particularly important from the start. Illumination of the political conduct of Martin Heidegger cannot and should not serve the purpose of a global depreciation of his thought.” (Habermas, 1989: 433) This is the case because a “rigorous conception of the unity of work and person seems to me inadequate to the autonomy of thought and, indeed, to the general history of the reception and influence of philosophical thought.” (ibid.)

In this line we have to accept, whether we want to or not, that Heidegger’s philosophy did exert an influence not only in Germany, probably not even mostly in Germany, but around the world that can hardly be overstated. Many of the leading philosophers in the later half of the 20th century engaged with Heidegger’s thought either to develop it further as we can see in Gadamer, Arendt, Löwith or Jonas or to overcome it as for instance Foucault, Derrida, or Habermas. No matter which group we look at Heidegger was a seminal influence on their work and we cannot hope to grasp the scope and

substance of these philosophers without at the same time analysing and considering the influence Heidegger's thought exerted on them. As his former student Gadamer pithily observed: "Whoever thinks we can here and now dispense with Heidegger has not begun to fathom how difficult it was and remains for anyone *not* to dispense with him, as opposed to making a fool of oneself with supercilious gestures." (Gadamer, 1989: 430)

In this sense Heidegger has already made it into IR especially into the post-structuralist strand and it seems high time to acknowledge his influence and engage more directly but still critically with his thought. The present study aims at doing exactly this. As will become clear, Heidegger is one of the main thinkers in this study but by far not the only one.

The structure of the thesis

In order to develop the philosophical path towards a new social ontology roughly outlined above the thesis will proceed in two parts. Part A which is comprised of chapters I and II we will lay the foundations for the delineation of a new social ontology from a phenomenological angle. Chapter I hereby aims first at preliminarily outlining the central claims made in recent publications as towards the nature and role of ontology in IR theorising. The focus will hereby lie with two prominent examples in shape of the recent studies of Alexander Wendt and Colin Wight and their shortcomings in respect to their understanding of ontology. The chapter will also develop the core terms which will inform the thematic chapters in part B of the thesis.

Chapter II will depict the major thinkers and concepts as well as the trajectory of phenomenological thought from its inception in Brentano, through its most systematic formulation in Husserl to the Heideggerian turn and its aftermath. The aim hereby is to introduce the core elements of this school of thought which will be substantiated and elaborated upon in the actual thematic chapters in Part B. Furthermore, an overview will be presented that covers the main ramifications of Heidegger's thought which will inform the later analysis.

Part B, the main part of the thesis, consists of four thematic chapters each of which deals with one core term central to social ontology and aims at providing a phenomenological framework that clearly develops and substantiates these basic elements.

Chapter III will deal with the conceptualisation of agency in phenomenological thought drawing mainly on the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. The chapter hereby proceeds in three steps the first of which is an outline of the standard view on agency in modernity, labelled detached agency, which is also to be found in the mainstream neo-utilitarian accounts in IR. This will be followed by a deep analysis and exposition of the phenomenological critique of this concept of agency leading to a conceptualisation of engaged agency which as will be argued in a third step is an existential analytic that in its emphasis on continuous involvement and situatedness of human being portrays a powerful critique of the dominant Cartesian conception of agency.

Chapter IV illuminates the role of language within human existence. It hereby outlines first the modern account which conceptualises language as a system of signs that allows human agents to designate and communicatively relate to the world. Such an understanding which is labelled designatory conceives of language as picturing an

outside world and designating meaning to objects by using words. It relies hereby on a detached view of agency in which the word is corresponding to a picture or idea in the mind of the individual agent. In reaction to this, the expressivist view of language as it can be found in the later Wittgenstein as well as in different phenomenologists will be depicted. The chapter hereby draws on the thought of Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Important hereby is the argument that language does not picture an objective reality outside our minds with pre-given and logically structured meanings. Rather linguistic practices constitute a world and assign meanings according to socially formed rules that can and do change. Language is situated in public discourse rather than in individual minds and as such always reaches beyond the individual language user.

Chapter V will deal with one of the most contentious subjects in modern thought – the role and notion of truth. The chapter aims at a reconceptualisation of the notion of truth starting with the modern correspondence theory of truth and moving from there in a second step to a critical phenomenological enquiry. The thinkers relied upon here will be Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. The focus will lie with conceptualising truth as disclosure or deconcealment, an interpretation that is central to the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Chapter VI looks at the role freedom and its conceptualisation under the new social ontology. The possibility of human freedom is certainly one of the most discussed elements in modern philosophy and received attention by all major thinkers within the modern era. Yet it has to be clearly stated that there is anything but agreement about the character, role and scope of human freedom; the assessment reaches from a strict determinism as can be found in Spinoza to a positing of transcendental freedom as absolute spontaneity in Kant. Since a social ontology would have to cope with the

notion of change and choice it seems necessary to elaborate more clearly on the conception of freedom that frames possible actions for human agents. The chapter will hereby shortly outline different conceptions of freedom in modern thought and move from there to a phenomenological treatment of the matter that seems to open the notion of freedom towards an understanding of human existence and the interplay between the human agent and her world. The authors relied upon in such a conceptualisation will be Kant, Schelling and Heidegger.

The four elements presented in the main part of the thesis seem vital in finding a philosophical framework that sets the ontological possibilities out of which the more concrete concerns in respect to theory building and research methods in IR arise. After having developed these four elements from a new ontological angle guided by post-Husserlian phenomenology we will conclude by drawing the different strands together and elaborating specifically on new avenues of research made possible by such a reconceptualisation of social ontology (in other words we will reflect upon its ‘added value’) as well as showing further elements within its wider scope which are in need of further treatment and clarification. As such this thesis has to be seen as an initial undertaking that, to say it with Heidegger, aims at providing a ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*) which allows new perspectives to arise and new research to be done. It is in this sense not meant to provide a ready-made and finished product but in many ways it will have to be refined beyond the initial conceptualisations presented here.

Part I

Preliminary Conceptualisations

I The quest for a new social ontology in IR – Against a ‘metaphysics of presence’

“*The most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.*”

Martin Heidegger

Fifty years ago Peter Winch published his seminal work *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (2008). The impact of this book has wielded many lasting and fierce discussions in which the then already perceived views of a Continental and an Analytical strand of philosophy found new expression. The general argument Winch elaborately defended took shape before the background of the prevalent but misguided attempt to model the Social Sciences on the Natural Sciences. “That the social sciences are in their infancy has come to be a platitude amongst writers of textbooks on the subject. They will argue that this is because the social sciences have been slow to emulate the natural sciences and emancipate themselves from the dead hand of philosophy” (Winch, 2008: 1) The aim of his study was to defend an independent conception of the social sciences that was still oriented towards a scientific understanding without, however, aiming at emulating the methods and theoretical assumptions of the natural sciences. In particular, Winch opposed the often perceived role of philosophy as an ‘underlabourer’ occupation that is parasitic on the different strands of scientific enquiry. (ibid.: 3-6) Instead he tried to show that any social science that tries to grasp social ‘reality’ cannot do without a philosophy in place that is

occupied with conceptualising the conditions for the intelligibility of the world in general. In this sense, for Winch at least, the philosopher will be concerned with illuminating these conditions for intelligibility and understanding in general as well as in particular for the philosophies of science, religion, art and so on. He explains the difference between the general and the particular conceptions of philosophy when he maintains that “whereas the philosophies of science, of art, of history, etc., will have the task of elucidating the peculiar nature of those forms of life called ‘science’, ‘art’, etc., epistemology will try to elucidate what is involved in the notion of form of life as such” (ibid.: 39)

Since the publication of this path-breaking reconsideration of the social sciences as apart from the natural sciences and their relation to a conception of philosophy, many new accounts have arisen that seemingly break with the original endeavour to reduce the social sciences a ‘natural science of society’ or explore new ways in which it is possible to be scientific and critical at the same time. (see for instance Wendt, 1987: 355 and 370)

What is of interest for us in respect to the current enquiry is the way in which a new conceptualisation of international politics has been attempted in reflective literature. (the term ‘reflective’ is here understood in the sense of Keohane, 1988) Among the many different contributions to this burgeoning field one can find a renewed interest in matters concerning the entities IR as an academic field is interested in. Rather than starting from a ‘positivist’ epistemology and a delineation of what can be known and how to achieve this knowledge, scholars interested in ontology propose an approach that reverses this order. (Wendt, 1987: 352; Wight, 2006: 3) One of the first who attempted an ontological reconceptualisation in wake of the reflectivist turn in IR was Alexander

Wendt in his constructivist approach to world politics. Many commentaries and critiques have been written regarding Wendt's constructivism and its idiosyncratic attempt to bridge the gap between a social ontology and a 'scientific' epistemology. What still seems floating around from these early days of constructivism in the field of IR is his concern with ontology which recently has been picked up by group of scholars who label themselves 'critical realists'. (Wight, 2006; Kurki, 2007; Joseph, 2007; Patomäki and Wight, 2000) Again, in their literature, and we will closely examine Wendt and a proponent of critical realism shortly, we find a strong commitment to ontological enquiries as a starting point for our endeavours in the field of IR. (Wendt, 1999: 22; Wight, 2006: 2; Patomäki and Wight, 2000: 216-9)

The entities we encounter in the international realm need more attention, so the argument goes, since the primary focus on epistemological or methodological issues only distracts from the fundamental ontological basis which alone gives rise to these matters. (Wight, 2006: 1-2) Epistemological and methodological approaches always already rely on ontological assumptions about what entities are there in the international realm to be studied. (*ibid.*: 2) In this sense proponents of this 'ontological turn' emphasize the importance of reconceptualising exactly these entities in order to detect and eliminate epistemological and methodological problems that arise out of a wrong ontology. On the forefront of this movement is a group of scholars who label themselves 'critical realists' and draw their insights from specific parts of the philosophy of science, especially the work of Roy Bhaskar. (Wendt, 1987: 352fn.; Patomäki and Wight, 2000: 217-8; Kurki, 2007: 364-5fn.) Much attention has been drawn to this group of scholars as can be seen in a variety of publications in main IR journals as well as the appearance of book-length studies. (Wendt, 1999; Patomäki and

Wight, 2000; Wight, 2006; Kurki, 2006; Wight; 2007a; Wight, 2007b; Kurki, 2007, Joseph, 2007)

As will be argued, however, this renewed focus on ontology in IR is misguided as it reproduces the difficulties of the approaches it criticises by merely shifting the foundationalist element from epistemology to ontology. The problem lies not in the superficially conceived ‘new conceptualisation’ of the entities in the international realm and any subsequent means to know them. Rather, it seems, the whole notion of ontology these accounts rely on is bound to repeat the mistakes and impasses they aim to overcome. If we want to reclaim ontological themes for IR and provide the field with a new impetus to engage in research from a critical angle more is needed than a mere shift within the foundationalisms we have encountered so many times.

Starting with a detailed critique of these recent attempts to tackle ontological problems and open ways for new and alternative ways of research within the field of IR, this thesis sets out to sketch a new social ontology that does not fall prey to different forms of foundationalism and that penetrates deeper into the philosophical underpinnings of IR theory. In Winch’s spirit we try to overcome the view of philosophy as a mere henchman of science and grasp the challenges conceptually and substantially in their philosophical domain before bringing them to bear upon International Relations.

What is needed is therefore a thorough and basic reconceptualisation of ontology in the light of the reflectivist critiques extended against much ‘mainstream’ work in recent debates. The argument is not aiming at defending or critiquing any specific form of IR theory or even providing yet another ‘theory’ of international politics. The selection of Wendt and Wight as examples for (failed) attempts to reinvigorate ontological

conceptualisations is deliberately not meant to be a criticism or defence of specific approaches in IR theory but provides the entry point from which a much more basic and substantial reconceptualisation of the philosophical framework for much of IR theory and the social sciences in general can be attempted. Our focus lies with the ontological conditions that set the frame for the study of international politics and in this light we must first and foremost be concerned with achieving a conceptualisation and understanding of ontology that overcomes the narrow ‘metaphysics of presence’ prevalent in treatments of ontology right now.

Following Winch’s argument that any attempt to grasp and understand social and political ‘reality’ must be supplemented by a philosophical delineation of the conditions that make such an understanding possible and subsequently and attempt to understand ‘forms of life’, the thesis sets out to deliver such a delineation by conceptualising a framework for a new social ontology. As it is impossible to consider all the relevant contributions to such an endeavour we will discuss two exemplary works that explicitly dealt with the notion and role of ontology in IR. The thesis proceeds therefore by criticising two reconceptualisations of social ontology, drawing on Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) and Colin Wight’s *Agents, Structures, and International Relations. Politics as Ontology* (2006). As will be shown, both tried to develop a new take on the notion of ontology and its relation to and role in enquiries into the social and political realm. Their endeavours, as are those by other confessed critical realists, rely upon a specific strand of the philosophy of science, namely scientific realism. As we will depict the main tenets of this approach below it suffices to say here that by relying upon this approach they want to challenge the dominance of epistemology and reclaim ontology and specifically the ‘reality’ of unobservables which

is denied by a strict empiricism. (Wendt, 1987: 352; Patomäki and Wight, 2000: 217-8) In this way they call for a renewed treatment of the ontological entities existing independently ‘out there’ and critically investigating the different ways in which they constrain and enable human behaviour. (Wendt, 1987: 355 and 370; Wendt, 1995: 75; Kurki, 2007: 364-5; Joseph, 2007: 346)

Both authors, however, as will be argued, fail in their attempts as they remain stuck within modern notions of ontology and epistemology which only allow a mere shift of focus but not an original reconceptualisation of the dimensions that frame any enquiry into international politics. Rather than being content with a mere shift of focus the thesis will deliver a suggestion on how to overcome the established and derivative frame of thought that still holds many critical accounts in IR captive. As such it has to be understood as an iconoclastic enterprise that aims at radically overcoming the standard conception of ontology with its concomitant notions of agency, language, truth and freedom.

Secondly, this chapter will show how such a radical break is already practiced in parts of IR theory in which especially the use of language has contributed to a conceptual rupture in the study of social and political relations. These already practiced instances of iconoclasm within IR theory will provide the entry point for the remainder of this thesis in which the main pillars of a new social ontology for IR will be developed.

After outlining the current problems remaining in instances of reconceptualising ontology in the study of IR and instances in which a new way to deal with it has already emerged the chapter proceeds in a third step to delineate the main characteristics and notions of a social ontology for IR which have to be outlined in subsequent chapters.

Ontology in the spotlight – Wendt, Wight and the shadow of the ‘metaphysics of presence’

As was already mentioned above, the current thesis does not present an intra-IR theory argument but is more interested in a different ontological conception of human social and political life. The level of this enquiry is therefore not one that necessitates a direct involvement in the debates between realism, liberalism, constructivism and poststructuralism (whatever these labels may stand for). Instead the thesis tries to think through the conditions for the possibility of developing these different ‘theories’ ontologically. As was already pointed out above and as will be substantiated below, ontology in most accounts is understood as a delineation of the meaning and nature of beings but completely ignores, much in line with modern thought, the treatment of the question what it means ‘to be’. Ontology as will be shown in the remainder of the thesis can wield more fundamental insights into the nature of social and political processes and dynamics when understood as the quest for the meaning of being as such and in our case the meaning of human being in particular. To be clear about this point right in the beginning, the ontological delineation of the meaning of human being is not an argument that advances yet another stand for individualism as opposed to structuralism in IR theory. ‘Human being’ refers to the totality of human existence in the world, not to the individual human being. In Heidegger’s words we will be concerned with *Dasein* and not with subjectivity which as we will argue along Heideggerian lines is only derivative of *Dasein* (human being in general). (Macomber, 1967: 29)

In this way the thesis will progress without delving into the now prevalent polemics of labels that haunts much theorising in IR. We are not interested in categorising scholars according to ontological, epistemological and methodological commitments but we are

asking the deeper question of what conditions make the different conceptions of social and political processes that underlie these different accounts possible. In order to illuminate on these processes the attempts of Wendt and Wight, although they never get off the ground, must be welcome. It is indeed the case that in order to think about a study of the social and political world we must return to the question of being, i.e. to ontology which suffered a miserable existence in the shadow of epistemology for the better part of the modern era.

Wendt and Wight seek to delineate a ‘different’ ontology (read: an ontology that relies upon the same characteristics as before but with different emphases) to be able to gain a different form of knowledge about the international system. This attempt, however, is mainly concerned with fixing and establishing the nature of *beings* rather than focussing on the deeper question what it actually means to be. In other words, whereas Wendt and Wight still operate within the notion of ontology as a study of *beings* this thesis will break through to the more basic, phenomenological level of *being*. From this perspective, and again taking the cue from Heidegger, Wendt's and Wight's analyses are stuck on the ontic level that deals with the immediate conceptualisation of beings as a metaphysics of presence.

The conceptualisation of being, however, as it is attempted here, is not only much more fundamental than those of Wendt and Wight but also more basic. We are not aiming at delineating a metaphysical and foundationalist account of being by theorising on a systemic level but we are simply trying to delineate what it is to be human and involved in a social and political world by looking at and describing what human beings do in their everyday lives. This approach as was outlined above takes its cue from phenomenological thought in the second half the 20th century. Much in line with this

philosophical school we are not aiming at defining essences or fixing specific meanings to beings but ask the question what it means to be in the first place. That means that the focus of this thesis does not lie with a theoretical appropriation of social and political processes which rely on an *a priori* established ground as is still the case with Wendt and Wight but by looking at the question of how beings (entities in our enquiry) are able to be what they are and in which relation human being stands to other forms of being. As this enquiry takes place on a higher level of abstraction and generality the findings are not confined to the study of international politics but pertain to the study of the social world in general of which the occupation of IR is only one aspect.

Having outlined the general trajectory of the thesis in respect to its scope we can now proceed to the examination of the authors mentioned above. As was argued, we will find attempts to reconceptualise ontology in the publications of Wendt and Wight which, as will be shown consist in a mere shift of emphasis and exhaust themselves in yet another discussion about the relation of material and ideational forces. We will find the entry point to a more radical and fundamental reconsideration of ontology in examples that elaborate on the role and importance of language thereby having already entered into new ontological terrain without however, conceptualising the breadth and scope of this challenge (arguably because the aims of the scholars in question lie somewhere else in the scholarly debate).²

² Examples of this kind of consideration of the role of language can for instance be found in the work of Nicholas Onuf, Karin Fierke and Friedrich Kratochwil.

Alexander Wendt, scientific realism and rump materialism in pursuit of a social ontology

Alexander Wendt was among the first scholars in IR that introduced the broad movement of constructivism in the discipline hitherto dominated by neorealism and neoliberalism. Although constructivism was on the rise throughout the 1980s and conceptually used in relation to IR by Nick Onuf (1989) and Friedrich Kratochwil (1989), Wendt's seminal article *Anarchy is what states make of it* (1992) opened the discussion and subsequent rise of constructivism. As was said above we are not concerned here with delineating or even heuristically delimiting the field of constructivism as we can find it in IR practice today. What we are interested in is the challenge that was posed early on by this newly developing strand of social and political enquiry to the underlying ontological assumptions in most 'mainstream' accounts at the time. Alexander Wendt aimed among other things at an explicit re-evaluation of ontology as he found it in the study of international politics. (Wendt, 1999: 6; Smith, 2000: 162) In his articles (Wendt, 1987, 1995) and more elaborately in the subsequent book *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) he claimed that a renewed discussion about ontology is unavoidable if we want to achieve a better understanding of the international political realm.

In his book-length study which was written as a reply and critique to Waltz's seminal and very influential *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Wendt spends even more time to delineate and defend his new social ontology against structural realism. As we only take Wendt as a starting point for our subsequent enquiries we will not be concerned with the specific claims he makes in respect to a 'theory of international

politics'. Rather we focus on the question to what extent his ontology is new and can solve problems that befall theories of international politics in general.

From the outset we find that Wendt is situating his study as "an attempt to rethink the dominant ontology of international structure." (Wendt, 1999: 22) Wendt's shift in his ontological account consists in his critique of the overly material and individualist conception of states in the international system he finds in Waltz. He argues that a more ideationally, i.e. socially guided conception of the system will contribute to more conceptual clarity and a better understanding of processes and behaviour in the international realm. (ibid.: 20) He nevertheless remains committed to the notion of scientific enquiry as well as a rump materialism which should ensure a certain base of facts to place his ideational components on. (ibid.: 96)

Apart from the fact that Wendt consciously reifies the state as something given and subsequently focuses only on the construction of a specific systemic culture among these states we also find a specific endorsement of scientific realism to underline and justify this move. (ibid.) In his defence of scientific realism – as overcoming the intrinsic problems in what he terms empiricist and postmodern anti-realist strands – we find the starting point of our critique. Scientific realism as Wendt understands it posits the world as existing independent of the human mind and outside any linguistic conventions. Wendt argues that material facts condition the way in which human beings encounter the world and these material facts and their constraining consequences have a causal relation to the formation of interests and identities. (ibid.: 110-113) His argument proceeds hereby in two steps; first he looks at the real existence of observables and moves from there to an argument that should also prove the real existence of unobservables.

In respect to the first contention that scientific realism provides proof of a mind-independent world in which material conditions constrain human action he appeals to a common sense argument. Dismissing the ‘postmodern’ proclivity towards a relational theory of reference which allows only reference to discourse and not to accurate and true facts, he states: “The main problem with the relational theory of reference is that it cannot account for the resistance of the world to certain representations, and thus for representational failures or *misinterpretations*. Worldly resistance is most obvious in nature: whether our discourse says so or not, pigs *can't fly*.” (ibid.: 56) Wendt appeals hereby to certain facts that are simply materially given and do not depend on any human conceptualisation or discursive structure and therefore assume an independent causal moment. Pigs cannot fly because they are pigs – this has nothing to do with any human involvement, it is just a material fact. At first glance this argument seems watertight since any claim that pigs cannot fly because humans have decided it or that they could fly just because humans decided it is ridiculous. If we look closer, however, we can see that this argument is in fact not as secure as it seems. To restate the claim, material facts exist independent of the human agent and therefore constrain human action to a certain degree. The power of constraint does not come from any human conceptualisations or theory but lies in the nature of specific material entities in the mind-independent world – which means that pigs cannot fly because they are pigs.

Surprising as this may sound, this stipulation is simply not correct. It is right to say pigs cannot fly *on earth* but they can fly, as can humans, on the moon. Therefore we can find conditions under which pigs cannot fly and others under which they can. Now, at first this argument seems pedantic since human life at least at the moment is organised on earth and therefore it can hardly matter whether pigs can fly on the moon or any other

planet. In fact, however, the appeal to conditions under which pigs can fly reveals the weakness in Wendt's argument. Remember, for his account of material conditions as causes to work, they must evolve out of the nature of the mind-independent object. But in the case of the pig they obviously do not. What prevents the pig from flying is not its own nature as pig but specific conditions on earth – gravity. Gravity, however, is only one way and in fact a human way to state why pigs cannot fly. The notion of gravity developed historically with the rise of the natural sciences. In a religiously guided discourse we would find the argument that God and not gravity decided whether pigs can fly or not, maybe even that God is constantly pushing the pig down preventing it thereby from flying.³ Gravity as such and the concomitant belief in scientific enquiry can, however, not be understood independent from the human practices that constitute the natural sciences.

This insight is of tremendous importance. If human beings try to discover the reason why pigs cannot fly and they appeal to a divine entity that made this decision, certain enquiries into the nature of our environment and its manipulability will follow and others will not. The assumption ‘humans cannot fly because God decided they cannot’ and the assumption ‘humans cannot fly because gravity prevents them from doing so’ lead to completely different social realities. In the first there is no point to enquire any further into the reasons or causes why humans cannot fly, in the second, however, we stipulate that there are certain discoverable reasons and causes and once we have discovered them we are able to manipulate them – we can invent the plane to counter the gravitational forces that hold us down.

³ A position in the history of philosophy which would represent this or a similar argument can be found for instance in Nicholas Malebranche's occasionalism.

Following this line of reasoning further, Wendt is no longer able to maintain his claim that mind-independent, ‘real’ existent material facts are directly and causally linked with the formation of interests and identities. Even gravity is not just out-there. The notion of gravity and any appeal to its causal effects cannot be understood outside or beyond its, in this case scientific, framework. To appeal to divine intervention when explaining the pigs inability to fly is interwoven with the larger fabric of social practices to the same extent as is any explanation that refers to the forces of gravity. The meaning of both forms of explanations depends on legitimising processes in the society they are exercised in. In a secular society any appeal to divine intervention is labelled ‘superstitious’ and any appeal to scientific mechanical causes in a religious society is labelled ‘blasphemous’. It is obvious that the explanatory power emanates from socially accepted and agreed upon practices and not from the material objects themselves. Overall, we can see that even common sense facts such as ‘pigs cannot fly’ are in fact deeply interwoven and dependent on human practices and not vested in the nature of objects in a mind-independent world.

The case gets even worse if we move to unobservables which Wendt claims do also exist independent of the mind and language. (ibid.: 51) Here Wendt appeals to reasonableness when he maintains that the form of reasoning called “inference to the best explanation” (Wendt, 1999: 62) is the way forward. He readily admits that any appeal to an independent reality on these grounds is generally falsifiable but until such a falsification has been undertaken the fact stands as fact. (ibid.: 62-3) The problem, however, is that systems of verification and falsification are not neutrally established. There are different ways to conceptualise what a falsification consists in and likewise

different ways in which we can conceptualise what is reasonable to infer. It is historical blindness to assume that these standards that Wendt introduces here are value free and universally applicable. 500 years ago it was absolutely reasonable to assume that someone who suffered from epilepsy and went into seizures is actually possessed by the devil and has to be burned at the stakes or exorcised while today we would of course find it reasonable to look for a bio-chemical process in the brain to explain the symptoms. To assume that standards of falsification and reasonableness can be maintained outside social interaction and meaning-formation is simply historically myopic.

The same is true for unobservables in the international system. Wendt brings up the example that it is ‘reasonable’ to assume the existence of the state based on the “activities of people calling themselves custom officials, soldiers and diplomats... .” (ibid.: 62) Apart from the fact that any appeal to custom officials, soldiers and diplomats already presupposes what it is suppose to establish, i.e. the existence of an entity that we call state it is of course by no means and under any circumstances independent of human (inter)action. Furthermore, if a state decides not to have a standing army or any diplomats, does it cease to be a state? Likewise, if there are soldiers, custom officials and diplomats representing a specific territory, does that already constitute a state?

So what are we left with in Wendt’s account? We have shown that his scientific realism is fundamentally flawed in positing a reality that is existent in an essential way outside human action or existence. We have argued that one certainly can maintain that matter exists but this matter has contrary to Wendt no intrinsic and immediate causal power in constraining human action as he stipulates. What has constraining capacity are the

socially created systems of meaning that approach this matter and draw it into the human realm and thereby imbuing it with meaning. What enables and constrains us therefore is not the material circumstances but the socially agreed upon rules under which matter acquires meaning. How else could one explain how material circumstances can enable and constrain humans in different social settings in different ways? The argument is not that there is no matter ‘out there’ but that any attempt to conceptualise this matter is already embedded in and derived from socially constructed rules of enquiry. What sets the limits are these rules and not the matter they give meaning to.

Colin Wight and the ontological primacy of intransitive objects

Colin Wight in his recent book *Agents, Structures and International Relations. Politics as Ontology* (2006) presented a case for rethinking and refocusing on ontological issues in even stronger terms than Alexander Wendt seven years earlier. Right at the outset Wight claims: “There are simply no epistemological or methodological divides to accept, defend or bridge.” (Wight, 2006: 1) The study of IR is in fact not about epistemology but about competing ontologies. “Politics is the terrain of competing ontologies. Politics is about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be. [...] If there were no ontological differences there would be no politics.” (ibid.: 2) For Wight therefore the task is clear: Scholars in IR have to rethink their competing ontologies in order to understand the conflicts and disagreements within the discipline. “As such, understanding the ontological differences that lie at the heart of competing

visions of the world should be the aim of any properly conceived critical discipline of IR.” (ibid.)

What Wight has in mind becomes clear early on in the introduction when he launches an ill-fated criticism against Kratochwil’s position on matters of ontology and epistemology (or at least against the position he perceives to be Kratochwil’s). Wight says: “The epistemological way of approaching the issue is deeply ingrained and it is not only positivists who adhere to it. Friedrich Kratochwil ... argues that the important answers to fundamental questions concerning human action are located in our concept of knowledge.” (ibid.: 3) He clearly claims that Kratochwil takes epistemology to be prior to ontology and the two are basically causally linked in the way that “world-images are dependent upon, and derived from, corresponding concepts of knowledge.” (ibid.) He goes on to claim that this “assumption is endemic within the discipline. The assumption is also wrong. What we think we know exists has no bearing on what actually exists.” (ibid.)

Two elements are important here. First, it seems worthwhile to have a quick look at what Kratochwil actually says and then assess whether Wight portrayed the position correctly. Secondly, we must have a closer look at Wight’s proposed predominance of ontological issues over epistemological ones. If we refer to Kratochwil’s book *Rules, norms, and decisions* (1989), we find on page 21 (the page Wight cited to support his claims) the following paragraph:

“How do we understand human action, and what roles do norms play in this process? The answers to these questions obviously depend upon our concept of knowledge, and this concept in turn, is constituted by our ideas about the world we live in and which we experience as reality. One way of approaching this problem is, therefore, to reconstruct images of possible

worlds and show their epistemological presuppositions. Such a procedure might enable us to see in turn the limitations of certain concepts of knowledge, based on certain world-images." (Kratochwil, 1989: 21)

Wight, as we have seen, takes this statement as an example of how epistemology is taken to be prior to ontology in the current debates in IR. A closer reading, however, reveals that Wight's interpretation is simply and blatantly wrong. First, Kratochwil says that the answers to the questions he raises lie with the concept of knowledge. This concept of knowledge, however, "*in turn, is constituted by our ideas about the world we live in and which we experience as reality.*" (ibid., my emphasis) Epistemology is therefore not the basic ground out of which ontology arises but it is itself depended on our ideas how the world is – obviously an ontological argument. But Kratochwil goes further by saying that ONE way to approach the question he raises lies in the reconstruction of world images to uncover their epistemological presuppositions and then *in turn reflect back onto the limitations of these epistemological assumptions that arise out of these world-images.* What Kratochwil is in fact saying here is that ontology (world-images) and epistemology (systems of knowledge) are inextricably intertwined. The world we experience is based upon certain epistemological assumptions that in turn are limited by the world-image we have – ways of being and ways of knowing are inextricably intertwined. Kratochwil argues in fact for a dialectical relationship between epistemology and ontology and not, as Wight stipulates, for a primacy of epistemology over ontology. (Kratochwil: 2007: 72; see also Fierke, 2005: 7)

This point is important because if Kratochwil is right, any claim to a primacy of either epistemology or ontology is wrong and Wight's position is subsequently as misguided as purely epistemologically based approaches. In order to counter this argument, Wight

would have to show that ontological statements provide the basis for any enquiry into international politics and everything else is derivative of them. And indeed Wight makes this claim when he maintains that “[a]ll theories presuppose a basic ontology from which all other considerations follow. No ontology, no theory.” (Wight, 2006: 2)

In chapter I of his book Wight sets out to lay down his assumptions regarding the primacy of ontological facts that exist independent of and prior to any system of knowledge. In this sense he admits right in the beginning “Both Wendt and I advocate a form of scientific realism” (ibid.: 15) His initial critique is a clarification of the relation between scientific realism, positivism and science. Positivism for Wight is not synonymous with science but only one particular strand within the philosophy of science. (ibid.: 17) In this sense, Wight maintains, one can be a scientist without being a positivist. “The scientific realist critique of positivism takes issue with many of the fundamentals of positivism, but it does so out of a sincere commitment to science as a valid practice in terms of knowledge generation, and importantly, one that can be extended to cover the social world.” (ibid.: 18)

In principle Wight’s account of scientific realism relies upon three stipulations. “Understood as the attempt to provide depth explanations, however, a series of metaphysical commitments is still implied. Broadly put, I consider these to be: ontological realism (that there is a reality independent of the mind(s) that would wish to come to know it); epistemological relativism (that all beliefs are socially produced); and judgemental rationalism (that despite epistemological relativism, it is still possible, in principle, to choose between competing theories).” (ibid.: 26)

In the remainder of this section we will show how each of these commitments is incoherent and therefore undermines the overall account with which Wight tries to

rethink and reconceptualise the role and nature of ontology for the social sciences and for IR in particular.

Ontological realism and the quest for ‘intransitive objects’

In respect to the first point, Wight, as does Wendt, argues for a mind-independent reality that exists before and beyond the human agents that are engaged in delineating certain features of this environment. “A commitment to depth realism presupposes that there are things, entities, structures and / or mechanisms that operate and exist independently of our ability to know or manipulate them.” (ibid.: 29) In order to substantiate this claim which in due course should open the path towards a depth ontology or a depth realism Wight introduces the category of ‘intransitive’ objects. “Science is possible, then, because the world consists of ‘intransitive’ objects which form the focus of scientific discourses; with the aim of science in particular being the production of knowledge of mechanisms that in certain combinations produce the phenomena that are actually manifest in experience / appearance.” (ibid.) In Wight’s view these ‘intransitive’ objects exist and change without human interference and build the ontological foundation out of which the different sciences and varying epistemologies evolve. “On a realist ontology ... being is independent of human experience and / or expressions of it.” (ibid.: 28)

The existence of these objects is not confined to either material or natural phenomena. Wight sees no problem in identifying ideal and social structures or entities as ‘intransitive’ objects that exhibit a mind-independent momentum of existence and

which only subsequently are approached with different epistemological tools. He maintains, for instance, that

“[m]odern capitalist societies, for example, have not always existed and there may well come a time when they cease to exist, and in this sense Bashkar is right to claim that they are not time-space invariant. Nevertheless, in another sense, it would be correct to formulate, in a conditional manner, a law of the form: ‘whenever such capitalist societies emerge, with the relevant structures, then these tendencies will operate’. Laws formulated in this conditional manner are commonplace within the natural sciences. And there is no reason why the social sciences should not also construct such laws.” (ibid.: 55)

Therefore, Wright argues that we should “not rule out the idea of intransitive objects in terms of social inquiry. The events of 11 September 2001, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Holocaust were as they were, independent of anything we might write of them today, just as the men in army battle dress are engaged in a particular activity, and one, it needs stressing, can be misdescribed by a putative observer.” (ibid.)

Both assumptions, the existence of intransitive objects in the natural sciences as well as in the social sciences are, however misleading if not outright wrong. In the natural sciences the example of the statement ‘Pigs can’t fly’ discussed above is a case in point and does not have to be elaborated upon any further. Suffice it to say that the statement as such is never independent of the specific frame of reference which is created by the humans engaged in stating it. It is probably correct to say that matter in different forms exists; we can be agnostic about this. But as soon as we engage in naming this matter we already transform it into a social fact by drawing it into our awareness as humans. We never have a neutral stand towards objects in our world but always encounter them with specific conceptions and categories in place. Therefore, it seems fair to say, that although matter might exist beyond the human mind and has existed before the advent

of the human species, we as humans have no possibility to encounter matter as matter independent of our concepts of the world and anything in it. As will be elaborated further below, Wight as well as Wendt, to the detriment of their arguments ignore the constitutive role of language.

Secondly, Wight also maintains as we have seen the existence of ‘intransitive’ objects in the social realm. It will suffice to consider one example in this respect, let us say the Iraq War in 2003. Wight, we assume, would argue that independent of how we interpret or evaluate this event later on, something happened at a specific point in time that subsequently qualifies as the object, intransitive object that is, for our studies. Again, Wight is correct in stating that ‘something’ happened there but this ‘something’ cannot be grasped as what it ‘really’ is beyond the human sphere of meaning. Even a seemingly neutral statement such as ‘In March 2003 the United States of America went to war with Iraq’ is full of value laden meanings that are socially dependent. For example, the terms ‘United States of America’ and ‘Iraq’ presuppose the socially constituted notion of statehood. Some in the US administration might say, that America did not fight a war against Iraq but only against Saddam Hussein and his regime. Others might maintain that this whole event was actually not a war and we find certainly many different opinions on whether the ‘war’ has already ended or is still ongoing. Likewise, some people might say that the US attacked Iraq, others would say that they freed it, others might say they intervened. Some might say it is a form of imperialism, others that it is neo-colonialism, others that it was self-defence and yet others that it could even be seen as a humanitarian intervention. The problem simply is that although we might be able to conceptually realise that something happened, what this something ‘is’ cannot be described outside human existence and meaning exactly because the only way we have

to grasp these ‘intransitive’ objects is through language and language is never neutral (again, we will elaborate on this point below).

Therefore, we end up with asking what this ‘ontological realism’ is actually worth and whether it can help us in any way to grasp ‘reality’ outside human existence and use it as a neutral base onto which we plant further evaluations and epistemological concepts. To be sure, this is not a denial of a material reality outside the human mind nor is it an endorsement of a radical idealism as will become clear as the argument of this thesis progresses. Rather, the whole endeavour can be seen as relying upon a wrong conception of ontology.

Epistemological relativism and judgmental rationalism

The second and third point Wight proposes in his model of scientific realism regards the epistemological relativism and concomitant judgemental rationalism that he endorses as key components of his approach. To begin with, Wight accepts the necessity of various ways of scientific enquiry to react to the variety of phenomena to be studied. “For scientific realists there can be no single ‘scientific method’. Understood as the attempt to provide depth explanations of phenomena, it must be the case that different phenomena will require different models of explanation.” (Wight, 2006: 19) Furthermore, he argues in favour of historically situated forms of knowledge. He accepts that at different points in time the epistemological categories and methods change.

“..., since it is difficult to conceive of our minds being formed outside of the influence of specific societies, non-scientific knowledge is also historically specific. Different societies will instil different ideas and practices. Given the historically specific nature of knowledge, we have to accept the fact of

epistemological relativism; namely, that all beliefs are socially produced, so that knowledge is transient, and neither truth value nor criteria of rationality exist outside of historical time.” (ibid.: 39)

So far, we would have no problem agreeing with Wight’s stipulations. He maintains beyond this epistemological stand, however, further assumptions that are highly problematic. First is the stipulation that there are intransitive objects that exist beyond and outside the epistemological and social realms. Why this is problematic we have shown above. Secondly is Wight’s assumption that albeit the historically conditioned nature of our knowledge we are able to rationally judge which theory or methodology that arises out of the epistemic cultures is ‘better’. He says: “Scientific realism is epistemologically relativist, that is, relativist about the transitive object, not ontologically relativist. And because it is knowledge of an intransitive object, some knowledge claims may be better than others. Hence there is at least the possibility of judgmental rationalism. The acceptance of epistemological relativism, then, does not require us to embrace judgemental relativism. In fact, there may be, and often are, good grounds for preferring one theory or account of some aspect of the world to another.” (ibid.: 39-40) These decisions, however, that should bring us to judgements about the value of differing theories about an intransitive object or its parts rely upon a specific epistemological framework in which they are exercised. To underline his point, Wight insists that what he identifies as the usually used ‘incommensurability thesis’ is actually wrong and cross-paradigm discussions and communication is possible. “..., there is no reason to assume that it is impossible to communicate between different theoretical or conceptual schemes or that a scientist cannot know the same object under two or more different descriptions. To show the difference between Newtonian and Einsteinian

dynamics and that the latter is an advance of the former the scientist must be capable of doing so.” (*ibid.*: 42)

At first glance, again, Wight is of course correct to say first that different theories can be known and described by the same scientist and secondly that an evaluation which one is better is possible as for example is the case when comparing Newtonian and Einsteinian dynamics. There are, however, qualifications in respect to the latter claim, the claim that judgemental rationalism is possible, namely that it is only possible within an accepted frame of reference. In case of the comparison between Einstein and Newton it is obvious that both accepted a specific view of the world governed by scientific laws generally discoverable by human agents. The process of discovery and the subsequent process of proving a theory is presupposed. In cases, however, in which two completely different frames of reference meet Wight’s argument breaks down. If we talk about ‘the world’ and why it is rotating, for instance, we can indeed develop different ‘scientific’ theories and given the conditions under which theories are accepted (which of course are socially produced) we can say which is better. If we, however, address the question from a scientific and a religious point of view Wight’s judgmental rationalism is impossible. The scientist might argue that the world rotates because of specific physical laws; the believer will argue that it rotates because God has wanted it to. Which one is the better theory? The intuitive answer is that we can establish and prove the scientific arguments and the derived laws in many instances and show that it has general validity. This, however, already happens within the scientific framework which the religious believer will not accept. He will say that his theory is better because the sacred texts of revelation say that God created the world and therefore created it as rotating. In order to

accept this argument, however, we have to buy into his core assumptions which the scientist does not.

Another way to find a ‘rational’ solution to this dilemma could be that the one cannot show that God exists but one can show that gravity exists. Thankfully, Wight provides us with a readymade counter-argument. He says that the model of science he proposes “[m]uch like gravitational and magnetic fields, ... cannot be empirically identified independently of its effects. Scientific realists argue that it can be known to exist through its causal powers, but not shown to exist.” (*ibid.*: 51)

The same, however, can be said of God. We cannot prove that God exists but through his work we can know he exists. On this basis, for instance, looking at differing views on the causes of the hurricane Katrina that destroyed New Orleans we can either say that specific natural processes led to the disaster or we can say that God brought the destruction on the city to punish the promiscuous and blasphemous behaviour of its inhabitants. Like it or not, there is no way we can decide which ‘theory’ is more accurate or better. The force behind the causes for Katrina cannot be shown to exist, as scientific realists admit, and therefore our decision to ascribe causal power to natural processes or God is in this case dependent upon our system of belief.

In this sense it remains to ask what Wight’s intransitive object, this ‘something’ that gives rise to our enquiries, scientific or otherwise, can actually achieve. We think the answer is obvious – nothing.

Overall, therefore we are left with a rather problem-laden reconceptualisation of ontology. In fact we seem to have come full circle to the initial interpretation of Kratochwil’s argument that world-images and systems of knowledge are inextricably

intertwined and neither can justifiably serve as a secure and indubitable basis. The crux in Wendt's and Wight's arguments lies with the fact that they commit themselves willingly or not to a foundationalist enterprise and whether based on ontology or epistemology this move is indeed a very modern one. Wendt, of course would counter this argument and insist that his re-conceptualisation is thoroughly anti-foundationalist. He says: "... realism is anti-foundationalist. Thus, although it is common to conflate the two, the correspondence theory of truth does not entail epistemological foundationalism. What makes a theory true is the extent to which it reflects the causal structure of the world, but theories are always tested against other theories, not against some pre-theoretical 'foundation' of correspondence." (Wendt, 1999: 58-9)

What Wendt shows here is not that his theory is anti-foundationalist but that his epistemology is not monistic. For his whole account to work, as he admits and we have shown, there must be a mind-independent ontological ground which does not depend on any epistemological conception. If this ground exists independent of any epistemology, his epistemology might be anti-foundational but his ontology is not. Apart from that, scientific realism in the form Wendt and Wight present is not able to confirm the existence of this ontologically given reality beyond human existence. As was shown by reference to examples from the natural as well as social sciences above, any attempt to grasp these 'intransitive' objects unavoidably draws them into a web of linguistic meanings dependent on social practices. Ontology and epistemology are always intertwined and cannot be conceptualised independent of one another. Their attempt just to say and rely on what 'is' and then devise *ex post* epistemological tools to establish knowledge is as misguided as any attempt to devise epistemological devices in order to discern what 'is'. Any conceptualisation of what 'is' already takes place within a system

of social meanings and knowledge in the same way as any conceptualisation of what can be known already exists within a framework of assumptions about what ‘is’.

The key to the problems with the re-conceptualisations of ontology as attempted by Wendt and Wight in recent years is to be found in their views on language. As Winch in his seminal work in 1958 already argued: “To ask whether reality is intelligible is to ask about the relation between thought and reality. In considering the nature of thought one is led also to consider the nature of language. Inseparably bound up with the question whether reality is intelligible, therefore, is the question of how language is connected with reality, of what it is to *say something*.” (Winch, 2008: 11)

It seems therefore that if we accept the initial thrust of Wendt’s and Wight’s arguments that a foundationalist concern with epistemology leads to a misrepresentation of the (social) world and a re-conceptualisation of ontology might provide some alleviation we have to start not by positing some ontological realm independent of human agency and therefore commit ourselves to an ontological foundationalism but rather ask what makes ‘reality’ intelligible in the way it is. For this, it seems, we have to turn to the crucial role of language.

Signs of a new ontology – the importance of language in the study of social and political phenomena

We have seen above that language and the way we access beings linguistically does not allow for a representation of objective or ‘intransitive objects’ that lie outside the human purview. Before we elaborate, however, on the way language constrains and at the same time enables us in respect to grasping and constructing our environment it seems

necessary to reflect quickly on the question how such a role for language becomes possible. As was already hinted at above, the focus on ontology that we find in scholars such as Alexander Wendt and Colin Wight reproduces the problems of foundationalism that we have encountered so many times before. It does so because the notion of ontology relies already on a pre-conception of the nature of being that subsequently leads to inconsistencies. One way to portray this pre-conception and show the way towards an alternative is a reflection on one of the most important philosophical movements of the 20th century, namely phenomenology. Especially in the work of Martin Heidegger can we find the starting point for a renewed reflection on the relation between human beings and the world as an ontological question. In his article *The end of philosophy and the task of thinking* (2007e) Heidegger explores the general attitude of ontology as metaphysics. This notion and understanding of philosophy we can also find in Wendt and Wight. As Heidegger points out:

“Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole— the world, man, God — with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being. Metaphysics thinks beings as being in the manner of representational thinking that gives reasons. For since the beginning of philosophy and with that beginning, the Being of beings has showed itself as the ground (*arche, aition, principle*). The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as something that can be known, handled, and worked upon. As the ground, Being brings beings to their actual presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present each in its own way to presence. In accordance with the actual kind of presence, the ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the real, as the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, as the dialectical mediation of the movement of the absolute spirit and of the historical process of production, as the will to power positing values. What characterizes metaphysical thinking that grounds the ground for beings is the fact that metaphysical thinking, starting from what is present, represents it in its presence and thus exhibits it as grounded by its ground.” (Heidegger, 2007e: 432)

What we can find in recent publications on ontology is exactly this preoccupation with the presence of beings that provides the ground from which further investigations are conducted – what Heidegger called a ‘metaphysics of presence’. The preoccupation with the study of beings that are present (observables as well as unobservables) penetrates already into the realm of the modern mindset in which these ‘objects’ or beings are ontically empowered with forms of causation, characteristics to be known, elements to be controlled. We encounter here the objective attitude that sets the human being apart from these objects and makes them mind-independent. It is, however, exactly this move that brings back the dilemma that we thought was left behind. If these beings in their way of being are independent of human existence the question of how to bridge the gap between mind and nature remains. Even if we claim that forms of being can be grasped by different forms of knowing, any form of knowing, however determined, must account for the way the beings in question are known. A mere recourse to epistemological pluralism is not enough here. We find the source of this problematic in the attitude of encounter. As Heidegger rightly stated “an essential distinction prevails between comprehending the ensemble of beings in themselves and finding oneself in the midst of beings as a whole.” (Heidegger, 2007a: 99)

The modern scientific attitude represents the first alternative that tries to comprehend the ensemble of beings in themselves. Compartmental science as we understand it today with its topical differentiation is first and foremost concerned with beings. “But what is remarkable is that, precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks of something different. What should be examined are beings only, and besides that — nothing; beings alone, and further — nothing; solely beings, and beyond that — nothing.” (Heidegger, 2007a: 95) This attitude already presupposes

a concept of man that sees human beings apart from other beings and in possible control of them. Beings can be observed, known and manipulated in many different ways, within and across the different sciences. The boundaries of this ‘ensemble of beings’ are given by the way the essential features of the beings in question are observed. This is exactly the point where we encounter the abovementioned problem that leads us full circle to the problem we were eager to circumvent – the question of epistemology.

The second alternative is grasped by the formulation of ‘finding oneself in the midst of beings as a whole’. Here the gap between mind and nature seems avoidable when we accept that human beings are not ontologically detached from the environment they live in. The question, however, that obviously arises out of this conceptualisation is how, when placed into the midst of beings, these beings can be grasped as a whole. There are two elements that seem to be important. First, Heidegger argues that in different moods we relate to the totality of beings in different ways. (Heidegger, 2007a: 99-100; see also Macomber, 1967: 78-80) Secondly, and more importantly for us right now, is the fact that whereas the boundaries in the first alternative were determined by observation from the outside, in the second alternative they are constructed linguistically from the insight. Wittgenstein was right to claim in this respect that “die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt (the limits of my language constitute the limits of my world)” (Wittgenstein, 1961: 114-5). We find similar ideas in Heidegger’s dictum that “language is the house of being” (Heidegger, 2007c: 237) and Gadamer’s “being that can be understood is language.” (Gadamer, 1979: 432)

Subsequently a major shift occurs in our conception of the beings around us and our role in constituting them. As we will see below, to grasp the way beings are requires a deeper investigation into the meaning of being and especially human being. Human

beings are not just present among or beside other beings. Rather human being or Dasein is constitutive of the meaning of beings it encounters, or, in other words, Dasein let beings be what they are.

We can see here already that a simple inclusion of linguistic determinants into the ontological conception we found in Wendt and Wight will not do as the role of language hinted at here overturns the whole ontology they present, or even more radically, it overturns the whole meaning of ontology they exhibit. As Wittgensteinian scholars in IR have already pointed out, language is crucial here since it is not just a set of "labels that can be compared with the world. Wittgenstein demonstrates that language is constitutive of the world. We cannot get behind our language to compare it with that which it describes." (Fierke, 1998: 3)

An enquiry into the nature of beings must necessarily start with an account of the form of being that encounters the beings in question and draws them into its awareness. We will have to say a lot more about this 'drawing into awareness' in the remaining chapters. What is clear already, however, is that if we want to conceptualise a path that overcomes the problems encountered in forms of epistemological or ontological foundationalism we must radically challenge the way beings were apprehended in the sciences as we understand them today. Such an enquiry is exactly what is attempted here for the social and political world. With this task in mind, it should also become clear now why such a sketch of a new social ontology cannot be limited to one field such as IR alone. It is indeed a challenge that in its scope transgresses the boundaries of the different sciences and their methodological and theoretical apparatuses that aim at determining what beings are for their studies.

Having so far established the shortcomings of the reconceptualisation of ontology in IR that can be found in recent literature we would now have to show that role of language sketched out above in somewhat more detail. The discussion here has to be seen as preliminary as we will discuss the role of language within the proposed ontological framework at length in chapter IV. The focus in the following section is therefore informed by Winch's general suggestion that any judgment about the intelligibility of reality relies upon a specific conception of language.

Towards an expressivist understanding of language

We have so far dealt with the contentions of scientific realism as it is presented in some circles of IR theory in respect to three points: ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationalism. As we have shown, scientific realism shows weaknesses in respect to all three of these notions. We also stipulated that the main reason for these weaknesses seems to lie in the neglect of the nature and role of language especially in respect to the social realm and subsequently in the concomitantly relied upon notion of ontology.

This neglect of language is based on the views we find in scientific realism as towards the nature of language. One element which poses a major concern for scientific realists and which will help to illuminate this point further is the question about the reality of ontological entities. (Potamäki and Wight, 2000: 217-8; Wight, 2007b: 382; Kurki, 2007: 364-5) The position scientific realists take as followers of philosophical realism is naturally in support of the 'real' existence of these entities and in refutation of any form of nominalism, especially in respect to the nature of unobservables. (Wight, 2007b: 382)

As Colin Wright argues, there is a tendency in some approaches in IR to treat concepts as not really referring to real entities ‘out there’ but as placeholders that help facilitating access to the social world. (*ibid.*: 379-80) As such these concepts have no existence beyond the conventionalism and instrumental purpose they serve as ideationally structuring the world. Based on this supposition which is another instantiation of the long-fought battle between realists and nominalists Wright naturally comes to the conclusion that only two possibilities exist. Either, following the nominalist mode, we treat concepts and terms referring to unobservables as purely ideationally existent, i.e. as depending on the human mind. The reference for these terms does not lie in an independent reality but in a purely abstract conceptual realm and they serve purely instrumental means. Or, and this is the position Wright is presenting, we accept a deeper notion of reality and accept that these terms find their references in the ‘real world’ as existing independent of the mind. (*ibid.*: 382-6)

Nevertheless, this existence of ontological entities and the insistence on this form of depth realism exactly runs into the problems outlined above. We can simply not access these objects in the way necessary for scientific realism to work and for ontology to be more fundamental than epistemology. This is, however, not a refutation of either the ‘world out there’ or the concept of ‘reality’ as such. As Kratochwil pointed out, the stipulation that we do not have any direct access to these ontological entities or ‘things in themselves’ does not mean we have no access at all. (Kratochwil, 2007: 67) Neither does this mean that we espouse a Kantian dichotomy of a world of phenomena and a world of noumena.

As we remember, for these ontological entities to have any bearing upon our understanding of the social world their influences must flow directly from them. If we

would accept that the way they enable and constrain human action and understanding as arising out of a system of meaning or an epistemology in which we conceptualise these ontological entities we would return to the point of departure of the scientific realist critique. If ontological views about ‘what is’ are fundamental for the differences within IR and if we further want to come to a better understanding of social process through a renewed critical debate about these entities and what they are, there must be a way to access them pre-epistemologically, i.e. in a way that is not tainted by human descriptions, interests and values. If this is not possible, then the whole enterprise is useless, at least for the social sciences because any acceptance that these entities cannot be accessed independent of humanly devised systems of meaning and knowing would negate any notion of ontological primacy – and this is exactly what scientific realists are proposing here. (Wight, 2006: 2; Wight, 2007b: 385; for a similar argument against ontological primacy see Kratochwil, 2007: 71-2)

So, what are we left with? Are there only these two alternatives in respect to our conceptualization of ontological entities? Do we really have to choose between a nominalism which denies reality to ontological entities and a realism that posits these entities as real but independent of the human mind? The answer to this question, as will be argued in the remainder of this article, is no. There is a possibility to overcome this dilemma, not through a middle way or third alternative that operates within the same frame of reference but by transposing the problem *in toto* and searching for a new social ontology, i.e. a different understanding of what ontology is about.

Access to this endeavour is possible when we consider the underlying notion of the nature of language. Language in the abovementioned dichotomy is conceptualized along designative lines, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor. In his essay *Language and*

Human Nature (1985) Taylor describes a designative understanding of language as follows: “There are two sides or dimensions of meaningful objects, which can each be taken up as the guiding thread of an answer. The first is what we could call the designative: we could explain a sign or word having meaning by pointing to what it designates, in a broad sense, that is, what it can be used to refer to in the world, and what it can be used to say about that thing.” (Taylor, 1985: 218)

Language for the nominalist as well as for the realist consists of a system of signs with fixed meanings that help to conceptualise the world. The disagreement as we have seen is not about the function of language but about the ‘reality’ of the states of affairs described by it. Nominalists stipulate that the terms used only structure ‘reality’ without having points of reference outside the human mind – for them the terms used refer to concepts deployed by the mind. Realists, on the other side, see real entities as referents of these terms. Both, however, see language as a tool that can be used to describe something or designate meaningful connections between processes in the world. This view of language has been the dominant one throughout the modern period and can be found in almost all accounts in IR as well.

As is already apparent in this conceptualisation of language as designative is the opposition between the individual language user and the world in which the object designated by language exists. As such this conception of language is very much in line with Enlightenment thought since it posits the subjective consciousness as distinct from the world it inhabits and also ascribes the ability to reflect on this world from a detached and objective or neutral point of view.

In respect to language we find many instances in modern thought in which a designative conception of language is implicitly or explicitly expressed. Especially during the 17th

and 18th centuries the question regarding the origin of language, a question closely connected to a conceptualisation of the nature of language, attracted major philosophers. On the side of the modern conception writers such as Hobbes, Locke and Condillac delivered influential views on the nature of language. Overall one can say that “[t]his project assumes that language is one of the object supremely constituted by consciousness, and that actual languages are very special cases of a possible language which consciousness holds the key to – that they are systems of signs linked to their meaning by univocal relationships which, in their structure as in their function, are susceptible to a total explication” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 81)

If we follow Charles Taylor further, however, we find a different conception of language, which is no less distinguished in its genealogical development. This conception of language Taylor called expressivist and it can be traced back to thinkers such as Hamann, Herder and Humboldt as well as the later Wittgenstein and post-Husserlian phenomenology (here most notably in Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty). (Lawn, 2006: 4) In this view, language is the medium in which human existence is immersed and according to which it allocates meaning. It is not to be found in individual consciousnesses as the designative conception would claim but is exercised in the public realm and constantly contested.

Language in an expressivist view relies upon a wider, holistic understanding of linguistic practices. The main point of difference here lies with the fact that contrary to the designative approach language is seen as a social construct. It does not rely upon an individual consciousness that shares modes of perception with others but derives its function from its place in the public space. “The language-user is not a Cartesian subject in sovereign control of meanings; these are socially produced from the fabric of daily

life within which various customs and practices are performatively enacted.” (ibid.: 15) Whereas language is more a tool for articulation of thought in the designative model it represents more the opportunity for self-discovery and self-expression for the expressivists. Language hereby gains its power not from representational functions but from participation in the language community from which it develops and to which we all belong. This sense of language community of course means that language cannot be located in a Cartesian consciousness alone but that meanings are shared publicly and also re-shaped in public discourse. The subject involved in this community acquires a capacity to take part in communication but is never fully in control of language. Rather the linguistic development is a dialogical and continuous process publicly exercised within a language community in the form of language-games. (Wittgenstein, 1974, §23, p.11; Fierke: 2002: 337) And in the same way language is never fully understood and controlled, the subjects themselves are involved in a constant re-interpretation in respect to their self-understanding. (Warnke, 1987:38)

Following such a conception of language would allow a new approach towards the study of social and political phenomena that is partly already exercised in IR. (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989; Fierke, 2005) The expressivist view of language sees human agents always already submerged in systems of meaning. (Fierke, 2002: 333) The important point here, however, is that these systems of meaning do not emanate from a single consciousness or a group of single consciousnesses. This point is important because it disarms Wight’s concerns that reality can simply change when the human mind decided it should change. (Wight, 2007b: 392) ‘Reality’ in such a linguistically and publically guided system of meaning arises not out of individual consciousnesses but finds itself as the contested and constantly reshaped frame of

human existence. The gap between mind and nature that still haunts the scientific realist account presented here is overcome by relying upon a notion of intentionality that opens horizons in which the publicly negotiated and mediated frame of reference interprets the enabling and constraining conditions and thereby constitutes reality without making it reducible to single consciousnesses or placing it outside them.

Also, we can see that the abovementioned problems with grasping ‘intransitive objects’ do not even arise within the confines of an expressivist view of language. As was discussed above, the frame of reference in which ontological entities are experienced and encountered structures the conditions and possibilities of action. The constraints, although they depend on humanly devised systems of meaning cannot be reduced to mere phantasies that can be changed at will and therefore deny any reality outside the human mind. Wight and other scientific realists are right to claim that such a view would run counter to the experiences and practices we are engaged in everyday. The structures in question are very ‘real’ for the humans acting within their confines; and yet, they do not exist independent of *Dasein* which constitutes them. By transposing the mediation and deliberation of these social practices away from ‘inside’ individual minds into the ‘collective’ level of a linguistic and social community they exist ‘mind-independent’ (if we understand ‘mind’ as a Cartesian consciousness) but not independent of human existence. Human existence or human being must hereby not be misunderstood as ‘a’ human being or a number of human beings but refers to the totality of human existence. (for an elaborate exposition of the notion of coexistence in Heidegger see Odysseos, 2007, especially pp. 57-94) The social interaction and the concomitant emergence of shared meanings and practices that constrains and enables our actions is always already beyond the individual and can therefore never be changed

by ‘a’ human being but only in social discourse. Human being is thereby the space in which other entities (observables as well as unobservables) can be what they are; human being lets them be so to say.

In this sense it is important to note that the normative structure that arises out of the public mediation and negotiation must indeed be seen as having causal effects (which means it must be seen as enabling and constraining) on human action. Scientific realists are absolutely right to claim that the standard conception of causality as efficient causality puts any engagement with the social and political world into a straight jacket and creates rifts within the discipline that are unnecessary and misguided. (Wight, 2006: 1; Kurki, 2006) It is, however, likewise the case and of equal importance to realize that not only are norms causes but also that causes are norms. As we have seen above when looking at Wendt’s example of the fact that ‘Pigs can’t fly’, the way in which we interpret the reasons of this ‘fact’ conditions (in other words ‘norms’) our attitude towards this fact and its consequences for us. In a religiously guided discourse it is more likely that we accept this fact as an example of Gods action on earth, in a scientific discourse we are more inclined to find a physical force that can be manipulated and possibly overcome. The frame of reference in which we let this fact be what it is creates hereby a normative space which again assumes causal power. The fact is never graspable outside or beyond the collective interpretive frame of reference. It is not possible, as was argued before, to posit the fact as existent and subsequently devise means to understand and approach it. We as humans can only approach it with an understanding in place. Here we reach again the insight defended above that ways of being and ways of knowing are inextricably intertwined. It seems therefore that we always have to consider both sides: norms as causes but also causes as norms.

If we link these insights back to Winch's original question regarding the intelligibility of reality we can see that language is the medium in which we express our self-understanding and situatedness in the world and allocate meaning to the entities we encounter. Such an allocation of meaning does not derive from a primordial deliberation or even 'direct access' to ontological entities but always presupposes and takes place within an involvement in an already encountered world. (Dreyfus, 1991: 41-2) Just to point this out very clearly, the impossibility to encounter the world 'directly' is not as often stipulated an embracement of a Kantian dualism between phenomena and noumena. As Edmund Husserl has shown, such a conceptualization simply reproduces the dichotomy between mind and nature and all its concomitant problems. (Safranski, 2002: 25-39) Rather, and again following Husserl and his phenomenology, we have to see consciousness as always already reaching into the world, as constantly intending the world. (Kockelmans, 1994: 95) "It is not trivial to say that consciousness is 'consciousness of' objects; on the contrary, this statement goes against many common beliefs. One of phenomenology's greatest contributions is to have broken out of the egocentric predicament, to have checkmated the Cartesian doctrine. Phenomenology shows that the mind is a public thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines." (Sokolowski, 2000: 11-2; see also Moran, 2005: 53) The point hereby is exactly not to either deny or defend access to the things themselves outside and independent of human being. Rather, we have to realize that what we call 'reality' is publicly exercised and not just privately experienced.

Based on our argument thus far it seems that a new way of thinking about the ontological status on different entities in the international realm arises together with a

different sense of what ontology deals with. The separation between human mind in a Cartesian sense and human existence in a Heideggerian sense is crucial. In this vein, Colin Wight is right to say that it is ludicrous to assume that unobservables such as the state will cease to exist if social scientists cease to exist. (Wight, 2007b: 389) But it would cease to exist if humans cease to exist. This is an important point because it shows that the emphasis Wight and other scientific realists are putting on science is missing the point. In their view science arises out of our encounter (constraining and enabling) with ontological entities ‘out there’. (ibid.: 383) Surely, we had many different ways to practice science but overall this plurality shares the task to theoretically grasp what can and cannot be said about the world. The problem, however, is that they take the persistence of ontological entities beyond the confines of science as a proof that these objects exist independent of human being. This is simply not the case. The state as an unobservable structure is constituted not by the theoretical musings of scientists but neither is it detached from the human world. Wight seems to realize this problem to a certain degree when he states: “Of course, social objects are not mind-independent in the same way that natural objects are . . . But there are a lot of complicated issues here surrounding the issue of just what mind the object is dependent upon.” (ibid.: 389) The problem is that Wight never thinks of the possibility that ‘dependent on the human mind’ and ‘dependent on human being’ are two separate states of affairs. Or, to make it even more clear, Wight is simply converging the terms ‘the real’ and ‘reality’ and ‘being’ and ‘beings’ to mean the same thing. This, however, is a simplification that exactly leads to the perceived dilemma between realism and nominalism. Heidegger’s thought suggests a way out of this by maintaining that “reality

and being depend on Dasein's practices but the real and beings do not." (Dreyfus, 1991: 265)

Following this line of reasoning, it is obvious that states would cease to exist as unobservable structures when humans cease to exist. Therefore, it seems that there must be a third way to conceptualize the 'reality' of unobservables in the social world – states do not simply exist nominally in our minds but neither do they exist simply in the world 'out there'. The key to solve this dilemma is simply a detachment of consciousness and human being and a refocusing of our enquiry onto the *practices* that constitute the state and lets it be what it is. This simply means that the state indeed transcends the individual consciousnesses that inhabit or encounter it. On the other hand, however, the publicity of human minds in Husserl's sense constitutes the state as an unobservable entity dependent on human being (note that it is a dependency on human *being* not human *beings*!) This way we get out of the dilemma sketched above: the state is not just a nominalist entity dependent on consciousness but neither has it to be posited outside the confines of human existence to assume 'reality' and its concomitant enabling and constraining effects.

In our understanding of the constitution of such unobservable social entities the role of social and linguistic practices can hardly be overstated. As we have seen, a theory of the state as a relation between mind and independent object is a false abstraction. After all, the state as we conceptualizing it right now did not come into being through theoretical reflection but through practical concerns and intentional (in a Husserlian sense) action. To understand it, it seems plausible, we need to look much more closely at these practices rather than trying to conceptualise the entity *in abstracto*. Language in its expressivist understanding is hereby a key element as it highlights the public and

illocutionary characteristics inherent in linguistic usage and the subsequent emergence of meaning. As Heidegger pointed out: “Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man.” (Heidegger, 2007: 348) The intelligibility of reality is thereby not dependent on presupposed epistemological conceptions; but neither can it be achieved by positing an ontological domain independent of human existence. The role of human being and its immersion into social and linguistic practices provide hereby the space that lets beings be the way they are and at the same time provides an understanding that is always already shaped by our constant situatedness and involvement in the world, our being-in-the-world to say it with Heidegger. (Macomber, 1967: 75)

Language and the way to a new social ontology

So far we have argued that the recent attempts to reconceptualise the ontology of international relations is inadequate since it merely shifts the focus from epistemological foundationalism towards ontological foundationalism. The different arguments that have been presented thus far from scholars working on this project posit a mind-independent pre-epistemological world of ontological facts that causally structure human action but stay untouched by human ways of knowing and being. As we have seen, such a reliance on mind-independent and seemingly pre-epistemological facts is, however, just another illusion in the modern quest for an Archimedean point of departure, something that lies beyond doubt. The critique that is put forward in this case is a correct one since the preoccupation with epistemological questions that can be found in post-Cartesian philosophy is indeed not able to deliver the universal theory or

method that is needed to establish indubitable and necessary knowledge. The focus, however, that shifts the problem of finding foundations that condition human life by relying upon mind-independent ontological facts is as flawed as any attempt to find certain epistemological foundations.

It seems that Kratochwil's original argument presented above is absolutely correct in maintaining that ways of being (ontology) and ways of knowing (epistemology) are inextricably intertwined and therefore make it impossible to use either as the secure foundation from where to start our enquiry into the social and political world. (Kratochwil, 2007: 72) The crux with the ontological arguments derived from Wendt, Wight and others lie, as we have shown, with the total neglect of the role of language and the social emergence of systems of meaning that reach beyond an understanding of language as a mere system of signs. Kratochwil again is right to stipulate that "our conventional understanding of social action and the norms governing them is defective because of a fundamental misunderstanding of the function of language in social interaction... ." (Kratochwil, 1989: 5) We have shown that language when conceptualised along the lines of an expressivist understanding can yield important insights into the nature of social processes and dynamics. These examples show that a different way to approach the various ways of being and the various ways of knowing and their intertwinement can fruitfully be explored without falling into the foundationalist trap in either its epistemological or ontological guise.

But if this is the case and we can find elaborate examples of scholarship that take the role of language and its ramifications for ontological as well as epistemological issues seriously what is there left to do? The argument that will inform the rest of this thesis is that reconceptualisation of language as can be found in Onuf, Kratochwil, Fierke and

others cannot be correctly understood as a mere add-on to existing scholarship in IR but has to be seen as a iconoclastic enterprise that in its very nature challenges the framework within which enquiries have taken place in the field of IR. This challenge presents a pathway to a new conceptualisation and understanding of ontological and epistemological issues that are so far mainly unexplored. A conception of language that situates the individual agents within a socially constructed and constantly mediated network of meanings and actions subsequently shifts our conception of the beings around us and our role in constituting them. To grasp the way beings are requires a deeper investigation into the meaning of being and the especially human being. Human beings are not just present among or beside other beings. Rather human being or Dasein is constitutive of the meaning of beings it encounters, or, in other words, Dasein let beings be what they are. We can see here already that a simple inclusion of linguistic determinants into the ontological conception we found in Wendt and Wight will not do as the role of language hinted at here overturns the whole ontology they present, or even more radically, it overturns the whole meaning of ontology they exhibit. An enquiry into the nature of beings must necessarily start with an account of the form of being that encounters the beings in question and draws them into its awareness. Out of this arises the necessity to conceptualise a path that overcomes the problems encountered in forms of epistemological or ontological foundationalism.

We must radically challenge the way beings were apprehended in the sciences as we understand them today and this thesis tries to make the first steps towards this goal. If we take the difficulties encountered in recent attempts to reconceptualise ontology for the study of international relations seriously, we have to start rethinking the concept of ontology as such and concomitantly reconceptualise our understanding of such central

terms as agency, structure, language, truth and freedom accordingly. The focus must hereby not lie, as Chris Brown has rightly pointed out in his response to critical realism, in meta-theoretical pseudo-debates (Brown, 2007: 415-6) but by taking practice seriously Questions that will arise in this endeavour and that demand answers are not aiming at delineating theoretical facts about core concepts but praxeological features which condition the practical possibilities of the social ontology subsequently conceptualised. In this respect, as was already pointed out in the Introduction, we must not ask ‘What is agency?’ but rather ‘What are agents doing?’, we must not ask ‘What is language?’ but rather ‘How is language practiced?’, we must not ask What is truth?’ but rather ‘How are practices verified and validated?’ and we must not ask ‘What is freedom?’ but rather ‘What are the praxeological conditions of action?’.

It seems therefore paramount to demarcate the space of such an enquiry into this newly opened territory in IR theory. As we have argued above, the reconsideration of ontological issues has to be appreciated in general without, however, reproducing the pitfalls criticised in epistemologically focussed ways of social and political enquiries. The question that is left unanswered thus far is the way in which such an enquiry is possible.

The main pillars of a new social ontology

One way that might lead to an insightful answer to this question lies with the abovementioned reconceptualisation of language and the concomitant shift from questions like 'what is a state' to 'how is the state constituted'. Such a shift entails an

appreciation of the socially conditioned and fluctuating systems of meaning connected to certain terms or events within the international realm. It avoids a foundationalist commitment to what things are and instead accepts that their being is a continuous process of publicly mediated meaning-formation. Although such an enquiry is certainly able to avoid the main pitfalls pointed out above it is in its scope and aim still focussed on specific forms of being. To be sure, these forms of being are not foundationally reified but nevertheless address specific elements within the social and political environment they investigate. The aim of this thesis, however, is not to devise a way to grasp non-foundational specific ways of being in the international system but to sketch out the conditions for the possibility for such an enquiry. It therefore deals with a more general task that has as its aim to show and describe the conditions for the possibility to let things be what they are. In order to achieve such a sketch we would have to address not the processes that give meaning to specific ways of being in the international system but instead focuses on the question of the meaning of being in general.

In order to enquire into such conditions we find many attempts that aim at a theoretical reconceptualisation and reconstruction of central assumptions in order to infuse new and hitherto neglected elements into the conceptual framework under consideration. As should be clear by now such an endeavour would simply reproduce the difficulties presented above since we would have to delineate stipulations of an ontological or epistemological character that serve as a foundation on which our derivative concepts rest. As we have argued above, such an attempt is prone to failure from the very beginning as it presupposes a form of detached subjectivity that would allow us to

identify something beyond or outside human contingencies. In order to discover epistemological or ontological conditions that are not dependent on subjective categories or contextual circumstances a Cartesian notion of subjectivity is indispensable. As will be shown below in chapter III this notion of subjectivity relies upon the human capacity to recognise and abandon any belief or claim to knowledge that cannot be validated by scientific method and the use of reason. Core to this capacity is the notion of a self-transparent consciousness which allows humans to reflect on the content of their consciousness and individually confirm or reject claims to knowledge according to the standards of reason. Such a detached notion of agency, however, has already been questioned in recent examples of scholarship in IR. (see for instance Bleiker, 2000: 23-50) Supposing that human beings are always already embedded in a network of linguistic and social practices forecloses the chance of a detached theoretical delineation of certain foundations from which an enquiry can objectively depart. Exactly here fail the attempts at reconceptualising the social ontology of IR that we depicted above in the case of Wendt and Wight.

If a theoretical reconstruction or reconceptualisation of ontology is no longer an option for the above reasons, the question remains how to start the planned reconceptualisation of a new ontology for IR. What the thesis seemingly has to achieve then is a pre- or at least non-theoretical conceptualisation of being. Such an attempt can be found in post-Husserlian phenomenology which took its inception in the radical reinterpretation of Husserlian phenomenology in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. We will elaborate extensively on the main assumptions and developments of phenomenology in chapter II. Suffice it to say here that Heidegger and subsequent thinkers in the phenomenological movement aimed at a descriptive account of how life is experienced in its everydayness.

The situatedness and contextual character of human existence is hereby not conceptualised in the abstract and detached fashion of an uninvolved and neutral observer (the possibility of such an observer is denied in a phenomenological approach) but described from within the facticity of life and the linguistic context in which we all are constantly immersed and to which no 'outside' exists. (Fierke, 2002: 337) In this vein we would have to have a closer look at the very situatedness within linguistic and social practices and try to clear a space within this contextual forest out of which a better understanding of being can arise and a path towards a new social ontology can be opened. How such a phenomenological ontology is possible will be explained and delineated in detail in chapter II.

The one point left to address in this chapter is the scaffold of the proposed new social ontology, a demarcation of the central terms and issues that have to be grasped and conceptualised phenomenologically in order to think through the effects and possibilities such a new ontology provides for IR theory.

As should be clear by now, the current endeavour is not aimed at assessing or amending existing research methods within IR theory or even developing new ones. Rather, the focus lies with a philosophical conceptualisation and reiteration of the very core terms that open up the possibility to perceive and engage the world through a renewed and iconoclastic conception of being.

Up to now we have talked and continuously pushed for a reiteration of the meaning of being and the subsequent delineation of a new social ontology. The question of course that has to be addressed before we can engage in this reiteration is 'What are the core notions that have to be considered in such an enquiry?'. The selection again is mainly

guided by pragmatism as well as the question which elements can be considered fundamental in any enquiry into the social and political dynamics we are interested in. The first element hereby seems to be the basic unit by which such interaction is carried out, in other words the human agent. Agency is in general of vital importance in IR and a concentration on the human agents in our case does by no means imply either that human agents are the only agents in the international realm nor that collective agency only implies looking at the sum of individual agents involved. What it does imply, though, is that in the first instance human agency has to be conceptualised before any notion of interaction among human agents or forms of collective agency can be considered. To this extent the first element that has to be enquired into is the conceptualisation of human agency that opens possibilities for a specific reception of processes and events of a social or political kind.

Secondly, there is certainly a need to think about and elaborate on the medium in and through which agency is established and communicated. With hinting already at the specific conceptualisation of language as expressivist, there is a need to further develop the scope, influence and role language has on our social encounters and how it relates to the regulation of behaviour and perception. As was already indicated above, work has already been done in this respect by bringing in elements of Wittgenstein's later thought. But even this treatment seems to leave some questions regarding the development and change of meanings unanswered or at least problematical. In our consideration of language, therefore, we supplement this Wittgensteinian account with Heideggerian and Gadamerian thought on language in order to achieve a deepening and substantiation of the role of language in assessing the international realm.

Thirdly, it seems inevitable to reflect upon notions of validation and verification. As discussed above the notion of truth is certainly one of the most controversial in the current battles fought in IR theory. We hardly ever find, however, any longer discussion regarding this central term but mostly encounter either an unquestioned acceptance that truth is achievable or a rather superficial scepticism that denies any validity of the term itself. Such an attitude often leads to non sequiturs in which the denial of truth either in its objective or subjective form can only have validity if a notion of truth is presupposed. It seems therefore necessary to overcome the initial urge to push away or even deny the relevance of claims to truth and enquire into the nature and possible alternatives to a strictly scientific notion of truth.

Finally, we must consider the conditions that make meaningful action possible. In this vein we would have to consider the notion of freedom and develop clearly the limits and meaning freedom obtains within this academic discourse. Some critical accounts within IR have already stressed the intrinsic capability of agency to act as if the situation were otherwise. (see for instance Fierke, 2005: 13-4) This ability to act against and beyond seemingly fixed structural constraints and therefore induce change in the international system requires a notion of freedom that delineates the possibilities out of which such an action can evolve. Given that the notion of freedom is one of the most debated terms in modern thought it is therefore indispensable to enquire more clearly into the circumstances out of which this freedom arises and in which ways it can be employed. Before we, however, proceed to the substantial reconceptualisation of these elements of the new social ontology it seems necessary to develop more clearly the philosophical tradition out of which such a critique as it is proposed here arises.

II Trajectory of Phenomenology

Back to the Things Themselves!

Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations, 1901

In the following lines we will outline the main tenets of phenomenology as it developed in continental philosophy during the 19th and 20th centuries. Before we can, however, immerse into the assumptions and motivations behind its trajectory it seems necessary to say a few words in respect to the conceptualisation of phenomenology as a movement within philosophy and also to look at the philosophical environment in the late 19th century to situate its emergence historically. As Herbert Spiegelberg in his elaborate and meticulous study of phenomenology (Spiegelberg, 1969) pointed out, it seems indeed difficult to determine first when phenomenology in a proper sense began and secondly whether it is actually accurate to speak of a movement at all. “In fact, the very term ‘movement,’ applied to phenomenology, requires some explanation and justification. It is by no means common among the ‘insiders.’ [...] Actually the word used first by the German insiders in the earlier days was that of ‘Kreis’ (circle), with several sub-circles within the larger circle, a word, much more appropriate for the loose and informal association of the members of a group lacking any school-like organization in an academic sense.” (Spiegelberg, 1969: 1-2)

Nevertheless, Spiegelberg defends the notion of movement in the following way:

“(1) Phenomenology is a moving, in contrast to a stationary, philosophy with a dynamic momentum, whose development is determined by its intrinsic principles as well as by the ‘things’, the structure of the territory it encounters. (2) Like a stream it comprises several parallel currents, which are related but by no means homogenous, and may move at different speeds. (3) They have a common point of departure, but need not have a definite and predictable joint destination; it is compatible with a character of a movement that its components branch out in different directions.”
(ibid.: 2)

Since the term movement describes, as Spiegelberg points out, a vast and fluid conception of phenomenology as opposed to a clearly structured academic school, there are indeed difficulties in determining its inception in philosophical circles. This initial vagueness is aggravated by the wide variety of different philosophical currents at the end of the 19th century and their relation to the newly developing movement. These different schools themselves had developed out of two major strands of European philosophy which had on the one hand Enlightenment thought, especially Kant and Hegel, at its centre and on the other drew on anti-Enlightenment thought that developed out of the German Romanticist movement and followed thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Phenomenology “was one of several strong currents in philosophy prominent at the outset of the twentieth century, alongside, for example, *Neo-Kantianism* in its various schools (e.g. Rickert, Natorp, Cassirer, Windelband, Lotze), *idealism* (Green, Bradley, McTaggart), *logicism* (Frege, Russell), *hermeneutics* (Dilthey, Bultmann), *pragmatism* (Dewey, Pierce, James), *Lebensphilosophie* (Bergson, Simmel), *Existenz* philosophy (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche), as well as the *empiricism* of Hume’s followers (e.g. J.S. Mill), and the *positivism* and *empirio-criticism* of Comte, Mach, Avinarius, and, somewhat later, of the Vienna circle.” (Moran, 2000: 1) As we can see already, the variety of philosophical approaches covers a huge territory and to

make things worse, phenomenology or to be more precise individual phenomenologists were influenced by one or more of these already existing schools. It is impossible to decide who is on the inside and who has to remain on the outside of phenomenology in many cases. Heidegger was influenced among others by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Bergson and clearly showed affinities to Bultmann and Dilthey. Husserl on the other hand was fiercely opposed, as we will see below to the rise of historicism and one of his central aims in developing his approach of phenomenology consisted exactly in presenting a rigorous science dealing with the content of consciousness against such historicist leanings. He hereby was in close contact with thinkers like Frege and Russell. Gadamer, another central character which we will refer to repeatedly wrote his doctorate under Natorp and joined then the circle of Heidegger. And of course we would have to consider the second and third generation phenomenologists or those that worked at the fringes of the movement. This would include thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Löwith, Jonas, and further away in their development Foucault, Derrida and Ricoeur to name just the most prominent. In short, phenomenology, true to its conceptualisation as a movement, can hardly be grasped when considered from a genealogical point of view. Instead, we should focus on the concerns phenomenological thinkers raise and look at the basic problems and questions they try to answer. Seen from this perspective it “does not mean that the separate destinations of the various currents of the movement are contradictory, and hence that they cancel each other out. They rather represent the pursuit of definite and essential assignments of the movement in the total pattern of the phenomenological task: the descriptive investigation of the phenomena, both objective and subjective, in their fullest breadth and depth.” (Spiegelberg, 1969: 2) In this sense we follow a conceptualisation of the

phenomenological movement in the broad sense which was expressed in the first phenomenological platform in 1913. “In fact this is very much what happened in the case of the Phenomenological Movement, whose original ingredients, [...], came from very different sources, and, even at the time of the first phenomenological platform (1913), were never completely co-ordinated.” (ibid.: 2 and 6).

In this understanding the philosophical movement of phenomenology developed in the late 19th and early 20th century and is most closely tied to the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The term phenomenology as such was certainly used in philosophical circles long before Husserl as for instance in Kant’s famous ontological distinction between noumena (the things as they are in themselves) and phenomena (the things as they appear) or Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (ibid.: 12) Husserl recognised these and other instances as certain forerunners to his own efforts although his own phenomenological approach as set out throughout his works differs quite considerably from its semantic cousins. It is “of particular importance to examine and to eliminate certain equivocations which have arisen from the checkered history of the very term ‘phenomenology’. That this term existed long before Husserl adopted and assimilated it seems at times not to be sufficiently realized, at least not among philosophers.” (ibid.: 7)

In the following lines, a rough trajectory of the phenomenological movement will be developed starting inevitably from its conceptual inception in Husserl’s thought through its radical re-interpretation in the work of Martin Heidegger and subsequently into the various strands of continental philosophical thought that drew and draw from the original phenomenological insights. The task of this chapter is hereby twofold: first, as

mentioned above, an exposition of the original concerns of the phenomenological movement and secondly the depiction of the radical break with central conceptualisations in Martin Heidegger's opus that provided the foundation for subsequent phenomenological thinkers. In general it can be said that the focus in the remainder of this thesis will lie with Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian phenomenology and less with its original exposition in Husserl and Brentano. The reason for this focus simply lies with the differing conception of what phenomenology can provide in Husserl and Heidegger which will be shown in the following lines.

Husserl's debt to Brentano

Husserl was originally trained as an astronomer and mathematician at the Universities of Leipzig and Berlin between 1876 and 1881 where he studied among others with Wilhelm Wundt, Karl Weierstrass and Leopold Kronecker. (Moran, 2000: 67-8) In 1881 he moved to Vienna and continued his studies in mathematics, earning his doctorate in 1882 under the supervision of Leo Königsberger. (Moran, 2005: 16) Until 1883 Husserl had only marginal contact with the academic discipline of philosophy; he had taken some courses during his stay in Berlin but was not yet captured by philosophical problems and reflection. (Woodruff Smith, 2007: 15)

Only as late as 1884 did Husserl start to attend the lectures of Franz Brentano, then one of the most eminent philosophers of his time. Husserl stayed with Brentano in Vienna until 1886 studying the British empiricists David Hume and John Stuart Mill. (Moran, 2000: 69) Brentano at that time was preoccupied with developing and refining his approach of descriptive psychology which exemplified "the apodictic science of inner

perception studying the elements of psychic acts and their relations." (ibid.: 35) One of Brentano's most important publications laying out his philosophical endeavours was his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* published in 1874. His view of an empirical or as he called it descriptive psychology differed dramatically from the alternative approach to psychology at that time which was for instance expressed in Wilhelm Wundt's *Principles of Physiological Psychology* also published in 1874. The major differences between both approaches to the science of psychology and its methodology can first be traced to the different conditions of thought under which they were developed. "We see, on the one hand, a man [Brentano] who has devoted his 'hours of solitary reflection' to ancient and medieval philosophy; we see, on the other hand, a man who has wrought out in the laboratory his contributions to the latest-born of the experimental science." (Titchener, 1921: 109) Brentano was not interested in the connection between physiological and psychological process but focussed his attention on the purely descriptive study of mental acts. His main aim was to develop an understanding and categorisation of mental acts in order to create a "taxonomy of the mental". (Moran, 2000: 39) This taxonomy would represent a full account of the different ways in which mental acts are represented in consciousness and thereby provide a guide for understanding the whole variety of possible objects in consciousness and the way in which they are presented. In his study of psychical phenomena, Brentano came to the conclusion that all mental acts can be differentiated into three distinct categories: Ideation, Judgement and Love-Hate. (Titchener, 1921: 113; Moran, 2000: 45) Based on this general categorisation Brentano achieved the insight that all mental acts must have a content and therefore must be directed towards an object. (Titchener, 1921: 113) It is not possible to see, hear, acknowledge or despise without specifying the

‘what’ we see, hear, acknowledge or despise. The term ‘object’ does not refer to a necessarily material thing but can also include ideational objects such as numbers, states of affairs or imagined entities. In fact, Brentano held the view that mental phenomena are of a higher certainty in respect to their features than physical facts. “For him [Brentano], the domain of psychical phenomena possessed ‘actual existence’ (*eine wirkliche Existenz*), whereas the purely physical world had merely phenomenal existence.” (Moran, 2000: 34; see also Titchener, 1921: 114 and Krantz, 1990: 752) The external world is just assumed to exist but the states of consciousness are indubitable facts. (Moran, 2000: 42) In fact, Brentano reinterpreted the notion of truth in a number of lectures in 1889 introducing the notion of evidence to characterise the nature of claims made in descriptive psychology. It is not longer the case that these descriptions try to achieve a correspondence with what they describe. Rather than comparing our account of mental acts with an assumed reality – to which Brentano maintained we do not have any access anyway – we describe mental appearances as they appear in consciousness and ascribe an evident truth to them. “Some judgements are evidently true, self-evident. They assert *what is*. Judgements do not ‘combine or ‘separate’ elements, as the traditional Aristotelian account maintains, rather they affirm something as *existing*, as being the case.” (Moran, 2000: 31) Therefore, “[t]ruth is recognition of what is asserted, and the correspondence is between the thing given and its ‘self-givenness’ (*Selbstgegebenheit*). (ibid.)

Brentano proposes a unity between the object of the act and the act itself. If I see a red car the red car is the primary object and the act of seeing itself becomes the secondary object. (Kim, 1978: 200-1) “Brentano’s own view is that the presentation (or consciousness) of a primary object, i.e., an object which is not a present mental

phenomenon belonging to the subject of that presentation, and the inner perception of that presentation are one and the same act. (ibid.: 201) Brentano in his descriptive psychology is only interested in the very act of perceiving and does not make any stipulations about the actual reality of the car. Even if the car is only imagined, the presentation of it in the human mind would still be objectively perceivable though in a different way. And exactly a taxonomy of the different ways of perception of different objects is the aim of Brentano's approach. "For the philosophers like Brentano, who make physical objects into immanent objects, do not thereby rule out objective reality (though some might say, they invent their own brand of it); they certainly leave open the possibility of error beyond the realm of the infallibility of inner perception." (Krantz, 1990: 751)

Brentano then is not an idealist who seeks the ground for ascertaining the reality of the outside world in the human mind but represents a form of immanent or representational realism (Kim, 1978: 204) that is exactly not interested in proving the correctness of our assumptions about the world outside of our mind. (Krantz, 1990: 752-3) Rather, staying true to his task of describing and categorising the variety of mental acts he approaches the object as it appears in consciousness as the 'real' object of his enquiry and therefore ascribing a reality to this mental act. (Moran, 2000: 31)

The last point worth mentioning in this short survey is the central importance of intentionality in Brentano's and subsequently, although in a different form, in Husserl's thought. As was stated above any mental act, be it an act of ideation, judgment or of a love-hate relation is directed towards an object. This directedness towards objects that is the shared characteristic of all mental acts Brentano labelled intentionality.

“Every mental phenomenon is characterised by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing, or immanent objectivity.)” (Brentano, 1995: 88)

Brentano clearly distinguishes between two different realms – the physical which is characterised by outer perception and can be deceptive and the mental which is accessible through inner perception and is (self-)evident. (Moran, 2000: 52-4) “Consequently, when we say that mental phenomena are those which are apprehended by means of inner perception, we say that their perception is immediately evident.” (Brentano, 1995: 91) In respect to intentionality Brentano holds that physical objects, i.e. objects of outer perception only have an intentional existence which means they can be objects of possible perception. Mental objects however are characterised by what Brentano called intentional inexistence, i.e. they actually and evidently exist *in* the mind of the subject whose mental acts they are. (Morrison, 1970: 32-35) “By ‘inexistence’ Brentano does seem to intend that the object of an act of consciousness is something immanent in consciousness, whether or not there is also a real object or ‘reality’ (Realität) outside of consciousness.” (Moran, 2000: 48)

The three stages of Husserl's phenomenology

Having thus far developed the major characteristics and objectives of Brentano’s account of descriptive psychology we can now move to Edmund Husserl and his transformation of Brentano’s approach into what has come to be known as phenomenology. Before outlining the main tenets of Husserl’s thought it is important to

note that Husserl conceived of himself as a perpetual beginner (*ibid.*: 62-65) in the realm of philosophy and subsequently developed his thoughts into different directions with different results. In order to represent a fair although short account on Husserl's intellectual development we will pick two main publications each representing on specific period in his development and a thematic approach to grasp the main developments of his later thought. The *Philosophy of Arithmetic* stands for the first phase of Husserl's thought which is heavily influenced by Brentanian descriptive psychology, the *Logical Investigations*, often cited as Husserl's main work, is representative for the second period which could be summarised under the term descriptive phenomenology. As for his later work the focus will lie with Husserl's transcendental turn and the development of the reduction.

Husserl's whole œuvre is guided by his general aim to go back to and provide an account of 'the things themselves' as they appear in consciousness. (Husserl, 1970a: 252, see also Moran, 2000: 98) This description of appearances which came to be labelled phenomenology was seen by Husserl as a rigorous science that rested on secure and indubitable foundations found in the descriptive attitude of mental acts.

Husserl's first major work, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic* published in 1891 is still very much informed by Husserl's initial training as mathematician. (Macann, 1993: 2) In this work Husserl tried to think through arithmetic by using the descriptive psychological approach of Brentano. He was especially interested in finding the origins of core mathematical or arithmetical terms in consciousness and he hoped to be able to characterise those through a descriptive study of how these concepts appear in consciousness as they appear. (McIntyre, 1987: 529)

The actual content that deals with the philosophy of mathematics is of no interest to us here and can be dealt with rather quickly. As the subtitle to the *Philosophy of Arithmetic* suggests Husserl is engaged throughout this work with psychological and logical investigations in the realm of theoretical mathematics.

The starting point for this enquiry was based on efforts of two of Husserl's most influential mentors, the mathematician Carl Weierstrass and Franz Brentano. Weierstrass had himself sought for the fundaments of mathematics in simple mathematical operations and inspired Husserl to follow this road. Where Weierstrass delivered the content of Husserl's early work, Brentano influenced the method with which Husserl would try to achieve this aim.

As said before the exact details Husserl develops in his account of mathematics are not of any interest to us here and so we concentrate on the reception of his methodological stipulations which are expressed in his early work. Gottlob Frege, a highly influential contemporary of Husserl and later to be seen as the founder of analytical philosophy, commented on Husserl's exercise in descriptive psychology displayed in the *Philosophy of Arithmetic*. It was this rather critical review which prompted Husserl to leave behind the Brentanian heritage and move away from a psychological approach without, however, abandoning the complete endeavour. (Farber, 1940: 12) The main criticism levelled against Husserl's account was the charge of steering too much in the direction of psychologism which, of course, was underlined by Husserl's terminology derived from Brentanian descriptive psychology. To Frege, it seemed as if Husserl delivers a subjectivist-psychological account especially since Husserl did not differentiate substantively between subjective mental acts or presentations and their objective correlates. (Moran, 2000: 73, see also Frege, 1972: 335) As a consequence of this

omission "the number concepts, then, for Husserl, have a 'psychological origin' (*psychologische Ursprung*) in quite specific acts of the mind: [...]. It is this account that Frege claims 'shunts everything off into the subjective' and that he condemned as 'psychologistic'. (Moran, 2005: 79) After a very elaborate and in-depth criticism of Husserl's account of arithmetic Frege finally identifies one specific tendency in Husserl's work that inevitably led to the shortcomings he pointed out so pithily. "In reading this book [Philosophy of Arithmetic], I have been able to see how very difficult it is for the sun of truth to penetrate the fog which arises out of the confusion of psychology and logic." (Frege, 1972: 336)⁴

This lengthy criticism of one of the leading logicians of his age was taken up positively by Husserl; maybe because Husserl himself at that point had already realised the weaknesses in his early work and had already embarked upon a philosophical journey that in due course would lead to his phenomenological breakthrough in the *Logical Investigations*.

Ten years after his first book-length publication Husserl presented what should become his best-known and most renowned work – the *Logical Investigations*. This work is a vast, two volume treatise

"that includes, among other matters, an account of the nature of logic as 'the science of science', a lengthy refutation of psychologism, a broadly Platonist defence of ideal entities in logic and mathematics and cognition

⁴ To what extend Frege exaggerated his criticisms of Husserl and overemphasised its psychologistic tendencies is a matter of debate. I should also be kept in mind that Husserl himself was apparently not content with the outcome of his efforts to find the fundamental basis for arithmetic. Since we are here only concerned with a rough overview of Husserl's development and an exposition of the main tenets of phenomenology, we will not immerse into this rather specific discussion. For a more elaborate treatment of these matters see for instance Farber, 1940: 11-14 or Moran, 2005: 80-89.

generally, a rejection of empiricist and nominalist accounts of abstraction, a defence of the direct apprehension of universals and ‘categorial unities’, a pure theory of wholes and parts, [...], a universal formal grammar specifying the ground rules for linguistic sense as opposed to nonsense, a ‘descriptive psychology’ or phenomenology of cognitive experiences [...], a defence of ‘categorial’ intuition [...], and an analysis of the dynamic relations between intention and fulfilment in the process of knowledge, culminating in a revised account of truth as disclosure.” (Moran, 2005: 94)

It is obviously impossible to pay equal attention to all of these components and therefore the focus will lie again with the main elements of Husserl’s thought that constituted his influence in the manifold appearances of phenomenological thought throughout the 20th century. First and foremost it seems worth pointing to the change in terminology that was introduced in the *Logical Investigations*. The first volume that appeared in 1900 and was intended as the prolegomena to the actual investigations exhibits one of the most elaborate and serious attacks against psychologism. As it is beyond the scope of this short reiteration of phenomenology to pay attention to all the themes expounded in Husserl’s *magnum opus*, we concentrate on the main pillars of his early phenomenological thought. But even this limited task proves rather difficult since the *Logical Investigations* is by no means a logically structured account as even its author admits: “Our investigation can, however, only proceed securely, if it repeatedly breaks with [...] systematic sequence, if it removes conceptual obscurities which threaten the course of investigation before the natural sequence of subject-matters can lead up to such concepts. We search, as it were, in zig-zag fashion... .” (Husserl, 1970a: 261)

Husserl’s overall aim in the *Logical Investigations* can be said to lie in his attempt to establish a pure logic starting from below, i.e. from intuitions in the human mind and move from there to the more abstract. In general he is concerned with epistemology not

with metaphysics and thereby stands clearly in the modern tradition starting with Kant. Against the neo-Kantians, however, Husserl insists on starting with single mental acts in the human mind rather than transcendentally deduce a categorical framework for human perception. Furthermore, Husserl holds that truth and meaning are ideal and not dependent on the *a priori* categories in the human mind. The latter position Husserl refutes since it would lead to a form of species wide relativism that makes truth a consequence of the existence of human minds; such a position would constitute an anthropologism which is unacceptable for Husserl. Instead, starting from the principle of presuppositionlessness (Moran, 2000: 126-7), Husserl puts forward phenomenology, a new method, that “contributes to explicating the sense of both logic and knowledge, by clarifying their fundamental notions... .” (Moran, 2005: 97) Two of the most important concepts used by Husserl in elaborating this new methodology are ‘intuition’ and ‘evidence’. As mentioned above, Husserl insisted on the most basic starting point in order to develop his pure logic. As such he identified our intuitions as the “concrete experiences in which what is intended is directly given. Cognitions and ‘lived experiences’ become knowledge when confirmed or illuminated through a return to the adequate fulfilling intuition.” (ibid.: 97) Intuitions are given with evidence and provide therefore a secure basis on which to place subsequent cognitions. In this respect we see clear resemblances to the Cartesian cogito and also to Spinoza’s forms of knowledge which also posit intuition as the highest form of knowledge.

The interesting move Husserl makes in the *Logical Investigations* in respect to intuitions, evidence and the establishment of knowledge is the widening to all experiences and cognitions we encounter and not just mathematical ones. Evidence is understood as a form of seeing that ‘gives’ objects directly. It is important to note that

“evidence [...] is not any kind of psychological feeling, however intense, or a kind of mysterious, irrational hunch... .” (ibid.: 98) Instead, “[t]he most perfect ‘mark’ of correctness is inward evidence, it counts as an immediate intimation of truth itself.” (Husserl, 1970a: 61)

The critique Husserl is bringing to the fore here is that most sciences rely upon concepts in which such a tracing-back to original intuitions given with evidence has not been undertaken. In order, however, to ground these sciences on a firm basis Husserl sees the task of philosophy in exactly disclosing these bases. Here we encounter the true meaning of what now is conceived as the phenomenological battle cry par excellence: “Back to things themselves!” (ibid.: 252) This clarification of the origins and grounds of cognitions and experiences is achieved through pure phenomenology. As Husserl explains:

“[...] we are concerned with discussions of a most general sort which cover the wider sphere of an objective *theory of knowledge* and, closely linked with this last, the *pure phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing*. This phenomenology, like the more inclusive *pure phenomenology of experiences in general*, has, as its exclusive concern, experiences intuitively seizable and analysable in the pure generality of their essence, not experiences empirically perceived and treated as real facts... .” (ibid.: 249)

Having outlined his aims to this point Husserl declares that the “great task is now to bring the Ideas of logic, the logical concepts and laws, to epistemological clarity and definiteness. Here *phenomenological analysis* must begin.” (ibid.: 251) The things themselves that are directly given in consciousness “viewed not as psychological processes but in terms of their essential natures as ‘meaning-intentions’ and their connected ‘meaning-fulfilment’, essential structures in all understanding.” (Moran,

2005: 98) His phenomenological method is therefore an attempt to grasp the essences of objects given in intuition directly to consciousness and thereby ground the basics of the different sciences. In this sense Husserl describes to a form of empiricism since only those objects that are intuited can serve as the starting point for a phenomenological study. At the same time, however, Husserl is clearly widening the scope of such empiricism by including non-sensuous and formal intuitions.

Having outlined his approach so far, it seems that Husserl could now proceed in two different directions. First, he could be occupied with delineating the different varieties of objects that are made possible and would fall under his account – a similar effort was already made by Brentano's disciple Alexius Meinong. As said before Husserl clearly exceeds the hitherto set bounds of empiricism. An outline as to what objects can actually be given in consciousness and how they are given would therefore clarify his widened approach. Husserl, for the most part of his work, however, dispensed with such an account. Instead, he decided to focus of the second possible route which deals with the question how acts of cognition and acts of knowing are constituted within the subject. As we will see in a moment, this focus on subjectivity in Husserl led to the renewed criticism of psychologism and relativism but also foreshadowed Husserl's later turn to transcendental idealism. For Husserl, however, the question of how subjectivity is able to establish objectivity has to be addressed and understood in order to make his phenomenological approach work. Although it seems like a relapse into the realm of psychologism, Husserl in the second volume of the *Logical Investigations* addresses this subjective dimension. This was unavoidable since, "for Husserl, logic remains a science in naïveté if it does not tackle this subjective dimension, which above all, as he came to realize, is the problem of exploring the modes of experiencing (or evidencing,

understood as the direct givenness of the object) in which objectivities are revealed.” (Moran, 2005: 106) And exactly “this exploration of the dimensions of givenness of objectivity to subjectivity he names *phenomenology*.” (ibid.)

The last stage of Husserl’s development after the publication of the Logical Investigations stretches from roughly 1905 to his death in 1938. During this period we encounter a variety of publications in which Husserl developed new ways to pursue his phenomenological agenda. We also find the development of key terms such as noesis, noema, epoché and the reduction that were, if at all, only rarely discussed before. In order to portray this last stage of Husserl’s development it seems appropriate to follow a more thematic approach as it would be difficult indeed to pin the multi-layered activities to one publication of this period.

There are two interconnected thematic developments in Husserl’s thought in his later period that are of interest in the further trajectory of this study: Husserl’s transcendental turn and what Husserl himself called his greatest achievement (Woodruff Smith, 2007: 240), the epoché and the reduction. The approach developed in the *Logical Investigations* that was sketched in its elementary facets above leads in its first stage to a purely descriptive account of the essences of experience. Soon after the publication of the two volumes, however, Husserl started to think further beyond this descriptive phenomenology. “After 1903 Husserl’s thinking also began to take a *transcendental* turn. Phenomenology must explore not just the essential structures of all conscious experiences and their intentional objects, but the rootedness of these essences and objects in a transcendental realm and the transcendental ego as their ‘absolute source’.” (Moran, 2000: 125) This turn towards the transcendental did by no means render his

former investigations useless or outdated; rather they now presented a first step in a richer and fuller account of phenomenology. (Hammond et al., 1991: 71) In *Ideas I* we can clearly see Husserl's commitment to the basic assumption and presuppositions of the *Logical Investigations* and the outline of phenomenology he developed there. So he writes, "that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there." (Husserl, 1983: 44) What prompted the further development towards a transcendental phenomenology were basically two shortcomings Husserl identified in his accounts hitherto. First, he was still discontent with the amount of naturalist tendencies within his thought. By turning to an even more remote (remote from empirical and naturalistic influences) account he hoped for an even purer understanding of mental acts and their meanings and objects. The so far proposed "[p]henomenological description of phenomena was hindered by the inherently human tendency to interpret, to apply our everyday preconceptions and practical interests, to the pure experience." (Moran, 2000: 137) Exactly against this tendency was the impact of his transcendental phenomenology targeted.

The second shortcoming Husserl identified was the lacking depth in his account of the synthesising subject. Although, as mentioned above, the focus lay with an account of acts as they appear in subjective consciousness, these acts were considered individually without providing for a larger treatment of the 'ego' that synthesises the different experiences. "His recognition that this neglect of the ego was distorting the understanding of the mental processes themselves came during his analyses of the nature of our conscious experience of time and the manner in which ordinary acts of

perception carry along with them moments of the past (retensions) as well as anticipations of the future (protensions)." (ibid.: 138) Husserl's new found occupation with the experiencing subject led to a tripartite account of his whole project of phenomenology: ego-cogito-cogitatum. (Hammond et al., 1991: 73; see also Luft, 2004: 211) The subject is hereby defined as combining the individual experiences as they belong to a single identical subject. Furthermore, the subject is also characterised by a specific individuality which is developed and continuously developing based on the different experiences the subject has. Here Husserl seems to slip into an almost historicist mode when acknowledging the influence of past, present and future acts in forming the individual subject. And finally, Husserl maintains that this individual subject conceives its meaning only in relation to the objects it intuits – a point of view that closely resembles Fichte's idealism. Overall, "the individual subject , which Husserl calls the 'monadically concrete Ego', consist of the whole of actual and potential conscious life. [...] Husserl wants to emphasize that the concrete Ego 'contains within itself ', and is individuated by, all the experiences it could possibly have – all the ways it could constitute the actual or possible world." (Hammond et al., 1991: 74) Here again we see Husserl's closeness to Leibnizian rationalism, not only in the 'monadic' terminology but also in the view that each individual constitutes and is constituted through the actuality and possibility of its experiences. Following these new focal points in his account "in *Ideas I* (1913), phenomenological philosophy appears as an explicitly transcendental philosophy, a science of subjectivity as an entirely self-contained realm which in some strong sense is 'absolute'." (Moran, 2000: 141).

Many of Husserl's followers up to this point observed this move towards a form of idealism with great concern. So far they admired the scientific, foundational realism

Husserl seems to suggest as an underlying pattern for his descriptive account of mental acts. Now, so it seemed to some, Husserl abandoned most of this account in favour of a dangerously subjective and possibly historicist and relativist approach. It is, however, important to note that Husserl never gave up his original stipulation that philosophy is a science and must yield to insights that are objectively true independent from any ‘worldly’ factors. In accordance with this view Husserl was convinced that behind this subjective veil were essential features and those could be uncovered by what Husserl called the transcendental reduction and the epoché. “The terms ‘reduction’ and ‘epoché’ are both common logical expressions. Epoché means the suspension of judgment, either because one doubts that human beings are capable of knowing anything with certainty (radical skepticism), or because one wants to examine an issue before one feels confident to have a ‘definitive’ opinion about it.” (Kockelmans, 1994: 118) In the case of Husserl we find an example of the latter. Although used interchangeably at times (ibid.: 120) the two most important variants of the reduction are the ‘phenomenological’ reduction on the one hand and the ‘transcendental’ reduction on the other.

The phenomenological reduction can hereby be linked to the abovementioned first step of Husserl’s phenomenology. The phenomenological reduction tries to bracket all stipulations regarding the existence of the world. Instead as was outlined above it is now only concerned with mental acts of experiences of objects as they are intended by consciousness. What Husserl tries to overcome here is the naturalist attitude that we normally exhibit in our everyday lives in order to “enter the sphere of philosophy”. (Luft, 2004: 203) We just assume that the world exists and all objects within it without asking the deeper question as to how these objects relate as mental acts to consciousness.

“In this epoché consciousness remains a consciousness, and this consciousness remains consciousness of something. [...] That which we are conscious of, however, is not to be taken as such; that is to say, what we experience is not to be taken as a being in the real world but exclusively as that which is intended by consciousness. The object as being in the real world must be placed in brackets.” (Kockelmans, 1994: 121)

But as said above Husserl in his later work was not content with this form of the reduction since it still harboured remnants of the naturalistic attitude. The transcendental deduction then set out to bracket the whole of the life-world including other experiencing subjects (Hammond et al., 1991: 211) and aimed at finding and accepting apodictically given evidence. Here Husserl utilised Descartes’ original insights⁵ and posited a move towards the pure ego. In such a state “I am thus still left with the entire universe of all phenomena in the phenomenological sense of the term. Through the epoché and reduction, I apprehend myself purely, as ego, as having this conscious life, as having the entire objective world. All of this now exists for me as it is, precisely as it is for me. The entire world [...] received its entire meaning and its acceptance as existing exclusively from my cogitations.” (Kockelmans, 1994: 217) Husserl himself calls this step the reduction to the sphere of ownness (Husserl, 1960: 93) or the reduction to one’s monad. The allusion to Leibnizian terminology is deliberate here since Leibniz described the life of monads as necessarily solitary and without interference from the outside. In Leibniz this conceptualisation is necessary since he insists on the substantial form of monads. Therefore, Leibniz maintains that each monad brings the world with it and ‘mirrors’ the world inside itself rather than an external reality. In this vein Husserl argues that “in the sphere on ownness, one is to

⁵ Husserl is, however, not in agreement with Descartes in respect of the ramification of his discovery (for an exposition of the differences see for instance Kockelmans, 1994, pp.188-194)

construe any apparent relation between oneself and anything else as solely a property of one's own subjective experience, a 'mirroring' of what is included in one's monad and not a perceiving of something outside." (Hammond et al., 1991: 211) In this mode of the reduction all that one experiences mentally will be world-constituting and therefore world-transcendent.

"In these cogitations, my entire 'world-life' goes on, including my philosophical life. By my living and experiencing, I can enter no world other than the one that gets its meaning and acceptance in and from me. If I put myself above this entire life and refrain from all believing that takes the world as actually existing, [...] the pure ego is antecedent to the natural being of the world; [...] The subject that is brought to light by the transcendental reduction is rightly called transcendental subjectivity." (Kockelmans, 1994: 218)

This reduction to the sphere of ownness seemingly leads to a rather strong form of solipsism since the transcendental ego that is constitutive of the world does abstract from the existence not only of other subjects as possible perceivable objects but also and even more important from the existence of other subjects as other perceivers. Husserl responded to the problem of intersubjectivity in its later writings and indeed suggested a way from the transcendental reduction to an affirmation of intersubjective reality and experience. After the reduction to the sphere of ownness Husserl suggests a phenomenological explication of the self, followed by a phenomenological explication of other selves and finally a phenomenological affirmation of community and intersubjectivity. "Husserl concludes that this transcendental phenomenology can give an adequate account of the existence-sense of other selves, and that knowledge of other selves is possible. Further, his transcendental phenomenology can give an adequate account of our inter-subjective experience of the objective world, and so his account of our knowledge of such a world is complete." (Hammond et al., 1991: 210-1)

Martin Heidegger and the radical re-interpretation of phenomenology

So far we have outlined the basic strands and origins of phenomenological thought that took early shape in the descriptive psychology of Franz Brentano and was then properly developed throughout the distinguished career of Edmund Husserl. In the remainder of this chapter we will have a look at Husserl's legacy that, as we will see in due course fed many different philosophical movements throughout the 20th century and as will be argued from the next chapter onwards can provide a starting point to think through the conditions of a new social ontology for IR.

Before we, however, immerse into the trajectory of post-Husserlian phenomenology it has to be made clear that it is impossible to reiterate all the different influences and debates surrounding the phenomenological legacy. What we will do in the following lines is restricted to the needs of our further enquiry into the main elements of a new social ontology for contemporary IR theory and does not by any means represent a full account of phenomenology and its development throughout the 20th century.

The focus will lie on the seminal influence of Martin Heidegger on the one hand and the post-Heideggerian developments in the German and French strands of phenomenology. Since the details of the different approaches will be referred to in the following chapters in direct relation to IR theory we will save a detailed account of their work for the individual thematic chapters. What will be provided here is more a genealogical (in its original meaning, not in a Foucauldian sense) depiction of post-Husserlian phenomenological thought.

The first step in this direction cannot but has to be focused on the influence and radical re-interpretation of phenomenology through the work of Martin Heidegger.⁶

“Philosophy as science, a serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous science – the dream is over” (Husserl, 1970b: 389), wrote Husserl in 1936 after realising that almost all of his former students had considerably moved away from or beyond his original account of phenomenological philosophy. In fact, he mourned this development as a personal defeat against the growing influence of relativist and historicist approaches in continental philosophy – a movement he had fought against his entire academic career. Husserl felt like a ‘leader without followers’ and as the greatest enemy of the phenomenological movement as he himself declared in 1931 (Moran, 2000: 2), given the fact that his most promising and gifted students and followers had succumbed to the temptation of historicism.

The development of one student in particular made Husserl feel betrayed in his efforts to break through to a new method of philosophising. Martin Heidegger read Husserl’s work with great interest and was influenced by his phenomenology early on. “In his habilitation thesis, ‘The categories and doctrine of meaning in Duns Scotus’, on which he was working in earnest from the spring of 1914 onwards, he had laid the foundations of a particular interpretative approach, whereby scholastic patterns of thought were subjected to a phenomenological interpretation inspired by the work of Husserl.” (Ott, 1994: 79-80; see also Odysseos: 34-5) His early attempts to get in contact with the then

⁶ It seems important to point out in the beginning that the thesis is focussed on the impact of Heidegger’s work on phenomenology as it pertains to the tasks of this thesis. Therefore, a sustained philological critique of and engagement with Heidegger’s interpretation and use of Greek thought cannot be undertaken here. The importance of Greek thought for Heidegger’s philosophy will however be highlighted and discussed in places where it furthers and illuminates the argument at hand, especially in the chapters concerning truth and freedom.

famous phenomenologist, however, proved to be in vain. In 1916 Heidegger sent a copy of his habilitation thesis to Husserl in the hope of sparking some interest but he was largely unsuccessful for the time being. (Ott, 1994: 98) Only from 1918 onwards a closer and more fruitful relationship developed between the aging Husserl and his promising protégé. In January 1919 Heidegger became Husserl's assistant and began lecturing in the same year. But already "in these lectures, Heidegger criticised [...] Husserl's conception of philosophy as a rigorous science... ." (Moran, 2000: 205)

In the following lines of this section, we will look more closely on Heidegger's criticism of Husserl project as a whole. The deeper appreciation of the particulars of Heidegger's thought will be developed in the thematic chapters in the remainder of this thesis. Heidegger's main criticism of Husserl consists in the stipulation that Husserl, especially after his transcendental turn, had been too eager to bracket the natural attitude with which we approach our everyday experiences. Heidegger maintained that this epoché or reduction completely ignored the question of existence or being in favour of an appreciation of essences. As was outlined above Husserl was keen on phasing out the natural attitude that, according to him, prevented an eidetic account of consciousness and mental phenomena. Heidegger on the other hand insisted that by trying to reach an essential account of human subjectivity, any attempt to bracket the question of existence must lead to a distortion of human being since the very essence of human being, or in Heidegger's terminology, *Dasein*, "lies in its existence" (Heidegger, 1996:40)

Heidegger was nevertheless intrigued by Husserl's new approach which he saw in general as a viable and fruitful way to tackle the most fundamental philosophical problems. However, this affection for phenomenology was also coupled with an early

critical attitude towards Husserl himself. Even before they met Heidegger uttered doubts regarding Husserl's breadth of vision or his status as a true philosopher. His criticism culminated in the publication of *Being and Time*, which, "if the treatise was written 'against' anyone, it's against Husserl", (Carman, 1993: 98) as he told Karl Jaspers in 1926.

In general we can identify three major disagreements between Heidegger's notion of phenomenology and Husserl's original account – scientism versus hermeneutics, the question of phenomena and the relationship between essence and existence.

First, Heidegger was opposed to the intrinsic scientism in Husserl's approach, a feature which Heidegger linked to the inherent debt to Enlightenment thought in Husserl's project. "Husserl inherited from rationalism and idealism a conception of philosophy as a rigorous discipline or science (*Wissenschaft*), and that methodological ideal, Heidegger contends, clouded Husserl's view of the phenomena from the outset, contrary to his own stated aims." (ibid.: 98) Closely linked to this difference towards a possible scientific phenomenology are the core elements and their conceptualisations, i.e. the things themselves. Heidegger was also committed to the focus on phenomena but saw himself as staying closer to and fulfilling in a better way the original promise, or at least what he took it to be, of such an endeavour. What troubled Heidegger early on was Husserl's neglect of the question 'What are these things themselves?' Heidegger saw that Husserl in his attempt to reach a pure phenomenological description of these phenomena had completely neglected the question of what makes these phenomena perceivable as phenomena in the first place. As was stated above, Husserl saw phenomena in the literal sense as appearances and treated these mental acts or objects as

worthy of description in their own right and interpreted them as subjective occurrences. They have a real existence, actually ‘more’ real than physical objects since mental objects as they appear to or in consciousness are given self-evidently through their status of inexistence.

“Phenomena are, for Husserl, appearances, which is to say the contents of or in consciousness, not the things themselves appearing to consciousness. Phenomena are subjective, and phenomenology is essentially an inquiry into the nature of subjectivity in its own right, in strict distinction from the objective entities and structures studied by the empirical and formal sciences, in abstraction from our experience of them.” (ibid.: 100)

The question that Heidegger judged to be essential here and not addressed by Husserl is the ontological status of the phenomenon and its relation to the concepts of subject and object. Heidegger will maintain throughout his philosophy that the distinction between a subjective appearance and an objective thing that appears is nonsensical. (ibid.) Therefore, “in Heideggerian phenomenology, then, a phenomenon is not an appearance in contrast to something that appears, but rather ‘that which shows itself, the manifest’, a primitive notion that, he insists, ‘has in the first instance nothing whatever to do with what one calls ‘appearance’, or indeed ‘mere appearance’.’” (ibid.; see also Heidegger, 1996: 25) Out of this follows that phenomena are exactly not, as they were for Husserl, representations in consciousness of something transcendent to consciousness; phenomena for Heidegger are not essentially subjective. As Heidegger explains, a phenomenon is

“something that does *not* show itself initially and for the most part, something that is *concealed*, in contrast to what initially and for the most part does show itself. But at the same time it is something that essentially belongs to what initially and for the most part shows itself, indeed in

such a way that it constitutes its meaning and ground.” (Heidegger, 1996: 31)

The last point of major disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger concerns one of the major methodological devices Husserl developed after the publication of *Logical Investigations* and that formed the backbone of his phenomenology – the reduction. As was outlined above, the different forms of the reduction aimed at bracketing what Husserl called the naturalistic attitude in order to be able to achieve an eidetic account of mental acts and, in the case of the transcendental reduction, an account of transcendental subjectivity itself. Heidegger disputed the soundness of this methodological tool because “the phenomenological reduction is misunderstood if it is interpreted [...] as being a philosophical technique which makes possible the disclosure of a pure, absolute transcendental consciousness which requires no relationship to the world in order to be.” (Seeburger, 1975: 213)

In Husserl these idealist tendencies and allusions led to a disregard of the always already factual involvement of human being in the world. As Heidegger pointed out many times: “Man, [...], is not ‘in’ the world as one object present at hand, among other objects, but is ‘in’ the world precisely as that being through which the world first comes to be disclosed as world.” (ibid.) The neglect of direct experience and the bias towards ideal essences caused Husserl to turn away from the fact that phenomena are to the sole focus on *what* they are. The important point here is not that both aspects, the existential and essential should be dealt with and Husserl neglected just one of them. The crucial and indeed highly problematic fact is rather that in the case of human being its very essence lies in its existence. (Heidegger, 1996: 40) “If the very fact of our existence is

constitutive of our self-understanding, then the eidetic reduction suppresses what is most essential to intentionality, namely the existential moment.” (Carman, 1993: 108)

Here we see the most fundamental difference between Husserl and Heidegger. Where Husserl distinguished most fundamentally between consciousness and world – thereby staying heavily indebted to the Cartesian project – and accordingly between whatness and thatness, Heidegger insists that “the traditional concepts of whatness and thatness, precisely by admitting of a sharp conceptual distinction, fail to capture the way in which the very *being* of human beings is inextricably bound up with *what* they take themselves to be.” (ibid.: 107) What Heidegger is changing here is the whole direction of Husserl’s project. At the outset Husserl started with a complete disregard of the existence of the objects we intend in consciousness and focused instead on the very essence intentionality has in consciousness and the different ways in which intentionality related to mental objects and intends them. And “precisely because Husserl mistakes human existence for mere objective presence, he wrongly infers that the essence of intentionality can be grasped apart from any interest in its existence.” (ibid.: 108) But if Heidegger is right and the essence of human beings lies with their existence and their constant involvement in the world, this attitude towards intentionality is completely mistaken. Indeed, Heidegger suggests,

“we do not understand things, least of all ourselves, in this blandly objective way. Instead we make use of things, we rely on them, we take them for granted by manipulating, adjusting, wearing, stepping on, and ignoring them. Only rarely do they stand over against us as mere objects, In short, we do not simply *intuit* them as ‘occurrent’ (*vorhanden*), we *treat* them as ‘available’ (*zuhanden*).” (ibid.: 109)

Overall, as this short depiction has shown, Heidegger shares a common starting point with his erstwhile mentor Edmund Husserl and follows him in his attempt to go ‘back to the things themselves’. But whereas Husserl follows a more scientific-foundationist approach in line with the Cartesian ideal of scientific certainty, Heidegger deviates quite clearly in taking a more historicist-hermeneutical road.

“For both Husserl and Heidegger, [...], phenomenology is essentially a descriptive, not a hypothetical or explanatory, enterprise. [...] But whereas Husserl aspires to what he calls ‘a systematic and eidetic morphology’ of intentional attitudes, Heidegger explicitly renounces any purely observational conception of description.[...] Rather, ‘the meaning of phenomenological description as a method of *interpretation*.’ In a word, ‘The phenomenology of *Dasein* is a *hermeneutic*.’” (ibid.: 101; see also Heidegger, 1996: 32-3)

Therefore, it seems fair to say, that “while Husserl’s phenomenology was a crucial formative influence on *Being and Time*, it was an influence that exerted itself only at a rather abstract and programmatic level, touching neither the core nor the details of Heidegger’s project.” (Carman, 1993: 98)

As will be illustrated in the remainder of this thesis, Heidegger’s hermeneutical re-interpretation of phenomenology coupled with his enquiries into the nature of Being in general and human *Dasein* in particular together with the work of later phenomenologists forms a viable background for the current search for a new social ontology for IR theory.

Before, however, we can turn to this fruitful exposition of the possible contribution of post-Husserlian phenomenology to the new social ontology it seems necessary to quickly present the reception and development of Heideggerian thought in German and especially French philosophy.

Post-Heideggerian phenomenology – the German and French repercussions

The influence of Heidegger's thought on continental philosophy, independent of any discussion about its proclivity towards authoritarianism and Heidegger's complicity with the regime during the Nazi rule in Germany, can hardly be overstated. Not only did his thought influence discussions within the field of philosophy but also sparked many debates in related areas such as aesthetics or religion. At the centre of attention in our case are the repercussions of his thought in the German and French post-War philosophical environment, the place in which his impact was most immediate.

The difference in perception and treatment of Heidegger's intellectual legacy in Germany and France after WWII is striking. Generally it seems fair to say that the fame Heidegger enjoyed in Germany was accompanied with recognition of his work abroad. After 1945 the situation reversed and Heidegger became much less influential in Germany where he lost his teaching license and was eventually only granted the status of professor emeritus. In France, and in many other countries around the globe, Heidegger's star, however, rose to unprecedented heights. It is certainly true to say that the two most influential philosophical strands in France after 1945 were Marxism and Heideggerianism.

Heidegger remained an important figure in certain philosophical circles in Germany but was mainly invited to talk by former students and individual admirers. He was repeatedly urged, as was already hinted at in the Introduction, to engage with his past and take responsibility for his political commitments but he refused until his death in 1976 to come even close to any form of regret. And although Heidegger resurfaced repeatedly in discussions and TV documentaries as well as in interviews, he was never

able to regain his former stature as a leading intellectual within the German academic environment. His thought, however, provided starting points for other important post-War German thinkers. Habermas, Gadamer, Jonas, Löwith and Arendt are certainly among the most prominent. The reception of Heidegger's thought abroad, however, reveals a strikingly different picture. He became influential in many parts of the world, especially Latin America, Japan, and the US but also gained tremendous influence in European countries, especially France. As Tom Rockmore in his extensive study has shown, "that as measured by a variety of criteria – including the sheer size of the discussion concerning his thought, the number of philosophers interested in his position, his impact on the subsequent debate – as we approach the end of this century, Heidegger has attained exceptional status as one of the several most influential philosophers of this period. This is nowhere more clearly the case than in France... ." (Rockmore, 1995: 1 and 18-9; see also, Ungar, 1989 and Wolin, 1988)

Initially, Heidegger's thought entered France mainly through the work of such eminent philosophers as Kojève, Koyré, Lévinas and Wahl during the late 1920s and early 1930s. (Koyré, 1998: 521-30) The second even more influential wave started with the publication of the *Letter on Humanism*. (Heidegger, 2007c) "It was sustained through the determined efforts of Jean Beaufret, its addressee and from the mid 1940s until his death in 1982 Heidegger's most important French student, to transform the view of this text into the French view of Heidegger." (Rockmore, 1995: xvii)

Especially the decline of Marxism in French thought during the late 1970s and 1980s, however, left Heidegger almost unchallenged in his position as master thinker.

Until the mid 1970's, Marxism satisfied the need for a radical anti-liberal doctrine and encouraged the hope that the programme of the Enlightenment might be achieved after all. Heidegger's conservative anti-

modernism was then countered by the Marxist confidence in a future, fully rational society. During the 1970's and 1980's, however, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the military repression in Poland, French intellectuals began to associate Marxism with imperialism and state terror. After the decline of Marxism, they were left with Heideggerism as the only radical critique of modern society." (Pavel, 1988: 890-1)

This of course does not mean that Heidegger's thought stayed untouched but rather that the intellectual engagement with political and social circumstances was broadly guided by Heideggerian ideas. The variety of thinkers that developed against the background of this Heideggerian influence is immense and "nowhere more clearly the case than in France, where over the last half-century his ideas have left their mark on a wide range of leading philosophers (Lévinas, Derrida, Lyotard, Henry), on philosophers committed to detailed historical studies of such figures as Aristotle (Pierre Aubenque, Rémi Brague), Suarez (Jean-Francois Courtine), Descartes (Jean-Luc Marion), Schelling (Courtine, Miklos Vétö), Hegel (Kojève, Jean Hyppolite, Dominique Janicaud), as well as on social theorists (Foucault), feminists (Luce Irigaray), psychanalysts (Lacan), and others." (Rockmore, 1995: 1)

In this view, the range of thinkers that were influenced by Heideggerian philosophy throughout the 20th century offers a seemingly endless choice for appropriating their thought to projects of the social sciences. Phenomenology became such a vast undertaking that most philosophers working under this umbrella turned to different subject areas to explore the ramifications of phenomenology. In the following chapters we will present a selection of the most important philosophers in the post-Husserl era of phenomenology and their impact and contributions to the Heideggerian project of *Fundamentalontologie* (fundamental ontology) as they pertain to our project at hand.

Part II

A new social ontology

III Agency – The constant involvement of Dasein in its world

Man is not the lord of existing things.

Man is the shepherd of Being.

Martin Heidegger

The notion of self and agency is certainly one of the most central to both philosophical reflection and political action. In both fields the notion of agency is heavily discussed and forms one of the main centres of gravity. In the following chapter the attempt will be made to show the deep and substantial challenge that will start the proposed reconceptualisation of ontology in IR challenging the hitherto dominant interpretation of the individualistic and rational concept of agency shared by realists and liberals alike. It has to be admitted that the concept of agency has started to change in recent accounts. It seems, however, that we are in need of a more substantial evaluation of agency especially in respect to in place in the wider ontological form that emerges concomitant to it. In order to achieve this deeper and more substantial account this chapter will proceed in three steps. First, it seems necessary to quickly portray what the notion of agency was taken to be in modern philosophy as well as in its representatives in IR theory. Secondly, the phenomenological conceptualisation of agency has to be depicted and the differences between the hitherto dominant conception of agency and a phenomenological one have to be elaborated. Finally, this chapter will look at the

challenges posed by this differing understanding of agency and its ramifications for other core terms (which will be discussed in subsequent chapters) sketched out.

Agency and modernity

The role of the human agent in respect to her mental capabilities as well as her place within nature was and still is one of the major themes of philosophical, anthropological, sociological and political reflection. The modern assumptions regarding human agency which by and large still dominate the majority of the humanities and certainly the natural sciences emerged with the philosophy of Descartes. In modernity they underwent certain refinements and changes but the central message they conveyed – the possibility to master the world and objectively grasp and understand it – is still intact.

This view of a unitary, self-aware form of agency lay at the heart of Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" – I think therefore I am – and can be seen as expressing the modern worldview in a nutshell. Descartes' original endeavour was an attempt to tackle the rising scepticist tide and to ground human knowledge about the world on secure, i.e. indubitable foundations. (Sedgwick, 2001: 3) His focus on epistemology was to become the central focus of most philosophical endeavours in the following 300 years. In order to find this indubitable ground on which all knowledge can rest Descartes decided to question every belief that seems to stem from tradition, convention or prejudice. The mind, cleared of all these mere beliefs should then proceed and confirm the one fact that could not possibly be doubted – the existence of a thinking thing, i.e. its own existence as mind. "So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or

conceived in my mind." (Descartes, 1996: 17, see also Sedgwick, 2001: 5) Taking the cue from this secure foundation Descartes moved on to confirm other facts not through reliance on tradition, convention or myth but through the exercise of reason. "Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false." (Descartes, 1996: 12) A fact should be conceived of as certain and therefore as established knowledge if reasonable proof for its correctness can be brought forward. This of course, in a very simple formula, entails the nucleus of scientific research that in due course led to unprecedented successes and advancements in the natural sciences (which in turn of course corroborated this world view and made it the dominant one in the modern era).

Of importance for the topic at hand are basically three ramifications of Descartes' revolutionary approach that emerged out of the general tendency to depict the human agent as disengaged and detached from the world. First, the introduction of the mind – body dualism or alternatively a material mechanism to ground the claims for disengaged agency, secondly the inherent conception of a self-transparent consciousness and finally the role of reason.

In respect to the first point, the provision of a ground from which to argue for a disengaged form of agency two alternatives developed in early modern thought. On the one hand we find the Cartesian dualism between mind and body. By separating the mind from the body, it became possible to ascribe to the mind the powers of developing a picture of the world that is not tainted by feelings, prejudices or conventions, that presents the world neutrally and achieves through critical self-reflection an objective view of the world. (Taylor, 1993: 205; see also Sedgwick, 2001: 7) Certainly, the ideal

of objectivity is often not reached and contaminated by personal attitudes and convictions but these negative influences can be attributed to the body with its fallible senses and its involvement in nature. The mind, however, through its inherent rationality can overcome these distorting factors and achieve a factual representation of the world without any recourse to values. (Taylor, 1993: 205)

The second approach that led to a detached notion of human agency can be found in mechanistic materialism which is closely linked with Spinoza's philosophy. The core of Spinoza's philosophical outlook was his stipulation that God is Nature. (Stewart, 2006: 158; see also Spinoza, 2000: 226) What Spinoza tried to convey with this utterance was a radical break with the old medieval conceptualisation of a transcendent God that willingly and purposefully created the world and its inhabitants and now watched from afar. Spinoza for his part insisted on the logical necessity that God as an infinite substance cannot be apart from his creation since a substance in its Aristotelian sense cannot be limited by anything outside itself – it has to be in and for itself. (*ibid.*: 75; see also Della Rocca, 2002: 11ff.) Therefore the one substance must completely coincide with its creation in the form of Nature.

The natural order Spinoza identified was an order in which mechanical necessity prevailed and all living beings had to be conceptualised as modes or specific finite expression of the all-encompassing Nature-God. The principle of sufficient reason loomed large in Spinoza's system and coupled with his extreme determinism, Nature necessitated a predetermined mechanical sequence of events in which human agents are only elements among others that express this naturalistic panentheism (see for instance Spinoza, 2000: 86) and its inevitable course. As was stressed by many different authors on the subject, Spinoza was in fact the first thinker that systematically portrayed a

modern worldview in which rationality and the belief in scientific explanation were placed at centre stage. (Stewart, 2006: 310; see also Hampshire, 1951, p.17) One of the consequences was the separation of fact and value since “the new science had negative implications for value theory. It seems that there is not room for values in the world of pure motion.” (Koistinen and Biro, 2002: 8; see also Spinoza, 2000: 233)

Inherent in both views is the conception of a self-transparent mind or consciousness. (Sedgwick, 2001: 9) In order for Descartes’ approach to work it must be possible for the mind to empty itself from all beliefs and reflect critically on each component that constituted a part of our convictions and opinions through the powers of reason. In the same vein, Spinoza through his mechanistic materialism reduced the processes and features of the mind to mere physical states. The physical states, however, can be described and discovered through the use of method. Each physical state causes hereby by necessity another physical state and so on. In this picture, no room is left for the influence of contextual, conventional or traditional variations. The world unfolds itself in all eternity according to a pre-determined causal chain of events whose rules and conditions can be discovered and described through the use of reason.

In these two descriptions we find the second feature of disengaged agency. Notions of language, culture and custom can be phased out in a rational reassessment of our knowledge about the environment we live in. Our social role, our identity, our historical situatedness are to be bracketed or simply put aside as unimportant in order to ensure a correct and neutral representation of the world.

Finally, and of course most importantly for this new approach to work, the nature of reason had to be redefined. To depict the change in the meaning of the word ‘reason’ modernity brought about, in both its object and the role of the reasoning subject, it seems prudent, as Nicholas Gier suggested, exploring not only the etymological roots but also the content of its meaning. The word for reason in ancient Greece was *logos* that simply translated just means ‘word’. Metaphysically, however, *logos* means reason as the controlling principal in the universe. (Gier, 2001: 13-5)

We encounter a view based on this meaning in the use of the word *logos* in the famous prologue of the book of John where it says: “In the beginning was the logos, and the logos was with God, and the logos was God.” If we now apply the original Greek meaning of *logos* as reason understood in terms of the controlling principal of the universe we can see, that in the pre-modern understanding reason was first a faculty of the human mind that was given by God and secondly that this faculty gave man the opportunity to grasp an idea of what God as the principle of the universe intended us to do by picking up and combining pieces given to man. (Descartes, 1996: 36) God as Reason describes the order of the world as a wilful act of creation by a divine being, endowing man with a spark of the divine understanding in form of ‘human reason’. In Descartes this belief in reason as the faculty able to discover a pre-given structure in nature rests upon the faith in the equity of God and his conviction that God is not deceitful. “To begin with, I recognize that it is impossible that God should ever deceive me. For in every case of trickery or deception some imperfection is to be found: and also the ability to deceive appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive is undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so cannot apply to God.” (ibid.: 37) A similar understanding of reason as coupled with faith is also dominant in

Leibniz (Stewart, 2006: 116, 191 and 237; see also Barnouw, 1981: 619ff.) and only dies slowly with the re-definition of reason and its purpose in Kant. (Neiman, 1994: 34-8)

The modern understanding on the other hand shares the notion of reason as a faculty of the human mind, manages however to strip reason from all divine connections. Furthermore reason is not the faculty that established knowledge – in Kant this faculty becomes the understanding. Arguably, in Kantian terms the *logos* in the meaning of ‘picking up’ and combining different perceptions to a form of knowledge is more independent from reason than it was before. When the understanding in Kant becomes the *logos*, reason becomes *ratio*. The difference is indeed a considerable one since reason in a pre-modern understanding is concerned with finding means to achieve a pre-given end; in other words reason is responsible to discern the will of God. In modernity however reason is equated with freedom, a freedom that allows reason to create its own ends and prescribe imperatives to experience. This crucial move is worth reflecting upon since it presents the final step in the development of the modern notion of agency.

The shift in Kant’s philosophy is best explained when looking at the first Critique in which Kant discussed the nature and possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments – judgements that add actually something new to human knowledge but are not derived from experience. Here we discover the scope of the Kantian redefinition of reason since reason becomes the faculty that is suddenly active, free and potent to create something new. (Neiman, 1994: 36) Synthetic *a priori* judgements require such a faculty since they have to be derived totally independent from our senses and also must not just be analytic in deducing pre-given truths. In this understanding reason is no longer the

faculty of the human mind that just passively deduces knowledge but becomes an active part that is actually able to imprint its mark upon the external environment. Kant stresses the fact that reason creates ideas and he also recognises that these ideas, since they lack material existence and therefore cannot be objects of sensual perception, cannot be known. “But recognizing the limits of our knowledge allows us to realise our real power: to use the ideas of reason to judge, evaluate, and transform experience.” (ibid.: 38) Suddenly, reason is no longer man’s capacity to discover the order of the world, its underlying structure – this is not possible according to Kant. But it actually and revolutionary allows for something else: the order of the world, even if it may not be discovered, may be constructed by dint of our ideas derived from reason.

The main difference in Kantian epistemology to earlier forms lies therefore in the capacity of reason to determine ends rather than contemplating about means to achieve pre-given ends. (ibid.) In this way reason became externally active and was an important factor in influencing the way we perceive our environment.

In allowing for this active part of human reason, Kant set the tone for the subsequent development of modernity as this new epistemology freed man from an order that was assumed to be naturally given (maybe there is one, but we cannot know it) and made him the master of his own experience. It was no longer deduction or induction that was used to decipher the logic of our environment but the actively shaping influence of ends determined by man alone that dictated the way nature was perceived. This newly found role of human reason had of course detrimental effects for the role of God in everyday discourse. The loss of a naturally ordered world shifted the attention away from the creator of this order to the agents that are now able to infuse their own ways into nature.

As we have seen above, before Kant, with few exceptions such as Spinoza, God was the centre of the universe in ontological and epistemological terms. Everything that existed and happened was attributed to this divine being and the capacity of man to know was also seen as depended on the assumed coincidental relationship between nature and reason, i.e. on the belief that God invested his creation with a certain order that is at least partly accessible to human reason. With the abandonment of God as the constitutive principle reason as the active faculty of the mind became thereby not only responsible for determining ends but also for critiquing all our beliefs. All knowledge, all truths that we cherish have to stand before reason and pass its critical scrutiny.

There were of course other effects that an abandonment of God as the constitutive principle brought with it. First and foremost was the necessity for man to replace not only God as divine being but even more important man had to find replacements for God's qualities in order to ensure a viable foundation for the new order of the world. In order to allow human reason to define ends it was necessary to find a way to match possible experience with these pre-determined ends and to be able to do that man had to believe in his capacity to transform his environment according to the demands of reason. The power to transform the environment, i.e. to power to create, had so far of course only been attributed to God. In particular it seemed necessary to match God in three respects: omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

Indeed, during the following 200 years after the publication of Kant's critique man tried to emulate these three characteristics. Science replaced divine omniscience, technology replaced omnipotence and human ethics replaced divine omnibenevolence. This endeavour, however, proved to be a long shot from the very beginning. Whereas

omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence constituted attributes of God, science, technology and ethics were human inventions. They were and still are external to the human agent and were able to shape and reshape not only the environment on which they were employed but also the human agent himself. The very use of these tools to master nature had lasting effects on what it meant to be human – overall, without drawing any premature conclusions, it seems fair to say that the effects were detrimental to the natural environment as well as to mankind in general. What started with the planned conquest of nature, the mastery of the world according to human reason and instrumental rationality, soon deteriorated into a conquest of man himself. Metaphorically seen, the world suddenly faced not one God but billions and as it turned out these all-too-human ‘gods’ were everything but omniscient, omnipotent or omnibenevolent. Every community presented a different way to master nature and reason soon proved to be not as universally valid or abstractly definable as Kant had wished.

The role and understanding of the human agent that evolved out of these initially philosophically abstract approaches managed to dominate not only academic discourse be it in the social or the natural sciences, it also managed to seep into the common sense of society. The belief that human agents are able to mould nature according to ideas and concepts derived from the mind's capacity to reason and objectively analyse its environment was taken as given through the better part of the last 300 years. Certainly there were always critics of this rationalistic approach the role of humanity and its place and relation to nature but these voices grew only stronger in recent years and for the most part are still confined to academic, mostly philosophical, discourse.

As Charles Taylor among others pointed out this account of human agency “has to some extent colonized the common sense of our civilization. [It] offers us the picture of an agent who in perceiving the world takes in ‘bits’ of information from his or her surroundings and the ‘processes’ them in some fashion, in order to emerge with the ‘picture’ of the world he or she has, who then acts on the basis of this picture to fulfil his or her goals, through a ‘calculus of means and ends’.” (Taylor, 1993: 204) This act of processing relies heavily on the abovementioned assumptions of disengaged agency, self-transparent consciousness and a specific interpretation of reason.

It is this notion of agency that the new social ontology proposed here argues against. The next section will shed more light on the philosophical background of this criticism and is therefore basically concerned with elaborating and conceptualising the deeper implications of this critique and show how a inclusion of reference to phenomenology can underline and strengthen a different conception of agency without, however, risking the fallback into a foundationalist or objectivist enterprise.

The phenomenological conception of agency – Towards a hermeneutics of the Self

If we come to the topic of agency in IR we can hardly avoid sparking huge discussions as to what agency actually entails and who can be said to be an agent in a meaningful sense. Classical realists on the one hand focus on the individual that acts in and through history. Human nature which is characterised by desires above all ambition if we follow Morgenthau is the most important background out of which individuals form and make the decisions in positions of power and influence. (Morgenthau, 2006)

Neorealism and large parts of the neoliberal strands fought successfully against this conceptualisation aiming at an objectified and quantifiable conception of agency that allowed the use of scientific methods. It is now no longer the individual decision maker and her nature that lies at the centre of attention but the constraining necessities of the system it exists in. Agency here was mostly reduced to mere instrumental rationality, the agent became a mere utility maximiser acting according to *zweckrational* principles. (Waltz, 1979; Waltz, 1986a; Waltz, 1986b; Mearsheimer, 2001) In this view agents are reduced to rational entities whose decision can be calculated, objectified and quantified. (for a translation of this view into methodology see for instance King et al., 1994) Any meaningful engagement with self-reflecting and self-interpretive elements is strictly avoided due to their intrinsic resistance to scientific conceptualisation. This picture of agency is strictly modelled along the line of disengagement typical for the modern conceptualisation depicted above.

Since the mid- 1980s a third conception developed under the large umbrella of constructivism. In its critical strand constructivism puts forward a conception of agency that is based on choice and contextually situated. (Fierke, 2005: 7-8) Agents can act individually or collectively and always have a freedom to act as if the situation they are in could be otherwise – they have the undeniable capacity to change their environment through social interaction and a changing understanding of their social surroundings. (Checkel, 1998: 330-2; see also Fierke 2005: 12-4) The main difference interpretivist approaches emphasise in respect to agency is a limited notion of freedom which allows the introduction of a meaningful notion of change that goes well beyond the quantifiable shift of capabilities. Likewise, they accept structural constraints and therefore do not posit an absolute freedom of the agents in question but maintain the fluctuation of these

structure-providing norms and rules through an intersubjective framework based on practices.

The question therefore arises how the concept of agency can be conceptualised more substantially outside or at least different from the hitherto dominant disengaged picture modern philosophy and science has painted. Again, the general argument here will focus on the centrality of a new social ontology of the notion of human being. On the very fundamental level we will challenge the rationalist mainstream through the introduction of a new and radically different ontology that can be grasped more clearly and substantially than so far by reference to post-Husserlian phenomenology. As opposed to the traditional ontology and its assumptions especially in respect to human agency, the ontology presented here can roughly be described by a reversal of the Cartesian tantrum ‘I think, therefore I am’ – ‘I am, therefore I think’. (Dreyfus, 1991: 3; see also Bowie, Andrew, 1996: 106)⁷

This ontology is in the first place not about philosophical idealism or materialism, i.e. not about the nature of what lies behind our conceptions of what exists. The debate between materialism and idealism is just another example of the modern attitude to solve the problems of human agency through bifurcating human existence.

The ontology that might just add new insights to the study of human social and political relationships must therefore be of a very different and in many ways more fundamental kind. We can find such a conceptualisation of human existence and human agency in post-Husserlian phenomenology and it seems odd that no scholar in the vast field of

⁷ It is important to point out that the inversion suggested here can only be seen as a rough appropriation to a post-Husserlian phenomenological position as the ‘I’ even in the inverted statement would certainly remain a matter of concern for Heidegger and its successors.

reflectivist accounts has yet developed an account of agency by drawing on phenomenological insights.

The way into this conceptualisation of agency leads through the seminal work of Martin Heidegger. As is well known, Heidegger in his magnum opus *Sein und Zeit*, tried to reinvigorate philosophical enquiry into one of the most neglected concepts since the time of Plato – *Sein* (being). (ibid.) According to Heidegger, modern humanity has forgotten what it means to ask for the meaning of being. It does not mean that no one asked the question regarding the nature of entities but the answers that were given did not properly address the nature of being as such; instead they only dealt with entities whose being was taken as given and not enquired into. The nature of being was hereby seen as self-evident but, as Heidegger points out, “[t]he fact that we live already in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of repeating the question of the meaning of ‘being.’” (Heidegger, 1996: 3)

Therefore, in Heidegger’s view, ontology so far has only dealt with *Seiendem* (entities) but not with *Sein* (being). The reason for this forgetfulness is not to be found in ignorance but, on the contrary, in the lucidity of being – being is too familiar, too close, too obvious to pose a question or puzzle to the human enquirer. (Heidegger, 1996: 19) And yet, Heidegger insists it is necessary to ask the question of the meaning of being anew and try to find an answer outside the modern philosophical framework. He was not interested in a purely ontic account that treats being as being that arises out of the *Offenbarkeit des Seins* (obviousness of being) but rather wanted to think through this *Offenbarkeit*. In order to achieve this task, he proposes the necessity to use a completely

new language that carves out the characteristics of being. As we will see, “Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology thus calls into question both the Platonic assumption that human activity can be explained in terms of theory and the central place the Cartesian tradition assign to the conscious subject.” (Dreyfus, 1991: 3)

The first major step Heidegger makes in *Sein und Zeit* after outlining his task at hand is to narrow his focus to one specific form of being, human being or as he calls it *Dasein*. “Thus to work out the question of being means to make a being – one who questions – transparent in its being. [...] This being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being we formulate terminologically as Da-sein.” (Heidegger, 1996: 6) This step that initially seems to leave Heidegger’s endeavour open to the criticism of an anthropocentric bias is however justified since *Dasein* as a form of being is special because “Dasein is a being which is concerned in its being about that being.” (Heidegger, 1996: 179) In other words, human being is the only kind of being that reflects on being. The meaning of *Dasein* is crucial for understanding Heidegger’s initial question and his approach to answer it. First, and most importantly, *Dasein* (literally translated being-there) does not designate a mere physical presence in the world. It rather signifies a form of constant involvement in the world, a point we will come back to later. Secondly, *Dasein* does not describe a particular human being understood in the traditional sense of a subject. Being-there is not a substitute for consciousness. (Kaufmann, 2004: 37) On the contrary Heidegger is eager to avoid any contamination of his endeavour with traditional ontology which tried to ground “all kinds of being in a causally self-sufficient source” (Dreyfus, 1991: 12) such as God or the absolute/transcendental ego we find in the philosophies of Fichte or Husserl. Rather than assuming that consciousness is a prerequisite for human existence

or human subjectivity, Heidegger proposes that vice versa consciousness can only arise out of being. Here we find again the abovementioned inversion of Descartes: *Sum, ergo cogito* (I am, therefore I think).⁸

And finally, Heidegger ascribes a specific form of being to Dasein which he calls existence. The special characteristic of Dasein as we will see more elaborately shortly is that “Dasein’s activity – its way of being – manifests a stand it is taking on what it is to be Dasein.” (Dreyfus, 1991: 15). In short, one existential characteristic of Dasein is its self-reflexivity; Dasein is the only form of being for which its own being raises questions or becomes a matter of concern. For Heidegger “[w]e shall call the very being to which Da-sein can relate in one way or another, and somehow always does relate, existence [Existenz].” (Heidegger, 1996: 10) Or as William Blattner puts it: “Existence is, roughly, that feature of Dasein that its self-understanding is constitutive of its being what or who it is.” (Blattner, 1996: 97)

If, as Heidegger points out, the question of being has not only been insufficiently answered but has been posed wrongly by the tradition altogether, a reconsideration of the methods, ways of thinking and language is necessary. Reconsidering these elements, however, means reconsidering main aspects of what it means to be a human being. Therefore, “ontology must begin with a discussion of human beings (as it is they who ask what ‘being’ means) because their misconceptions about themselves, about what it

⁸ Heidegger’s indictment of the whole tradition of Western philosophy as having followed the Cartesian notion of agency in various ways must be seen as overstated. As Andrew Bowie rightly pointed out, the challenges against such a Cartesian notion of subjectivity did not arise with Nietzsche or Heidegger but can be traced back to the early anti-Enlightenment and Romanticism in thinkers such as Jacobi and Schelling. (Bowie, 1996: 108-9)

means to think and what it means to talk, frustrated all efforts to make clear what being means.” (Schmitt, 2000: 12-3)

Based on this emphasis on *Dasein* Heidegger introduces clear distinctions between human beings and other entities. *Dasein*, in order to ask the question of the meaning of being anew and to have any chance finding a more satisfying answer must of course have ways to judge whether any reconceptualisation indeed leads to more illuminating answers. Heidegger argues that *Dasein* has this capacity since one of its existential features lies with its access to being through a preconceptual or preontological understanding of its existence and its relations to other beings. “Such an understanding is contained in our knowing-how-to-cope in various domains rather than in a set of beliefs that such and such is the case.” (Dreyfus, 1991: 18)

Such a preontological understanding prevents any effort to achieve a ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ account of our environment since it always provides a background that shapes the experience in question. “When we find a certain experience intelligible, what we are attending to, explicitly and expressly, is this experience. The context stands as the unexplicated horizon within which – or to vary the image, as the vantage point from out of which – this experience can be understood.” (Taylor, 1993: 210) This background which the preontological understanding provides is needed to make our experiences intelligible. As such it is neither completely present in consciousness nor completely situated in the unconscious. The experience at hand expresses the preontological understanding in its very particularity but at the same time transcends the singularity and specificity of our experience. As Charles Taylor explains: “It is that of which I am not simply unaware [...], because it makes intelligible what I am uncontestedly aware of;

but at the same time I cannot be said to be explicitly or focally aware of it, because that status is already occupied by what it is making intelligible.” (ibid.)

Human beings act according to this preconceptual understanding all the time; “we understand preontologically what tools are as so far as we reach for them only under very specific conditions and in specific ways, and insofar as we know how to use them. We understand persons preontologically as the owners of these tools.” (Schmitt, 2000: 18) “Ontology [therefore means] asking about the nature of this understanding of being that we do not *know* – that is not a representation in the kind corresponding to the world – but that we simply *are*.” (Dreyfus, 1991: 3) This preconceptual understanding is not a form of dispositional knowledge and therefore not comparable to what Heidegger calls theoretical understanding. (Schmitt, 2000: 166) Rather the preconceptual understanding that is an essential feature of Dasein relies upon a practical action-oriented conception of knowledge – one knows one’s way around in the world. (Haugeland, 1982: 22) “Preontological understanding is not dispositional knowledge that certain statements are true. I demonstrate preontological understanding not by talking but by acting (although sometimes, of course, the acts are linguistic ones).” (Schmitt, 2000: 19)

Such an understanding stands in clear contrast to the rationalist tradition that described agency as existing at the nexus of mental representations and objects in the world. In Heidegger’s conceptualisation preontological understanding precedes any attempt to theoretically grasp the way of sensation or the obtainment and validity of knowledge. Preontological understanding as the primordial background of human experience can best be grasped as a practical disposition of involvement. This practical disposition “can not be analyzed into a set of images on one side and a reality portrayed on the other.

[...] To know one's way about is to be really moving around, handling things, dealing with things, with understanding." (Taylor, 1993: 212)

By outlining this centrality of human being or *Dasein* to his enquiry and also providing a new view on what it means to be human in the world Heidegger opens the realm of criticism against rationalist accounts by introducing a new set of differentiations that are unknown to the modern conceptualisation of human agency. First, based on the above arguments, *Dasein* is intrinsically situated in the world. This does not just mean the obvious spatial situatedness of our bodies in a specific environment (Dreyfus, 1991: 40) but refers to a form of continuous 'involvement' in the world. The world is not just there as a neutral place that surrounds us but is always already shaped by human involvement in forms of preontological understanding and disposition towards certain elements within it. The difference lies here between the factual or the ontic and the factual or the ontological. For Heidegger, modern philosophy and science with their disengaged notion of human agency only recognised what properly can be called the factual or the ontic, circumstances that are not contaminated by the involvement of human being. In the natural sciences for instance, the concepts and laws of gravity or evolution have validity even without the presence of human beings. There are, however, circumstances in which this is not the case. As soon as we pick up a tool or engage with other human beings, the following actions cannot be understood without reference to the human beings that act in them. Tools would not exist without human agents and their use expresses already a clear disposition of the human agents towards their world. Of course one could argue that some primates also use tools and therefore would exhibit similar features as a human being. There are, however, two factors that constitute a

decisive difference here. First, using tools in the case of human beings is always connected to appropriateness that is “tools have proper uses – for each tool there is a ‘what it’s for’. If an ape uses a stick to get bananas, whether cleverly or not, whether successfully or not, it has in no sense used it either properly or improperly. [...] An ape could not misuse a stick, no matter what it did.” (Haugeland, 1982: 18) The second important difference concerns the unique human characteristic to form second order desires in respect to actions within a given context. An ape or any other animal follows its simple first order desires – if it desires a banana it gets up and gets one. It would never occur to it that the situation in which it finds itself presently makes it inappropriate to get up and get a banana. In contrast, human agents in most of their actions consider the specific self-understanding they have of themselves. If a bank manager has a meeting with her customers, it would be inappropriate to just leave the room to eat a banana. Her desire for food is in this instance overruled by her second order desire to appear as a professional person. (for an in-depth analysis of second-order desires and their relation to human agency see for instance Taylor, 1985: 23-42)

This self-reflective disposition towards the environment is not neutral or simply to be grasped by reference to instrumental rationality in form of means-ends calculations or any other theoretical methods but has to be understood as being embedded in a specific self-interpretation of the human being and its contextual aims.

All factual circumstances can be grasped by asking “What is it for?”, the answer to which will show a certain disposition and involvement of human agency that always already includes a preconceptual understanding of the situation. (Heidegger, 1996: 17) If the question “What is it for?” cannot be meaningfully asked we encounter mere factual statements or as Heidegger calls it mere occurrences.

Most importantly then, *Dasein* is for Heidegger always already in the world which means it is impossible to step back from *Dasein* and look at it and its environment as an object of or for scientific enquiry since *Dasein* always already is involved. As Inwood puts it: “Dasein is essentially in the world, not simply in the sense that it occupies a place in the world together with other things, but in the sense that it continually interprets and engages with other entities and the context in which they lie, the ‘environment’ or the ‘world around us’. It is in a way only because Dasein does this that there is a unitary world at all rather than a collection of entities – Dasein brings the whole world along with it.” (Inwood, 1997: 22)

The most important ramification for human agency that follows from this reconceptualisation of being and especially human being, lies with Heidegger’s insight that *Dasein* as opposed to other forms of being does not have an essence – or rather that its essence lies in its existence. Whereas normally we try to determine ‘that’ something is or ‘what’ it is in the case of human being the most appropriate question is ‘how’ it is. So compared to *Dasein* “[t]he being of entities that are merely present at hand and which are therefore not appropriately addressed as “I” or “You” is a matter of indifference to them. Since they cannot, like *Dasein*, take charge of their own being, they need, if they are to be anything at all, a definite ‘what’. But a human being is whatever it decides or has decided to be.” (ibid.: 23) *Dasein* therefore is not a definite actual thing, but the possibility of various ways of being. Central hereby is the view that “humans are given their content neither by an ahistorical, transcultural essence, nor by nature. Rather, *Dasein* itself determines this content in its act of self-understanding.”

(Blattner, 1996: 97) The notion of self-understanding is central to Heidegger's conception of human agency.

Understanding in a phenomenological sense does not refer to either a faculty of the mind or a cognitive state but describes capabilities. If we therefore say that someone has a specific self-understanding it does not mean that she has a specific form of knowledge about herself, maybe even complete knowledge. This in fact would lead us directly back to the Cartesian notion of a self-transparent consciousness which, as shown above, was of course one of the major targets of post-Husserlian phenomenology. Understanding therefore is closely linked to two features of Heidegger's thought depicted above. First, it describes the ability of human beings to ponder about the possibilities of their being. If *Dasein* lacks any definite essence and consists existentially in its own possibility, self-understanding describes the mode of grasping and deliberating about the various possibilities of being.

Now, of course this seems to suggest that *Dasein* can be whatever it wants. This is obviously not the case. (Polt, 1999: 102-3) First, and most fundamentally, we cannot decide to be. We can certainly decide not to be and kill ourselves but we are unable to bring ourselves into existence. Heidegger calls this ‘*Geworfenheit*’ – thrownness. (Heidegger, 1996: 127) But even beyond the fundamental decision of to be or not to be we are constrained by circumstances that place restrictions upon us.⁹ Heidegger expresses this with the term *facticity* which brings us to the second point. “‘Facticity’ is the name that Heidegger gives to *Dasein*’s determinacy as an existential entity. Despite Heidegger’s referring to it as ‘*Dasein*’s own manner of ‘occurrence’, [...] he wants to contrast it with whatever might be natural in *Dasein*.’” (ibid.: 102)

⁹ The nature and role of these constraints will be illuminate in more depth in chapter VI on freedom.

And yet, human beings have the existential characteristic to project themselves into the future and deliberate about possibilities. Dasein is never a finished state but always involved in becoming. All the existential characteristics of Dasein are not to be understood as mere factual appearances or state-characteristics. On the contrary, since Dasein is always already involved in the world and constantly exhibits a form of self-understanding its characteristics are ability-characteristics. (ibid.: 100) Certainly we can make mere factual statements about human agents as for example concerning their height and weight. These, however, are not concerned with the human being qua being but just with its factual appearance. Height or weight, when we consider the human being qua being, gain a completely different, factual quality since the self-understanding of the human being in question is certainly influenced by them. “Being tall has in this way to do with one’s stature, not just one’s physical height. A person who understands herself as unusually tall might talk down to people, use her height to lord it over them; on the other hand, she might be embarrassed by her height, more shy about physical encounters.” (ibid) In this sense being tall is an ability not just an physical feature. To be clear, and Heidegger acknowledges this, it is of course possible to make statements regarding only the factual characteristics of Dasein but only under the pretence of ignoring the ‘existential make-up’ of being-in-the-world. “... those beings which are not worldless, for example Da-sein itself, are objectively present ‘in’ the world, too. More precisely, they can be understood within certain limits and with a certain justification as something merely objectively present. To do this, one must completely disregard or just not see the existential constitution of being-in.” (Heidegger, 1996: 52; see also Dreyfus, 1991: 44)

Dasein in all its existentiality is of course still factually situated in the world. It is therefore fair to say that “not only is Dasein’s activity conditioned by cultural interpretations of facts about its body, such as being male or female, but since Dasein must define itself in terms of social roles that require certain activities, and since its roles require equipment, Dasein is at the mercy of factual events and objects in its environment.” (ibid.)

Having said this, reactions to and interpretations of facticity are not given but remain a matter of choice. But are these choices completely our own? Arguably they are not. Rather, “[t]he concept of facticity implies that an ‘innerworldly’ being has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the being of those beings which it encounters within its own world.” (Heidegger, 1996: 52) This situatedness or being-in-the-world is missed in modern conceptions of subjectivity and agency. (Janicuad, 1996: 49) But apart from Dasein expressed in the form of ‘I’ or ‘You’ Heidegger develops the notion of ‘*das Man*’, ‘the they’. (ibid.: 118-22; Dreyfus, 1991: 151-62) The they is a conventional normative background that governs much of our everyday life. Due to it we do not have to make decisions or even think about possibilities of decision-making in everyday situations. This is what Heidegger refers to as “Uneigentlichkeit” – inauthenticity. This is not a negative notion, it just describes that every human agent is already embedded in a network of social conventions norms and rules that governs large part of our everyday-behaviour. (Heidegger, 1996: 40; Guignon, 2006: 276-81)

One way to conceptualise ‘the they’ a little bit more is by looking at the work of one of Heidegger’s most influential students – Hans-Georg Gadamer. Where Heidegger was always more concerned with the disclosure of being Gadamer oriented his thought more

towards the social interaction between human beings and especially tried to re-think the notion of understanding. Gadamer, in order to defend the all-encompassing historicality of being and the utterly dialogical nature of understanding criticised the notion of self-transparent consciousness by emphasising its impossibility. The sheer thought that consciousness could be purged from tradition and prejudice appears absurd to Gadamer since human existence, the Heideggerian being-in-the-world always already presupposes a situatedness we cannot leave. As we have seen, “the distinctive feature of Dasein or human life for Heidegger is that ... in living human beings relate themselves interpretively to their lives, that they understand themselves in a continuous process of self-understanding, experience and re-interpretation.” (Warnke, 1987: 38) The past acquires hereby its meaning in light of present experiences and anticipations while the meaning of the present and the anticipation of the future are conditioned by the way in which the past has been understood. Heidegger therefore considers self-understanding to be ‘thrown-projection’. (*ibid.*, 38-9) On the one hand it involves projecting a future for oneself or projecting one’s possibilities. On the other hand, these possibilities have already been conditioned to some extent by the way the future has already been projected in the past. Gadamer took this Heideggerian thrownness and maintained that we understand history not simply because we make it but also it has made us already. By developing this dialectic Gadamer presents a whole new meaning of the notion of ‘mutual constitution’ in respect to agent and structure. While the agent certainly is constantly involved in making history, history is also constantly conditioning these actions since they rely upon past projections that are our present in the same way as our present projections for the future become one day the present of other actors that will be conditioned by them.

This conditionality is described in Gadamer with reference to the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘prejudice’. (Gadamer, 1979: 245-53; Palmer, 1969: 182-4; Weinsheimer, 1985: 167-8) Through his reintroduction of prejudice and tradition Gadamer takes a clear stand against the Cartesian conception of the self-transparency of the mind. Relying on the Heideggerian conception of ‘thrownness’ Gadamer reaffirms the contextual and situational mode of human existence which does not allow for a purely neutral, abstract and theoretical conceptualisation of social and political life. (Gadamer, 1979: 245) This thrownness Gadamer captures in the notion of ‘historically effected consciousness’ (*wirkungsgechichtliches Bewusstsein*) (Warnke, 1987: 79-80; Wachterhauser, 2002: 65 Gadamer, 1979: 305-10) which describes the embeddedness of our understanding in a tradition that reaches infinitely into the past as well as the future and escapes our grasp in its entirety.

If we now take the insights of the above discussion together, a fuller and deeper notion of agency seems to develop. Human agents are characterised by the capability and practice of deploying a vocabulary of worth displaying a choice already made that illuminates the way of the life imagined. Agent’s actions are qualitative and not completely quantifiable, calling for a deeper social analysis of their decisions and actions. Furthermore, agents are not isolated subjects but always already in-the-world by being embedded in a tradition that reaches beyond their actuality and informs decisions and judgments that cannot be analysed from a neutral self-transparent point of view. The world we live in constitutes the agents in the same way as the agents live out the world through tradition. These agents are not only the makers of their own destiny but constitute through their situatedness a unity of the world that transcends a mere agglomeration of different things. Agents make judgments about the world and give

meaning to it through a never-ending process of social interaction and self-interpretation.

Grasping the scope of the challenge – A hermeneutic conception of agency and its ramifications for IR theory

Taking the account of agency embedded into the larger question regarding the meaning of being that we find in post-Husserlian phenomenology we can now move to an analysis of the consequences and differences for a new ontology and IR theory in general. As depicted above, modern conceptions of agency rely upon a specific interpretation and reification of subjectivity. (Janicaud, 1996: 47-8) This basis out of which all but a few accounts in IR take their point of departure, however, can be questioned by a new ontological conceptualisation of what it means to be human.

The phenomenological conception of agency is critical of the rationalist model of enquiry at the heart of which still lies the Cartesian notion of detached observation and scientific explanation. The intersubjective emergence of meanings and practices cannot just be observed from the outside in a neutral or objective way. Rather, the emphasis in our research endeavours must be placed on the contextuality and situatedness in which agents interact and make decisions.

The challenge, seen in the light of the abovementioned phenomenological reconceptualisation of human agency, is indeed a much bigger one than usually thought. What appears as a quarrel between different epistemological camps turns out to be rooted in a deeper disagreement regarding the nature and meaning of human existence and the relationship human beings exhibit to other human beings and to their

surroundings on an everyday basis. On this level the question emerges as to whether the disengaged picture the modern sciences and many scholars in IR paint and suggest to be the correct one for analysing and explaining events in international relations is not dependent on a deeper pre-theoretical level in which human beings are involved in the world in an active rather than cognitive way. The answers given by Heidegger and many of his successors form a strong case in favour of this existential notion of involvement qua being-in-the-world. (Dreyfus, 1991: 3)

To be sure, a disengaged picture dealing with factualities is possible but it is not the most fundamental mode of engaging with the world – this is the true challenge which Heidegger posed philosophically and which some scholars in IR have already started to explore as well. The Cartesian world-view that wrote rationality into the actual make-up of the human mind and lead to the widely held view of the mind as a processor of externally perceived sensations in order to achieve a factual value-free mirror-image of the world must be reconsidered given the phenomenological insights that arose during the 20th century.

We can identify a number of arguments in the phenomenological account of agency that warrant such a move. First comes the insight that human agents always already belong to a world they understand pre-conceptually, i.e. before they have the chance to relate themselves theoretically or scientifically to this world. The world is not just a place of objects that stands opposed to a subject but the subject through its being-in the world always already relates to the objects in a way that makes a detached observation without existential interference impossible. It is possible to describe and observe factual characteristics of entities and human beings in the world but only at the price of

ignoring the existential nature of *Dasein*. Heidegger insist that such a neglect leads necessarily to a distorted picture of human agency which Heidegger calls it *Seinsvergessenheit* (forgetfulness of being) – an unwarranted de-contextualisation of human practices. It simply refers to the fact that in order to truly understand what human agency entails and how it relates to the environment it finds itself in requires a recognition of the always embedded nature of human existence in the world which makes the Cartesian bifurcation of subject/object and the concomitant conceptualisation of disengaged agency difficult to defend. “When we inhabit something, it is no longer an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relation to other objects in the world.” (ibid.: 45) This is meant by the Heideggerian term ‘dwelling’ and finds its equivalent in the notions of context or discourse already referred to in some quarters of IR theory.

Out of this contextuality arises the next parallel, that of the lacking essence of human beings. In some classical as well as modern accounts we find the stipulation that there is something unchanging at the heart of the human agent. Whether this is a lust for power or ambition that is immutably at work and compels us into certain actions or the reliance upon rationality as a feature of the human mind that conditions our perceptions and allows the objective and neutral depiction of our environment. Phenomenology, at least post-Husserlian phenomenology, criticises this de-historicised and de-contextualised conceptualisation and turns the question away from what human beings are to the question how they are. The how already indicates that there are different states of human being and if one wants to enquire into relationships between human agents and their actions within a specific environment one has to accept the intrinsic possibility for change that is vested in human being as such. The notion that agents can act ‘as if’ the

situation would be otherwise is at the same time a critique of deterministic theories of human political action as it is a proposal for an anti-essentialist reading of *Dasein*. For human being to act within a constantly changing environment and the ability to adapt and think through different possibilities not only of action but first and foremost of being is indispensable. Only through this existential feature of projection and ‘running ahead’ of oneself is change in the social and political world possible and comprehensible.

Of course these possibilities find their limits in the specific setting and the understanding thereof. Heidegger describes these limits by using the term *facticity* which includes cultural, political and social norms that guide our behaviour and at the same time also includes our understanding and disposition towards other entities we encounter in our everyday activities. These norms and rules provide a framework for action transmitted linguistically and can be very closely associated with the Heideggerian notion of ‘das Man’ or alternatively with Gadamerian tradition. In many instance we operate according to these normative frameworks and exhibit a specific understanding of them. That does, however, not foreclose the capability and possibility of change within these sets of norms and rules. Agency in phenomenological understanding is fluid and involved in a constant process of self-understanding and self-evaluation. It is in constant dialogue with its environment and fellow human beings conditioned by and at the same time reconditioning its life-world factically.

In such a conceptualisation is no room for a clearly bifurcated understanding of human existence in which we try to access a world ‘out there’ and mirror it in our minds. The standard terminology that relies upon the dualisms of subject/object and

internal/external becomes dissolved in an engaged picture of agency. But such a picture of agency must be philosophically buttressed by referring and exploring the deeper ontological deliberations of what it is to be a human agent as such. Before we can immerse into the concreteness of political life and events in which we try to analyse and understand human agents and their actions, in Heidegger's terminology before we dive into the ontic make-up of politics, a substantial clarification must be delivered in order to clearly explicate the conceptualisation of agency any research into international events and changes is derived from.

As we have seen reference to the post-Husserlian movement of phenomenology can provide such a conceptualisation that in its core coincides and ontologically substantiates claims regarding human agency. An existential analytic, as it was first attempted by Heidegger and later further developed by many phenomenologists can give us a starting point from where we can discuss processes and events we all seek to understand. Central in this undertaking is the critique, as was outlined above, of the assumed centrality of consciousness and the concomitant view of subjectivity as part of a substance-ontology. As was shown above, the advent of the modern interpretation of the subject and its place in the larger order of things emerged as a radical break with earlier conceptions centred around a higher guarantor of this order. Starting with Descartes, medieval cosmology was severely challenged and although attempts have been made during the 17th century to combine the rise of reason with religious doctrine as for instance in Leibniz' philosophy the fate had already be decided against the centrality of a divine Being at the heart of the order of the universe. Human subjects became the ones that replaced God in respect to creative power and knowing intellect. As was argued above, the rise of modern subjectivity and agency coincided with a

concerted attempt to inscribe certain powers into the human being; central hereby was the pivotal demand to secure human existence and its role in relation to the world around it as certain. Again Descartes dictum ‘cogito, ergo sum’ served as the backbone of these efforts. Humans convinced themselves that they had the powers inherent in them to replace the one substance that for so long dominated their view of the world and the universe. Before long, they endeavoured to replace God’s qualities with human one’s; they could create through technology, they could know through science and they could act according to human ethics. With the rise of modernity, man became the measure of all things, a being invested with the potential and the capacity to rule of his environment and shape it according to his will.

We have seen that such an attitude necessarily entailed the rise of a disengaged picture of agency and situated the human mind as over and against an outer world which it encounters to know and master. 400 years on we still see the huge influence such a conception left on the sciences and our everyday lives. Heidegger and with him the phenomenological movement throughout the 20th century posit a renewed interest in the creation of this form of subjectivity. They question in many different ways the attitude inherent in such a picture and aim at disrupting the veil of tradition and convention that transformed the modern notion of subjectivity into a naturalised and taken for granted truth. Ontology for them is not exhausted by ever new modes of relating to the objects ‘out there’ and tries to achieve a correct representation of them. Ontology is not primarily the study of beings that are fixed and ready in their existential make-up – it is not a substance-ontology phenomenological thinkers represent. Rather, the relation between subjectivity and objectivity as such is fundamentally drawn into question and the account which seems to precede any account of the nature of beings is supplanted by

the more primordial question of what it is to be human and how this being-human relates to other entities in the world. The ramifications of such a refocusing towards the existential nature of human being is not a simple supplement to other enquiries and can simply be added on. Rather, the findings of this renewed enquiry into human being, as we have seen, challenges the most basic beliefs and convictions on subjectivity and agency that dominated the last 400 years in many different forms. One consequence of this reconceptualisation of agency and subjectivity was recently pointed out by Louiza Odysseos in her intricate study on the notion of co-existence in the social and political realm.

The most common view of co-existence in the political and social realm is conceptualised along the lines of subjectivity and agency in their modern guise. As Odysseos points out, “the modern subject is generally understood as a completed self, already fully constituted when it enters into relations with others, relations that are considered ontologically secondary to the subject itself. Its main attributes are self-sufficiency, nonrelationality, and autonomy; these become instrumental in determining coexistence as the presence of multiple units, in other words, as a composition of otherwise nonrelational subjects.” (Odysseos, 2007: xii-xiii) The central distinction between subject and object that lies behind such a conceptualisation and provides the necessary ‘security’ for both leads subsequently to a substance-ontology in which subject and object are reified in the dynamic of the thinking mind as representing mind. The quest for a true account that mirrors the ‘outer’ world factually starts exactly here. The dichotomy coupled with the specific powers of the mind are taken as a given and remain unquestioned in these attempts to access the world of objects and achieve a correct representation. One form this can take we have seen in the case of Wendt and

Wight above. Both posit most strongly the ontological distinction between human subjects and mind-independent objects. Only in this way are they able to distinguish between the accepted different ways of apprehending objects and their reality which serves as a ground for the activity we call science. As was shown above this dichotomy between subject and object and, in the form of scientific realism, the primacy of ontology (understood as substance-ontology) over epistemology is impossible to maintain. Apart from the obvious problem to account for a mind-independent reality when the only way this reality can be grasped is by a mind, the naturalised conception of subject and object and subsequently the whole ontological outlook as substance-ontology can be severely questioned. The conundrums and tensions that result out of the relation of subject and object and ontology and epistemology in these accounts can not simply be overcome by shifting the burden of certainty away from epistemology to ontology. What has to be done instead is a fundamental reconceptualisation of the very conditions that made these problems endemic.

In this respect an existential analytic, i.e. an analysis of what it is to be human and the subsequent conceptualisation of human agency can here only provide the first step of an enquiry that necessarily leads to adjacent terms which will be discussed in length over the next chapters. Such an enquiry will ensure a proper and full consideration of the scope of the new social ontology that we try to outline. The next step in this consideration will lead us to one of the most fundamental features of human existence that since the beginning of the 20th century was subjected to heavy debates regarding its role in human life, namely the function and conception of language.

IV Language – The House of Being

Man behaves as if he were the creator and master of language, whereas on the contrary, it is language which is and remains his sovereign.

Martin Heidegger

The second key element in our quest for conceptualising a new social ontology is the notion of language. The main starting point for enquiries into the notion and role of language in political and social discourse is widely associated with the ‘linguistic turn’ brought about at the beginning of the 20th century. In this respect the thinker most often referred to is Ludwig Wittgenstein, or more precisely the work of the later Wittgenstein that centres around his second *magnum opus*, the *Philosophical Investigations*. Much in line with the trajectory of the linguistic turn the focus of this chapter will lie on an exposition of language that is closely tied in with the notion of agency developed above. Wittgenstein will certainly feature in this exposition but first he will have to be placed into a historical trajectory of thought on language that reaches back to the early beginnings of the counter-Enlightenment and secondly in this respect supplemented by a range of phenomenological thinkers that might be able to tackle some of the unresolved tensions in Wittgenstein’s thought and lead to a comprehensive placement of language as central to the new social ontology proposed here.

In order to present this line of argument the chapter will proceed in three steps. First, it seems necessary to depict the conceptualisation of language against which the thought of the later Wittgenstein and post-Husserlian phenomenology is directed – following

Charles Taylor we will label this conception of language ‘designative’. Secondly, an exposition of the alternative view of language – called expressivist – will be presented drawing upon phenomenological thinkers as well as elements of Wittgenstein. Finally, it will be shown how this enlarged conceptualisation can be seen as providing a viable philosophical approach to language for the development of a different and more substantial depiction of the relation between *Dasein* and its world within a new social ontology.

The Enlightenment and the designative conception of language

The purpose of this section is the short portrayal of what above has already been introduced as a designative conception of language. The term ‘designative’ that is used here to describe a specific approach to the role, function and nature of language is taken from the work of Charles Taylor and as was pointed out in chp. I it entails the opposition between the individual language user and the world in which the object designated by language exists. As such this conception of language is very much in line with Enlightenment thought since it posits the subjective consciousness as distinct from the world it inhabits and also ascribes the ability to reflect on this world from a detached and objective or neutral point of view.

In respect to language we find many instances in modern thought in which a designative conception of language is implicitly or explicitly expressed. Especially during the 17th and 18th centuries the question regarding the origin of language, a question closely connected to a conceptualisation of language, attracted major philosophers. On the side of the modern conception writers such as Hobbes, Locke and Condillac delivered

influential views on the nature of language. In Hobbes's *Leviathan* chapter IV on speech we read: "The generall use of Speech, is to transferre our Mentall Discourse, into Verbal; or the Trayne of our Thoughts, into a Trayne of Words; and that for two commodities; whereof one is, the Registering of the Consequences of our Thoughts; [...] So that the first use of names, is to serve for *Marks*, or *Notes* of remembrance. Another is, when many use the same words, to signifie (by their connexion and order,) one to another, what they conceive, or think of each matter; [...] And for this use they are called *Signes*." (Hobbes, 1997: 25) Hobbes sees language and speech as a tool that can be used as either 'marks' or signs' in order to structure and communicate thoughts and ideas. Language hereby resides within the individual and is used by a single consciousness to communicate the consciousness's mental states and relations to other consciousnesses or the world which they inhabit.

Communication therefore relies in successful cases on a transmission of clearly defined meanings assigned to words expressed in speech. As such the complexity of language can be reduced to logical connections and the whole system of a language can be mastered by those who know the defined meaning of words and their relation to other words as well as the appropriate circumstances in which they can be used. "When a man upon the hearing of any Speech, hath those thoughts which the words of that speech, and their connexion, were ordained and constituted to signifie; Then he is said to understand it: *Understanding* being nothing else, but the conception caused by Speech." (ibid.: 30)

We can already see in this early conception of language as a system of signs with fixed meanings a tendency to regard words to stand for mental content and not for the objects

signified themselves. John Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* makes this feature explicit when he says: “Besides articulate sounds, therefore, it was further necessary that he should be able to use these words as signs for internal conceptions, and then to make them stand as marks for the ideas within in his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men’s minds be conveyed from one to another.” (Locke, 1972: 9) Famously for Locke, there is not a direct representation of objects in the world in our minds but the object is represented as an idea in our mind and relates to the world by way of these ideas. In the same vein, Locke suggests that words do not stand for direct objects but for ideas of these objects, ideas formed in the mind when we perceive the object in the world. He further explains that the relation between words and ideas are not natural, otherwise there would only be one language. Rather the allocation of words to ideas is arbitrary and differs from language to language. (see also West, 1984: 749-50) Once, however, a word is assigned to an idea in a specific language its meaning becomes fixed for all those who speak this language. “Thus we may conceive how words, [...] came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connexion that there is between articulate sounds and certain ideas, [...] but by a voluntary imposition whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea.” (Locke, 1972: 12) The sequence in which language develops in Locke therefore starts with the perception of objects which form ideas in the mind of the individual. These ideas are always the same for all individuals when encountering the same object. Words are then introduced arbitrarily to signify these ideas in individual consciousnesses and enable individuals to communicate and convey the content of their minds to others. As Locke concludes: “*words in their*

primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them... .” (ibid.)

A very similar conception of language can also be found in the thought of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac. Condillac, although focussing on the origin of language, a discussion we have not the time or need to immerse into, produced valuable insights into the function and nature of language. In this respect, he is perceived as being clearly in line with John Locke. “Condillac followed Locke’s hint in making the origin of language the cornerstone of his entire philosophy.” (West, 1984: 751) Condillac, as Locke, emphasised the close connection between the acquisition of knowledge and the capacity to communicate this knowledge. He remained hereby in the mould of Cartesianism in allocating the attainment of knowledge to a single consciousness and the use of language as expressing ideas of this single consciousness through signs. “Ideas connect with signs, and it is, as I will show, only by this means that they connect among themselves” (Condillac, 2001: 5) Condillac maintained hereby that language evolves spontaneously by convention and cannot be seen as a natural phenomenon. From the early origins of humankind direct signals such as gestures or cries were used to communicate. At one point “actions not originally intended as signals to others at all came in time to be deliberately made as signals because a secondary effect of these actions was first noted and then exploited.” (Wells, 1987: 9; see also Sapir, 1907: 5-6)

It is remarkable how closely the description of language here resembles the development of other tools and techniques to simplify human life. Language was seen as a human invention and “[j]ust as a machine is a tool, a means for bringing about certain desired mechanical effects, so language was looked upon as a tool, a means for

bringing about certain other desired mechanical effects - namely: the communication of ideas by means of audible, secondarily by means of visible, symbols." (ibid.: 109) In very much the same fashion as Locke, Condillac argues that the acquisition of language occurs parallel to the acquisition of higher mental capacity. "He then notes that the use of signs led to a development of the mental powers and this in turn led to an improvement in the signs." (Wells, 1987: 9) The whole complex of language is seen as an elaborate system of signification developed out of and used by individual consciousnesses. The use of signs hereby is very much portrayed as the invention of an almost technological but certainly technical nature that eases the communication between human beings. "[...] we clearly see how good sense, intellect, reason and their contraries are all equally the product of a simple principle, namely the connection of ideas with one another; and that we see how, on a higher level, this connexion is produced by the use of signs." (Condillac, 2001: 69)

From these early beginnings this Enlightenment conception of language was developed by many different thinkers for very different reasons but the general conception of language as a system of conventional signs with fixed meanings was maintained. "Posited in this way as an object before thought, language could not possibly play any other role in respect to thought than that of an accompaniment, substitute, memorandum, or secondary means of communication." (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 81) We can find examples of the further development of this position in thinkers as diverse as Monboddo, Reid, Smith, Russel, Frege, Quine, Davidson, Dummett and Kripke to name just a few. (see Hanna and Harrison, 2004; Kaye, 1924; Berry, 1974; Land, 1976; Land 1977; Formigari, 1974 and Bakalar, 1976) Certainly, the conception of and thought on

language came a long way since the discussions in the 17th and 18th century but what all these thinkers share at the very basic level is the designative conception which posits language as a logical structured system of signs.

Taken the view on agency developed above, it seems apparent that a designative view on language is not compatible with a notion of engaged agency. If we always already are embedded in a world and cannot detach ourselves from the context in which we live and which determines a pre-theoretical understanding of the world a designative view on language is inconceivable. It rather seems that interpretations and meanings of words and propositions have to be situated in these contexts in which they are used. Human beings are never detached from the world they encounter, they cannot flee form their historical situatedness but are always already involved in the world. Such a conception of human agency seems to call for an equally embedded view on language in which fixed and universally applicable meanings give way to the manifold instances, perceptions and interpretations of contextually situated human agents. It seems then that language is in fact much more primordial than any conception of a mere tool developed to ease matters of communication could ever admit. In other words, if the notion of agency stands and should acquire meaning in a larger context we would have to turn to an alternative view on language. As was already hinted at above we can find this different view on language in the early reactions against thinkers such as Locke and Condillac in Hamann, Humboldt and Herder and also, taking the cue from these early critics, in the writings of later periods including the later Wittgenstein and post-Husserlian phenomenology. It is to these accounts that we now turn.

The alternative – an expressivist conception of language

In the same way as the designative conception of language relates and complements a disengaged picture of human agency, the expressivist view of language is closely tied to the above discussed conception of engaged agency. Language in an expressivist view, as the next lines will show, relies upon a wider, holistic understanding of linguistic practices. Therefore it can be traced back to the work of thinkers such as Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

In respect to language these thinkers laid the foundation on which in our own age new insights into the nature and function of language and associated philosophical problems were based. In his writings “Hamann does make some statements which may be interpreted as implying that the use of language is not necessarily a process of fitting an appropriate term or phrase to some alleged bit of mental activity which is called ‘thinking’.” (Anderson, 1969: 248) Certainly, Hamann did not develop all the implications of such a perspective but Isaiah Berlin for instance acknowledges that Hamann’s “greatest discovery is that language and thought are not two processes but one; that language (or other forms of expressive symbolism – religious worship, social habits, and so on) conveys directly the innermost soul of individual and societies... .” (Berlin, 1956: 273) In his critique of the Enlightenment and its unfettered belief in reason and rationality Hamann insisted that “rationality is answerable to language rather than the other way around. Reason is not a purified given working its way into the capillaries of language; on the contrary, it is only possible once language is a going concern.” (Lawn, 2006: 14; Wells, 1987: 63)

Herder, who was thoroughly influenced by Hamann (Sapir, 1907: 30-1), showed a similar disposition in his famous attack against Condillac's account of the origin of language. (Wells, 1987: 31-47) Whereas Hamann was very much rooted in a religiously infused view regarding the conceptualisation of human existence in general and the origin of language in particular, Herder overcame the then predominant dichotomy according to which language was either a human invention or divinely ordained. It was with Herder's response to the question given out by the Berlin Academy in 1769 that the move from the old to the new question regarding the origin of language was made. In this respect Herder achieved both, "the doing away with the conception of divine interference, and the introduction of the idea of slow, but gradual and necessary, development from rude beginnings... . The very answer that Herder gave to the question posed made the question itself meaningless... ." (Sapir, 1907: 110)

Against the conventional view that conceptualised language as a human invention and tool for communicative purposes Herder asked how the general ability to link signs to specific ideas or objects can be accounted for. (Lawn, 2006: 7) Herder stressed the fact that allocating the origin of language in the accidental discovery that language can be used to communicate easier already takes the general ability of human agents to make mental connections between sign and the signified for granted. Herder therefore defends, similar to Hamann, a conception of language that is rooted in specific human expressivity and relies upon a special role of language for human existence that reaches far beyond the mere technical or tool like characteristics put forward in designative conceptions. Herder conceives the gift of language hereby to be "as characteristic of man as the ability to construct a hive is native to the bee – with this notable difference: the bee, acting mechanically by virtue of its inborn instinctive powers, build as

efficiently the first day as the last, [...]; the language of man, however, increases in power and efficiency with every use that is made of it.” (Sapir, 1907: 131)

Wilhelm von Humboldt also contributed to the expressivist picture of language that was drawn up against the formulaic view formed by Enlightenment thinkers in a very similar vein especially in his *On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*. “Language [...] is not the mere adventitious or epiphenomenal outward manifestation or garp of thought for the utilitarian purpose of communication, for if that were the case we would be making the false assumption that words merely constituted a nomenclature of tags for concepts that had been offered ready-made to the mind by the self-sufficiency and autonomy of perception.” (Aarsleff, 1988: xix) Humboldt based his thoughts on his extensive studies of different languages and their embeddedness in and close connection to the social environment of a language community. Exactly because he combined philosophical insight with first hand experience of other cultures and languages Humboldt rejected the formulaic and sterile conception that the Enlightenment brought to bear upon the role and nature of language. For Humboldt it was clear that “language is not like a toolbox with discrete instruments and parts designed for particular tasks that are known in advance. It is not already given work, like the contents of the tool-box, but a creative power – or in Humboldt’s famous words, it is not *ergon* but *energeia*... .” (ibid.) The expressivist view of language embodied in this conceptualisation shows itself in communal self-perception and self-interpretation. This interpretation still relies upon individuals in which language manifests itself but at the same time Humboldt had already realised that language in this function always already transcends the individual

mind in which it resides. The public linguistic sphere is the place in which language achieves its consummation as the medium through which meaning arises. “So although languages are thus the work of nations, in a sense of the term liberated from all misunderstanding, they still remain the self-creations of individuals, in that they can be produced solely in each individual, but only in such fashion that each presupposes the understanding of all, and all fulfil this expectation.” (Humboldt, 1988: 44) Following this understanding of language and its relation to the community in which it is practiced Humboldt maintained that “[l]anguage is, at it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit is their language.” (ibid.: 46)

The conclusion one can draw out of these arguments comes very close indeed to the modern conception of language as expressivist. In Humboldt we can already see that “[o]nly by virtue of language do we gain self-awareness, knowledge and mastery of reality. [...] This philosophy does not have room for the copy-theory of knowledge; language is not merely designative; it is not representation but expression. Language is constituent of thought and for that reason it must stand at the center of any viable epistemology.” (Aarsleff, 1988: xix)

Overall, these three thinkers present certainly important forerunners of present conceptions of language and recognised early the centrality and crucial importance of language in assessing and understanding the complexity of human existence. And though they were not able to produce a full-fledged appreciation of the consequences of their thought, we find their original work continued in contemporary thought. “It is not till our own day, and especially as a result of the ideas of Wittgenstein and his disciples,

that the cardinal importance of such an approach to the problems of philosophy was realized.” (Berlin, 1956: 275)

In a similar fashion, post-Husserlian phenomenology treated language in a more existential and fundamental way. In Heidegger and even more importantly Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, language was seen as the medium in which as well as through which we relate to our environment. The constant process of Dasein’s thrown-projections, i.e. its constant evolving into its own possibilities, is expressed in language and language only. As Gadamer pointed out: “Being that can be understood is language.” (Gadamer, 1979: 432)

Central hereby is the insight that “[t]he language-user is not a Cartesian subject in sovereign control of meanings; these are socially produced from the fabric of daily life within which various customs and practices are performatively enacted.” (Lawn, 2006: 15) Language hereby gains its power not from representational functions but from participation in the language community from which it develops and to which we all belong. The subject involved in this community acquires a capacity to take part in communication but is never fully in control of language. Rather the linguistic development is a dialogical and continuous process publicly exercised within a language community in the form of language-games. And in the same way language is never fully understood and controlled the subjects themselves are involved in a constant re-interpretation in respect to their self-understanding. (Warnke, 1987: 38)

In order to elaborate further on these general points it seems worthwhile to depict in more depth the approaches to language we find in phenomenological thinkers such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty and also include and assess in this light the relationship between phenomenological thought and the later Wittgenstein. As will

become clear in due course, we can identify a number of important parallels that seem to suggest a common goal or approach to linguistic practice. We will also find certain disagreements, each with its own positive and negative consequences, that stem from the differing starting points of phenomenology on the one hand and Wittgenstein's work on the other. We will show how a complementary appreciation of the commonalities and differences between phenomenological thought on language and the later Wittgenstein will contribute to a more substantial account and deeper understanding of the role of language and its place in a new social ontology.

Anti-foundationalism and the existential role of language

On a very general level both post-Husserlian phenomenology and Wittgenstein's later thought on language share a deep rejection of traditional modern philosophy and its foundationalist aspirations. The expressivist conceptualisation of language shows that "Gadamer and Wittgenstein are 'anti-foundationalists', that is, thinkers who place in doubt the whole project of philosophy as traditionally conceived since the seventeenth century." (Lawn, 2006: 30) At least in Gadamer's case this thoroughgoing anti-foundationalist sentiment is rooted in a Heideggerian conception of human agency as engaged agency. Since human beings always already are in a world they have not made and that is not graspable from a detached, scientific point of view language assumes a broader and at the same time more specific role in expressing the self-understanding of human beings and thereby revealing or disclosing partly at least *Dasein* itself. (Blattner, 1996: 97) In this approach, and Gadamer makes this abundantly clear in his works, language is no longer a tool aiming at a representational picture of the world. Language

is the defining medium in which and through which *Dasein* expresses its existentiality; “language is not an instrument of communication but communication itself.” (Lawn, 2006: 32)

In a very similar fashion Maurice Merleau-Ponty points towards the role of language as a fluid realm in which human existentiality appears. Language ceases hereby to be a transparent tool, a set of fixed symbols or signs with designated meanings and becomes a whole in which the human being performs his or her existential expressions. In this sense, language is never finished, it is never completely grasped but always already lies beyond the individual human being. Language “is never composed of absolutely univocal meanings which can be made completely explicit beneath the gaze of a transparent constituting consciousness.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 84) And Merleau-Ponty continues in an almost Wittgensteinian formulation: “It will be a question not of a system of forms of signification clearly articulated in terms of one another – not of a structure of linguistic ideas built according to a strict plan – but of a cohesive whole of convergent linguistic gestures, each of which will be defined less by a signification than by a use value.” (ibid.)

This anti-foundationalism that is shared by phenomenological thinkers and the later Wittgenstein rests on an interpretive and contextual understanding of language. Language as the medium in which and through which we express our self-understanding can only be grasped in its meaning through a hermeneutical rather than scientific or logical approach. Gadamer develops this need for a philosophical hermeneutics in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*.

From his initial criticism of Dilthey and Schleiermacher Gadamer turned to the phenomenological thought of Husserl (in respect to his concept of life-world

(Chatterjee, 1969: 119-20) and Heidegger. What attracted Gadamer in his efforts to conceptualise the central role of language and interpretation in our everyday encounters with the world we live in was the already mentioned concept of ‘thrownness’. As was outlined in Chapter III, thrownness describes the specific circumstances of human agency that is always already situated in a world. “In considering being-in-the-world fundamental, Heidegger places historicity at the foundation of the objective sciences.... Scientific objectivity is no longer regarded as the measure of legitimate knowledge in general but as a methodological standard appropriate to certain projects within the life world. At the same time Heidegger suspends the search for ultimate cognitive foundations below the life-world and thus replaces Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity with being-in-the world.” (Warnke, 1987: 38)

Apart from the fact that we encounter again the thorough anti-foundationalism of post-Husserlian phenomenology we also can see how language now moves to centre stage in such a conception. Far from being a simple tool of communication, language becomes the medium through which human agency and the world around it is constituted in the way it is. There is no longer a pre-established and simply given reality we try to grasp but our self-understanding and constant existential relation to ourselves, others and the world around us which can only be expressed through the medium of language constitutes this world. Accordingly in order to understand this world and the human agents within it a hermeneutical, i.e. interpretive approach is needed. “The question of being that arises in *Being and Time* no longer refers to the question of how the objective world is constituted in consciousness, as it still does for Husserl; the focus is rather on the question of what human being is, or, rather, how human life is itself a process and product of interpretation.” (ibid.)

Wittgenstein in this respect argues in very similar fashion. In his later work “Wittgenstein, like Gadamer, starts from the assumption that we ought to refrain from epistemologically driven metaphysics – the foundationalist philosophy we get in modernity, from Cartesianism to positivism – and stay close to the actual uses of language.” (Lawn, 2006: 34) Language for Wittgenstein assumes hereby a public rather than private role. It is not tied to a specific consciousness that derives meaning from ideas formed in the mind on the basis of perception and then communicates these ideas via language. Rather, Wittgenstein points towards the intersubjective dimension language takes in its everyday use. “As a system of communication, a language has rules, binding on those who wish to play the ‘game.’ Yet language is not an exact calculus; we are not forced to follow its prescriptions.” (Munson, 1962: 40) Here we encounter a second important parallel between the later Wittgenstein and Gadamer: the notion of ‘game’.

In line with the thus far developed understanding of language as expressive rather than designative Wittgenstein maintains that “the term ‘language-game’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life.” (Wittgenstein, 1974, §23, p.11) In this sense language is transformed from a pre-existing system to be explored to a form of interaction with potentially unlimited usages. The possibilities that are expressed in *Dasein*’s existential form and the subsequent ways of being (what Wittgenstein might call ‘forms of life’) are expressed in different and varying language-games, each with its own rules and system of meaning. In this sense language is always open ended, or to put it in more Heideggerian terms, language is open towards *Dasein*. As Wittgenstein explains: “But how many different sentences are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are countless

kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new kinds of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten (Wittgenstein, 1974, §23: 11) In this conceptualisation Wittgenstein denies us the possibility to relate to the world in a clear subject-object scheme which would allow the discovery of the world in its actual state. Reality vanishes in Wittgenstein and is transformed into and confined to a linguistic realm whose rules are in constant flux as the participants are on the one hand following the existent rules of the language-game but at the other hand, through this use, are involved in changing these very rules. (see for instance Mauws and Phillips, 1995: 325) “Meaning is use, though a word’s meaning is not determined by its use, not even by the sum of all its possible or actual uses. Rather, the question of determination does not even arise. Meaning is situated in a given context but not determined by it.” (Shaviro, 1986: 224) This context is hereby not to be understood as existing separately or even logically or temporally preceding the production of meaning. “Relations and contexts are matters, not of determination, but of production. Although relevant context is always needed in order to give sense to a particular utterance or action this by no means implies that the context logically or structurally precedes the given instance.” (ibid.)

The meaning given to a word is therefore never fixed but only achieves a punctual or contextual meaning in which “the use of words teach[es] you their meaning.” (Wittgenstein, 1974: 220) Wittgenstein’s conception of language as dispersed into different language-games and his concomitant grounding of meaning in the contextual use of words and propositions shares again many aspects with phenomenological thought on language. (for a detailed study of these similarities see Gier, 1981) For one,

“Wittgenstein’s analysis of ostensive definition, which shows that this type of definition cannot be the primary way to learn the meaning of words because understanding it is parasitic on knowledge of the language, corresponds to Heidegger’s qualification of the ‘objective’ attitude to the world as a deficient mode of a more fundamental indwelling-in-the-world.” (Philipse, 1992: 255) Very similar arguments can indeed be found in different thinkers of the phenomenological tradition. For Merleau-Ponty for instance “the most outstanding feature of the linguistic sign does not reside in the fact that the signifier and the signified constitute two discontinuous orders, nor that the former comes to break the continuity between consciousness and its ‘object,’ but on the contrary that the two are continuous, that the corporeity of language disappears in the very fact of its utterance.” (Donato, 1970: 808) The quest for a universal essence that lies at the heart of language (in the abstract sense) is under these considerations a futile undertaking since a formulaic conceptualisation of language could never live up to the manifold instance of contextual use and meaning. “If universality is attained [...] [i]t will be through an oblique passage from a given language that I speak and that initiates me into the phenomenon of expression, to another given language that I learn to speak and that effects the act of expression according to a completely different style – the two languages (and ultimately all given languages) being contingently comparable only at the outcome of this passage and only as signifying wholes, without our being able to recognize in them the common elements of one single categorial structure.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 84)

The notion of 'game' in linguistic practice

Even more important in respect to the parallels between the later Wittgenstein and phenomenological thought on language appears to be Gadamer's use of the notion of 'game' or 'play' in his own writings. The first hint of this notion of play and its centrality in Gadamer can be found even before the introduction to *Truth and Method*.

At the beginning of the book we find a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke which seems worth quoting here:

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill an little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your centre, in an arch
from the great bridgbuilding of God;
why catching then becomes a power –
not yours, a world's. (Gadamer, 1979)

As we can already see the notion of play is not just a form of interaction between two or more subjects; the game itself presents something that reaches beyond the players and engulfs them – catching becomes a power, not of an individual but the power of a world.

Gadamer starts his elaborations on the notion of play in the first part of *Truth and Method* where he contemplates the shortcomings of the many approaches in aesthetics that deny art any truth value on its own. Indeed, as Gadamer claims, the interpretation of art has been completely decoupled from the purely scientific understanding of truth. This argument and the wider ramification of the quest for truth will be discussed in more detail in chapter V. What is of interest at this point is Gadamer's introduction of the notion of play (or game, depending on the translation of the German word *Spiel*) in chapter two of *Truth and Method*. As Gadamer formulates: "I select as my starting point

a notion that has played a major role in aesthetics; the concept of play. I wish to free this concept from the subjective meaning which it has in Kant and Schiller and which dominates the whole of modern aesthetics and philosophy of man.” (Gadamer, 1979: 91)

We can see here already that Gadamer aims at giving significance to the notion of play beyond a mere aesthetic experience. The notion of play in relation to art has not been introduced by Gadamer himself but is in fact taken from Johann Gottfried Herder’s discussion of play in *Kalligone*. (Burwick, 1990: 60) But although the initial scope of the notion of play, both in Heidegger and Gadamer, deals with the encounter with a work of art, it has hermeneutic significance beyond this realm in our everyday encounter with other human beings in different contexts. Games constitute specific realms with a clear normative content. To play a game is to follow rules, to act in specifically defined ways. “Playing a game involves not only entering a different reality but, more importantly, submitting to its norms and requirements. Games comprise a set of rules and principles to which participants must adhere and which at least partially determine those participants’ own goals and aspirations. The game thus has authority over its players and even specifies a range of appropriate attitudes and responses.” (Warnke, 1987: 49) Gadamer is adamant that the nature of play cannot be grasped in its entirety by only looking at the subjective reflections of the players. “Our question concerning the nature of play itself cannot, therefore, find an answer if we look to the subjective reflection of the player to provide it.” (Gadamer, 1979: 92; see also Burwick, 1990: 62) Gadamer here clearly reacts against the Cartesian notion of agency in which any agent is conceptualised as disengaged and therefore able to step back from her experience and describe this experience in an objective and neutral way. What Gadamer

demands instead is an ontological understanding of game that can only be achieved by “enquiring into the mode of being of play as such” (Gadamer, 1979: 92), in other words through a phenomenological analysis of play. The mode of the being of play as such is characterised by the oddness “that, on the one hand [games] have authority over their participants, determining their goals and aspirations for the duration of the game, while on the other they exist in a concrete sense only through the participation of their players. A game both determines the actions of its players and is nothing other than these actions themselves.” (Warnke, 1987: 50)

We can see here clear parallels to Wittgenstein’s concept of language-games. As pointed out above language-games draw their participants into a normatively regulated speech situation. This contextual linguistic situation and the rules that characterise it is not a static one. The language-game as game is only constituted through the interaction of the participants. It does not exist in any meaningful sense outside or prior to the engagement of the participants but at the same time must in its normative contents be understood by the participants before constituting an instance of the game. This leads to the peculiar situation in which “[t]he players thus ‘create’ the particular instance of the game although, at the same time, they could not create or play it if it did not already exist.” (ibid.) Likewise, games or language-games in particular are not normatively stagnant. Again the notion of game helps to make this point very clear. Although a game has a set of rules and regulations each instance of the game leads to different outcomes. No game will exhibit exactly the same sequence of events or the same consequences and outcomes. The players enter the game not neutrally but already equipped with contextually dependent aims and objectives that they try to realise during the game. How the different aims and objectives are being played out is by no means

predictable but depends on the perceptions and judgment of the participants – Gadamer refers to this as the to-and-fro movement. (Gadamer, 1979: 96; see also Burwick, 1990: 62 and Warnke, 1987: 48) “This suggests a general characteristic of the way in which the nature of play is reflected in an attitude of play: all playing is a being-played. [...] Even when it is a case of games in which one seeks to accomplish tasks that one has set oneself, there is a risk whether or not it will ‘work’, ‘succeed’, and ‘succeed again’, which is the attraction of the game. [...] The real subject of the game [...] is not the player, but instead the game itself.” (Gadamer, 1979: 95-6)

Furthermore, not only is each instance of the game different but also the normative framework of the game, the rules that regulate it, might be and continuously are subject to change. The participants willingly or unwillingly alter the game by playing it. Old rules and meanings constantly give way to new rules and meanings. The new rules and meanings are not externally and vertically imposed but rely upon an intersubjective dynamic of acceptance or rejection. Therefore the game that is manifested only through being-played is always already beyond the players who participate in it. There is never a situation in which the play can be mastered and fully understood in a theoretical sense. The constant change that is perpetuated by playing the game forbids any notion of finality in respect to understanding and mastering each instance.

“We have seen that games have a priority over their players since their norms and purposes dominate the players. At the same time, however, a game is not simply that which is codified in a book of rules or reflected in a set of strategies; it is rather that which is played. Thus, despite the dominance of the game over those that play it, their playing it remains essential to it. For this reason, Gadamer calls games ‘self-representations’.” (Warnke, 1987: 50)

The conceptualisation of ‘tradition’ and ‘form of life’

The final important parallel between Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and phenomenological thought on language can be seen in the commonalities to be found in Wittgenstein’s abovementioned notion of ‘forms of life’ and Gadamer’s use of the term tradition. At the same time these two terms will guide us into the main differences that remain between Wittgenstein and phenomenological conceptions of language, especially between Wittgenstein and Gadamer.

So far we have portrayed the later Wittgenstein as an anti-foundationalist philosopher that continued the tradition that sees language as an expression of what it is to be human, or at least we can say he moved close to it. We have to recognise that language as it is used in our everyday situatedness is always contextually embedded. The meaning words assume depends not on an abstract, formulaic and logical system of meaning but on the use of the words within a given context. We have also seen that Wittgenstein argues that there are many different contexts coinciding with the different social, political and cultural environments in which we live. Linguistic activities practiced in these environments or contexts Wittgenstein labelled language-games. “Wittgenstein’s concept of a language game is clearly to be set over and against the idea of language as a system of meaningful signs that can be considered in abstraction from its actual employment.” (McGinn, 1997: 44)

These language-games are, however, a part of the larger framework of human existence as such. Here again, Wittgenstein in the same vein as the post-Husserlian phenomenologists stands clear of an essentialist or foundationalist account. He acknowledges that the realm of human existence is as fragmented as are the linguistic

expressions that give meaning to it. “Wittgenstein [...] emphasises the multiplicity and heterogeneity of both language-games, and the social contexts of which they are a part. He thereby rejects the linguistic essentialism common to logicist views of language [...] and to semiotics and structuralism. A human ‘form of life’ is among other things inescapably linguistic; however, no grounds exist for privileging the linguistic aspects of a social formation over other dimensions of practice.” (Shaviro, 1986: 221) A form of life constitutes hereby the realm of human practices within a given context of which the linguistic part is one of the most important. Language is the main way of expressing intentions, actions and objectives about oneself, others and the environment. Language-games cannot be judged from a detached perspective to determine which language-game is richer or more developed or closer to some ideal. (Hinman, 1983: 346) The language-games themselves set the limits of judgment to those that are participating. These limits are constituted, however, as is the whole language-game, by linguistic practice rather than natural or logical necessities. This view ties in neatly with Wittgenstein’s notion of forms of life. “The idea of language as form of life [...] again serves to bring into prominence the fact that language is embedded within a horizon of significant, non-linguistic behaviour. Thus, just as the term ‘language-game’ is meant to evoke the idea of language in use within the non-linguistic activities of speakers, so the term ‘form of life’ is intended to evoke the idea that language and linguistic exchange are embedded in the significantly structured lives of groups of active human agents.” (McGinn, 1997: 51)

If we now turn once more to phenomenological thought we will indeed find close parallels to this conceptualisation of forms of life. Gadamer starts from the consideration of what is involved in the process of understanding, i.e. how meanings

evolve not from a certain base but are constituted by linguistic practices situated in different contexts. The conceptualisation of context here is similar to what Wittgenstein named ‘form of life’ and Gadamer termed tradition. “Gadamer follows Heidegger in anchoring understanding in the concerns of the interpreting subject or, as Heidegger puts it, in a structure of practical involvements. More emphatically than Heidegger, however, Gadamer locates this structure of involvements in history. This means that the issues we bring to the process of interpretation are not our preoccupation alone but rather refer to issues and concerns that have developed within the historical tradition to which we belong.” (Warnke, 1987: 78) In the same vein as Wittgenstein insists on the impossibility of a private language in line with much modern conceptualisations of Cartesian consciousness, “Interpretive understandings of the world (or texts) have no absolute grounding but they operate within the temporal unfolding of linguistic change.” (Lawn, 2006: 45) Gadamer thereby opens the notion of understanding to the public realm. Tradition for Gadamer provides an all-encompassing framework in which certain meanings emerge. In emphasising this notion of an all-enveloping tradition “Gadamer holds the Enlightenment responsible for both the negative connotations of the notion of prejudice and the negative implications of a recourse to the authority of tradition.” (Warnke, 1987: 75; see also Mendelson, 1979 and Scheibler, 2000: 9-70) Any attempt to delineate a specific meaning of an object or utterance is thereby already embedded in a pre-ontological understanding of the interpreting subject. Gadamer is here very much in line with the Heideggerian existential analytic in which the notion of agency appears as situated, engaged and involved in the world that always already is. Heidegger uses the three terms, *Vorgabe*, *Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff* to describe the involvement of human actors in a net of social and linguistic practises out of which

understanding arises. (Dreyfus 1991: 199-202; Heidegger, 1996: 214) There is no outside to this contextual situatedness no detached point from which objectified observation would be possible. “[Heidegger’s] point is that even before I begin consciously to interpret a text or grasp the meaning of an object, I have already placed it within a certain context (*Vorhabe*), apprehended it from a certain perspective (*Vorsicht*) and conceived of it in a certain way (*Vorgriff*). There is no neutral vantage point from which to survey the ‘real’ meaning of a text or object; even a scientific approach to an object places it within a certain context and takes a certain attitude towards it.” (Warnke, 1987: 77) Here we have reached the more elaborate depiction of our initial critique on Wendt and Wight who overlook the crucial situatedness out of which all attempts to access and understand the world are made. With Gadamer we see that any such attempt always already relies upon a framework of understanding that we bring to the situation we wish to analyse. In this sense the scientific approach propagated by Wendt and Wight always comes to late as we have already understood the situation and can not leave our own contextuality.

Based on this Heideggerian starting point Gadamer combines Heidegger’s tripartite fore-structure of understanding in the word prejudice (*Vorurteil*) which literally translated means pre-judgment which conditions any attempt to understand and interpret the world. (Moran, 2000: 252) “Gadamer points out against the Enlightenment that prejudice (*Vorurteil*) literally simply means pre-judgement (*Vor-urteil*) or in other words, judgment made before all the evidence has been adequately addressed. [...] To assume that all prejudices are illegitimate and misleading as the Enlightenment does is, in Gadamer’s view, simply a ‘prejudice against prejudice’.” (Warnke, 1987: 76) Once more we encounter the common criticism common to both the later Wittgenstein and

Gadamer of the Enlightenment notion of detached agency and the concomitant conception of designative language. In this sense the Gadamerian notion of ‘tradition’ links very well with the Wittgensteinian ‘form of life’. Both insist on the situatedness of the subjects when it comes to the delineation of meaning. The context in which a word or proposition is uttered and the way in which it is used determine its meaning. There is no outside, no neutral point to this situatedness from which a logical or essentialist conception of language could depart. Furthermore, this context is not just a linguistic context nor should it be reduced to such; rather, the context provides a wide array of social practices of which the linguistic sphere is only one. “The social and the historical are principle features of the linguistic, we might say that we cannot sideline out engagement with language. At another level of generality, we might say that the linguistic, the social, and the historical are all constituents of an even greater whole, Gadamer calls collectively ‘tradition.’” (Lawn, 2006: 45) We have here clear parallels that can ultimately be derived from Wittgenstein’s and Gadamer’s (and thereby phenomenology’s) commitment to a thorough expressivist view of language that strongly combines a rejection of any foundationalist enterprise with a dedication to a linguistic situatedness coupled with the intersubjective and publicly achieved delineation of meaning. Put in a nutshell, this position can be found in Gadamer’s above-mentioned utterance: “Being that can be understood is language.” (Gadamer, 1979: 432)

Language and its role as the 'house of being'

So far we have depicted the major parallels that can be found in the thought of the later Wittgenstein as well as in post-Husserlian phenomenology referring to the work of Gadamer, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In order, however, to show that an appreciation of phenomenological thought on language moves beyond mere agreement and congruence to the later Wittgenstein we need to point out why a complimentary reading of both approaches could be central to a new social ontology. The focus will hereby lie with the differences that are important for our matter at hand.

The following section will therefore be confined to mainly two elements which could be seen as problematic in Wittgenstein. In the cases discussed here, the problematic nature does not so much arise out of opposing views but rather out of different foci and scope we encounter in Wittgenstein and phenomenological thought on language. The argument we would like to present here aims at supplementing the later thought of Wittgenstein and with phenomenological insights that seem to be complimentary to and illuminating for elements in Wittgenstein's thought that remain underdeveloped in his work. The points in question regard the notions of change or creativity and the role of historicity in experiencing the world.

In respect to the first point – change and creativity – Wittgenstein's account as we have seen above is not only open to change and constant evolution in the realm of language but sees such a proclivity towards change as one of the main features of language in its expressivist understanding. The language-games that we encounter and that are part of our everyday lives present hereby the normative framework in which we linguistically and more importantly existentially operate. As such language can only be found in the

public realm where the complexity of linguistic practices never fully resides in single consciousnesses as assumed in a designative approach. Rather, the meanings of words and propositions in different contexts are in flux and reshaped by the practices through which the ‘games’ are constituted.

Although Wittgenstein subscribes to a notion of change, there are some questions that still need to be answered. Even if it is clear that change can and does occur the question how it occurs or can occur is an interesting one to explore. According to Wittgenstein, human existence is centrally defined by our use of language and even more important by our embeddedness in language-games. These language-games depend on the one hand on the social roles that the subjects participating have and on the other on the normative framework that governs meaning and establishes the rules of the particular game. Two ramifications of this conceptualisation seem important here. First, Wittgenstein contends that language-games exist as linguistic systems with clearly defined rules that are socially constituted. Any participant is on his or her entrance introduced or socialised into these rules and can subsequently meaningfully participate in the language-game. Language-games are also posited as necessarily transient since meanings and rules can and do change. Secondly, it follows from this conceptualisation that the participants once introduced to the rules of this game follow them without the need to interpret each single instance of rule-following. (on the relation between rules and interpretation see Fierke, 1998: 23-30)

Given these two characteristics of how Wittgenstein conceptualises his notion of language-game the first question to arise seems to be how change is induced in these systems of meaning. The obvious answer is that changes in meaning are introduced by socially shifting practices as to establish a different meaning for the same term in a

context. How, however, do we have to think about this change in practices. The rules guiding the meaning and appropriate behaviour within the language-game have to be changed and any change of rules in a system of meaning must imply a ‘violation’ of the rules themselves, otherwise change cannot occur. Now initially such a violation with the prospect of change is not necessarily problematic but it seems worth exploring by which means violations of rules and subsequently changes within in a language game are accepted or rejected. It arises the question of legitimacy at this point. One way to answer this question is by pointing towards the power relations within this language-game and stipulate in an almost Foucauldian fashion that the distribution of power among the participants lies behind changes in discourse. (Thiele, 1986: 248) This change, to be certain, might not turn out in the way it is initially intended but the fact that change occurs at all and this occurrence as a violation of existing rules is still possible, can be interpreted by a close intersection between discursive power and the probability to induce change.

As said, this intersection between power and change is only one possible way and it seems to solve the initial question as to how change is possible and can be legitimised in a system governed by certain rules. If we, however, take a closer look we would have to ask what kind of discursive power can introduce change and why exactly these circumstances are seen as legitimate to induce change. In other words, we would have to look into the rules that govern the change of rules. Because even if socially and politically powerful actors might be seen as able and in some instances legitimate to induce change, they are so not by nature but again by social practice. In Western societies right now, for instance, it is certainly possible to make an argument that key agents in the social and political realm are able to induce change, key agents in the

religious realm, however, are less likely to succeed. This constellation that allocates power and influence to a certain set of agents, however, arises itself out of the secular setting within the community under scrutiny. 500 years ago, religious authority was certainly perceived as being able to and legitimate in changing the meanings and rules of specific discourses and subsequently affect the social practices in which these appear. In other words, the ability to change the meaning of words and propositions within language-games must depend upon a deeper social stratum in which the rules for changing the rules are made, again based on social practices and intersubjective agreement. If we, however, stipulate, and we would argue such a stipulation is necessary if we do not want to fall back into a form of foundationalism here, that in order to grasp the process of changing rules regarding meanings and social practices we have to understand which rules guide this process of changing rules, we will end in an infinite regress. This is because even if we can identify rules that regulate the change of rules these rules themselves since they rely on social practices as well must generally be changeable. And if they are changeable we would have to ask again how does this change occur and what are the rules for changing the rules to change the rules and so on.

The point this is leading towards is the neglect of history and the treatment of first order rules in Wittgenstein's thought. If we understand human existence as inherently social and linguistic we would have to consider the wider realm in which particular language-games are embedded especially in cases in which rules and practices undergo change. Before we address this point further, however, it seems necessary to point out another potentially problematic feature in Wittgenstein's thought which is closely connected to the issue of first order rules. It lies with Wittgenstein's conception of the language-game

as a system of linguistic practices into which one can be socialised by internalising the rules and participating meaningfully in the game. Wittgenstein repeatedly points out that language-games are embedded in a form of life, a way in which a world is established and imbued with meaning. There are in fact five instances in the *Philosophical Investigations* in which Wittgenstein refers to ‘form(s) of life’. In four instances Wittgenstein speaks of ‘form of life’ (Wittgenstein, 1972: 8, 11, 88 and 174) in the singular and only once, at the very end of the *Philosophical Investigations* he uses the plural ‘forms of life’. (*ibid.*: 226) What Wittgenstein seems to suggest, and suggesting is the only thing he does since he is not elaborating on this notion of ‘form of life’ in any substantial manner, is that language-games are embedded and have to be situated in a larger context. This meaning becomes clear when he says: “And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.” (*ibid.*: 8) or “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.” (*ibid.*: 11) Two elements of Wittgenstein’s treatment of the notion of form of life seem worthwhile mentioning here. First, a form of life encompasses a number of language-games and secondly language as such is only part of a form of life which suggests that this form of life finds expression in other than pure linguistic practices. This seems to be somewhat at odds with his conceptualisation of language-games as systems of meaning with socially constituted rules. This is because Wittgenstein seems to suggest that we take part in language-games that seem semi-permeable in terms of normative content. On the one hand the agents can and do switch between different language-games but each time they change they enter a new world of meaning.

At first glance, this seems to make sense since language in Wittgenstein is needed to constitute a world and words and propositions can assume different meanings in

different contexts and also are guided in their use by different rules within different language-games. The concomitant picture of human linguistic practices, however, is rather kaleidoscopic as it suggests many different language-games and therefore many different ‘worlds’. The notion of ‘form of life’, however, as well as the actual experience of our existence suggests a perception of our environment as ONE world in which different roles and language-games are embedded. With Wittgenstein’s conceptualisation of monadic language-games, each of which constitutes a world of meaning and governing rules the question arises how such a perception of ONE world is achieved. This of course feeds also into an implicit notion of agency and Wittgenstein’s view on the human subject. It seems, although Wittgenstein again never elaborated on human subjectivity or agency in any depth, that the subject that is introduced and participating in different language-games is more or less split in different existences. If the language-games he or she takes part in constitute different realms of experience and practice, in other words constitute worlds for their participants, how is a unified perception of identity over time achieved? In fact there must be a background against which the subject is still able to perceive herself as self-identical over a period of time when partaking in different social and linguistic environments.

In conjunction with the argument regarding the notion of change outlined above, Wittgenstein himself seems to hint at a possible solution to the notion of change and the perception of one world and a concomitant emergence of a subject that perceives itself and is perceived by others as identical over time that avoids both a step back into foundationalism and an infinite regress. The ‘form of life’ appealed to sporadically in the *Philosophical Investigations* can be seen, as was argued above, in light of

Gadamer's notion of tradition thereby introducing a missing historical angle into Wittgenstein's thought. If a 'form of life' provides the background in which different language-games and practices develop and form a continuous perception of one world inhabited by subjects there have to be, however, some supplements to Wittgenstein's work in respect to the notions of historicity and linguisticality.

First, the historical dimension will overcome Wittgenstein's rather presentist outlook on language-games in which "language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten". (ibid.) In their embeddedness in a 'form of life' language-games cannot become obsolete in terms of meanings or be simply forgotten or inaccessible. They certainly can change and maybe abandoned in favour of other language-games but they will still exist within the 'form of life' in which they are embedded and out of which they arose. We can basically distinguish between active and deactivated language-games here. Deactivated language-games are thereby games that are no longer played but they are not forgotten in any meaningful sense. They might have contributed to inducing change into the system at one time and thereby live on in the change they helped to bring about.

Here, we reach a second amendment which can be made to Wittgenstein's thought in light of phenomenological insights, namely the linguistic interconnectedness of language-games. Although it is the case that language-games have rules and specific linguistic practices, the fact that subjects perceive themselves and are perceived as self-identical over time even when changing language-games, suggests that a cross-application of meanings and rules is possible and unavoidable. Agents participating in a language-game do not leave their involvement in other language-games and therefore their other identity facets behind but bring them to bear in each specific language-game.

It is necessary to take into account that although the players within a language-game seem to follow certain rules and practices they exist in a basic ontological sense beyond the language-game they are taking part in at the moment. Only in this way is it possible to understand the different motives, aims and objectives different players have in each language-game. Suggesting that participants in a language-game only focus on and exist within the scope of this game, i.e. exist only in the moment would ignore their historical being as well as suggest that they should share basic interests and identities arising out of this particular instance.

The important difference here lies with the insight that from the moment human beings are socialised into linguistic practices onwards they not just learn, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest, specific rules and meanings in language-games but they are in fact introduced to linguisticality itself which means they acquire a capacity to access and use the general disposition of human beings towards language as an existential characteristic of being.

Gadamer, indeed in much agreement with Wittgenstein, captures this component very well. For Gadamer a ‘form of life’ or in his terminology a tradition is a repository that includes all past language-games that have emerged out of this tradition. They might be no longer in use but they are still accessible and exert their influence in the present in form of the change they induced during their active phase. “At work here is what Gadamer calls ‘effective history’ (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) by which he means the operative force of the tradition over those that belong to it, so that even in rejecting or reacting to it they remain conditioned by it. [...] In either case, the interpreter remains subject to the hold of effective history, to the way in which the object has already been understood in the tradition to which he or she belongs.” (Warnke, 1987: 80) As

Merleau-Ponty reminded us in respect to the present and past of language: “Far from our being able to juxtapose a psychology of language and a science of language by reserving language in the present for the first and language in the past for the second, we must recognize that the present diffuses into the past to the extent that the past has been present.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 84)

The way we can still engage with this legacy of the past is certainly determined by and has to be situated in our current understanding of the world. Gadamer labels this engagement between two different elements of social practice ‘fusion of horizons’. (Risser, 1997: 80-1; Taylor, 2002: 133; Gadamer, 1979: 273-4) The original meaning might be lost but the words that are still known can assume a new meaning in the light of current circumstances and interpretations. Old or deactivated language-games still have meaning and are therefore not obsolete or forgotten. In Gadamer

“[h]orizons are fused in everyday linguistic encounters. Concerns draw the participants into dialogue and in the meeting both language and horizons are changed. A ‘fusion of horizons’ also takes place when one inevitably and unwittingly encounters the language-games of the past. For Gadamer past language-games are not repositories of redundant meanings. On the contrary, they sustain their effects in the present. Without past meanings, current meanings would be impossible. What makes the fusion of horizons possible is the assumed commonality of tradition.” (Lawn, 2006: 29)

In other words, language-games in Wittgenstein are framed by an intersubjectively created set of rules that lay down what is a meaningful utterance and under which circumstances it is meaningful in a given discourse. For Wittgenstein, as mentioned before, the fragmentation of linguistic practices is a fragmentation on the surface of day-to-day interaction only. It is based on an underlying agreement made manifest in regular linguistic activity which guides the speaker into an appropriate practice. There

is, however, on another level still a fragmentation between language games both thematically and temporally that Wittgenstein does not try to overcome.

Gadamer in this respect embeds his account of language again in his notion of tradition. As Chris Lawn points out for Gadamer “[t]here is no internalising of a set of rules for particular language-games, one is not merely socialised into the specifics of language but brought to linguisticality itself.” (ibid.: 27) From a Gadamerian perspective, Wittgenstein never advanced beyond the elementary stage of linguistic appropriation. Central for Gadamer is hereby the above-mentioned term of ‘fusion of horizons’. (ibid.: 29; Weinsheimer, 1985: 210-1) As he points out, all linguistic understanding takes place from within a specific horizon. Horizon here describes the totality of all that can be realised or thought about by a person at a given time in history and in a particular culture. In the everydayness of linguistic interaction it is the horizons of the speakers/texts involved that interact and in the attempt to reach an understanding of one another are fused. Hereby, each horizon that takes part in the dialogue is transfigured. Whereas “Wittgenstein sees only a logical relationship between rules and application Gadamer sees the hermeneutic circle in operation.” (ibid.,: 28)

It is important to understand that this historical background that is grasped in terms such as ‘form of life’ or ‘tradition’ is not an extra-existential structure that exists beyond human beings. Rather, in the same way particular language-games in Wittgenstein are constituted through practices, the tradition is constituted through current practices as well. Any participation in present language-games brings with it the whole of the tradition and expresses this tradition in the actual practices and rules which arise out of its totality. It is exactly in this sense that Gadamer reinterpreted and refined Heidegger’s

stipulation that being is essentially temporal by “equating the temporality of Being with the historicality of tradition...” (DiCenso, 1990: 32)

Overall we have to admit that in respect to the understanding and nature of language and its role in social and political discourse important work has already been done by quite a few scholar in IR influenced by the later Wittgenstein. Opposed to the designative understanding of language, in which words are representations of ideas of perceived objects developed in individual consciousness, the later Wittgenstein, as we have seen, proposed and followed a more expressivist understanding of language that was foreshadowed by the three Hs: Haman, Herder and Humboldt.

The above chapter presents the attempt to portray the scope and importance of language for the new social ontology developed here. We have seen that close parallels and commonalities can be drawn and developed between the later Wittgenstein and phenomenological approaches to language. Not only do the latter share the same conceptualisation of language as expressivity but they indeed exhibit corresponding terminologies as was shown in the case of ‘game’ or ‘play’ as well as in the case of Wittgensteinian ‘forms of life’ and the Gadamerian notion of ‘tradition’. We are reminded that language is more than a system of signs that can be used as a tool readily available in our project of mastering the world around us. Instead we are made sensitive to the ontological and existential dimension that every linguistic encounter brings with it. For the study of political and social relations on the international scene especially after the rise of influential non-state actors such a conceptualisation of language will help to grasp the elements of identity formation that have been proven to be so important in evaluating and understanding developments on the international stage. The

clear connection between any notion of identity and language as the medium through which these are expressed is much more substantial than portrayed in mainstream accounts. Not only are identities not induced from an exogenous source such as the structure of the international system and therefore conceived as being immutable. Language in this respect is also more than a simple tool that allows statements such as: "I am x." The notion of identity here is constructed out of an existential characteristic of human agency that relies upon the centrality of possibility. Any statement that tries to describe a feature of identity is at the time of its utterance always already beyond itself. It is the linguistic expression of past and the anticipation of future projections. Identity in this sense is in a constant process of re-definition and re-interpretation. Language expresses this fact by revealing not an essence of the human being or other beings she encounters (as for instance the conceptualisation of intransitive objects would presume) but the existential frame in which human agents engage with the world. This world that is expressed through notions of identity by the way of language is not there to be discovered. It is not the case that identities are to be projected as over and against a material environment which in some instance even assumes causal powers in identity formation. Rather the utterance involved in instances of self-interpretation brings the world along with it. Any statement of a human being is derived from the pro-ontological situatedness of the human agents out of which an interpretation of the world arises. In this view, and this is stressed by both the later Wittgenstein as well as post-Husserlian phenomenology, the world is constituted through linguistic practices of self-interpretation.

What this entails on a larger scale is of course the rejection of a clear-cut dichotomy between agent and structure or subject and object. If the world as interpretation is

constituted through linguistic practice it has no detached and independent standing in respect to the agent. Any question regarding the primacy of either agent or structure is hereby not only misguided and a fallback into Cartesianism, in a phenomenological understanding it is outright meaningless.¹⁰ Even instances that stress the ‘mutual constitution’ of agent and structure it has to be made clear that this does not simply mean that there exists a mere dialectic between two separate elements which are somewhat entangled and influence one another. Phenomenological conceptions of language as well as Wittgenstein’s later thought overcome these seeming opposites in which world is set over and against word. It is important to understand that the separation of word and world is a theoretically detached simplification of a much more existential and complex process. There cannot possibly be world without word since the constitution of any world is brought along in the social and linguistic practices of our everyday engagements.

The context out of which meaning arises, as we have seen in Wittgenstein and Gadamer, is not to be posited as prior in any sense. This seemingly leads to the abovementioned contradiction that the context of meaning is established through language but at the same time is needed for any linguistic engagement. This contradiction seems to suggest a fallback into some kind of dualism that in its simplest way is depicted by saying that past actions constituted a context which is now restricting our future actions and also provides a frame of reference for meanings.

Such an argument, however, is misguided in the light of the insights we have stated so far. Such a context would again be a structure that exists outside language as a

¹⁰ for a more elaborate depiction of the agency-structure problematique in light of the ontological arguments presented here see chapter VI.

repository of meanings in front of which we encounter ourselves and others. It would be principally graspable through abstraction and reflection – from there the step towards a half-hearted Cartesian account is a small one. Instead we have to understand that meaning in deed arises out of a speech community that provides a linguistic context (for lack of a better word) but since language in its expressivist view is always public and never private it transcends the individual in each instance of its use. What that means is that the context in which meaning arises is at the same time constituted by the individual and transcends her through the constitution and reiteration of the constituents of a speech community. The remnants of past linguistic encounters certainly have an influence but never independent of the individual language user. Rather, the way language is used in constituting the world and representing a certain self-interpretation of existential possibilities brings these past encounters with it in their entirety and makes them bear upon the world anew in every instance. It is not about structure and agency or about subject and object but about the realisation that language is constitutive of being as such. Heidegger would say that Dasein always brings the whole world with it and in this respect that “language is the house of being”. (Heidegger, 2007c: 237)

First in line stands of course the central function of language as the expressive medium through which we relate to the world and each other. In order to understand social relationships and the emergence of intersubjective meaning, identities and rules that govern these relations it is impossible to ignore this wider scope and different conceptualisation of language. On the other hand, the points raised above also remind us of the historicity of our being in a wider context. Although language is indeed a central characteristic of human existence and the prime medium through which relations and

self-interpretations are constituted we must not forget that even this central role of language is itself part of a variety of practices that define the social realm. The reduction of human existence to language use or purely linguistic practices forecloses a deeper and wider conceptualisation of other existentials. We are reminded of this wider scope even within the work of Wittgenstein when he maintains that “language is part of an activity, or a form of life.” (Wittgenstein, 1974, §23: 11)

Furthermore, phenomenological thought can certainly help to compliment Wittgenstein by focussing and elaborating more on the concept of linguisticality and creativity. In respect to linguisticality it seems necessary to move beyond the narrow analysis of language-games and how specific terms changed. In order to develop a broader understanding of the dynamics of change it is worthwhile first to take into account the role of first order rules and their embeddedness within a historically constituted form of life or tradition. Each instance of a present language game is so to say impregnated with past meaning in which light current rules and practices can be accurately understood.

Beyond the scope of language, however, or at least connected to it lie other elements that define and characterise the social and political involvements of human beings. We have already seen that an expressivist view of language also implies a specific form of agency, namely engaged agency. Wittgenstein himself did not enquire into the conditions and conceptualisations of other existentials of human being since his main occupation lay with language. What is needed, however, in any analysis of political and social events and relations is a conceptualisation of these other existentials. In this respect, phenomenological thought reminds us and delivers a wider and account of agency and as we will see of notions of freedom and truth that cannot be found in Wittgenstein. It is here that the claim for a complimentary reading of the later

Wittgenstein and post-Husserlian phenomenology becomes strongest. The ontological thought of many phenomenological thinkers explores elements of human being that remain necessarily shadowy when focussing on one thinker alone.

The final element that achieves a substantiation and expansion when being considered in the light of both the later Wittgenstein and phenomenological thought is the notion of change. In this respect a deeper and widened understanding of the range and historical situatedness of human creativity can be gained from insights drawn together from Wittgenstein's treatment of language and phenomenological thought on the wider theme of human existentiality which situates the potential for change in a specific conceptualisation of human being that looks well beyond the linguistic realm.

Doing this, both Wittgenstein and Gadamer grasp wider aspects in which particular language-games are situated and, as shown above, conceptualise it in the terms' form of life' or tradition. This tradition provides the totality (not in foundationalist sense though) out of which a pre-ontological understanding of the world and other beings arises. This totality, however, is not a fixed structure that determines what is possible and not possible outside the existence of the beings engaging with it and with each other. Instead, the tradition itself is constantly reshaped through the intersubjective practices that instantiate it. As such it can be conceptualised as autopoietic in its nature. Again the tradition in general as is the individual human being and the meanings and practices she adheres to is more characterised by possibilities and actualities. It is not possible to enquire into this tradition from an abstract or theoretical point of view. Every attempt to grasp the tradition is first always already situated within the tradition itself and secondly changes the tradition through the act of enquiry. What is contributes, however, is an advanced understanding of the situatedness of complex systems of

linguistic and social practices in this autopoietic totality of past actualities and future possibilities. Only against this background is the fusion of horizons and the constant amendment and reinterpretation of human existence explicable.

It is exactly because the tradition or form of life is not just a structural repository existing over and against the human being and conditions it but is instantiated repeatedly through practice that the ways in which it can be and is portrayed involves a constant interpretation of the environment in which rules are shaped and followed.

Such a conceptualisation of an autopoietic totality that is instantiated in every instance of practice and that provides the framework for our pre-ontological understanding (our understanding that we always already are in a world in which we know our way around in a practical sense) also involves a move beyond the sole focus on language towards the being of language as such – linguisticality. As outlined above, due to the larger scope of the philosophical endeavours of phenomenological thought, linguisticality describes one of the existential features of human existence. In learning and participating in language-games we are not just internalising specific rules and practices but the practical capacity, the ontological structure of language as such. From then on we are able not only to participate in language-games we have been introduced to or learn the rules of new language-games; our participation which is characterised by the very nature of our existentiality and thereby by the thrown-projections we constantly engage in is translated through linguisticality in concrete aims, objectives and interpretation which we bring to the language-games we engage in. Here we find the hub of human creativity. This creativity is not only dependent on our intersubjective engagement with each other but also and maybe more primordially our engagement with ourselves and the tradition we are part of. Creativity and change maybe realised in

intersubjective practices where horizons of existentiality are constantly fused but the very conditions that make such a form of change possible and lie at the heart of the creativity we encounter can only be found by moving to the fundamental ontological level that grasps the specific of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world. In this respect this chapter closes by emphasising once more that the points raised here are not meant to replace Wittgenstein's thought or even dismiss it. Rather, the complimentary appreciation of phenomenological insights on language relates to the larger picture of human existentiality that finds only rudimentary and peripheral consideration in Wittgenstein. We therefore want to argue for a wider scope and deeper situatedness of language in a form of life or tradition which is inseparably linked to particular instances of human interaction.

Whereas links to the conception of agency have already been made in the above lines, it remains to show how language relates to the notions of freedom and truth. To these themes we will turn now.

V Truth – Deconcealment of Being in the disclosure of worlds

We seek the essence of truth as the unhiddenness of beings in deconcealment, as a deconcealing occurrence upon whose ground man exists.

Martin Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 1929

Once known, truths acquire a utilitarian crust; they no longer interest us as truths but as useful recipes. That pure, sudden illumination which characterises truth accompanies the latter only at the moment of discovery. Hence its Greek name aletheia, which originally meant the same as the word apocalypsis later, that is, discovery, revelation or rather, unveiling, removing a veil or cover.

Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Quixote, 1914

In this third of the thematic chapters the argument advances to probably the most contentious theme related to our enquiry – the notion of truth. Having outlined the complexity of the human involvement in a world in terms of agency and the central relation to this world through an expressivist understanding of language we now must consider the nature of the insights and knowledge that can be obtained through our involvement in the world. In other words we must proceed to the crucial question of how knowledge claims relate to the contextuality and historicality of our existence – the question of truth.

Throughout the modern period the quest for reliable truth in form of universally valid and necessary propositions proved to be a main element in philosophical enquiries. (Heidegger, 1996: 198; Shell, 1977: 549) As will be shown in the first section below, truth in most conceptualisations was either taken to mean correspondence or coherence. Something was seen as true either if correspondence between mind and an object of knowledge or coherence of a proposition to a network of propositions was achieved. It proved, however, harder than expected at the outset to bridge the gap between mind and nature. Descartes may have initially been successful in securing a starting point by insisting on the indubitable existence of our mind that thinks but how such a mind is ever able to confirm extra-mental existence and therefore establish truth outside its own mental states remained a problem.

Apart from this particular problem Descartes laid the foundations, as was shown above, for other commitments such as the view of disengaged agency and a designative conception of language. The notion of truth was practically guided by the huge successes of the natural sciences which proved vital in the ever expanding quest of modern humanity to conquer and control nature. (Bauman, 1978: 10-1) In many instances direct links and analogies were put into place to show the validity of scientific methods for delivering insights into the social and political world. The field of IR was not left out hereby but came under the spell of such scientific approaches early on. The challenge that we are concerned with in the current enquiry, however, drew from sources that denied the possibility to achieve truth about human relations and human existence in general by relying upon such a scientific notion of truth.

This short overview, however, paints a somewhat distorted or at least simplified picture of the matters and discussions about the notion of truth in IR and the wider field of philosophy. In fact, it seems somewhat hard to fathom the manifold nuances that guide the discussion regarding matters of truth. It seems therefore necessary to map out the differences somewhat more carefully and stress the more or less heuristic value of such an exercise. Pointing towards a ‘mere’ heuristic value, however, does not undermine the strength and depth of the discussion to follow since at the end we will show that a primordial notion of truth grounds or prefigures the different shades that cannot be elaborated upon here in all detail.

The problem in dealing with matters of truth, however, remains to haunt even a heuristic map of differences unless we can find a way to depict the breadth of discussion without losing too much of its depth. The way that will be followed here takes its starting point from an influential and thoughtful discussion on matters of truth and concomitant problems sketched out by Bernard Williams. (1997) As Williams rightly observes the tension which will accompany most accounts of truth lies in the contradiction between truthfulness and truth. As he points out:

“Two currents of ideas are very prominent in modern thought and culture. On the one hand, there is an intense commitment to truthfulness – or, at any rate, a pervasive suspiciousness, a readiness against being fooled, an eagerness to see through appearances to the real structures and motives that lie behind them. [...] Together with this demand for truthfulness, however, ... there is an equally pervasive suspicion about truth: whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind; altogether, whether we should bother about it, in carrying on our activities or in giving an account of them.” (Williams, 2004: 1)

Surely, these two tendencies in modern thought are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact they can complement each other in cases where the denial of any meaningful

notion of truth is framed in the demand for truthfulness, i.e. to give up the notion of truth out of a desire to be ‘true’ to that fact that there is no truth. On other hand, the relation between truth and truthfulness in these cases gets complicated since any account on why it is meaningless to talk about ‘the truth’ or ‘Truth’ must rely upon a line of reasoning that itself implies a claim to truth. “The tension between truthfulness and the doubt that there is (really) any truth to be found comes out in a significant difficulty, that the attack on some specific form of truth ... itself depends on some claims or other which themselves have to be taken to be true.” (ibid.: 2) Besides the question arises that if we are truthful in a denial of Truth, i.e. “[i]f you do not really believe in the existence of truth, what is the passion for truthfulness a passion for? Or – as we might also put it – in pursuing truthfulness, what are you supposedly being true to?” (ibid.)

It is one thing to claim that universal and necessary insights cannot be reached when looking at social and political dynamics but quite another to abandon the notion of truth altogether. If so-called post-positivist scholars rely in their research on specific philosophical insights or conceptualisations such as Wittgensteinian linguistics, the interesting question arises whether they hold what Wittgenstein says to be actually true. Or in more general terms, are the reasons given for an anti-foundationalist and ‘post-positivist’ conceptualisation of the political and social world true; can they be true and what are they true to? If yes, then we would have to say a little bit more about the way in which they can be true and on which basis they can be seen as sincere examples of scholarship; what notion of truth do we actually encounter here? If not, then we certainly are in the odd situation to put forward reasons to proceed with our enquiries in a specific way but are unable to ‘authorise’ them in any meaningful sense.

The problem with the critique of any particular claim to truth in the interpretation of social circumstances lies simply with the fact that “it leaves the critics themselves with no authority, since they need to tell a tale (a lot of detailed tales, in fact) to justify *that* tale . . . They also need a tale to explain why they are in a position to tell it.” (ibid.: 8)

Lastly, if a piece of research relies upon theoretical and methodological commitments that avoid the notion of truth, what does this piece of research represent? How are we supposed to deal with the claims, assumptions, reasons and insights provided in this example of scholarship? If we stringently deny the applicability of any notion of truth to this piece of work, are we supposed to see it merely as an opinion, almost a work of art? In such a conceptualisation we are not even able to determine the worth of different competing insights dealing with the same object; if there is no system of judgment in place every decision as to what piece of research represents a ‘clearer’ or ‘better’ account of the matter at hand is impossible or at least arbitrary (one could even go so far as to say that at the end of the day it is also impossible to determine what actually constitutes a piece of scholarship in general).

We can already see here that the notion of truth is a problem not easily disposed of. In our pursuit of truthfulness – and arguably the academic endeavour is one in which truthful and sincere accounts should be reached – implies and relies on a notion of truth that cannot simply be shut out from our enquiries. As Williams rightly points out, for every position regarding the conception of the notion of truth “[w]e need to understand that there is indeed an essential role for the notion of truth in our understanding of language and of each other.” (ibid.: 6) In short, we can see that the mere abandonment of the notion of truth does not overcome problems we face in social research but rather

produces new problems on other levels. It is hereby important to note that although explicitly the notion of truth might not be discussed openly in a system of thought, we find assumptions that are taken to hold. To be sure, that does not automatically and necessarily include a commitment to a scientific notion of truth which would claim that what this kind of scholarship produces is in fact universally valid and necessarily the case. What it does entail, however, is the apparent conviction that these approaches are first of all valid ways to enquire into the matter at hand and secondly that they produce insights that can be framed as adding to our knowledge. The question then is what makes these insights ‘insightful’ if it is not the production of scientific truth. The argument followed in the subsequent chapters will be that the worth of this kind of scholarship lies with its production of a different and one might say more primordial form of ‘truth’ – truth that emerges out of the already described conceptualisation of human embeddedness in social and linguistic contexts. In line with the argument as it developed so far we will therefore immerse into another dimension of *Dasein* in order to discern the relation between being and truth.

In light of this the following sections aim to provide a new engagement with the notion of truth and a demonstration that first truth based on realist or idealist conceptions is a historically specific conceptualisation of truth and by no means timeless and binding. Secondly, by retrieving the plurality of meanings connected to the notion of truth the chapter progresses to a phenomenological enquiry into the notion of truth at the end of which a more primordial notion of truth as unhiddenness and appropriation will be presented. The answer that will be developed in the following sections as towards the meaning of truth is that truth describes the unhiddenness of beings in the deconcealment of being. Finally, the last section will show how such a notion of truth is compatible

with forms of historical and contextual knowledge and at the same time is also able to answer the paradoxical questions raised above.

Truth as correctness and approximation – A derivative concept of truth

The notion of truth as mentioned above is certainly one of the most central and most debated in past and present philosophical endeavours. We cannot aim at delivering a complete and exhaustive overview of all the different approaches to truth from the ancient world to the present nor is this necessary. For our purposes it seems sufficient to portray the main contemporary contenders and show their commonalities before moving on to a consideration of a different approach to tackle the question on the nature of truth which relies upon a strong notion of anti-foundationalism.

In our depiction of the main approaches to truth that can be found in the modern period and that are linked back to earlier accounts in many ways we will draw attention to the correspondence theory of truth on the one hand and the coherence theory of truth on the other. The correspondence theory of truth can hereby be linked to a philosophical realism and the coherence theory of truth to philosophical idealism or at least to an anti-realism. Or alternatively one could say that

“[c]orrespondence and coherence, as theories of truth, both have their advantages. To the plain man and to the monistic philosopher each gives a comfort of peculiar warmth. To the one it is the comfortable assurance that as a man grows older he gets into his head the ‘hang’ of the real world; that as he becomes possessed of more and more truths inside him, as it were, so is he increasingly master of the things outside him. [...] The monistic philosopher’s joy, some would say, is of a nobler sort, akin, perhaps, to the joy of the mystic. To him nothing is perfect save the All; not truth is true unless it becomes Truth; and this Truth again is something which is thought, somehow, to transcend the truth which we usually think of as realised in

knowledge, to become Being, a self-subsistent self-consistent Experience.” (Reid, 1922: 18)

And although these two conceptualisations offer completely different readings of the notion of truth, they nevertheless share certain commitments which are rooted in a deeply modern sentiment deriving from the original formulation of truth or to be more precise of what is true emerging with Descartes.

In the following lines we will look at the differences and similarities between these two approaches to the notion of truth. Since our focus is guided by the endeavour to develop a phenomenological notion of truth the depiction of the correspondence and coherence theories of truth will only be taken as far as suffices for the current purpose.

The correspondence theory of truth

The first notion and concept of truth that will be presented here is the most common approach in the modern period especially throughout the 20th century – the correspondence theory of truth. Generally, the correspondence theory of truth can be conceptualised along the lines of common sense. The theory in its most simple and almost naïve form stipulates that truth describes and is characterised by a correspondence between an idea or state of mind and an object in the world or a fact. “According to the theory, a true proposition corresponds and agrees with, and a false proposition fails to correspond or disagrees with, its fact.” (Ratner, 1935: 142)

As such the correspondence theory relies upon a form of philosophical realism since the comparison must take place with an idea or judgement uttered from a human agent and a mind-independent world or reality to which this thought corresponds. “Anyone who

asserts that a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to the facts commits himself to a form of realism, or at least to a denial of idealism. But this form of realism is minimal in the sense that it is merely a necessary condition of a statement's correspondence to fact that there should be an independent world." (Hamlyn, 1962: 204)

The correspondence theory of truth is accordingly in line with the continuing search for indubitable instances of knowledge and truth on which subsequent claims can be based. In this sense the correspondence theory presupposes two main points. "The first is, that in 'truth' there is always a duality involved; on the one hand 'ideas,' and on the other a reality which is existentially different from the ideas, and known only through them as medium. And in the second place, it holds that if we are to know the nature of this reality 'truly,' it must in so far correspond to our ideas of it." (Rogers, 1919: 67) Correspondence is established through a process of combination and separation at the end of which the status of the relation between idea and object is either confirmed or denied. "Because philosophers have often been interested in the search for certainty, the Correspondence Theory of Truth has often been fitted to the task of providing a means of finding out for certain whether a proposition is true – a test of truth. (Hamlyn, 1962: 200)

As such the origin of the correspondence theory of truth is by no means a modern development but can be traced back in its rudimentary form to Aristotle. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle explains truth in the following way: "To say that what is the case is the case and what is not the case is not the case is truth, while to say that what is the case is not the case, or that what is not the case is the case, is falsehood." (Aristotle,

1993: 123) In this simple form the correspondence theory of truth is understandably appealing. For simple statements, that is for statements that express a correspondence between a simple sense perception and an object perceived the theory seems undeniable. Throughout the history of philosophy this notion of truth as correspondence has been purported and defended by many seminal and influential thinkers. John Locke, for instance, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* follows a general trajectory of the correspondence theory. Truth and falsehood arise out of a specific process of understanding in which judgments are passed. These judgments refer either to corresponding notions in several minds if we talk about abstract concepts such as justice or to a corresponding notion between an idea and an object in the external world. It seems important to note that for Locke, ideas, complex or simple, can never be false. Ideas, in Locke's sense, are only appearances and states of the mind which seen in themselves cannot be true or false. "For our *ideas*, being nothing but bare appearances and perceptions in our minds, cannot properly and simply in themselves be said to be *true* or *false*, no more than a single name of anything can be said to be *true* or *false*." (Locke, 1972: 326) Notions of truth and falsehood only arise for Locke at the moment the mind proceeds to pass judgments about the relation either between two ideas or an idea and an object. (ibid.)

A similar attitude can be seen in certain quarters of early positivism and analytical philosophy. One of its leading thinkers, Bertrand Russell, also adhered to a correspondence notion of truth. In *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* Russell lists four different types of theory regarding the notion of truth the fourth one of which he identifies as correspondence. "IV. The correspondence theory of truth, according to which the truth of basic propositions depends upon their relation to some occurrence,

and the truth of other propositions depends upon their syntactical relations to basic propositions. For my part, I adhere firmly to this last theory." (Russell, 1940: 289)

There are, however, quite a few problems connected with these conceptualisations of what we take as being true. First comes obviously the problem of bridging the gap between a state of the mind and the external world. If we follow Descartes here for a moment, and a lot of connections have been made between Cartesian philosophy and the correspondence theory of truth, we encounter that Descartes had characterised two different types of 'stuff' (*res*). On the one hand we find the material world which Descartes described as *res extensa* on the other we have the mind which Descartes labelled *res cogitans*, the thinking thing. As we can already see these two types of things or 'stuff' are separated from one another in their elemental characteristics. "[I]f this is so then the two expressions of an Idea, the two wholes, the two systems, one 'mental', one 'real', are, because different in 'material', incomparable to one another." (Reid, 1922: 21)

The question therefore remains how a correspondence between these completely different types of 'stuff' can successfully be established. And even if such a bridging is achieved in one way or another, the additional question on how to establish this connection as certain and indubitable, as required by the correspondence theory, is left open.

Secondly, it has been pointed out that the correspondence theory in its traditional guise is open to charges of triviality and circularity. In respect to circularity the correspondence theory does not seem to get out of a mutual dependency in meaning of

facts and truth. If we, as the theory states, assume that truth is reached by comparing the facts we have with the reality, we face a conundrum. First we have to ask: “What function ... does the Correspondence Theory serve?” (Hamlyn, 1962: 198) So far we would say that the correspondence theory addresses the question ‘When is a proposition true?’ and the answer would be ‘If it corresponds to the facts’. But “[i]t is impossible, ..., to elucidate the nature of fact-stating discourse – what it is to state facts – without circularity. Facts are merely what true statements state and true statements state facts.” (ibid.)

Out of this circularity which arises between the notion of true statements or propositions and facts or states of affairs arises the concomitant problem of triviality. If true statements state facts and facts are just what true statements state the correspondence theory turns out to be trivial in respect to the establishment of truth. “The dilemma we are involved in by the correspondence theory is inescapable. Before we have the fact, to compare the proposition with it is, of course, impossible. And to compare the proposition with the fact, after we have established the fact is trivial, as far as determining truth is concerned, because such comparison presupposes that we already possess the truth.” (Ratner, 1935: 145)

There have been numerous responses and refinements to respond to these two general points and it is not necessary or fruitful to trace the different ways to respond to allegations of circularity or triviality at that point as it would lead us to far astray in our current endeavour. The one point of criticism, however, that is of interest to us is the as of yet unresolved challenge formulated by adherents of the coherence theory of truth.

As Harold Joachim, one of the foremost spokesmen of a coherence approach at the beginning of the 20th century pointed out, a correspondence exactly because it relies upon a notion of philosophical realism describes essentially a relation between an idea or proposition and an object. The comparison involved is therefore always directed towards something external. This relation, however, is never finally and satisfactorily developed and explicated. It rather seems that a correspondence theory of truth “involves external relations, both the relation of knowledge between mind and object, [...], and between terms in a judgment. The terms are simples, independent of their relations, the same before as after being related, and the relations are like links between carriages in a train” (Reid, 1922: 20) Correspondence is thought in terms of indubitable certainty as it pertains to individual knowledge claims. What adherents to such an account overlook, however, is its embeddedness in a much larger context which provides the conditions that makes any notion of correspondence meaningful and comprehensible. The pre-eminence of affirming a certain, i.e. indubitable, knowledge and thereby building a secure base for relating to the world has led to an exclusive focus on the specificity of particular propositions and knowledge claims that either can be affirmed or denied. The wider context, however, on which the propositions qua propositions depend, remained outside the purview of correspondence accounts. It seems, however, that the mind that in Aristotle, Descartes and Locke “determines the relation constituting truth, is not simply an immediately focused discursive faculty that engages in processes of analysis and synthesis. Rather, the human mind brings to bear pre-given conceptual and perspectival configurations upon any apprehension of perceptual givens. These involve past experience and memory, including theoretical

training and methodological approaches derived from particular points of departure and intended goals or ends.” (DiCenso, 1990: 13)

It seems therefore important to include the contextual conditions out of which the possibility for a correspondence theory arises in the very act of establishing any notion of truth. Reality and its interpretation is not just objectively given but always historically conditioned. Questions dealing with such fundamental notions as what counts as a judgment, what kind of knowledge is obtainable and worth pursuing and by what means necessarily penetrates the individual assessment of knowledge claims as towards their truth or falsity. A proposition alone can never be meaningfully understood or even labelled true or false without considering the historical conditionalities which determine the very notions of truth and falsity. “The nature of an experience of correspondence, therefore, will be determined by the context within which the elements of the correspondence are being approached and apprehended. [...] No correspondence can occur without the operation of some prior conceptual frame of reference that provides the standard of measure that makes specific judgments possible.” (ibid.: 14)

Such a line of reasoning of course leads to a shift in focus when it comes to the determination of truth. Truth in a meaningful and encompassing sense can under these considerations not lie with individual propositions but must be allocated to the level of the system of thought which holds the framework of the conditionality of truth in place. “[T]ruth depends primarily on something other than correspondence – on something which itself conditions the being and the nature of correspondence.” (Joachim, 1906:

The coherence theory of truth

The main rival to the just portrayed correspondence theory of truth has commonly become known as the coherence theory of truth. Generally put the coherence theory of truth “claims that the truth of a statement consists in its coherence with a system of statements.” (Dauer, 1974: 791) In the same way as the correspondence theory, the coherence theory is not a recent conceptualisation but developed over a much longer time span and is inspired by the thought of such eminent philosophers as Spinoza and Hegel.

The point of departure in most accounts of the coherence theory is a critique of the correspondence notion of truth. The primary target is the above shown preoccupation of the correspondence theory with establishing truth in respect to specific knowledge claims and propositions. As was argued, correspondence approaches to truth commonly neglect to appreciate the wider context out of which the conditions for truth-judgments arise. Different systems of knowledge will lead to different propositions and different truth conditions. “A truth that is determined within a context of value-free scientific inquiry may appear quite different within the context of an ethical inquiry, and so on.” (DiCenso, 1990: 14)

Followers of the coherence theory question the dualism inherent in correspondence account by stipulating that the independence of mind and nature cannot just be assumed. In this respect it is fair to say that followers of a coherence account, although they might not necessarily be idealist in outlook, are at least anti-realists. As Joachim put it: “But this severance of the experienced Real from the experiencing of it, is the very mistake ...; whilst, if truth be thus located in a sphere of being apart from mind, it is difficult to

see how science can in any sense be true. [...] Science would be ‘true’, so far as its system of demonstrations reconstructs – i.e. *repeats or corresponds to* – the systematic coherence which *is* the truth as a character of the Real.” (Joachim, 1906: 69)

Instead of a separation of mind and nature the coherence theory posits a systemic approach in which the notion of truth is defined by the degree to which a proposition fits with other propositions about nature in a given system. “Truth in its essential nature is that systemic coherence which is the character of a significant whole. A ‘significant whole’ is an organised individual experience, self-fulfilling and self-fulfilled.” (ibid.: 76)

Such an approach leads to different levels of truth. A single judgment or proposition is never true in itself but always embedded in a larger truth. The coherence theory is therefore characterised by “the dependency of all truth-statements upon a process of systematic universalization, which incorporates them into an overriding conceptual framework and which provides the basis for the determination of truth.” (DiCenso, 1990: 22) Truth proper is only the whole of the system, that which in Spinoza is the one substance he calls God or Nature and becomes the Absolute in Hegel.

Spinoza’ approach to truth must be seen in light of his thought developed in the *Ethics* (2000) Here he delivered the first account of a purely rationalistic and mechanistic conceptualisation of philosophy by overcoming the so far dominant relation between a transcendent God and an immanent creation. God in Spinoza is necessarily synonymous with Nature. (Spinoza, 2000: 226) God as the only substance cannot create anything that is outside himself, therefore the only logical conclusion for Spinoza would be that God

actually *is* Nature – the creator and the creation cannot be distinguished or exist distinct from one another.

Within this all-encompassing system, however, we can conceive truth and knowledge only as always already embedded in the system as a whole. Single propositions derive their truth and meaning only from the overarching whole in which they are embedded as moments. As such a truth of a proposition depends on the mode of enquiry from which it is derived. Spinoza distinguishes three degrees of truth dependent on three different kinds of knowledge which he calls imagination, reason and intuition. (Spinoza, 2000: 148-9; Parkinson, 2000: 32-37)

Spinoza's conceptualisation of knowledge and the connection between particular knowledge claims and the whole system exemplifies the main arguments of a coherence theory of truth. As Joachim notes, “[n]ow the monistic system of Spinoza stands out in the history of philosophy as representing the kind of position which we have been trying to develop and maintain. [...] For we shall be studying a philosophy in which the notion of coherence obtains definite form and systematic development... .” (Joachim, 1906: 148)

A further even more refined account that is often taken to exhibit the main strands of a coherence theory of truth is the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel developed an account of truth that is thoroughly reliant upon contextuality and the historical situatedness of knowledge and human existence. “Even the ordinary, the ‘impartial’ historiographer, who believes and professes that he maintains a simply receptive attitude [...] brings his categories with him, and sees the phenomena presented to his mental vision, exclusively through these media.” (Hegel, 2004: 11) Hegel postulates that the knowledge obtained, although bound to the categories out of which it arose, will to a

certain degree represent the world as such. “We may come to the world predisposed by our reason to see it in a certain way, but the structure of our rational concepts and categories is identical with, and thus discloses, the structure of the world itself, because we ourselves are born into and so share the character of the world we encounter.” (Houlgate, 1991: 8)

The compatibility between history and truth in Hegel relies upon his stipulation that the historical particularities at large represent the movement of humanity towards self-conscious freedom. What Hegel calls the Absolute, the identity of identity and non-identity, is the principle that through self-alienation gradually discovers itself and becomes conscious of itself. This dialectic movement as a whole is what Hegel sees as Truth. As he famously stated: “The truth is the whole.” (Hegel, 2003: 11)

Hegel is therefore, in the same way as Spinoza, not interested in particular claims to truth or would even maintain that such claims could possibly be true in a certain and indubitable sense. Absolute truth can only be located at the highest level of generality and from there any other notion of truth must be seen as deriving its legitimacy. A single proposition can never be true as it is historically contingent. “All finite truths are incorporated into a unifying teleological process that has as its goal Absolute Knowing. It is this terminus ad quem that provides the coherent structure through which particulars take on their truth.” (DiCenso, 1990: 20)

As one can see, the coherence theory of truth has as much philosophical pedigree as the correspondence theory. But it has, equally, as many flaws. The most important in our case is the reliance on a systematic whole that is seen as synonymous with truth. As Joachim already realised, it has to be “admitted that conceptions derived from partial wholes cannot adequately express the whole; and that what we experience is in a sense

always a partial whole, or the whole from a finite and partial point of view. We cannot experience the whole completely and adequately, just in so far as we are not ourselves complete.” (Joachim, 1906: 81) The problem of truth is therefore just re-allocated to a higher level. It might be correct to state that a single proposition in its truth value is always related to a larger whole but that in consequence only leads to an infinite regress since “[i]n this manner the final criterion of truth is transferred form the certainty of the subjective intellect as such to an encompassing system of thought within which the individual intellect is but a moment or aspect.” (DiCenso, 1990: 22)

The problem that adherents of the coherence theory face is that on the one hand such a system in its reach and character is infinite but on the other is developed and described by a finite being. That is not a denial of the human capacity of transcendental thought but “that this transcendence cannot be such as to leave behind finitude altogether, which is precisely what speculation must accomplish if it is to develop a complete and coherent system.” (ibid.: 24)

Both approaches to truth rely upon a foundationalism either in the form of mind-independent facts and their simple accessibility or a natural or transcendental systemic whole. “Coherence theories fall into the same difficulties as correspondence theories in this respect. That is, they look toward some given basis for the determination of truth.” (ibid.: 25) A further difficulty we encounter in both accounts is their lack of accommodating active human developments. Exactly because they rely upon given foundations human existence is very much constrained either through a specific conception of the human mind or by an overarching metaphysical system according to

which everything unfolds. “In each case there remains little possibility of approaching truth in terms of the active and engaged processes of human existence.” (ibid.: 26)

In the remainder of this chapter we will addressed whether it is possible to find a notion of truth that does not rely upon a strict and *a priori* given foundation and thereby avoids the pre-structuring of human experiences whether individually or for humankind as a whole. The notion of truth looked for here will be thoroughly anti-foundational without, however, lapsing into a thin and common sensical notion of truth. Instead, starting from the elaborations on agency and language established so far we will show that a primordial notion of truth as disclosure emerges out of the fundamental ontological encounter of human agents with their world, leaving any secure and certain foundation behind and emphasising the historicality of human existence in all its complexity. To this conceptualisation of truth we now turn.

Truth as unhiddenness of beings in deconcealment – the primordial concept of truth

After having outlined the basic interpretations of truth in modernity either following a form of philosophical realism or philosophical anti-realism we can now proceed to the endeavour to develop a conceptualisation of truth which can accompany and meaningfully enrich critical thought. As we can see from the section heading truth will be presented not as correspondence or coherence but as the ‘unhiddenness of being in deconcealment’ (die Unverborgenheit des Seinenden in der Entbergung des Seins). (Heidegger, 2002: 57) In order to develop this notion further we will consecutively draw on the thought of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. The

central notion that will surface time and again in the next sections is the interpretation of truth as disclosure. This interpretation that relies upon the Heideggerian translation of the Greek term for truth – *aletheia* – presents truth as a process of unveiling a state of being.¹¹ As will be substantiated in the next sections, truth in such an understanding must be seen as a process of appropriation rather than approximation in line with the literal meaning of the Greek notion of ‘a-*letheia*’ (un-covering or dis-closing). (Heidegger, 2002: 1-68)

For Heidegger the question of truth arises at decisive points of rupture within the ‘common sense’ framework of a system of thought. “Heidegger argues that we attain to truth after the possibilities of traditional thinking have been exhausted and we are brought to confront the source of our tradition in a dimension of human experience which precedes such thinking.” (Macomber, 1967: 9; see also Heidegger, 2007: 136-7) In our activities we are, as was pointed out in chapter III always already immersed in a world that we find structured in our original position of thrownness. (Heidegger, 1996: 127; Schmitt, 2000: 216) The conceptualisation of thought is hereby mediated between past and future and represents a world which provides a framework that is beyond the individual human, a state of affairs that is captured in the notion of Dasein as *being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*. (Heidegger, 1996: 179) In order to conceptualise truth we therefore have to engage this moment of rupture and enquire into the conditions that made the traditional notion of truth possible. The point of departure

¹¹ Heidegger develops this interpretation in a long and elaborate manner in his lecture course on the essence of truth by providing a new and insightful interpretation of the cave allegory in Plato. Again, we are not interested in the current study to what extent Heidegger’s take on Plato is philologically justified and sound. Instead the current chapter focuses on the paths towards a new conceptualisation of truth that have been opened by Heidegger and since then further developed in thinkers like Gadamer and Ricoeur.

has already been identified by saying that the manifestation of crisis takes place in the realm of human experience and the relation between Dasein and its world. In this sense the argument will proceed to show that truth is not primarily cognitive but has to be seen as an event out of which human agency arises and in which human existence consistently stands.

Heidegger – Being and Truth

In order to grasp this approach of truth and its concomitant problems in Western thought as Heidegger understands it, it is necessary to start the enquiry into the meaning of truth with quickly recapitulating Heidegger's account of human Dasein and the way it relates to a world via experience. As has been argued above human agency is intrinsically engaged agency, agency that is situated in a context that is always already there. (Dallmayr, 1991: 27; Macomber, 1967: 58-9; Schmitt, 2000: 13-26) In any account of the notion of truth it is therefore necessary to enquire into the relation of Dasein to the world.

Such an ontological approach to the meaning of truth must proceed by pointing to the uniqueness of human being (Dasein) and its relation to the world it finds itself in. As was argued above, theoretical and objective knowledge about the world, even if only the phenomenal world, was the aim and driving motivation in modern thought and as such in need of a foundation on which the epistemological quest could be rested. This kind of knowledge, however, already presupposes an encounter with the thing to be known in a given context. (Macomber, 1967: 93-4) If the thing we endeavour to know has not been encountered yet, we cannot attempt to know and understand it. This dimension is

certainly missing from recent conceptualisations of ontology as we could find them in the work of Wendt and Wight. Admittedly, they posit a relation towards ‘intransitive objects’ prior to any epistemological engagement but the way how human beings can relate to these objects prior to questions pertaining to knowledge remains obscure at best since their notion of knowledge is still very much in line with modern thought. What has to be accounted for, however, is the way human beings relate to objects and the way in which they encounter them. Theoretical knowledge itself cannot be the original encounter exactly because it presupposes it. (Heidegger, 2002: 4; Schmitt, 2000: 137-8; Macomber, 1967: 94-6; on the different meanings of the term knowledge see also Blattner, 2006: 84-5 and Dreyfus, 1991: 202-8) Heidegger describes the relation towards objects we encounter through the threefold structure of interpretation. We encounter an object never in a neutral, abstract or distanced way but relate to it intentionally and interpretively through *Vorhabe* (fore-having), *Vorsicht* (fore-sight), and *Vorgriff* (fore-conception). (Heidegger, 1996: 140-1; Dreyfus, 1991: 198-9) Here we find again the crucial difference between a traditional conception of ontology and Heidegger’s fundamental ontology (Fundamentalontologie). The argument here is not that the way we gain knowledge and approach the world in thought depends on the material circumstances we find ourselves in; it is not an argument that tries to establish the primacy of *beings* over thought as it is in Wendt and Wight. Rather, the question here aims at delineating the mode of discovery, a primordial relation to the world that characterises human agency and constant involvement in the world; it is an argument that enquires into the nature of (human) *being*.

Another problem with the relation between truth and knowledge that dominates the Western outlook relates to the fact that we have different kinds of knowledge. The

knowledge that we most cherish and that lay at the heart of epistemological endeavours in Western thought is closely tied to propositions and their structure. (Heidegger, 2002: 2-3; Blattner, 2006: 84-5; Macomber, 1967: 28 and Dreyfus, 1991: 265) In this respect truth is established as soon as we present a proper proposition stating an objective fact. There are, however, forms of knowledge which cannot be put in propositional form. “The knowledge of the wise man is ineffable, and so is my knowledge of what a starched collar feels like on a hot summer day. [...] There are various kinds of knowledge, of which only some – those roughly at the middle of a scale running from the lowliest to the most exalted – can adequately be expressed in propositions.” (Macomber, 1967: 27-8) The preoccupation with propositions in the quest for truth leaves us therefore in a position in which truth only represents a certain kind of human experience, namely experience or knowledge claims that can be put in propositional form and then verified. This, however, leaves out and completely ignores the realms of pre-propositional and post-propositional experience. Furthermore, it portrays a commitment to a designative conception of language in which a system of signs with fixed meanings must be presupposed to achieve the desired universal validity of the proposition under scrutiny.

In respect to truth we find in our everyday life many instances in which the use is not propositional. Most often we encounter the argument that these notions and uses of the word ‘true’ have to be seen as derivative and metaphorical. (Heidegger, 2002: 3; Macomber, 1967:11) They reveal, however, yet again the problems with taking propositional truth as the original conception.

“We call a man a ‘true friend’ or a ‘true leader’ because he measures up to our expectations of what a friend or leader ought to be. But the human mind in its judgment must also measure up to our expectations of it. We

may call a judgment true in the first instance because it reflects the facts accurately, but in the final analysis this is because, by doing so, it fulfils our notion of what a judgment ought to be. A judgment which is correct and accurate is the sort of judgment we value, and we value it because it is steadfast and dependable, like a true friend.” (ibid.: 12)

Heidegger refuses the traditional split between propositional and metaphorical notions of truth and argues that both conceptions are valid in themselves (ibid.) Before truth can be obtained from and vested in knowledge propositions it seems necessary to enquire into the conditions out of which this conception of truth can arise. As we will see, truth in its ontological and primordial sense is not about approximation to certainty but appropriation to contextual situatedness.

Having sketched out the problems and silent assumptions of traditional approaches to truth we can now move on to a phenomenological conception of truth that aims at showing the fundamental ontological premises that make modern notions of truth possible. As was outlined above the prime element in our enquiry into the meaning of truth lies with human experience and the way and mode things in the world are encountered before they can give rise to knowledge. The central element here is an appreciation of human being or *Dasein* since it occupies a unique position at the nexus of being in general and beings in particular. “However, only as long as Da-sein *is*, that is, as long as there is the ontic possibility of an understanding of being, ‘is there’ [*gibt es*] being. If Da-sein does not exist, then there ‘is’ not ‘independence’ either, nor ‘is there an ‘in itself’. Such matters are then neither comprehensible nor incomprehensible. Innerworldy beings can, too, neither be discovered , nor can they lie in concealment. *Then* it can neither be said that beings are, nor that they are not.” (Heidegger, 1996:

196) *Dasein* is the one form of being that is able to discover other beings in any meaningful sense. And as such *Dasein* must have an existential characteristic that enables it to be open for the discovery of other beings. This specific characteristic is captured in Heidegger's notion of care or concern (*Sorge*) as a fundamental and existential relation of *Dasein* to its world. "As we have noted, being (not beings) is dependent upon care." (ibid.; Demske, 1970: 21) In this way *Dasein* is the only form of being which is able to be concerned or care about other beings in a way animals or other things cannot. (Gadamer, 1979: 403) Other beings can certainly be related to one another in many ways but they can never encounter one another for two reasons. First, in order to discover beings and bring them into openness as Heidegger would phrase it, it is necessary that the discovering being is not just any being but that it is in its existential structure open towards other beings. (Macomber, 1976: 29; Heidegger, 1996: 129) Secondly, and this is closely related to the first point, *Dasein* itself cannot be a determinate being, it cannot be described by the question of 'what it is'. "What sort of being is this which essentially discovers, renders accessible, brings into immediate presence? It cannot have any determinate character of its own, because its being is to reveal other beings in their determinate character." (Macomber, 1967: 18) The openness of *Dasein* consist therefore in its existential lack of an essential and definite what. (see also Dreyfus, 1991: 318 and Heidegger, 1996: 179)

In an understanding in which the essential characteristic of *Dasein* lies in its capacity to open a clearing (*Lichtung*) in which it can discover and let beings be *Dasein* occupies a unique position. In this sense we encounter a claim that truth in its primordial and ontological understanding is not descriptive but revelatory as the process of discovery; the process of bringing beings into the openness and let them be what they are is the

necessary prerequisite of any correspondence notion of truth. “The being of the judgment is not essentially descriptive but revelatory. What verification proves is not the accuracy of description but the genuineness of revelation.” (Macomber, 1967: 17)

We can see here an important consequence of the notion and conceptualisation of Dasein. As was already argued above, Dasein or human being is not *a* being, it is not synonymous with consciousness. “Discovery presupposes first a being which, itself essentially open, discovers other beings by drawing them into its openness. This being is Dasein. Heidegger does not equate the openness of Dasein, however, with consciousness, which he regards as a development within openness.” (ibid.: 29)

The important insights for our quest for a meaning of the notion truth can be seen in the denial of a primacy of consciousness and the concomitant reliance upon theoretical knowledge as a way to truth. For Heidegger, as later for Gadamer, consciousness and knowledge can only be derivative, dependent on a more primordial conception of human existence in which *Dasein* encounters the object to be known prior to any conscious theoretical endeavour. The notion of encounter is central since the ability to encounter beings presupposes a specific form of being. As Heidegger explains: “A being can only touch an objectively present being within the world if it fundamentally has the kind of being of being-in – only if with its Da-sein something like world is already discovered in terms of which beings can reveal themselves through touch and thus become accessible in their objective presence. Two beings which are objectively present within the world and are, moreover, worldless in themselves, can never ‘touch’ each other, neither can ‘be’ ‘together with’ the other.” (Heidegger, 1996: 52; Macomber, 1967: 29)

Before we can move on to an actual formulation of the primordial notion of truth it is necessary to develop the notion of care and the process of encountering objects in a world prior to consciousness a little bit further. First, it seems important to note that the notion 'object' in this connection is somewhat misleading since the process of discovery does not yet lead to a subject-object divide, to a divide between mind and nature. "Being-in-the-world is not simply a relation of subject and object, but that which originally makes such a relation possible." (Heidegger, 1997: 212) The main characteristic of care as an existential mode of encountering the world lies with the fact that this encounter is not driven by theoretical concerns but always already embedded in a specific project *Dasein* is involved in at the time. "We do not first encounter things and then see them in relation to some possible use. Usefulness is not a fortunate veneer of things which man is able to turn to his own purpose; it is only insofar as they are instrumental that things first manifest themselves at all." (Macomber, 1967: 36) Beings never appear as a neutral 'thing' which we consciously and subsequently theoretically grasp but they serve in the instance of discovery as ends towards our projects. (Dreyfus, 1991: 46-7; Macomber, 1967: 34) We can here see once more the clear distinction between an ontological approach pursued by scientific realists such as Wendt and Wight who try to grasp the entities in the international realm as objects manifested over and against a consciousness. This dichotomist view explicates the primacy of the theoretical over the practical which leads to the problems sketched out above. What we have to understand, with Heidegger, is that these objects are already encountered and assumed a meaning through this encounter. The encounter is hereby not one of theoretical grasp or conceptualisation – they only come second in the order of discovery. "Rather than first perceiving perspectives, then synthesising these perspectives into objects, and finally

assigning these objects a function of the basis of their physical properties, we ordinarily manipulate tools that already have a meaning in a world that is organized in terms of purposes. To see this, we must first overcome the traditional interpretation that theory is prior to practice.” (Dreyfus, 1991: 46-7; see also Heidegger, 1996: 62-3) Tools, and this encompasses observable as well as unobservable entities, are used and assume a role in relation to *Dasein* only through their function in the overall project we are involved in.

“The phenomenological exhibition of the being of beings encountered nearest to us can be accomplished under the guidance of the everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call association in the world with innerworldly beings. Associations are already dispersed in manifold ways of taking care of things. [...] What shows itself in taking care of things in the surrounding world constitutes the pre-thematic being in the domain of our analysis. This being is not the object of a theoretical ‘world’-cognition; it is what is used, produced and so on.” (ibid.)

This is why consciousness itself is only derivative. (Dreyfus, 1991: 71) At the moment of the primordial encounter there is not yet a clear distinction between subject and object but a fundamental ontological unity of *Dasein* and its world. (Heidegger, 1996: 60) Heidegger clearly distinguishes between two relations of *Dasein* to objects – *Zuhandensein* (being at hand or readiness to hand) and *Vorhandensein* (being to hand or presence at hand). (Blattner, 2006: 52; Heidegger, 1996: 70-75) “It is the peculiar characteristic of that which is immediately at hand to withdraw from its being at hand precisely in order to be properly at hand. It is for that reason that the being of the instrument is distorted if it is regarded as an object.” (Macomber, 1967: 39)

Only in the latter sense, being to hand, is the instrument characterised as an object as we relate to it and deal with it as something that ruptures in one way or another the project we are involved in, it engages with us as distinct from *Dasein*. (Heidegger, 1996: 68) The rupture normally occurs if the instrument breaks down or does not fulfil the

function within the project we have expected it to fulfil. Heidegger identifies three different modes of breakdown or disturbance: conspicuousness, obstinacy and obtrusiveness. (Dreyfus, 1991: 70-1; Heidegger, 1996: 68-9) At that moment of rupture we are taken out of our primordial involvement and reflect upon the instrument as an object that in some way interferes with our present concerns. At that moment we start theoretical reflection, analysing what the instrument is supposed to do and finding out what is wrong with it and how to fix it. This is the starting point of consciousness and the ontic notion of the object of which we can acquire knowledge. As we can see this state is only derivative of the more primordial discovery and encounter with the instrument as instrument. “*Dasein*’s immediate concern is not with the instrument but with the work which it is meant to perform. It is the work and not the instrument which is immediately ‘at hand’.” (Macomber, 1967: 39) In a situation in which no rupture in the frame of reference occurs neither subjectivity nor objectivity would arise.

The defining moment in Heidegger’s conception of truth is therefore the breakdown of the instrument out of which arises for the first time an awareness of the environment as consciously apart from *Dasein*. The instruments seem to ‘appear’ in front of the user because their breakdown interrupted the flow of *Dasein*’s project. This situation for Heidegger can be described as ‘disclosure’ since the instrument as long as it is drawn into a project vanishes as object from our awareness. Only the breakdown, the rupture of reference brings it again to our attention and discloses its being as object. But the object in this rupture of reference is not the only thing that is disclosed. With it appears the whole world in which it is embedded and draws our attention to the wider environment in which we are embedded. “A broken instrument or deficient material not only reveals itself. For its instrumentality consists in its relation to other instruments, all

of which together go to make up the complex in which alone any instrument can function. The broken instrument thus reveals, in addition to itself, all the other instruments, which are now useless without it, and the structure of the complex of which they are part.” (ibid.: 44) Truth in its primordial sense consists for Heidegger in exactly this moment in which we are ripped out of our project and brought back into the present and the presence of objects. It becomes clear now, that any attempt to base truth exclusively on knowledge is misinformed since knowledge can only arise out of a more primordial state in which *Dasein’s* frame of reference is ruptured by a breakdown that brings its project to a hold. “Only when it thus confronts an impasse and is unable to proceed with its work is Dasein called back out of its preoccupations to an explicit awareness of the present. [...] And now for the first time Dasein becomes explicitly aware of itself, being forced to confront itself in the question ‘What do I do know?’” (ibid.: 45) It is exactly this confrontation out of which the subject-object divide arises, disclosing the world as objective and external to the subject and therefore opening the possibility for (theoretical) knowledge.

Dasein, however, never remains in the present in which it has been brought by the rupture of reference but almost immediately engages in other projects projected into the future. “Pure objective presence makes itself known in the useful thing only to withdraw again into the handiness of what is taken care of, that is, of what is being put back into repair.” (Heidegger, 1996: 68) The instruments and the structure in which they acquire meaning again vanishes from the consciousness of *Dasein*. Here we encounter Heidegger’s critique on the primacy of subjectivity and the misguided obsession of modern philosophy with the self. Descartes was wrong in first assuming the primacy of

consciousness and positing it as self-transparent, as objectifiable and standing over and against a world of constantly present things. (ibid.: 88-94)

“The idea of constant objective presence not only motivates an extreme definition of the being of innerworldly beings and their identification with the world as such. At the same time it blocks the possibility of bringing to view attitudes of Da-sein in a way which is ontologically appropriate. But thus the road is completely blocked to seeing the founded character of all sensuous and intellective apprehension, and to understanding them as a possibility of being-in-the-world. But Descartes understands the being of ‘Da-sein’, to whose basic constitution being-in-the –world belongs, in the same way as the being of *res extensa*, as substance.” (ibid.: 90-1)

What we can see here are the deeper consequences of Heidegger’s claim that *Dasein* is characterised as being-in-the-world, i.e. a state of constant involvement. This involvement is embodied by the constant pursuit of projects or thrown-projections which equally constantly are ruptured due to the imperfections and limitations inherent in the instruments used. The impossibility of an objective and neutral stand towards the world arises out of the fact that such an endeavour is in itself a project guided by some motives and interests. In this sense everything *Dasein* engages in is a kaleidoscope of cascading projects each of which is connected to the others and engages in a constant oscillation between its pursuit and a breakdown of its instruments which again *Dasein* tries to understand and overcome through theoretical reflection, i.e. the establishment of knowledge.

Instrumentality therefore posits one pole of human experience; it is the mode in which we primordially encounter the world. Only a breakdown in instrumentality can wield the emergence of truth in its ontological sense, a form of disclosure. There is, however, another pole which stands in opposite to instrumentality – art. Whereas instrumentality in its primordial form presents a complete concealment the work of art in its ideal form present the other extreme – a state of complete disclosure. For Heidegger, a work of art

succeeds in the same way in revealing truth as does a broken instrument. The work of art does not represent a tool or instrument, it is as such not drawn into any project but ruptures our existence by providing an unfamiliar context we have to deal with and therefore become fully conscious of this work. “For all their differences the broken instrument and the work of art both call us back from the future in to the present, manifest the material out of which they are made in a way that cannot be overlooked, and break through the familiar, self-evident context of our daily lives.” (Macomber, 1967: 48)

Subsequently, Heidegger opens a dialectic of Dasein between these two poles, pure instrumentality and pure beauty. (Heidegger, 2007f: 181) Whereas the one presents Dasein in the future, the other conceptualises it as resting completely in the present. Neither form can ever be reached in its ideal but human existence oscillates between instrumentality, i.e. our existential thrust of projecting ourselves into the future, and beauty, which makes us aware of the present and thereby discloses the world. *In this way Heidegger develops an ontological notion of truth as disclosure through the rupture of time and the momentary return to the present which provides the primordial condition out of which any subsequent epistemological notion of truth can arise.*

Heidegger, however, develops his notion not in contradistinction to a scientific rendering of truth but aims at explicating the derivative nature of any notion of truth that merely aims at certain knowledge. (Heidegger, 1996: 197) With the rise of subjectivity as the focus and origin of knowledge, the primordial notion of truth as a deconcealment of being becomes concealed. In the drive to ascertain the necessary and valid relation between mind and object or the coherence of different judgments within a metaphysical

or mechanistic frame of reference, “the epistemological impulse behind the traditional notion of truth is to take the object (thing or man) out of its existential/temporal context to render it a pure and shareable presence.” (Spanos, 1977: 428) Only by spatialising or detemporalising beings is it possible for a scientific conception of truth to arise. “In doing so *Dasein* as interpreter must transform his temporality into a series of ‘now points,’ … which suspends and thus ‘spatialises’ the temporal process. In this way, he achieves ‘objectivity’: a distance from the originally experienced object which allows him to become a privileged ‘observer’” (Spanos, 1977: 428)

The drive towards such a concealment of the original notion of truth that reveals the characteristic notion of care as *Dasein*’s encounter with the world is by no means arbitrary but linked to three further central notions in Heidegger’s thought – *Angst*, nothingness and (in)authenticity. *Dasein* encounters the mood of *Angst* (anxiety) in the moment of truth, i.e. in the moment where its primordial involvement in a world is ruptured by a breakdown of an instrument central to its project. What *Dasein* encounters in this moment when a world is disclosed and *Dasein* reflects upon itself and on the objects around it is what Heidegger terms nothingness. (Heidegger, 2007a: 100-1) At the very moment when the instrument breaks down *Dasein* is not focussed on any object or project but experiences the finitude of its existence and its being-towards-death. *Angst* is therefore not the same as fear since fear is always a fear of something whereas *Angst* describes an existential dread which reveals the finitude of human existence. (ibid.: 101; Polt, 1999: 76-7; Heidegger, 1996: 174) We have here therefore a multilayered account of the rupture of reference. On the one hand this rupture brings us into the presence of beings, opens up the space for a world in which subject and object arise. This is the initial and primordial notion of truth as disclosure. On the other hand

and on a different level, however, the moment of rupture is also the moment where *Dasein*, encountering its own primordial being, finds itself in the mood of *Angst* as it faces nothingness. (Macomber, 1967: 56) At this very moment we encounter the third Heideggerian term which will complete the account of truth we are looking for – authenticity. As was already discussed in chapter III, *Dasein* is not just a ‘being there’ but also always a ‘being with’. We do not inhabit the world alone but are co-proprietors, our projects and those of other human beings intersect and as such our existence is one of communal experience (*Mitda-sein*). (Heidegger, 1996: 107, 112)

This fact, however, gives necessarily rise to what Heidegger calls ‘das Man’ – the they. ‘The they’ includes a levelling experience in which we enter into a mode of inauthenticity by following rules and norms that belong to everyone and no one in particular. “The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.” (ibid.: 119)

Inauthenticity becomes a mode of being in which we find ourselves most of the time. When, however, we encounter a breakdown of an instrument that ruptures our frame of reference we experience a true moment of authenticity. *My* instrument broke down hindering *me* from pursuing *my* project. What is experienced here is the moment in which the world is perceived from a thoroughly authentic perspective that is not tainted with what ‘they’ do or think. But this moment of authenticity comes for a price – the price of facing nothingness and *Angst*. (Macomber, 1967: 147) In this very moment my primordial condition as *Dasein* is exposed to me and by experiencing the finitude of my existence, I realise that the world is beyond my reach; it is infinitely bigger in scope than I am and any attempt to make it follow my commands and fit into my projects is doomed to failure. (ibid.: 46) *Dasein*, because it is always already placed in a world

which it finds and which transcends it, experiences the realisation of its finitude and being-lost on this world as *Angst*. “The ‘rupture of the referential totality’ discloses *Dasein’s* primordial situation … as one in which he finds himself in an alien and uncanny environment without reference points and boundaries. In this original realm, the fundamental mood of *Dasein* is dread, which, having temporality, has *no thing* or nothing as its object.” (Spanos, 1977: 424-5)

As we can see now, this encounter with nothingness is a necessary condition for knowledge to arise but it is also a condition which *Dasein* tries to avoid and conceal. The modern quest for certainty in knowledge and subsequently for necessary and universally valid truth is exactly one strategy to avoid facing the temporality, historicity and finitude which primordially characterises *Dasein*. *Dasein* withdraws from the scene of rupture almost immediately and involves itself in another project. The return to this project is in most cases a return to inauthenticity. *Angst* vanishes and is replaced by its inauthentic counterpart – fear. Fear is inauthentic because it is not an existential mood in which we encounter nothingness but an ontic notion in which we transfer our primordial *Angst* in the face of nothingness to a fear of something. Fear is therefore always directed towards an object and the answer to an unbearable insight into human finitude. When encountering nothingness “men seek to ‘flee in the face of death’ and its ontological counterparts, time and nothingness, by ‘interpreting [these] publicly’: by transforming dread into fear or, since fear has its source not in *no thing*, but in *some* thing, by *wilfully objectifying* (finding objects for) dread.” (Spanos, 1977: 426)

Having developed the argument thus far, we can finally summarise the main elements of Heidegger’s notion of truth. The enquiry into the meaning of truth started by looking at the two most prevalent notions of truth in past and contemporary scholarship namely

the correspondence theory of truth and the coherence theory of truth. Both, as was shown, are preoccupied with truth as derived from knowledge either in the form of a correspondence between a mind and its object relying hereby on a notion of philosophical realism or on a general anti-realist outlook which sees truth arising out of a larger system of coherent propositions.

The next step in the quest for the meaning of truth was an attempt to illuminate further whether these two notions of truth are primordial or derivative. Here, it was argued, we enter the realm of post-Husserlian phenomenology, especially through the work of Martin Heidegger. For any account of truth that relies upon the establishment of knowledge there must be a more primordial event which allows knowledge to arise. This is the case because knowledge about something already presupposes the presence of the object to be known. Knowledge, since it presupposes this presence cannot be the original encounter. Rather, as was argued above, the original encounter is to be understood in pre-theoretical terms allowing *Dasein* as being-in-the-world to draw in instruments in its pursuit of a project. This drawing in and using of instruments is not a reflective or even conscious endeavour but stems from *Dasein's* existential characteristic of care. *Dasein* is always already involved in a world in which it lives and works. *Dasein* is furthermore also always beyond itself as it has the unique characteristic of projecting itself into the future and into possible modes of its being. *Dasein* is the being that allows other beings to show themselves as what they are. Therefore *Dasein* can itself not be a definite being characterised by a fixed essence but must provide what Heidegger calls a clearing or opening (*Lichtung*) in which it lets other beings be. In this vein, *Dasein* can only be described in respect to how it is but not as what it is. (Inwood, 1997: 23; Heidegger, 1996: 39-40)

This notion of care and *Dasein*'s constant involvement in projects which anticipate and constrain future modes of being makes possible the discovery of other beings as instruments. This discovery, however, is not a cognitive but a purely praxeological one in which the being encountered is manipulated into a specific usage that will further our project. Only when the instrument breaks down does any notion of subject and object arise. Only then does *Dasein* become aware of the world around it as different from it. The breakdown of the instrument is the defining moment for the primordial notion of truth since it discloses the primordial state of *Dasein*'s place in the world. Only out of this moment of reflection can any notion of subject and object arise which in turn provides the condition for epistemological and theoretical conceptualisations and derivative notions of truth. (Macomber, 1967: 44-46; Heidegger, 1996: 203) But this rupture has different layers of experience. We certainly find ourselves as grasping the totality of beings from a specific vantage point but we also find ourselves confronted with nothingness. Nothingness, the experience and confrontation of the radical limits and finitude of human existence, delivers us to the mood of *Angst* or anxiety. (Macomber, 1967: 108) This state, it is important to remember, cannot be reached or induced from inside *Dasein*'s own being but is an intrusion from the 'outside'. We will have more to say about this 'outside' in the following chapter on freedom.

Nevertheless, the truth event is characterised by the unhiddenness of objects or instruments and thereby opens a grasp of *Dasein*'s primordial relation to being. It is exactly this event which is described in Heidegger's formula 'Truth is the unhiddenness of beings in the deconcealment of being'. Truth is a disclosure that draws us near to the primordial state of being without ever being able to grasp it fully and exhaustively and it also deconceals other beings in the world as objects for the first time. This is the

phenomenological understanding of truth and the ontological precondition of any epistemologically grounded notion of truth. (Heidegger, 1996: 203; Polt, 1999: 83-4)

Gadamer – History and Understanding

Having outlined the general thrust of Heidegger's argument regarding the notion and conceptualisation of truth in its ontological and primordial form we can now proceed to flesh out more clearly how this original quest for the meaning of truth has been received in the thought of other phenomenological scholars. Such a depiction will first broaden our understanding of the ontological notion of truth and also provide a different perspective which will help to assess the implications of such a conceptualisation of truth for the social sciences and IR in particular

Although Gadamer relied heavily on the insights produced by Heidegger's original enquiry (Grodin, 2003: 6-7; Dostal, 2002: 1-2)¹², he was more concerned with the social dimension of human existence and its hermeneutical characteristics. (Scheibler, 2000: 130) Concomitantly, Gadamer moved beyond a Heideggerian account and refocused the endeavour on the notions of history and understanding and their role in human existence and the attainability of truth in the social realm. Whereas Heidegger is originally occupied with a delineation of being-in-the-world and its relation to notions such as truth and freedom in abstract terms, Gadamer focuses his thought much more clearly on the historical and interpretive element of Dasein. (Grodin, 2003: 75-7; DiCenso, 1990: 79-80; Warnke, 1987: 78) Therefore “the focus upon the terms Being and truth in Heidegger is shifted to history and understanding in Gadamer.” (DiCenso, 1990: 82) As

¹² That is not to say that there are no differences between Heidegger and Gadamer. For a concise overview of the most important differences see for example Grondin, 2002: 49-50 and Lammi, 1991.

we will see in due course this shift is not as fundamental as it might seem at first glance. Principally Gadamer stays close to Heidegger but adds a new hermeneutical element to Heidegger's thought.¹³

Understanding in Gadamer, and here he is clearly taking the cue from Heidegger, moves away from the narrow confines of epistemological certainty in search for validating truth claims. Understanding becomes rather a practically related activity that draws its insights from the Aristotelian conception of *phronesis* understood as practical wisdom. (Gadamer, 1979: 278-89; Weinsheimer, 1985: 73; Grodin, 2003: 7) Practical wisdom gives us the opportunity to apply knowledge of practical rather than theoretical value. It does not mean, however, in focussing on practical wisdom that Gadamer gives up truth. In the same way as he extends the notion of understanding beyond its scientific scope he also extends the notion of truth. As he explains in the opening chapter of *Truth and Method*, restricting truth to the results of scientific methodological research is a modern aberration that left the human sciences in general in a dilemma. (Risser, 1997: 151-7; Grodin, 2003: 22) Either they adopt the methodologically oriented research that proved so successful in the natural sciences to be able to claim truth for their findings or they abandon the notion of truth and aestheticise their work.

If we now keep Gadamer's claim in mind that truth does not have to be derived from scientific method that establishes ahistorical and decontextualised propositions which can be repeatedly tested and verified we can see the possibility to achieve and orient ourselves towards a more primordial kind of truth. This kind of truth is a truth about

¹³ This does not mean that Heidegger did not make use of the term 'hermeneutics' as is clear from his conceptualisation of the 'hermeneutics of facticity'. What it does mean, however, is that Gadamer much more so than Heidegger emphasised and substantiated how such a hermeneutics is instantiated and has to be understood in the social context of human life.

human existence and interaction, it is necessarily situated within history and it assumes its importance through generating practical relevance for our current situation and in doing so reveals a facet of human life that provides insights into the contextuality of *Dasein*.

To begin with, the title of Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* seems to promise a straight forward conception of both. In fact, however, Gadamer neither develops a 'theory of truth' nor does he propose a specific method with which such truth could be obtained. (Gadamer 1979: xvi-i; Dostal, 2002: 2-3) In respect to truth, as we will see, he is and stays very close to the Heideggerian conception of disclosure and in respect to method he retains the general phenomenological characteristic of description.

In developing his hermeneutical account Gadamer enters through the realm of art, a starting point that resulted from Heidegger's characterisation of art as a truth event, as a disclosure of being through the rupture of reference achieved by our encounter with the work of art. (Macomber, 1967: 46-8) Such an encounter in respect to its effects is, as was indicated above, similar to the breakdown of an instrument and the subsequent rupture of reference. In this line Gadamer maintains that truth is in its primordial form not a cognitive process relying upon a scientific method but a disclosure of being exemplified by a fusion of horizons. (Di Censo, 1990: 101-2; Taylor, 2002: 134-5) The notion of horizon is central to Gadamer's argument but not original to him. The term horizon surfaced in the wake of the historicist movement in Germany and was most important in Nietzsche's philosophy. Horizon in Nietzsche was the given socio-cultural background that on the one hand allowed us to understand things and on the other

confronted us with the impossibility of obtaining objective knowledge as all knowledge arises out of a specific horizon of thought. (Weinsheimer, 1985: 39-40, 183; Gadamer, 1979: 407) The horizon in Nietzsche, however, is something static that restricts our view of the world and can never be moved or shifted. In Gadamer, however, there is not only one horizon but a manifold of horizons. (Gadamer, 1979: 269, 272-3) These horizons, furthermore, are shifting and developing constantly. In Gadamer it is certainly the case that the horizons are an embodiment of tradition as their constitution is always historically situated. (Grondin, 2003b: 100-1) On the other hand the concept of understanding Gadamer is trying to bring in here relies upon the possibility to overcome and change a given horizon – not in the sense of leaving all horizons behind and achieving objective access to the things themselves; but in the sense that horizons can be fused. (Risser, 1997: 80-1; Gadamer, 1979: 273, 337; Grondin, 2003b: 96, 125) In this conceptualisation the event of truth is principally dialogical and consists in an encounter of horizons which in their fusion, i.e. in the process of understanding, reveal insights into human existence. (Weinsheimer, 1985: 183) These insights are identical in their character with the abovementioned disclosure as it does not provide a theoretical scientific grasp of a state of affairs about human existence but, as it ushers into the development of a new horizon discloses human situatedness and self-understanding contextually, i.e. praxeologically.

Central to this notion of truth is of course Gadamer's conception of experience. Experience as it is seen in the natural sciences points to something that is repeatable and can when rested upon correct empirical methods be confirmed independent of direct historical, political or social circumstances. Gadamer moves away from this notion of

experience and emphasises the difference developed by Husserl between scientific experience and historical experience. Again we find striking parallels to Heidegger's thought. The conception of experience as arising out of a disposition of care which we found in Heidegger is taken up by Gadamer and situated within the historical horizon of understanding. Where Heidegger relies upon the tripartite fore-structure of understanding characterised by *Vorgabe*, *Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff*, Gadamer posits the notion of pre-judice (*Vorurteil* –literally meaning pre-judgment). (Gadamer, 1979: 239-40; Weinsheimer, 1985: 11, 167-8; Wachterhauser, 2002: 72)

Similar to Heidegger, we find here a critique of the Enlightenment project and its reliance upon the power of reason to establish knowledge and certainty. The core conception of consciousness and its complete transparency allowed Descartes to state : I think therefore I am. Combined with his general task of establishing certain knowledge we witness here the modern intertwinement and primacy of subjectivity and epistemology. Against such a conception Gadamer reintroduces the notion of tradition whose abandonment in course of the Enlightenment he labels a “prejudice against prejudice.” (Gadamer, 1979: 240) Central is the insight, that consciousness, as was shown above, is merely derivative and not constitutive of human existence. Gadamer, in line with Heidegger, reversed the Cartesian dictum and maintains ‘I am therefore I think’.

Because historical or social experience is primordially practical and can only be grasped theoretically in retrospect, Gadamer agrees with Heidegger that a scientific approach that aims at establishing certain knowledge about such experience always comes too late since what we try to grasp in knowledge has already been experienced and cannot

be re-enacted. (Palmer, 1969: 194-198; Risser, 1997: 83-5) Historical experience or learning experience both depict a negativity that is expressed in the overcoming of former views in light of new insights. This type of experience cannot be repeated and serves to negate our previous views. (Gadamer, 1979: 317; Grondin, 2002: 44) What is actually experienced is not something external to us but the contradiction between cognition and previous views on the matter at hand. (Taylor, 2002: 128) Experience proper therefore is the error or partiality of these previous views and we experience this in such a way that we are now too experienced or sophisticated to re-live the experience of believing in these errors. Gadamer calls this process a ‘reversal of consciousness’, thereby obviously borrowing a term that is central to Hegelian dialectics. (Gadamer, 1979: 317) In the same way as Hegel stresses the abandonment of former truth when a new stage towards the Absolute is reached, Gadamer interprets dialectical experience as a way through which human agents correct their formerly held views on history. As Gadamer explains, “[u]nderstanding 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.” (Gadamer, 1989: 290; see also Palmer, 1969:199-200) But there is more to this notion of understanding than mere practicality. Understanding for Gadamer always involves a dialogue between the respective parties. (Gadamer, 1979: 330-3) It seems, however, important to point out that for Gadamer “[w]e can ... speak of a relative autonomy of dialogue with respect to its participants. If it is so, those who take part in a dialogue are not so much participants, as those in whom the dialogue participates.” (Grondin, 2003b: 127) This dialogue can either include two subjects or a text and a subject. Understanding therefore always means the attempt to reach an agreement through the medium of language. “Language is the middle ground in which

understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people.” (Gadamer, 1979: 345-6) This emphasis on agreement is a clear critique of the classic positivist approach that locates the process of understanding in the consciousness of individuals. In much Enlightenment thought understanding does not refer to a dialogue but to an imposition of will onto the world. To understand is to dismantle and control, to master that which has to be understood in the vain attempt to gain absolute knowledge of and therefore absolute control over it. Gadamer, in order to defend the all-encompassing historicality of all knowledge and the utterly dialogical nature of understanding criticised exactly the Cartesian notion of self-transparent consciousness by emphasising its impossibility. The sheer thought that consciousness could be purged from tradition and prejudice appears absurd to Gadamer since human existence, the Heideggerian being-in-the-world always already presupposes a situatedness we cannot leave. (Weinsheimer, 1985: 161-4; Gadamer, 1979: 405) The distinctive feature of Dasein, as developed above, is that in living human beings relate themselves interpretively to their lives, that they understand themselves in a continuous process of self-understanding, experience and re-interpretation. Here Gadamer maintains that we understand history not simply because we make it but also it has made us already. Gadamer, captures this particularity of human existence through the notion of ‘historically effected consciousness’. (Weinsheimer, 1985: 205; Wachterhauser, 2002: 65 Gadamer, 1979: 305-10) “The principle of effective history gives expression to the limiting forces that operate in any act of understanding. Gadamer historicizes the Heideggerian conception of foremeanings, arguing that such antecedent interpretive frameworks develop through historical existence. Effective history includes both the

creative production of cultural forms, such as texts, that shape the worlds we inhabit, and the history of the *interpretation* of these texts.” (DiCenso. 1990: 82-3)

It describes the embeddedness of our understanding in a tradition that reaches infinitely into the past as well as the future and escapes our grasp in its entirety. As Gadamer observed:

“In fact history does not belong to us; but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices [pre-judgments (*Vorurteil*)] of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.” (Gadamer, 1979: 245)

In this sense that the experience of historical understanding cannot be reduced to a ‘subject-object’ schema in which the knowing subject is seen to be standing and judging over against an ‘object,’ coldly and calculatingly distancing himself from the text under investigation.” (Chan, 1984: 423)

The influence of the historically effected consciousness that expresses itself in tradition provides the link between Heidegger’s claim that being is essentially time and Gadamer’s focus on historicality and understanding. Tradition, i.e. the structure of pre-judgments that inform our pre-theoretical relation to the world are not to be understood as ontological entities, i.e. beings. (Wachterhauser, 2002: 61-4; Palmer, 1969: 182-4)

Rather tradition is pertaining to being itself. Tradition as well as the totality of historically effected consciousness can never be grasped or theorised like other ontological structures or beings. Tradition is but another term for the historicality of Dasein and therefore lacks necessarily any definite ‘what’. Tradition, or the historical existence of Dasein is itself a temporal phenomenon, instantiated in every act of

understanding in which Dasein relates to its world. Truth in such an understanding provides the Heideggerian *Lichtung* (clearing) through the dialectic of the fusion of horizons and the “art of saying”. (Thompson, 1981: 41; Risser, 1997: 156; Schweiker, 1988: 26) Having outlined Gadamer’s position on truth arising out of a dialectic of thrown-projections we can move on to the third thinker that contributed to a phenomenological notion of truth – Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur – Interpretation and Worlds of Meaning

As was the case with Gadamer before we can not hope to explicate the whole scope of Ricoeur’s thought but will focus on two specific elements – his reconceptualisation of representation and reference – in order to show how his thought adds to the aforementioned efforts to conceptualise truth as a disclosure of worlds and thereby redirecting it towards and placing it in a new social ontology. Ricoeur was heavily influenced by the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer and, especially in his later thought, reacted to and amended what he perceived to be shortcomings in their approach to hermeneutics. (Ihde, 1971: 6-7; Lowe, 1981: 384; Thompson, 1981: 36; for a concise overview on this see also Reagan and Stewart, 1978: 97-108) In respect to the role of texts and the hermeneutical nature of understanding Ricoeur was indeed very close to Gadamer’s conception but also moved beyond Gadamer in important aspects.

The point of disagreement that seems most interesting to the project at hand is Ricoeur’s criticism of Gadamer’s dialogical model of hermeneutics. As was outlined above Gadamer saw the embeddedness of reader and text within a tradition as the central feature through which a hermeneutics of human understanding in history becomes

conceptualised. In this way Gadamer had already made a decisive step towards a historical appropriation of Heidegger's philosophy. (DiCenso, 1990: 121) The engagement with a text leads to a fusion of horizons in which a new understanding arises in which the contextuality of a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (historically effected consciousness) assumes a central role. By accepting the ever-present force of history and the inability of consciousness to leave its embeddedness in history, Gadamer adds a new and stronger hermeneutical dimension to Heidegger's thought. (Grondin, 2003b: 75-7; Warnke, 1987: 78)

The very situatedness of the interpreter within a web of normative and existential determinants allows only for an ontological relatedness between understanding and project/world. The main argument hereby was that truth for Gadamer is not missing from such a situated and ontological hermeneutics but rather embodied in the disclosure of a state of being that reveals, in light of the projects in which the understanding is achieved, central characteristics of the relatedness between *Dasein* and world. (Taylor, 2002: 132-5; Grondin, 2003b: 147-8) Truth, and here Gadamer is clearly agreeing with Heidegger, is primordially ontologically disclosive and only derivatively epistemologically certain, even if Gadamer in response to Heidegger takes this notion further by arguing that "imaging of truth for Gadamer is not about how things come to show themselves as they do. It is not about the conditions for the rupturing of the folds of being (as Heidegger takes up this project). It is rather about the art of saying." (Risser, 1997: 156)

What Gadamer tries to overcome in his dialogical manner is exactly the alienation or distanciation between reader and text. The historical tradition framed in linguisticality always brings its immediate presence to the text through the interpretative engagement

of the reader. The text ceases thereby to be a historical remnant in which we have to recover the original intent and meaning and is transformed into an immediate medium in need of interpretation through the historically affected consciousness brought to bear upon it. "Ricoeur concurs with Gadamer's arguments that interaction with textual embodiments of historically produced wisdom provides the dynamic basis for reflexive and disclosive forms of understanding. However, he argues that the functional mode of the process is ill-represented by a personification of the text as a conversation partner." (ibid.: 114)

In describing the process of interpretation as an immediate appropriation of a text through a subject embedded in and confined by a historically affected consciousness Gadamer opens the way towards the insight that such a notion of consciousness "no longer pertains to methodology, to historical inquiry, but rather to the reflective consciousness of this methodology. It is the consciousness of being exposed to history and to its action, in such a way that this action upon us cannot be objectified, because it is part of the historical phenomenon itself." (Ricoeur, 1981: 61)

The problem of such a conceptualisation of a hermeneutics of immediacy in which the text replaces an interlocutor became clear in the debate between Gadamer and Habermas in the early 1970s – the so called ideology-critique debate. (for a detailed and concise depiction of this debate see for instance Scheibler, 2000: 9-70 or Mendelson, 1979: 44-73) The danger of Gadamerian hermeneutics and its conceptualisation around a dialogical model of interpretation could lead to the unquestioned acceptance of the authority of tradition. (Wachterhauser, 2002: 61; Weinsheimer, 1985: 170-1) Although certainly not intended by Gadamer such a conclusion becomes possible since both the text and the reader meet within the constraining framework of the historically effected

consciousness. Without tracing the debate about ideology critique it provides the starting point for Ricoeur's attempt to widen Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic disclosure and reintroduce the eliminated notion of distance.

Ricoeur maintains that the presence of the text is only of a trivial kind. "While in a facile sense the text may be said to be present to the reader, the semantic disclosure of the text produces meaningful worlds that are not fully assimilable to existential and historical immediacy." (DiCenso, 1990: 115) What has to be recognised beyond the constraints of the dialogical model provided by Gadamer is the all-pervasive presence of distanciation. Ricoeur points out that "in spite of the general opposition between belonging and alienating distanciation, the consciousness of effective history contains within itself an element of distance. The history of effects is precisely what occurs under the condition of historical distance. It is the nearness of the remote; or to say the same thing in other words, it is efficacy at a distance. There is thus a paradox of otherness, a tension between proximity and distance, which is essential to historical consciousness." (Ricoeur, 1981: 61)

Such an acceptance of the proximity of distance at the very heart of hermeneutics makes it possible to insist on the historically conditioned framework of interpretation and yet maintaining a critical edge to its practice. It seems worth quoting Ricoeur here at length before moving to the ramifications of this reconceptualisation for the notion of truth.

"The distanciation in which this hermeneutics tends to see a sort of ontological fall from grace appears as a positive component of being for the text; it characteristically belongs to interpretation, not as its contrary but as its condition. [...] Writing is not simply a matter of the material fixation of discourse; for fixation is the condition of a much more fundamental phenomenon, that of the autonomy of the text. [...] What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; verbal meaning and mental meaning have different destinies." (ibid.: 91)

With this move away from the conceptualisation of the text as an immediate partner in conversation, as a ‘Thou’ so to say, Ricoeur leaves behind the last remnants of the notion of authorial intent, a conception of hermeneutics that Gadamer had already largely demolished in the wake of his universal hermeneutics of tradition. Accepting the inherent dialectic between the immediacy of the encounter and the historically implied occurrence of alienating distanciation mapped out by Ricoeur means that “the hermeneutical encounter with the text is not analogous with a personified Thou but is rather a process in which the linguistic disclosure of the text opens worlds of meaning before the reader.” (DiCenso, 1990:115) Giving up on seeing the text as a ‘Thou’ with which to engage purely within the immediacy and contextuality of the encounter and making room once more for the distanciating element within any process of interpretation it becomes possible to shift the focus away from the reader who appropriates the text towards the world that is disclosed in front of the reader and thereby widening the scope of the hermeneutical encounter in transcending the immediate subjectivity of the reader. (on the centrality of such a distanciation see for instance Pellauer, 1979: 106-8; Ricoeur, 1974: 75, 80; Schwartz, 1983: 292) “The relation to the world of the text takes the place of the relation to the subjectivity of the author, and at the same time the problem of the subjectivity of the reader is displaced. To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds.” (Ricoeur, 1981: 94) In this sense then, “the text is not simply a medium of communication between two subjects or a substitute for the authorial partner in a conversation. Rather, the text is the source of a disclosive process that supersedes and transforms the subjectivity of both author and reader.” (DiCenso, 1990: 116)

In order to maintain such a focus on linguisticality as the disclosure of worlds Ricoeur develops a new conceptualisation of the core terms of representation and reference which leads to an understanding of truth that reiterates and at the same time widens the ontological notion of truth we have already found in Heidegger and Gadamer.

In respect to the first term – representation or mimesis – Ricoeur is challenging the prevalent conception that restricts the notion of representation to a form of copying or mirroring an object or state of affairs. The framework in which such a function of representation becomes possible is still vested in the notion of Cartesian consciousness that tries to bridge the mental ‘inside’ with the worldly ‘outside’. As we have repeatedly shown, this dualism is endemic to the modern conception of subjectivity and still haunts many conceptualisations in IR and the social sciences in general. Predictably, representation in Ricoeur’s work does not rest upon the notion of a Cartesian cogito which assumes the passive characteristic of simply re-presenting what has been originally presented. (Schweiker, 1988: 27-8; Reagan, 1996: 75-6; Thompson, 1981: 55) Rather, Ricoeur sees such a conception of representation as derivative of a much broader and more primordial relation between the cultural worlds out of which it arises and the reconfiguration of these worlds through processes of representation. In order to conceptualise this approach more clearly Ricoeur split the notion of representation into three different and yet interconnected spheres which he calls $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$ and $mimesis_3$. (Ricoeur, 1984: 46; Schweiker, 1988: 28; Connerty, 1990: 392-3)

Ricoeur’s aim is to determine the place of representation in the order of being. Whereas representation in its usual understanding is vested in the mind as a form of connecting to the outside world, it must in Ricoeur’s ontology be vested not in the mind, i.e. in

consciousness or in the world, i.e. nature but reside in the place that brings both of these into being. In other words for representation to assume a meaningful place in a fundamental ontology its relation to being-in-the-world must be illuminated and conceptualised. Ricoeur aims at exactly such a conceptualisation by widening the sphere of simple mirroring through the introduction of the determinants that guide and make such a mirroring possible in the way it occurs. The focus hereby lies with the notion of mimesis₁ and mimesis₃ which Ricoeur describes as “a reference back to the familiar pre-understanding we have of the order of action” (mimesis₁) and “a new configuration ... of the pre-understood order of action” (mimesis₃). (Ricoeur, 1984: xi) Such a widening of scope provides the existential link between the process of representation and being-in-the-world by including “both the pre-given cultural worlds inhabited by human beings and activity transformative of these worlds.” (DiCenso, 1990: 122) The link to the specific position of Dasein as the place where worlds are being disclosed is provided by the fact that “presentation per se refers to a being-in-the-world that is culturally and linguistically formed and hence is itself mimetic.” (ibid.) With this conceptualisation Ricoeur is completely in agreement with Heidegger and Gadamer and their critique of the objectivising tendency of modern subjectivity and consciousness that underlines many enquiries into the social and political world. (ibid.: 127; Ricoeur, 1971: xv; Klemm, 1983: 59-60; Thompson, 1981: 55; Reagan and Stewart, 1978: 104) Ricoeur shows that the “unreflective condition, the linguistic determinations of being-in-the-world, which are endemic to cultural worlds, are taken as value-neutral tools of operation, and their specific interpretive and mimetic nature is suppressed.” (DiCenso, 1990: 124)

This tripartite structure of representation is by no means a temporal or logical sequences leading from one stage to the other. In fact, the partition of representation into the three different spheres is more heuristic than anything else. “Behind Ricoeur’s formulations there lurks not teleology or chronology of beginning-middle-end that seeks to encapsulate the flux of experience into neat prefabricated structures.” (ibid.: 125) If one wants to conceptualise their relation it would be most appropriate to see them as involved in a ever-present circularity in which conditionality of experience flows in a multifaceted and self-referential, mimetic fashion.

“Indeed the value of the differentiations involved in threefold mimesis is that it avoids the error of attributing the more deliberate, distilled, and highly-organized configurations of mimesis₂ to the more contingent and open-ended narrativity of mimesis₁. The inherent linguisticity and narrativity of temporal existence makes possible the emergence of narrative per se (mimesis₂) [...] Moreover, it is the intrinsic narrativity of cultural existence that makes efficacious the critical reflection of forms of memesis₂, back upon reality by means of mimesis₃.” (ibid.)

The second term which has to be reconceptualised in light of the insights produced in the thought of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur regards the notion of reference. In the light of the reconceptualised notion of representation “Ricoeur articulates the relationship between language and Being, and hence the critical and transformative dimensions of hermeneutics, by a reconstruction of the notion of reference.” (ibid.: 126) Reference is hereby not linked to a simple correspondence between mind and world but describes the mutually constitutive relationship between being and language. (Klemm, 1983: 85-90) As for Heidegger and Gadamer being and language are deeply intertwined and any separation between the two is an abstraction that can only obscure the connection between them. Any designative system of language, as shown above, posits the relationship as between a linguistic and non-linguistic realm. In fact, however,

linguisticality permeates through being and is essential for our understanding of Dasein. “Being as such cannot be disengaged and isolated from the disclosive capacity of language. Yet neither does the nature of being allow a total absorption into language.” (DiCenso, 1990: 126-7) We find here a correspondence to Wittgenstein and his contention that human existence cannot be understood outside the confines of language, i.e. that forms of life are necessarily linguistically determined but at the same time they cannot simply be reduced to language. This point is important to stress since it is a clear position that prevents any profane synonymy between being and language and a subsequent reductionism. Human relationality towards the worlds we inhabit is always mediated by linguistic practices carried out publicly; or, in other words, the only way to access ‘reality’ is through language (*ibid.*: 127), not in a manner of approximation and correctness but in a manner of appropriation and disclosure. In this sense Ricoeur points out that the notion of reference is a sign of the “self-transcendence of language.” (Ricoeur, 1979: 74) The ‘pointing-beyond-itself’ of language which is characteristic of an expressivist notion of language is hereby the hallmark of the renewed interest in the notion of reference. “The disclosive and creative nature of language does not derive from, or result in, an abolishing of the functions of reference. Rather, with the reformulation of mimesis and all that this implies, we are led to a complexification of our understanding of reference.” (DiCenso, 1990:126) In this sense Ricoeur sees the referential function of language as pointing to the world that is disclosed in front of the interpreter in any event of interpretation. (Klemm, 1983: 85-90) This ‘world’ does not exist beyond language and yet it is not reducible to mere fiction in a profane sense – it is not just made up and can individually be changed at will. Rather the disclosure inherent in any hermeneutical process is necessarily expressed in language and framed according

to the tradition or cultural world out of which it arises. It is not dependent on a single consciousness of author or reader but transcends in its linguisticality the subjectivity of both and critically discloses a world in front of them. “The meaning disclosed by the text transcends the subjects and challenges the interpretive frameworks of understanding derived from the manner in which reality (or, in Heidegger’s language, Being) is disclosed to the subject.” (DiCenso, 1990: 116) The cultural worlds that are disclosed in this process transcend the individuality and subjectivity of the interpreter engaged in the process of disclosing; in fact, it is already a subjectification, in a Cartesian sense, to say that the interpreter through his interpretation is disclosing these worlds. Rather, it would be more precise to say that the reader assumes more the role of a midwife which is necessary to bring about a world and let it be; the interpreter is so to say characterised by the paradoxical state of self-transcendent consciousness rather than self-transparent consciousness. (Klemm, 1983: 87) The world disclosed would not be without him and yet it is not him in his individuality who lets them be. The worlds antecede the interpreter, not logical or spatially but temporally. They do not exist in an outside but are instantiated in time through exactly the dialectic between the immediacy of interpretation and the alienating distanciation of hermeneutical historicity. “Ricoeur describes the critical relation between linguistic disclosure ($mimesis_2$) and cultural reality ($mimesis_1$) as a referential operation. He maintains that it is the referential function that allows language in general and hermeneutics in particular to operate critically in relation to cultural worlds.” (DiCenso, 1990: 128) This becomes only possible through an understanding of language that links being and linguisticality on the most basic and existential level. Language becomes in fact inseparable from any instance of being. “Here it becomes clear that Ricoeur, in agreement with such diverse

figures as Wittgenstein and Foucault, understands the reality of language to be inseparable from its instances of use. Linguistic meaning cannot be determined in any full and final sense apart from its operations within specific contexts.” (ibid.: 129)

It is more than evident from this formulation that language must not be seen as aloof from human existence but exhibits an existential category of it. Truth must therefore also be found within the historical conditions of human existence as the place in which meaning is publically mediated. Every human being is situated within a wider web of linguistic and social practices that transcend his horizon and make it impossible to inquire into these states of affairs in an objective and abstract manner. (Ricoeur, 2007: 28-31) Or to put it in Ricoeur’s language: [T]he infinite or the transcendent does indeed contribute to the constitution … of our being-in-the-world. [...] But the role of that infinite is properly exhausted in the task of constituting, and thus it is never possible for us to encounter the presence of the infinite directly.” (Lowe, 1981: 399)

Through his extensive elaboration on the notions of mimesis and reference which here could only be presented in their main outlines, Ricoeur pushes Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s notion of truth as disclosure further. He picks up Heidegger’s notion of openness and at the same time moves beyond it. “[T]ruth is not merely a term or an horizon but a milieu such as the atmosphere or light, the latter being an expression common to Gabriel Marcel and Martin Heidegger. [...] The metaphor … of truth as milieu or light, leads us to theme which we earlier encountered: that of being as ‘openness.’” (Ricoeur, 2007: 54) It thereby reveals the underlying interconnectedness between objectified and spatialised notions of truth which can be found in coherence as well as correspondence theories of truth and the more primordial notion of truth as the linguistic disclosure of worlds which make them possible. “Truth verification simply

confirms ontic experiences within the frameworks governing the appearances of things. The dynamic and disclosive approach to truth developed by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur displaces the closure of interpretive frames and opens our understanding to repressed and unthought dimensions of existence.” (DiCenso, 1990: 143)

The last step that is left in this enquiry into the notion of truth is the assessment of how far such a primordial, ontological notion of truth is compatible and illuminating for a reconceptualisation of social ontology in IR.

Truth and Dasein – Towards a phenomenological understanding of truth

In this chapter we tried to trace the conditions of the possibility of coherence and correspondence theories of truth and also a way to conceptualise truth within an anti-foundationalist ontology. This path was constructed along the lines of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur who struggled with the notion of truth and tried to establish an ontological form of disclosure that is appropriate to the denial of the primacy of Cartesian consciousness and everything that follows from it.

It seems first important to realise that an engagement with the notion of truth is possible beyond the smoke of the ‘foundationalist’ vs ‘relativist’ battlefield. If we return to the initial starting point of this thesis and the depiction of recent attempts to rephrase and revive the notion and importance of ontology for the study of the international realm we can see that there is more than a simple commitment to ‘epistemological relativism’ necessary to engage in a meaningful discussion about truth and ontological primacy. The role of language, much neglected in recent literature on ontology in IR, is crucial and provides the key that opens a field much more complex than imagined in these

publications. It seems also possible now to reflect more closely and in a substantial fashion on the conditions under which verification and validation is placed in a framework that commits itself to an anti-foundationalist stand. It is not necessary to embrace epistemological or ontological foundationalism in order to achieve ‘truth’ especially because the truth derived from such commitments turned out to be conditioned by and dependent upon a more primordial form of existence. Truth does primordially not reside in the fixed notions of either ‘how to establish certain knowledge’ or ‘concentrating upon the ontological realism of intransitive objects’. Rather, truth arises out of a notion of *Dasein* that in its existential categories provides an iconoclastic wave in the wake of which the old notion with its fixation on beings is swept away. Truth exactly because it arises out of the ontological dialectic between *Dasein* and its world mediated through language is not longer characterised by a vain quest for certainty through correctness and approximation but rather finds its innermost nature in the appropriation and disclosure of worlds of meaning.

Secondly, based on the arguments unfolded above it seems now possible to establish a reconceptualised notion of truth that shares a commitment to the historically situated and contextually contingent position of human-being-in-the-world without giving in to relativist and ‘everything-goes’ musings. Likewise we have seen that such a commitment does by no means imply the abandonment of either a meaningful notion of reality or the central terms of representation and reference.

In detail we have shown that from the very beginning, the notion of truth as disclosure does not set out to compete or replace the prominent notions of truth in the form of correspondence or coherence. Heidegger, for instance, claims as central for his endeavours that “[a] notion of truth as correspondence overlooks – and even tends to

obscure – the original way in which Dasein relates to things.” (Macomber, 1967: 35) Rather, an ontological approach to truth which emphasises the necessity to elaborate on the initial discovery of instruments that subsequently can serve as objects of knowledge shows that such a notion is more interested in a different and more primordial type of truth. This is captured in the Heideggerian notion of *aletheia* in its original meaning as ‘unhiddenness’. The focus here lies with the question of what characterises human existence and how it is possible to appropriate a description of it. In other words, truth as disclosure is never concerned with correctness or approximation to certainty but it is intrinsically revelatory of different aspects of Dasein as it relates to and finds itself in a world in which it is thrown and in which it struggles, lives and works.

Based on this initial quest for the meaning of being found in Heideggerian thought and the subsequent elaboration of the nature of *Dasein* as the field in which beings can be and are disclosed as what they are we move to the historical appropriation of this thought through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer, although very much indebted to Heidegger, moves the focus of his work towards the notion of history and the nature of understanding. He argues, as has been shown above that human agents in their attempt to understand the world are always already constrained (as well as enabled) by a historically effected consciousness that provides them with a pre-understanding that they bring to every act of interpretation. In Gadamerian hermeneutics we do not find an attempt, as in earlier conceptions, to devise a method of interpretation that will lead to correct and accurate representation of the meaning of texts. Rather, hermeneutics for Gadamer is characterised by a dialectic which draws the text and the reader into a conversation and fuses their respective horizons in the process of interpretation.

Gadamer's work focuses hereby on the inevitability of historical conditionalities which befall and emanate through all instances of interpretation. "Gadamer contributes to an approach to truth as disclosure by developing the hermeneutical and historical dimensions of understanding that are constitutive of the human experience of truth." (DiCenso, 1990:113) What Gadamer is developing is a more primordial notion of understanding and truth, one that takes into account the involvement and practically oriented existence of *Dasein*. In this way Gadamer as well as Heidegger pave the way for a radical reorientation towards ontology.

"After Dilthey the decisive step was not to perfect the epistemology of the human sciences but to question its fundamental postulate, namely that these sciences can compete with the sciences of nature by means of a methodology which would be their own. [...] The presupposition of hermeneutics constructed as epistemology is precisely what Heidegger and Gadamer place in question. Their contribution ... must be seen as an attempt to dig beneath the epistemological enterprise itself, in order to uncover its properly ontological conditions" (Ricoeur, 1981: 53)

To be very clear about it, this reorientation towards ontology and away from the primacy of epistemology is by no means compatible or synonymous with the claims recently made by critical or scientific realists in IR theory. It is of a completely different and much more substantial kind since it does not simply switch from 'how can we know the world' to 'what entities are there'. Rather, the driving question as Ricoeur so pithily observes is "what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding" (ibid.: 54) – we see here a completely different and more primordial conception of what ontology entails.

In a last step we have shown how the work of Paul Ricoeur adds further to our ontological conception of truth by retaining and elaborating on the critical element of such a hermeneutics which is someone obscured in Gadamer's work. Central in

Ricoeur's elaboration of Gadamer's historical hermeneutics is the retrieval of the element of distanciation which Gadamer had bracketed in light of his focus on the immediacy of text and interpreter as partners in a dialogue. Starting from Gadamer's work Ricoeur maintained that "in spite of the general opposition between belonging and alienating distanciation, the consciousness of effective history contains within itself an element of distance. The history of effects is precisely what occurs under the condition of historical distance." (ibid.: 61) Drawing on Gadamer's central notion of the fusion of horizons Ricoeur found "another index of the dialectic between participation and distanciation... . For according to Gadamer, if the finite condition of historical knowledge excludes any overview, any final synthesis in a Hegelian manner, nevertheless this finitude does not enclose me in one point of view. Wherever there is a situation, there is an horizon which can be contracted or enlarged." (ibid.: 61-2)

In order to substantiate these claims Ricoeur set out to reconceptualise and broaden the concepts of mimesis or representation and reference. Through this he was able to shift the focus away from a Gadamerian dialogue towards an unfolding of worlds in front of the text through the mediation of immediacy and distance. "This concept signifies that we live neither within closed horizons, nor within one unique horizon. Insofar as the fusion of horizons excludes the idea of a total and unique knowledge, this concept implies a tension between what is one's own and what is alien, between the near and the far; and hence the play of difference is included in the process of convergence." (ibid.: 62)

Out of the combination of the reflections found in Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur it becomes possible to elaborate a substantive reconceptualisation of truth which neither succumbs to a mundane foundationalism nor ignores the deeper questions related to the notion of truth. Truth in an ontological sense is presented by the process of disclosure. “Insofar as the meaning of a text is rendered autonomous with respect to the subjective intention of its author, the essential question is not to recover, behind the text, the lost intention, but to unfold, in front of the text, the ‘world’ which it opens and discloses.” (DiCenso, 1990: 115)

This disclosure is dependent on forms of being and is therefore never complete. As Heidegger never became tired to point out, any process of disclosure is at the same time a process of concealment. The inherent critique upon a self-transparent consciousness that dominated much of modern thought entails a rejection of the objective attitude in any attempt to understand the social and political world. “The approach to truth that has been traced from Heidegger through Ricoeur is hermeneutical, critical and disclosive. It is not predicated upon the immediate apprehension of unanalyzed ‘ordinary’ reality. Hermeneutics moves from the unreflexive ontic and apophantic to the level of disclosed frameworks of interpretation that condition any experience of immediacy as this or that.” (DiCenso, 1990: 143)

In this respect it seems more important than ever not to simply abandon the notion of truth in our enquiries into the social and political worlds we encounter and constitute. Rather, it is necessary to lay claim to the more basic and fundamental notion of truth as disclosure in order to account for a different ways to approach phenomena in the international realm. What critical scholarship provides is a disclosive endeavour in which worlds of meaning unfold in front of its audience. These insights and disclosures

are not neutral or objective, they are not aiming at establishing transferable and theoretical knowledge but they lead us deeper into the nature of the social which is existentially praxeological. *Dasein* is the plane on which the entities we encounter are disclosed as what they are in light of the dialectic between immediacy and distance brought upon them in the act of interpretation. We have now reached again the point in which early arguments such Winch's demand to enquire into the relation between reality and thought and subsequently into the intelligibility of reality find their consummation in the linguistically constituted disclosure of worlds which transcend the individual and pertain to human being or *Dasein* as such. "The quest for truth, on this level, leads us to rethink the interpretive patterns that govern our existential activity. It carries us beyond the false immediacy of the subjective appropriation of objects to the processes that are constitutive of subjectivity." (ibid.)

The notion of truth as the unhiddenness of beings in the deconcealment of being unfolds its whole momentousness through the notion of disclosure. Truth assumes thereby a central part in any attempt to fundamentally reconsider the ontological premises out of which social research arises. The new social ontology which we set out the sketch in the present thesis has gained another element that neatly fits into the reconceptualisations of agency and language provided above. The one element left that seems necessary to explore for an initial sketch of this new social ontology concerns the central role of human freedom. Freedom in its nature is again a very much debated concept in philosophy and the social sciences. As will be shown in the next chapter it has to be appropriated and reconceptualised in light of the fundamental insights produced so far. To this task we will now turn.

VI Freedom – The Possibility that we are

Freedom is not a particular thing among others, not lined up as a part of a row, but rather it prescribes and permeates the totality of beings as a whole. If we are to investigate freedom as the ground of possibility of human being then its essence is more primordial than man. Man is only a guardian of freedom, ... human freedom signifies now no longer: freedom as a property of man, but the reverse: man as a possibility of freedom. Human freedom is the freedom which invades and sustains man, thereby rendering man possible.

Martin Heidegger

The last chapter which will complete the preliminary sketch of a new social ontology undertaken in this thesis is concerned with the character and role of freedom in human existence in general and in the political and social realm in particular. The role of freedom in human life and existence was and still is one of the most puzzling and widely debated issues in different fields in the humanities. At the heart of these controversies lies the paradoxical insight that freedom can neither be affirmed to exist in any absolute sense nor can it be denied to exist in any absolute sense. Total human freedom is impossible since the limitations (both physically and mentally) which humans face in their mode of existence constrain their actions to a certain degree. On the other hand it seems equally obvious that human beings compared to most other

beings are not dependent on purely instinctual reactions or mechanical necessities in their environment.

The question of freedom in our current endeavour seems necessary however in order to provide a space for praxeological concerns pertaining to the way human beings are enabled and constrained in respect to their actions. As we have seen with Wendt and Wight, both rely in their account of ontology on the famous dictum '*ex nihilo nihil fit*' – nothing comes from nothing. It seems, however, that such a one-sided account which is left unsubstantiated in the work of both scholars, leaves us somewhat stranded in face of the antinomy of freedom so well described by Immanuel Kant. (Kant, 1998: 484-5) Although it is commonly accepted that 'nothing comes from nothing', i.e. every event is conditioned by a prior cause (and that is not necessarily restricted to efficient cause) the room for choice and freedom of action is severely jeopardised. Especially in respect to the normative dimension in which an account of freedom is relied upon in order to give a meaningful space to the notion of responsibility such a short-cut solution to the problem of freedom suffers not only from undetermination but also from underdetermination.

The fact remains that aside from the commonly accepted sequential succession of events, human beings tend to subscribe to a notion of freedom that gives them breathing space in respect to their actions. How is this possible within or in relation to the notion that 'nothing comes from nothing'? That is not to say that both positions are *a priori* irreconcilable but it demands at least a clarification of the extent to which human action is free and even more fundamental an exposition of what is meant by 'freedom'.

In the history of philosophy we find numerous treatises dealing with the notion of freedom, much too numerous in fact to deal with all of them at this point. Important therefore will be the attempt to provide an answer to the dilemma of the coexistence of determinacy and indeterminacy of human action. In order to provide such an answer it seems first of all possible to restrict our inquiry to the way freedom manifests itself ontologically and phenomenologically. That means that the many different forms of freedom such as political freedom, moral freedom, metaphysical freedom will be illuminated only in so far as they presuppose the concept of freedom which they all embody. Secondly it seems necessary to proceed in three steps in order to elaborate on this concept of freedom as towards its scope and meaning. First we would have to gain more clarity about the notion of freedom we are dealing with. As will be demonstrated freedom can be conceptualized in many different ways – metaphysical, cosmological, practical, negative, positive and so on. Before we therefore can actually start with developing an account of freedom it is unavoidable to shed more light on the different angles used to engage with the question of freedom. Secondly, based on these different conceptualizations, we would have to sketch out the relation of freedom to human existence and conceptualise the dialectic in light of the themes of agency, language and truth we have already dealt with. Finally, we would have to provide a link to matters concerning research into the social and political processes to be found in the international scene.

Approaches to the problem of freedom

As was already indicated above, the entry points to discussions on the notion of freedom are numerous depending of the specific area of enquiry. One can debate about the nature

and scope of political freedom in the form of self-legislation or self-determination, one can focus on matters of moral freedom and subsequent questions of responsibility or one can focus on metaphysical freedom and its relation to systems of realism or idealism. Equally, one can find innumerable philosophical accounts with which to start. In the modern period alone path-breaking accounts of freedom were delivered by thinkers as diverse as Spinoza, Leibniz, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, just to name the most prominent. So the first problem before one can actually immerse into any substantial discussion on freedom is the determination of the starting point in terms of the kind of freedom to be addressed and the philosophical perspective from which it should be addressed.

In respect to the first point, the kind of freedom under consideration, it seems necessary to chose, if possible, the broadest or most basic conception of freedom. This is the case since we are concerned with a conception of freedom that pertains to the same level of generality as the other themes presented here. In pursuit of a new social ontology the focus can initially not lie with any specific notion of freedom in an already compartmentalised field of study but only with the conditions that make such a compartmentalisation and subsequent narrower foci on particular kinds of freedom possible. We can therefore, at this point of our enquiry, leave aside any notion of freedom that deals only with an aspect of what it is to be human, such as political or moral freedom. Instead we will focus on the conditionality out of which freedom, if it is to assume any positive meaning at all, must be grasped and subsequently makes derivative and compartmentalised notions of freedom possible. The focus in the remainder of this chapter therefore lies with ontological freedom as the ground for the

possibility for different manifestations of immanent freedom in the various disciplines concerned with human action.

In respect to the second point, the selection of the philosophical starting point seems more difficult to determine especially since the different philosophers in question come to completely different solutions in respect to the problem of freedom. The range of approaches reaches from a Spinozist determinism to a Leibnizian compatibilism to the Kantian positing of transcendental freedom and the subsequent critique in Schelling and Kierkegaard. (Kosch, 2006) The starting point for our short depiction of the treatment of freedom in modern philosophy will be provided by Kant's thought in this matter. The reason for choosing Kant as the point of departure is mainly twofold. First, in almost all systems of freedom devised before the critical philosophy the solution to freedom was presented as a certain and systemic one. In Spinoza, for instance, freedom in any meaningful sense was denied through the subjugation of individuals to nature of which they only constitute moments that are necessarily regulated by natural (efficiently causal) laws.

In Leibniz' system freedom is not denied but presented in a compatibilist mode. (Adams, 1998: 51) Freedom here simply means 'independent from external causes'. In this way the general notion of causality as necessitating a temporal sequence of cause and effect is brought in agreement with the notion of freedom. Kant righteously denied such a conception of freedom any meaning as moral responsibility cannot be allocated to individual action on the basis of internal and external causes since even internal causes derived from sensibility could not have led to a different form of action. (Kosch, 2006: 25-6; Honderich, 1996: 855) Kant from the first critique onwards struggled with the notion of freedom and its relation to the realm of natural causality. The most famous

statement of this dilemma can be found in the third antinomy of reason to which we will turn in due course. Therefore, Kant provides the widest and most open consideration of freedom in its transcendental sense both in respect to the possibility of such a freedom and its conditioning relations to subordinate notions of freedom. We therefore enter into our discussion on freedom from the struggle that plagued Kantian philosophy to the end in order to find a possible point of overcoming (not solving) the Kantian predicament.

The second reason why Kant's philosophy and his thought on freedom seems to be of central importance is taken from the influence it expounded in subsequent models of thought. Almost the whole development of what nowadays is, rightly or wrongly, subsumed under the label of Continental philosophy can be read and interpreted as a reaction to Kant's philosophy and its inherent shortcomings of which his unfinished treatment of freedom remains one. In this line we find a direct relation between Kantian thought on the matter of freedom and the various attempts to engage with the subject in the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel and the more anti-Enlightenment thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard. There we can already see proto-Heideggerian tendencies in the late philosophy of Schelling which will provide the link to the main movement under consideration here – post-Husserlian phenomenology. And indeed if we look at the lecture series given by Heidegger himself on the issue of human freedom throughout the 1930s we find the most extensive and intensive treatment of Kantian philosophy in all of Heidegger's work. (Heidegger, 2005) Kant therefore seems very well suited to outline the central dilemmas connected to matters of freedom on the one hand and via Schelling to provide a link to post-Husserlian phenomenology on the other.

Kant and the third antinomy

The problem of freedom arises in Kant in wake of the opposition of theoretical and practical reason. “The issue of compatibility of freedom and theoretical objectivity arises in the way that it does for Kant because his case for the objectivity of theoretical claims relies in part on his view of causality – in particular, on the claim that the (phenomenal) universality of deterministic causation is a condition of the possibility of experience.” (Kosch, 2006: 15) For Kant the limits of theoretical reason and subsequently of what can be known result from his ontological and epistemological split into the realm of phenomena and the realm of noumena. (Scruton, 1997: 48-52; Kant, 1998: 338-365) Accessible through experience is only the world of appearances or phenomena, not, however, the things as they are in themselves, the realm of noumena. Kant therefore must run into a problem resulting from his commitment to deterministic causality in the natural realm. If human beings are simply part of this natural realm and exist only in its confines Kant would have had to admit that freedom is a mere myth; in other words he would have ended up in a very similar place as Spinoza did. Kant, however, insisted that human beings are not simply natural machines but that their intrinsic capacity to reason will put them in contact with the noumenal realm of freedom. (Bowie, 1996: 106) Such a dualistic ontology of human existence – as standing in the phenomenal realm but being connected to the noumenal – left Kant with a dilemma in respect to freedom which he sketched out in its scope in the third antinomy of reason. On the one side of the antinomy Kant stipulates that “[c]ausality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom

in order to explain them." (Kant, 1998: 484) This is the thesis in defence of a substantial notion of freedom. On the other hand, however, stands the antithesis which assumes that "[t]here is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature." (ibid.: 485) This position obviously follows a strict deterministic attitude.

Before we look closer towards the way Kant tried to deal with this antinomy and to which conclusions he came, it seems necessary to clarify the meaning of the term 'freedom' Kant is using here. Throughout his writings Kant uses freedom in quite a few different meanings. "Kant employed the terms 'freedom' in a number of senses. [Four of them are]: transcendental, practical; comparative; and the freedom of rational self-determination." (Kosch, 2006: 17) The concept of freedom that raises the conundrum sketched out in the third antinomy is transcendental freedom. It "is the one that raises the problem of compatibility with determinism; Kant calls it 'transcendental freedom' or 'absolute spontaneity'." (ibid.; Allison, 1997: 42; Benson, 1987: 571) This kind of freedom necessarily has to escape the confines of natural causality and posits an uncaused cause that is able to start a sequence of events without being the consequence of any prior event. It thereby describes "a causality ... through which something happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause, i.e., an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself a series of appearances that runs according to natural laws.... ." (Kant, 1998: 484)

We can see here again the clear location of such a freedom as being outside the realm of appearances which follow one another in a deterministic causal sequence. As such Kant recognised that transcendental freedom must lie outside the scope of possible experience and subsequently he held the view that this kind of freedom cannot be

grasped theoretically, i.e. it cannot be known to exist. We can find this instance in other writings by Kant as well, most clearly, for instance, in his short pamphlet on perpetual peace. Here he states:

"The guarantee of perpetual peace is nothing less than that great artist, nature (*natura daedala rerum*). In her mechanical course we see that her aim is to produce a harmony among men, against their will and indeed through their discord. As a necessity working according to laws we do not know, we call it destiny. But, considering its design in world history, we call it "providence," inasmuch as we discern in it the profound wisdom of a higher cause which predetermines the course of nature and directs it to the objective final end of the human race. We do not observe or infer this providence in the cunning contrivances of nature, but, as in questions of the relation of the form of things to ends in general, we can and must supply it from our own minds in order to conceive of its possibility by analogy to actions of human art. The idea of the relationship and harmony between these actions and the end which reason directly assigns to us is *transcendent from a theoretical point of view*; from a practical standpoint, with respect, for example, to the ideal of perpetual peace, the concept is dogmatic and its reality is well established, and thus the mechanism of nature may be employed to that end." (Kant, 2002: 443, my emphasis)

Kant sees the concept of transcendental freedom as being outside the confines of any theoretical grasp and yet states that it is not only necessary but also 'dogmatic' and 'well established' in practical terms, i.e. in terms pertaining to moral conduct. In fact, Kant's main concern with the notion of transcendental freedom does not aim at delivering a notion of freedom concerned with the whole of human existence but one that is specifically concerned with moral action. For Kant, transcendental freedom in the above understanding is seen as the indispensable prerequisite for any moral law which might bind human agents and prescribe a duty to follow it derived for the demands of practical reason.

"[T]he abolition of transcendental freedom would also simultaneously eliminate all practical freedom. For the latter presupposes that although something has not happened, it nevertheless ought to have happened, and its cause in appearance was thus was not so determining that there is not a causality in our power of choice such that, independently of those natural

causes and even opposed to their power and influence, it might produce something determined in the temporal order in accord with empirical laws, and hence begin a series of occurrences entirely from itself." (Kant, 1998: 534)

Practical freedom and transcendental freedom, however, are not synonymous, since Kant leaves the possibility open to think about practical reason in itself as not necessarily being in contradiction to natural determinism. "[I]n both the practical and transcendental conceptions, freedom requires that reason have causal force in the determination of the will; but the transcendental sense adds a further requirement: that reason be an *uncaused cause*." (Kosch, 2006: 19) Two elements within this conception of freedom seems central to our current endeavour. Firstly, and we will come back to this point in the next sections, freedom for Kant is inextricably linked with reason and reason itself resides as a faculty in the human mind. Secondly, if Kant posits transcendental freedom in the noumenal realm and stipulates that for freedom to be effective in starting an 'uncaused' sequence of events in the phenomenal realm, it is necessary to introduce a new conception of causality which Kant indeed does. On the one hand he maintains that natural causality indisputably rules the phenomenal realm but on the other hand he affirms a specific causality of freedom which makes it possible for reason to be an uncaused cause in the noumenal realm. (Benson, 1987: 571) Following these two conceptions of cause, Kant in fact deepens the rift characterising human existence by stipulating that human beings are part of the phenomenal and noumenal realm. At first sight he opens a possibility to combine the two forms of causality by locating them into different moments within the human agents. "The union of causality as freedom with causality as the mechanism of nature, the first being given through the moral law and the latter through natural law, and both as related to the same

subject, man, is impossible unless man is conceived by pure consciousness as a being in itself in relation to the former, but by empirical reason as appearance in relation to the latter. Otherwise the self-contradiction of reason with itself is unavoidable.” (Kant, 1956: 6) And although this bifurcation solves the compatibility problem between natural determinism and transcendental freedom, it leaves the concept of human agency somewhat obscure. It is one thing to say that the two kinds of causality are situated in different ontological realms but it is quite another to conceptualise the convergence of these two realms in the human subject which supposedly takes part in them. Kant’s dichotomy “does not offer much in the way of guidance on the questions of how the two sorts of causality (natural and spontaneous) are supposed to fit together (and to be predicated of the same entity: the human agent in its phenomenal and noumenal aspects).” (Kosch, 2006: 29)

Kant himself was aware of the negative effects of this split. To be sure, it was not a split that claimed the existence of two completely distinct entities in a sort of causal relation. Rather the split is a split in the human agent herself. It presents the human agents as being looked at in two different ways and these two different ways are governed by completely different laws. In this way “the self has to be seen, on the one hand, as an absolutely spontaneous noumenal entity and, on the other, as a mechanistically determined object of experience. [...] How can these two descriptions be descriptions of one and the same moral agent?” (ibid.: 37) Kant himself found two possible ways to synthesise these two concepts of reason which subsequently informed the development of German idealism and later anti-Enlightenment thought to a large degree. We will depict these solutions only briefly and only in respect to those aspects that seem relevant for our current enquiry. Needless to say, any attempt to conceptualise either

solution in its entirety would require a plunge into Kantian philosophy that would neither be possible nor very helpful in our quest for a phenomenological concept of freedom.

The first solution can be seen as a shift in priorities in terms of the relation between theoretical and practical reason. Whereas in the discussion so far the two realms of reason seem simply different in their subject-matter (theoretical reason as being concerned with judgments of truth and falsity and practical reason with decisions of right or wrong), Kant suggested in the second critique that theoretical reason has itself practical elements within it and should therefore be seen as subordinate to practical reason. “Thus in the combination of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has the primacy... .Without this subordination, a conflict of reason with itself would arise... .” (Kant, 1956: 126; Kosch, 2006: 38)

The second solution was the introduction of a purposive element into the realm of mechanical nature which Kant called ‘technic of nature’. (Kant, 2005: 193; Guyer, 1990: 38; Pluhar, 1986: 407-8) Based on the differentiation between determining judgment (a judgement that subsumes particulars under concepts) and reflexive judgement (which moves from the universal or whole as such towards the particular) Kant introduced the regulative idea of an absolute spontaneous understanding which imbues nature with a notion of purpose in its designs. “What Kant is asking us to imagine is an understanding for which the parts could be seen as dependent upon and determined by the whole, rather than (simply) the other way around. There would be no distinction between actual and possible for such an intellect...; nor would there be a distinction between what should be and what is... .” (Kosch, 2006: 40) Such an understanding, however, can only be conceptualised as a subjective regulative idea that

frames the limited and contingent understanding of human beings; were it an objectified understanding it would equal an all-powerful, God-like being which again would not be within the purview of theoretical reason to grasp. (Kant, 2005: 198) Nevertheless the introduction of a purposeful notion into the so far mechanical realm of nature allows Kant to highlight a different form of causality to be working as a regulative idea. (ibid.) In addition to the simple efficient causality he identifies in the determined sequence of natural events he introduced through the technic of nature a notion of teleology or final causation. “This solution is intended to mediate the first two critiques by describing an understanding that can be viewed both as the substrate of the world of appearances of the first Critique and at the same time the moral author of the world of the second Critique. [...] The regulative principle requiring that we think about organisms in teleological terms while thinking that they are nonetheless mechanistically determined provides a concrete example of how such a reconciliation is possible – though the details of the reconciliation cannot be grasped by us, but only by the posited intuiting intellect.” (Kosch, 2006: 41) This solution, as ingenious as it might seem, however, comes for a price. The notion of transcendental freedom in terms of absolute spontaneity is necessarily threatened by the introduction of a teleological principle. Although the unity between theoretical and practical reason seem now at least possible, this approach “cannot do without the idea of a higher intellect that intuits the whole as a whole and for which each particular as well as the totality of particulars is necessary.” (ibid.: 42) Exactly because the proposed unity of theoretical and practical freedom rest on the (subjective and regulative) idea of a purposeful understanding behind the contingencies of our experience the contingent minds are no longer entirely independent. Kant will be able to maintain that practical freedom in such a system is

still possible but the notion of absolute spontaneity must necessarily find its limits in the intuiting intellect which limits the range of individual free choice.

Both solutions make a unity of the two kinds of reason possible but again produce difficulties of their own. We will leave Kant's outline on the notion of freedom here and move to the ramifications of his thought. The leap towards a post-Husserlian conception of freedom as can for example be found in the work of Martin Heidegger is not as radical as it might appear at first sight for two reasons. First, because Heidegger himself as will be shown below takes his own starting point from Kant and works his notion of freedom out of the two solutions presented briefly above. For Heidegger, the problem of freedom as it was perceived in post-Kantian philosophy did not stem from a misguided conception of freedom but was grounded in the missing analysis of human existence. Heidegger will fill this gap and move to a conception of freedom that will broaden and deepen the Kantian one. Secondly, because the way towards Heidegger was already cast in a general fashion in the thought of Schelling who in his struggle with the Kantian legacy on freedom made the first important steps towards a radical reinterpretation of human being. It is this intermediate step which foreshadows important elements in Heidegger's approach to which we will briefly turn now.

Schelling on freedom – a proto-Heideggerian critique on Kant

One of the main problem-complexes that was identified and seemingly shared by all of Kant's critics was the inherent tendency of his thought to create dualisms such as phenomena-noumena, theoretical reason-practical reason, sensibility-understanding and

understanding-reason. It seemed the way to mend Kant's shortcomings lay with the surmounting of exactly those dichotomist tendencies.

Starting from these motivations Schelling in his early stages clearly followed Fichte who suggested the self-positing I as the unconditioned unity – a unity Fichte called the Absolute Ego. (Schaub, 1912: 568; Copleston, 1946: 46-7 and 49-50) On the other hand, however, Schelling agreed with a very powerful criticism on Fichte's subjective idealism brought forward by Friedrich Hölderlin. As Hölderlin argued, Fichte's abstract notion of the absolute I or absolute ego could not even be assumed viable in theory. Fichte readily acknowledged that it is indeed impossible to achieve the state of the absolute ego in which all dualistic notions would coincide but re-affirmed that man has a metaphysical as well as normative inclination to strive for its fulfilment. Hölderlin, however, righteously showed that Fichte's absolute ego is in fact nothing. Fichte argued that the limited I by the act of self-positing in a form of *Tathandlung* becomes aware of itself by positing a non-I outside itself. Now, from this it follows logically that every I can only become aware, i.e. conscious of itself, by exactly this process of self-positing. The absolute ego, however, cannot possibly perform this act of self-positing since nothing can by definition lie outside it. In other words, the absolute ego would remain unconscious of itself and subsequently would mean nothing to itself. (Hölderlin, 1972: 515-6) Whereas Schelling agreed with Fichte and of course with Kant that the subject is important in the establishment of the object, he went further and stressed the point, following Hölderlin's critique, that the object is important for defining the subject. "Berkeley and Fichte had seen – the former that there is no object without a subject, the latter that, in this sense, the subject makes the object; but Schelling saw that neither can there be a subject without an object – that the objective world equally conditions the

existence of the ego.” (Lindsay, 1910: 265) The importance of the object in establishing the subject as conscious subject resembles of course Spinoza’s notion of God or Nature, a single substance of which all objects and subjects are only modes. Although Schelling in his early philosophy agreed with the monism of Spinoza which he obtained from a close familiarity with Jacobi’s reading of Spinoza (Snow, 1996: 21-8), he surely disagreed with the purely mechanistic and deterministic conclusions Spinoza drew from them. “Schelling derives largely from Spinoza, the net result not being Spinozan substance, with matter and mind as inseparable attributes of one being, but an inconceivable background named the Absolute.” (Lindsay, 1910: 260) Schelling recognised the importance of the two poles of existence, subject and object, and demanded they must be reconciled in a higher principle or unity as otherwise the problem of Kantian dualism between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom would re-emerge. In a general sense, it has therefore been said that Schelling found himself somewhere between Fichte’s subjectivism and Spinoza’s monism. “At one time this concept is represented by the Absolute Ego, another time by the Unconditioned, and again by the Absolute Reason, or simply the Absolute. In whatever form the conception appears, it assumes the role of an all-inclusive universal, conceived presumably by extending the concept of the subjective or consciousness so as to embrace the universe.” (Dewing, 1910: 158) This Absolute in Schelling’s thinking must, however, not just be thought as a negatively unconditioned unity, i.e. as a ground that is defined by an absence of subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, “it is necessary to demonstrate its sufficiency as a ground of experience”. (Groves, 1999: 30) From the beginning, however, Schelling faced major problems in establishing a conceptualisation of the Absolute that would fulfil the requirements he stated for it. The Absolute as a unity

beyond the empirical categories of subject and object “has to be thought of determining itself and thus grounding experience, without thinking this process in terms of the forms of ground-relation that we posit as determining the merely conditioned features of our experience.” (ibid.) In other words, the conceptualisation of the Absolute must not be conditioned by thought but must be grasped as truly unconditioned.

Three different ‘projects’ can be identified in Schelling’s philosophical development that mirror his quest for an all-encompassing unity as the ground of human existence. The first can be found in his early *Naturphilosophie* (nature-philosophy) in which he starts from a more Spinozist account and posits nature as the condition for the development of self-conscious beings. In opposition to Spinoza, however, Schelling insisted that Nature, in order to provide the unconditioned ground, must be understood in dynamic terms, in terms of ‘productivity’ (Copleston, 1946: 50; Lindsay, 1910: 265); this approach is very much in line with Kant’s own thought of a teleological moment in nature as suggested in the third critique. (Snow, 1996: 82-6)

This, however, did not prove to be sufficient for Schelling since the question how free agents evolve out of nature as productivity and are seen as transcendentally free *and* subject to mechanical laws remains somewhat shady. The role of the subject and its emergence was tackled by Schelling in a second project – his system of Transcendental Idealism. Again, the aim was to find an underlying unity of human existence that is able to provide the ground for the dualisms in everyday experience. (ibid.: 120-1)

The third and final stage in Schelling's philosophical development began with the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift* (1992), in which he sought to uncover the possibility for a positive conception of evil which was missing in his idealist predecessors. From 1809 onwards Schelling's philosophy took a most radical break with his former attempts to systematise idealism, a task Hegel later would achieve. Instead, the new approach that gradually developed was characterised by three distinct features. "(1) a view of the nature of human freedom and the nature of agency arising from the *Freiheitsschrift*; (2) a radical theological voluntarism in ethical theory...; and (3) an anti-idealistic insistence on (to put it in terms common to Schelling and Kierkegaard) 'the priority of being to thought'." (Kosch, 2006: 88-89) As becomes almost immediately clear (3) is the most important step in our current endeavour and will be dealt with in the following lines to show its proto-Heideggerian character. The main concern for Schelling in this respect was the abovementioned problem with a teleological account of nature which threatened the validity of transcendental freedom. Schelling's line of attack against the idealist conception that he had hitherto tried to amend lay with the stipulation that reason alone cannot be the only source for moral action as it was in Kant. (Snow, 1996: 31) "For however highly we place reason, we still do not believe, for example, that anyone can through pure reason become virtuous or a hero or any kind of great man, nor even – in the well known phrase – that the human race can be propagated by it." (Schelling, 1992: 95) The moral character of human beings can therefore not simply be derived from the capacity of reason but for Schelling it has to be situated again in the original concept of transcendental freedom as absolute spontaneity. So far Schelling simply retrieves Kant's original concept of the first two critiques. But "Schelling goes further than Kant ... in two ways. First, not only the agent's actions, he

claims, but *everything* about the empirical agent ... is determined by that agent viewed as intelligible object. What one's transcendental spontaneity determines is not only one's moral character, but everything about one. Second, this first aspect of transcendental freedom is attributed to *all of nature*. [...] The nature of all being, not just human being, is determined conceptually rather than mechanically, and this determination is in some sense a *self-determination*." (Kosch, 2006: 94; Snow, 1996: 168-74) Freedom for Schelling is therefore something that pertains to the world in general and does neither simply reside in the mind nor can be merely attributed to the capacity to reason and subsequent moral action. Surely, Schelling did not equate the freedom of human beings with the freedom of plants or animals. He argued that both indeed shared a form of causal ultimacy which allowed them to be what they are, but only human being had the additional feature of alternate possibilities. (Kosch, 2006: 95) We see here already a proto-Heideggerian conception in that Schelling realised that human being is itself not caught in a predetermined nature but that different ways of being are open to it. (Snow, 1996: 142, 145-6) What Schelling did not yet grasp was that the being of innerworldly beings such as plants or animals would also depend upon the indeterminate being of Dasein. Nevertheless this account "captures a part of the phenomenology of agency as Kierkegaard and later figures of the so-called 'existentialist' tradition experienced it and which distinguished them from Fichte and even Kant. Agency did not seem to them to be self-starting. Human beings are agents whether they choose to be or not. They receive their agency as a gift or have it imposed on them as a task; they do not self-constitute as agents." (Kosch, 2006: 97) As we will see in the next section such a view of agency is firmly tied to the notion of freedom found in Heidegger. For the time being, however, Schelling remained stuck within a

substance ontology which did not allow him to move to a more radical interpretation of human existence and involved him in a manifold of new problems in connection with his notion of freedom. (ibid.: 96-8)

This widening of the scope of freedom in Schelling, however, as we will also see in Heidegger, was the first careful step out of an idealist system which equated actuality with thought. In his later ‘positive’ philosophy in the 1830s and 1840s Schelling moved further away from idealist systematisation as can for example be seen in his critique of Hegel. One element that stands out in Schelling’s rather obscure philosophical work in the 1830s and 1840s is the relation between systematisations of thought and their relation to the actuality of life. Systems of thought, especially in idealist thinkers, always aim at conceptualising the world in a universal and all-encompassing fashion. The relation of thought to life is one of correspondence if not congruence. Schelling challenges this view, not to the extent that he denies any connection between thought and life or world, but to the extent that he maintains that such connections can never exhaust the contingencies and idiosyncrasies of actuality. Part of Schelling’s attempt to establish a ‘positive’ philosophy as opposed to the elaborate *a priori* systems of thought prevalent at his time was to introduce the possibility to move beyond the constraints and constructions of thought. “In later iterations of the positive philosophy on finds similar claims: negative philosophy is an abstract scaffold upon which a concrete description of the actual world must rest – but not itself a sufficiently concrete description.” (Kosch, 2006: 109) We can see here already a move away from the exclusiveness of thought in grasping the complexities of life although Schelling still seems committed to a form of primacy of thought as it is seen as providing the ‘scaffold on which the actual world must rest’. Schelling does not go so far as to say that thought in fact is only derivative of

a deeper notion of being as Heidegger and other post-Husserlian phenomenologists will later do. However, “[t]he result of beginning not from the contents of thought but from the ‘being that precedes all thought’ (what Schelling calls *das unvordenkliche Sein*, which is meant to form the ontological foundation of the later system) is that the correspondence of being to thought cannot be grounded in thought.” (Kosch, 2006:111) And although Schelling never managed to think these approaches through to their logical end for various reasons, we can find in Schelling the first instances that aim at a much more fundamental and wide-ranging challenge to the trajectory of Western philosophy; a trajectory Schelling calls ‘negative philosophy’ and Heidegger will call the ‘tradition’. (Snow, 1996: 184; Marx, 1970) In these, as will be shown next, we can see proto-Heideggerian lines of thought that fundamentally will shake Western philosophy and contribute substantially to a notion of freedom as ‘the freedom that we are’ to which we now turn.

Heidegger and freedom as the condition of Dasein

Out of these reflections on freedom we can now move to Heidegger’s appropriation of the theme of freedom in light of his fundamental ontology. As we will see Heidegger engages with Kant’s thought on the matter but claims that the Kantian dilemma of the third antinomy and the remaining problems in its two solutions are due to the fact that Kant did not realise or penetrate into the complete depth of his questioning. (Heidegger, 2005:119) For Heidegger, Kant never raised the central question of the meaning of being but always dealt with the notion of freedom in relation to an already existent field of beings and from this metaphysics of presence tried to justify transcendental freedom

as the ground for the specific form of freedom that will bind human beings morally manifesting it as the highest value. (Thiele, 1994: 283-4)

What Heidegger tries to achieve as will be shown below is another approach to the transcendence of freedom as imagined in Kant without, however, necessitating a commitment to a form of Kantian idealism. This, for Heidegger, can only be achieved if we relate the question of freedom once more to the fundamental question of the meaning of being. (*ibid.*) In order to show how Heidegger undertook such an attempt at reconceptualising freedom from a fundamental ontological point of view it is necessary first to look at the specific place of human being at the nexus of what Heidegger called ‘world’ and ‘earth’. From these preliminary reflections we can then proceed to show how Heidegger placed his account of freedom in relation to being and time and from there derived the fundamental nature of an ontological notion of freedom that at least in some respects supplements Kant’s prior deliberations.

Dasein between world and earth

As we have seen in the course of the preceding chapters the relation between human being or *Dasein* and the world it inhabits is of central importance for post-Husserlian thinkers and for the conceptualisation of a new social ontology as it is attempted here. Traditionally, this relation was seen as one of coexistence between different forms of entities or substances each definable according to a set of observable characteristics. (Odysseos, 2007: xii-xiii) Human existence stood out among those entities as it was imbued with reason which gave it the edge over other forms of being. The result was that with the advent of modern philosophy the relation between human beings and their

world was one of dominance and control. So far we have shown that such a conception is by no means as straight-forward and self-evident as its supporters would like to have it. Rather the relation between human being and its world is much more complex and subtle than often assumed. Heidegger and subsequent thinkers in the phenomenological tradition questioned the inherent metaphysics of presence that such a substance-ontology entailed. Instead they tried to show the close involvement of human being in its world which does not allow for a neutral viewpoint from which objective observation will be possible; in other words they tried to overturn the elevation of human beings over their world and situate them right in the midst of other beings. (Dreyfus, 1991: 40-3) Nevertheless, as was shown above such a situatedness was special in some respects that prove vital if we ask about the nature of human being. Human being is not just any being but is concerned with its own being. (Heidegger, 1996: 39) It stands out through the fact that it is not just an innerwordly being as plants and animals are but through its very being establishes a world which lets beings be what they are. Human being is thereby always involved in projects and hence projects itself constantly into the future – human being is its own possibility. (ibid.: 139)

As such we can already see that human being must have a characteristic that allows it to project itself into the future in many different possibilities and subsequently encounter other beings and let them be. On the other hand we can also readily realise that these powers of projection are not unlimited. Human being cannot simply be whatever it wants to be. Heidegger catches one aspect of these limitations in the facts of birth and death. (Inwood, 1997: 24-5; Dreyfus, 1991: 305-13; Demske, 1970: 54-5) Human being is ‘thrown’ into the world and its existence is a constant being-towards death; no human device or project can ever move beyond those limitations. But there are smaller

limitations we encounter in our everyday lives as well and we will have to consider their nature and origin in order to gain a clearer conception of the nature of freedom. These further limitations must not only transcend human beings but also their world which only comes into being through human *Dasein*. The world as we have depicted it so far is therefore only one of two aspects human being is confronted with in its very being. The other element which as we will see provides a constant resistance and challenge to human projects Heidegger labelled ‘earth’. “Though dependent on Dasein for its unity and coherence, the world rests on a foundation of natural products and has its roots in the fecundity of ‘mother earth’.” (Macomber, 1967: 64)

‘Earth’ in this sense roughly equals what is normally grasped under the term ‘nature’. It is the force behind and beyond human being and its world but not simply in the traditional materialist sense. It is not the realm of ‘intransitive objects’ that simply exist alongside human beings and can be grasped in a simple and scientific way. The earth in Heidegger is more closely related to the term *mater* in ‘materia’ – in the sense of mother earth. (ibid.: 65) This is not simply a mystic or poetic appeal to some elusive realm in which and out of which beings evolve. Rather, it has to be seen as the other side of the nexus at which human being stands. The projects we are involved in constantly can only be pursued by drawing materials into our awareness and use them. These materials are indeed existent as such beyond human existence but they are concealed from our view. The earth (note that Heidegger speaks of *the* earth and *a* world) is at the limits against which human being is struggling continuously. “The earth announces itself in every breakdown of the world. Such breakdowns bring Dasein to the recognition of the contingency of its designs, to an awareness that the rhythm of the earth is not its rhythm and that the manipulability of things is not unlimited; is often not even sufficient.”

(ibid.) As such the earth is in constant conflict with the world and both are inextricably interwoven in their struggle. As Heidegger once said, describing the relation between the two: “Die Welt gründet sich auf die Erde und die Erde durchragt die Welt.” (The world is founded on the earth and the earth emanates through the world) (Heidegger, 2007f: 174) For Heidegger it is important to stress that the intrinsic concealment of the earth is the negative pole of human being that does simply not allow *Dasein* to control and manipulate everything in its reach. In this sense the anthropocentric view of modernity in which the natural world is seen as being imbued with reason – as is man – and subsequently can be an object to be controlled, manipulated and dominated is misguided and reveals itself as a vain undertaking in every breakdown of our instruments and projects. “Surrounding *Dasein*’s world of meaning – or rather penetrating it to the core – is the meaningless source of meaning and the marvelous or terrible ground of everything that is familiar. The familiar is not fundamentally familiar – it is not familiar in its ground or origin.” (Macomber, 1967: 65-6) The earth as important as it is for the very nature of our being is forever beyond our control because it is essentially out of tune with human existence.

The conflict that defines human freedom is exactly situated at the nexus of the conflict between world and earth. Human being itself is not involved in this conflict but becomes its primary expression. Bound by the contingencies of the earth which are forever beyond its control and opened towards the world which is of its own making, we find human being as the place that opens the possibilities for being.

“*Dasein*’s activity throughout history takes permanent shape against the resistance of the earth in the way in which the activity of the sea leaves its mark in the contours of the coast against which it washes. If the world belongs to the being of *Dasein*, which is defined as a source of activity, it requires a counterelement as the source of its permanence and continuity.

This counterelement is the earth, which, in Heidegger's thinking, plays the role traditionally ascribed by philosophers to material. [...] Heidegger speaks of it as an 'opponent.' The earth has a rhythm and dynamism of its own, on which Dasein is wholly dependent, which it must exploit, and to which, in the final analysis, it can only submit." (ibid.: 66-7)

"The negative character of the earth as the unfamiliar, like that of the instrument as the inconspicuous, does not merely indicate what the earth is not. [...] The earth is the sustaining-and-self-concealing, each in virtue of the other. Heidegger appeals to the twofold sense of the German verb *bergen*, which means both 'to shelter or protect' and 'to hide or conceal'." (ibid.: 66; Heidegger, 2007f: 174) As such the earth provides the element of constancy that stands over and against the transient and fluctuating conception of the world. "The earth is the ground of the constancy of Dasein's world: the resistance which it offers is essential to the abiding or enduring aspect of openness."

(Macomber, 1967: 66)

Such a ground is indeed necessary if one wants to avoid a conception of a seemingly all-powerful Dasein which shapes and reshapes a world which is constantly in flux, waxing and waning under human existence without any constraining force to hold its defining characteristics in place. "The earth sustains Dasein's life and conceals itself from Dasein's scrutiny – and mastery – and is thus *bergend* in both senses of the term. [...] The essence of the earth is best expressed in the inner coherence of these two notions." (ibid.; Polt, 1999: 137-8) The conception of the earth as the ever elusive and yet maintaining sphere also stands in clear opposition to any megalomaniac attempts to subdue the environment we live in to human design and control. (Thiele, 1994: 284) *Dasein* only takes its place in the order of things as the place where the constant antagonism between transience and constancy is fought. "Man is not one of the

combatants; the combatants are the world and the earth – or the familiar and the terrible or marvelous – as these are the poles between which human existence is cast. But Dasein is the arena in which the combat takes place, and without it there would be neither combat nor combatants.” (Macomber, 1967: 68) The constant confrontation with the fragility of human design and control reminds human existence of the constraints that are placed beyond any grasp in the concealed and mysterious realm of the earth. (Thiele, 1997: 501) On the other hand, however, it is exactly the earth that provides the enabling moment for Dasein to engage in its projects and create a world for itself. “The design which renders things accessible and intelligible requires resources on the one hand and resistance on the other [...] By providing both the resources and the resistance of human design, the earth is the hidden source of the openness and order of the world.” (Macomber, 1967: 71; Heidegger, 2007f: 171) At this moment human *Dasein* returns to a central role within this antagonism that transcends its powers. “This conflict unfolds in human life; in Heidegger’s understanding it is human life. It is man who must wage the conflict – or at least provide the arena.” (Macomber, 1967: 67, Heidegger, 2007f: 174; Polt, 1999: 138-9) The conflict described between world and earth takes place only in the presence of *Dasein*; *Dasein* provides the field in which the forces of its own design and the resistance of the earth meet. The awareness of these conflicts that regularly show themselves in the breakdown of human designs and projects cannot be grasped by purely theoretical reflection as is to be found in many philosophers of modernity. Important is the practical dimension of encountering this conflict. It is not the theoretical musings of attempts to systematize human life but the breakdown of the world, a rupture of reference which truly reveals the transient and imperfect state of human design. One area in which such breakdowns can most often be observed is

certainly the international political sphere where the life-projects of communities and individuals are enmeshed in a constant struggle and in need of constant adjustment in the face of one another.

In this sense we can characterize human beings as situated between two poles of his existence the earth and the world which provide a constant flow of concealing and revealing without any chance of ever clearing the mystery of the earth in order to reach an objective account that allows mastery and control over nature. (ibid.: 138) Out of this constant antagonism must freedom arrive and only under these auspices can it be properly appropriated as it shapes human existence and the concomitant thrown-projections through which human *Dasein* evolves into its own possibilities. Keeping this conflict between world and earth in our mind we can now move on to conceptualise more clearly where freedom can be found in relation to *Dasein*.

Freedom and its relation to Dasein – Towards the freedom that we are

So far, there might be a tendency detectable in the conceptualisations presented that seems to tilt the proposed new ontology towards a subjectivist and individualist primacy. We have said and shown how the notion of agency is characterised by the ability of human *being* and subsequently human *beings* to engage with the world and let other entities be what they are. It seems that here we reach yet again the threshold of a philosophical idealism that inscribes certain powers to the human agent that makes him or her stand aloof from the material circumstances he or she encounters. It seems likewise the case that through the medium of language it is now possible for this kind of human being not only to communicate through a set system of symbols but also to

create a ‘reality’ through the use of language in specific contexts and the subsequent establishment of rules of social and linguistic conduct that again can be ascribed to human influence.

Such a reading, however, as tempting as it may seem is completely misguided for different reasons. First, we have already seen that the notion of consciousness is the one crucial element that distinguishes the thoughts presented here from a classic idealist enterprise. The claims we made are not rested in a conviction that the single human mind is the all-powerful place where agency, language and truth reside. It is not primordially the individual that assumes power to change the world around herself and it is not the monadic view that posits already constituted subjects in relations to one another. (Odysseos, 2007: xii-xiii) Rather it has been argued that human being is centrally concerned with its world and finds itself always already immersed in a context that is not of its own making alone. (Heidegger, 1996: 52; Deely, 1971: 30) The publicity of consciousness was the guiding argument in our deliberations so far which makes change a possibility not for the individual but for the publicly deliberated and negotiated existence of human being. Secondly, and this will be elaborated upon in the following lines, the power of human being so conceived as being able to shape the environment in accordance with the projects pursued regularly finds that the designs constructed in this pursuit are radically inadequate. As we have seen in the chapter on truth, the pursuit of projects as the constant involvement and care of human being in the world regularly encounters a breakdown of its instruments – the moment out of which truth arises. This second element which we have linked in the above section – the constant struggle between world and earth – poses other very ‘real’ limits to human endeavours and confronts us with our own finitude. Earth, however, as has been shown

is not simply the ‘nature’ of the natural sciences and general materialist musings. The earth as such is the ‘always beyond’, the *Grund* (ground) which is also always an *Abgrund* (Abyss). (Thiele, 1997: 502; Moi, 2006: 21-2; Wild, 1963: 677; Heidegger, 1996: 142)

To the same extent to which notions of agency, language and truth fundamentally and primordially transcend the consciousness of the individual, the notion of freedom must likely be sought in its primordial configuration outside of particular subjectivity. If this is not the case, the third antinomy presented above will remain obfuscated and reiterate the dilemma between noumenal freedom and phenomenal necessity. In respect to the centrality of freedom for our understanding of human existence Heidegger is not far away from Kant, as he realises that indeed the problem of freedom might well be the most fundamental in any account of *Dasein*. (Heidegger, 2005: 15-6; Dallmayr, 1984: 207; Haar, 1989) We will also see that Heidegger agrees with Kant that freedom as such will never be revealed in its entirety but will always manifest itself in a blurred manner. “There are striking resemblances between this [Kant’s] conception of freedom and Heidegger’s. Heidegger too approaches freedom as a necessary presupposition, sees it as undissolubly bound up with obligation, makes it the background of a process of self-realisation, and denies that it can ever be adequately explained.” (Macomber, 1967: 100-1) And yet, Heidegger in his longest engagement with Kantian thought during his lecture series on the essence of human freedom sees Kant’s treatment of freedom as unfinished exactly because it remained on the level of consciousness alone. (Heidegger, 2005: 119-20) Freedom for Kant must be presupposed transcendentally in order to take effect on human subjects. This effect, however, is one that addresses the moral duties prescribed by practical reason vested in individual consciousnesses. “For Kant it is the

highest element in man – reason – which obligates the whole man, and this is why freedom is seen primarily in conjunction with some actions but not all.” (Macomber, 1967: 101) What remained problematic beyond Kant was the way the bifurcated nature of the individual human as free on the one hand and bound on the other can be grasped without ending up over and over again in the contradiction depicted in the third antinomy. We have seen that Schelling tried to escape this contradiction by following a path Kant had opened himself in the third critique by allowing an element of purpose into a hitherto purely mechanical concept of nature. (Kant, 2005: 193; Guyer, 1990: 38; Pluhar, 1986: 407-8)

In his deliberations Heidegger, as did Schelling before him, pushed the notion of freedom beyond the confines of reason as a faculty of man and beyond the realm of moral action where freedom was exclusively located in Kant. “For Heidegger it is the being of man as an arena of openness which obligates man as a being within such an area. This is why his freedom is a presupposition of all our actions, not simply of those which we call moral, and why it imposes obligations beyond our understanding, which always occurs within openness.” (Macomber, 1967:101; Polt, 1999: 128) We can see that Heidegger links the concept of freedom in its primordial understanding to the notion of *Dasein* and thereby already transgresses the traditional boundaries of consciousness. At the end of his deliberation Heidegger will say that “freedom now no longer means freedom as a property of man, but man as a possibility of freedom.” (Heidegger, 2005: 94) How Heidegger reaches this insight we will show in the remainder of this section.

Heidegger begins his reflections on freedom by delimiting the space of enquiry in very much the same fashion as Kant did by distinguishing the different notions of freedom

we encounter in everyday life. Among them are practical freedom, comparative freedom, political freedom understood as self-determination as well as positive and negative freedom. (Kosch, 2006: 17) The one type of freedom that is of the utmost interest to Heidegger, as it was to Kant, however, is the primordial one which provides the conditions under which the other types of freedom become possible. Kant labelled this freedom ‘transcendental’ and situated it in the noumenal realm beyond the confines of natural necessity which rules supreme in the realm of appearances or phenomena. Transcendental freedom was understood by Kant as ‘absolute spontaneity’, the capacity to start a series of events out of a spontaneous act which is uncaused itself. (ibid.; Kant, 1998: 484) Heidegger takes the cue from Kant here and explores in more depth the connection of human being and freedom and its relation as it pertains to being and time as such. Heidegger argues that such an account is missing in Kant’s thought as it focuses only on a specific range of actions but not on the possibility for action in general. Heidegger sees freedom to be the defining moment of *Dasein* and as such as more fundamental than being itself. (Heidegger, 2005: 94) Contrary to Kant, however, Heidegger does not rely upon the central notion of reason but seeks freedom on the very bottom of human existence which, as we have seen, he describes as a mode of care or concern with innerworldly entities.

“Even man’s original encounter with things, as we have seen, is a tenuous one; his being is immediately characterised not by openness to things but by distraction in his preoccupation with them. In his immediate manifestation the human condition, from this point of view, does not differ essentially from that of the beast. Only when human design breaks down do we attain to the area of openness in which things first manifest themselves explicitly. It is only from this moment on that we can regard the human situation as unique.” (Macomber, 1967: 94)

And further “[i]n the moment of withdrawal man stands in the presence of things – confronts things – for the first time, and only in virtue of this movement is he properly human.” (ibid.: 95)

In this way, Heidegger links the question of freedom back to the notion of encounter and the subsequent characteristic of human *Dasein* to let beings be what they are. Such a conditionality that regards the being of innerworldly beings as brought into the open through the capacity of human beings to let things be as they are brings freedom in very close relation to the notion of truth as unhiddenness of beings in deconcealment as it was discussed in the preceding chapter. Human being as situated at the nexus of world and earth and as embodiment or space of their eternal contest provides the necessary opening to encounter and let beings be. The moment of truth in which the breakdown in reference reveals the contingency of human projects and their tools is not only a moment of truth as we have seen but more fundamentally even expresses the primordial freedom in which *Dasein* becomes its own possibility. Central is hereby the insight that the beings we encounter are not simply present as finished and observable entities as the Western tradition since Aristotle defined them referring to the term ‘substance’. (Heidegger, 2005: 46)

Such a substance-ontology runs into the problems sketched out in the introductory chapter and ends in a dead end in which either ideational or material factors have to be posited as foundational in order to create a structure in which experience is framed. Heidegger, however, refutes such a notion of substance ontology, or as he describes it a ‘metaphysics of presence’. To support his claims he re-invokes the initial meaning of being in Greek thought – *oὐσία*. (ibid.: 43-5) *Oὐσία* is understood as constant presence but not in the sense of a monadic existence of different entities but rather as linked to

the concept of *ενέργεια* as constant activity and producedness. (ibid.: 50) Seen from this angle, Heidegger argues that beings in their innerworldliness are not simply there but they are brought towards their being through the self-showing of their appearance. What is meant by this is that “*energeia* stems from *εργόν*, work [Werk]. ‘*Ἐν εργόν*, in work, means more precisely: self-holding (self-maintaining) in the activity of work., the understanding is directed towards the inner content of producedness, to being brought to stand forth from here to there, and, as such, to be now standing there. So producedness means there-standingness [Da-stehendheit], and *ενέργεια* means a self-holding in producedness and there-standingness.” (ibid.: 48) This rather cryptic passage hints again at the role of *Dasein* in the process of ‘being brought to stand forth from here to there’. The work which in its producedness pertains to human being stands forth as what it is, i.e. in its actuality, in the clearing provided by *Dasein* itself. This standing forth in the clearing of *Dasein* does neither allocate a primacy to *Dasein* in its subjectivity nor a primacy to the being in its actuality. The individual human being merely takes part in the process of letting-be but alone and as subject it cannot let things be. “Letting beings be in this sense does not entail a passive or disinterested attitude toward them; it is not synonymous with letting alone but with the letting-be of the fiat. It is by explicitly turning toward things, opening ourselves to them so as to permit them to have a decisive influence on our being, that we let beings be.” (Macomber, 1967: 102; Thiele, 1994: 283; Dallmayr, 1984: 215) But that *Dasein* is open towards things and let them be is by no means an arbitrary act of imposing meaning. Rather, “[b]eings are open to every form of human conduct – not only knowledge or even to consciousness – and to each in a different way. [We can for example see] the different aspects which a field represents to a farmer, a military tactician, and a town-planner and ... the different way in which a

situation takes shape for a moralist, a judge, and a psychiatrist. Heidegger is convinced there is no point of view from which any being can be definitely ('objectively') represented." (Macomber, 1967: 96) Therefore, the being in its producedness provides *Dasein* with a certain set of limits but these limits themselves can only be understood as limits within the space cleared by *Dasein*. The limits that we encounter are therefore neither material (i.e. substantially found in the object) nor ideational (i.e. derived from consciousness) in the traditional sense but express the existentiality and actuality of *Dasein* and innerworldly beings at the vortex of world and earth.

"If *Dasein* can encounter things because its essence consists in being open to them, I can – and must – discover in things the criterion of its conduct for the same reason. *Dasein* must permit things to provide the binding direction of its conduct because its very being is such as to depend upon other beings, because it is essentially oriented toward the realisation of itself outside or beyond itself in the midst of the things it encounters within an area of openness which it itself constitutes. All human actions and attitudes involve an intrinsic reference to an 'other.'" (ibid.: 99; Thiele, 1994: 288)

Since the characteristic of letting beings stand forth as what they are in their presence Heidegger links freedom to the notion of truth which, as we have seen, arises out of a rupture of reference within the clearing provided by *Dasein* revealing its contingency and transience. As Heidegger proclaimed: "The essence of truth is freedom." (Heidegger, 2007b: 123) In order to be able to let beings be what they are it is necessary that *Dasein* must always already have an understanding of what it means to be. The ground out of which this understanding of being arises is what Heidegger calls freedom. "Dasein provides the context in which these things can be what they are and the perspective to which they can manifest themselves as they are. This is what Heidegger means by the freedom of *Dasein*, essential to truth, of letting beings be, and of letting them be what and as they are." (Macomber, 1967: 102)

Freedom is therefore not something that Dasein possess but it is more fundamentally the ground out of which the understanding of being which Dasein always already has arises. As such freedom is not what we have but it is what we are.

“The freedom which Heidegger calls the essence of truth is not a faculty or property of man: it is not the faculty of free choice or the property of the will which allows us to select between two possible goods or to realise one of two possible modes of conduct. The freedom with which we are here concerned does not refer to exemption from physical or mechanical necessity or to the acceptance of such necessity in the light of reason. It is not the sort of freedom which we exercise now and then, as occasion demands. In short, Heidegger does not employ the word ‘freedom’ in many of the senses, common or technical, in which it is usually understood. Yet the sense in which he does use the word is meant to reveal the event, fundamental to human experience, from which all the usual senses derive.” (ibid.: 98)

At this point we have reached the crucial difference between a Kantian and a Heideggerian notion of freedom. Kant tried to ground transcendental freedom in the noumenal realm in which practical reason takes part. The capacity to reason provides hereby the binding character to the moral law which human beings must follow – ought implies can for Kant. Freedom in this sense is posited as apart from nature and its intrinsic causal necessities. For Heidegger, however, freedom can only arise out of our place within being and it can therefore not stand apart from nature. “Against the background of freedom Kant portrays human being determining itself independently of the world and nature, while Heidegger regards such self-determination as possible only through the world and nature. Kant’s freedom binds man to actions imposing obligations which he can understand. Heidegger’s freedom binds man to beings, and the obligation which it imposes transcends human understanding.” (ibid.:101) We can see here already how Heidegger breaks with another piece reified by the tradition of Western metaphysics that saw freedom as situated in the human mind and therefore

empowered human action from within. For Heidegger, this seems to be a rather pretentious understanding that necessarily must run into the dilemma of positing the human mind as free and the human body constrained by natural necessity. Heidegger in his conception of freedom provides a solution to this antinomy through a more humble conception of human being and its powers. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the way Heidegger conceptualises freedom does not undermine a notion of responsibility. It may be that *Dasein* in its very nature lets beings be but this process is not just one that simply ‘happens’ and in which *Dasein* only plays the role of a catalyst. The process of letting beings be is an active one in which innerworldy beings are drawn into our awareness and thereby come into being in a context of the aims and objectives set by *Dasein*’s projects. *Dasein* is not a simple bystander but actively and decisively engaged in the process of clearing a space for beings used in the pursuit of its own thrown-projections. In this sense one can say that “Heidegger does not predicate freedom exclusively or primarily of the human will, just as he does not predicate truth exclusively or primarily of human understanding. The term is rather a development of the notion of openness and can best be understood by analogy with the spatial sense of ‘free’ as ‘clear of ...’ or ‘open.’ Heidegger frequently speaks of a ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*) in the density of beings – a clearing without which there could be no light (*Licht*) – and it is in this sense that the terms ‘free’ is employed in the present context. Such freedom is constitutive of *Dasein* as a being essentially open to things.” (ibid.: 98-9; Dreyfus, 1991:163-7; Polt, 1999: 149; Heidegger, 1996: 125)

The relation to freedom itself is thereby not one of freedom. *Dasein* cannot choose to be free since it is what it is only by dint of the freedom in which it takes part. “The freedom which Heidegger calls the essence of truth is the openness which constitutes

Dasein's being. Such freedom does not belong to man as a property; on the contrary, man belongs to freedom as its creature. [...] Man belongs to freedom as to the area of openness which he is, but which, for that very reason, does not stand at his disposal." (Macomber, 1967:99)

Ontological freedom and the possibility of choice in the social realm

The focus of this chapter lay with the notion of freedom and its place in the new social ontology suggested in this thesis. Freedom in relation to human action and the nature of human existence starts from a dilemma which was conceptualised in many different ways throughout the history of Western thought. It seems that when it comes to the question of freedom in relation to human existence and action one necessarily encounters a conundrum since on the one hand the actions of human beings can seemingly not be reduced to a mere mechanical sequence that follows pre-given and necessary laws. But neither can freedom be seen as absolute in the sense that human agents face no constraints on their actions. In fact, both positions seem to be true to a certain extent. Humans are free to choose between different paths of action and yet are constrained by material and ideational factors that transcend the power of change an individual agent (sometimes even a community of agents) possesses. Freedom for Heidegger, as was shown above, provides the frame in which Dasein can assume its powers which show themselves in everyday conduct. The engagement with the world out of its own embeddedness within it allows humans to clear a space in which it can encounter other beings as 'others' in a parallel disclosure of truth and *Angst*. Freedom

for Heidegger describes this unique position and capability of human existence to let beings be which derives from its situatedness at the nexus of world and earth.

The notions of world and earth occupy a central place in Heidegger's thought because the dialectic between the two makes Dasein in itself possible. "Dasein is cast between openness and concealment, between meaning and the source of meaning which is not itself meaningful, or, as we can now put it, between the world and the earth." (ibid.: 71)

Freedom evolves directly out of this struggle that is only realised through Dasein and provides the conditions for Dasein's possibilities. "World and earth are always intrinsically and essentially in conflict, belligerent by nature. Only as such do they enter into the strife of clearing and concealing. Earth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth only so far as truth happens as the primal strife between clearing and concealing." (Heidegger, 2007f: 180) The constant involvement in projects that are in need of tools and devices to deliver any sense of achievability creates the clearing in which Dasein and innerworldly beings meet. As we remember this dichotomy between the acting subject and the acted upon object is itself not the primordial condition of human existence. It results from the constant waxing and waning between the possibilities of Dasein and their ever looming breakdown. Central to our understanding of Dasein is "... the conflict which lies at the heart of human existence, the conflict between the intelligibility and control which he demands and the mystery and intransigence with which he is continually confronted – and the more forcefully confronted the more he demands." (Macomber, 1967: 68)

Freedom for Heidegger is therefore something that is not situated in human consciousness as a property or characteristic but is the very condition that makes us human and opens the possibility for the manifold endeavours we are engaged in

constantly. Freedom, itself is not something we can choose or reject; in its primordial form it is something that we are as humans.

This concept of freedom as we presented it in the thought of Heidegger pertains directly to the social and political realm in general. At first sight, it seems rather aloof from any debates regarding the role of freedom in decision-making process or political action that can be found in social or political analysis. This is mainly due to the fact that here we encounter as fundamental the ability to make choices and decisions that is still vested in the individual although certainly we realise that the number of choices is limited to a certain degree. The question that arises, however, is how to understand the ability that human agents individually or collectively have to make decisions and how this ability relates to the constraining circumstances they face. In short we reach the somewhat worn-out debate of the agent-structure problematique. What is more important when it comes to decision-making processes? Are the agents always on top of the structural constraints or do the structural constraints overwhelmingly condition the agents in their actions? By now it should be clear that this ontological dichotomy between agency and structure is itself not as fundamental as the literature makes us believe. The agency-structure debate itself is a manifestation of the subject-object divide which we have argued develops out of a much more fundamental conception of human being. Even accounts that maintain that the relation between agent and structure is one of mutual constitution cannot escape the negative ramifications of accepting the subject-object divide as primordial. By splitting the two kinds of entities into subjective and objective the dilemma is postponed but not overcome. In the wake of actual research the acceptance of a mutual constitution leads to an arbitrary break in dialectic of agency and

structure. The simple and yet decisive fact that ‘we have to start somewhere’ brings the theoretically promising solution of a mutual constitution to a sudden halt. We can emphasise time and again that although we might start with either structure or agency this be no means aims at establishing a primacy of one over the other. The deeper problem of having disrupted the dialectic which does not allow for a starting point, however, remains and posits the impossible question of justification for the proposed starting point in light of our assumption that this point itself was constituted and is therefore never original.

Such a justification cannot lie with the primacy of the subject because “[f]or Heidegger it is the being of man as an arena of openness which obligates man as a being within such an area. This is why his freedom is a presupposition of all our actions, not simply of those which we call moral, and why it imposes obligations beyond our understanding, which always occurs within openness.” (ibid.: 101) Likewise, it does not make any sense to see the entities as dominant in constraining the actions and decision-making processes of agents since these entities are what they are only due to the fact that Dasein lets them be what they are. They are not the monadic substances that Wendt and Wight rely on, pre-established objects with a clear set of characteristics that are what they are beyond human existence. The materials which we use as tools (both observables as well as unobservables) might transcend in their ‘reality’ the bounds of science and the bounds of individual notions of agency but they never transcend in their what-being the clearing provided by Dasein and subsequently can never be posited as what they are beyond human being as such.

The agency-structure debate is a derivative non-problem simply for the reason that agency and structure are only ontically but not ontologically distinct. Agency and

structure are in this sense two different ways to illuminate and conceptualise *Dasein* as engaged in specific activities and projects: they describe different moments of *Dasein's* involvement in the world. A distinct depiction of both can never be more than a heuristic device used to provide the different perspectives which embody our understanding of *Dasein* in its actuality. The views presented are never final but again publicly sanctioned either positively or negatively. Any account of agency implies a concomitant account of structure and vice versa exactly because the two are ontologically not distinct. Here we reach yet again the nexus of freedom and truth in an ontological sense. An enquiry into the political and social circumstances we are immersed in is only possible through the acceptance of a form of freedom as the essence of human being and any results of such an enquiry can be true only by dint of their disclosive power. Truth derives from freedom here as Heidegger argued and it maintains the truth as the disclosive power of human being before and beyond any claims to correspondence and coherence.

In such a conception the notion of choice is still a real one since it is empowered by the underlying notion of freedom as the essence of human being. Choice happens in the assessment and judgement of our everyday situation in light of our preoccupations and projects we seek to pursue. This choice, however, is not primordial to human beings but only derivative of human being. The dialectic of world and earth provides the background against which the essence of human being as freedom emerges and makes possible the involvement in a world which is constantly made and remade in light of the projects *Dasein* pursues and their inevitable breakdown. In this sense agency and structure become derivative notions that in their ontic distinctness disclose modes of being and therefore pertain to truth and express the freedom of *Dasein* to let beings be.

We can see here that even the most entrenched approaches to international politics appear in new light. The determinism inherent in structural realist accounts, for instance, is itself only possible in light of the powers to let anarchy be what it is. This ‘is’, as should be clear by now, does not refer to an unchangeable and fixed reality Dasein has to accept. It rather presents a way of interpreting the inherent clash and breakdown of human projects. Exactly the dialectic between the power of Dasein to let things be what they are and the obligations Dasein has to follow in this process of letting be account for the emergence of competing systems of order and the manifold of aims, objectives and solutions we face in light of the breakdowns of our projects. The space we clear is not a universal truth, it is never unconditioned or beyond the possibility of change. Change, however, can only come through the freedom that human being is and not through the freedom we wrongly think we possess. The possession of freedom as human property is an illusion, not in light of seemingly overwhelming material constraints we face but in light of our being as freedom – freedom possess us and can therefore never be possessed by us.

Conclusion

After outlining the main pillars of the proposed new social ontology, we have to ask where we have arrived and to what extent our endeavour has successfully been completed. In order to draw a conclusion on these matters we will proceed in three steps. First, it seems necessary to summarise the main arguments which were expounded in the preceding 6 chapters and find a way to tie them together in respect to their importance for a reconceptualisation of ontology for the social sciences in general and IR in particular. Secondly, it seems necessary to say a word about the status of our enquiry in respect to its state and perspective. We will try to outline the achievements made by these reconceptualisations as well as the elements within such an ontology that have been left to future conceptualisation and research. And finally, we will outline in which ways the ontology sketched out above will be able to contribute to the field of IR; in other words we will have a look at the added value of our endeavour for the study of political and social processes in the international realm.

The core arguments towards a ‘new social ontology’

Our study has come a long way. What started with a critique of recent publications on ontology took the shape of a wide and substantial re-evaluation of the notion of being and its relation to core terms such as agency, language, truth and freedom which are central for any attempt to conceptualise social and political dynamics. The reason for this far-reaching enquiry into different elements pertaining towards ontology was to be found in the argument that the tensions and problems arising out of recent publications

of ontology in IR cannot be dealt with from within the modern framework that naturalised ontology as substance-ontology. Substance-ontology describes the view that the entities we are as subjects and the entities we encounter as objects have pre-given observable characteristics and subsequently constraining and enabling effects. Furthermore, the objects we encounter, both as observables and unobservables, have a ‘real’ existence outside and independent of the human mind that grasps them. The main task when starting from these premises was to give up the attempt to specify a certain way to know these items (i.e. a epistemological foundationalism) and instead go to these objects directly. As we have seen, Wendt and subsequently the group of critical realists accept the historically conditioned nature of knowledge but maintain, based on the stipulation of a mind-independent existence of ‘intransitive objects’ that these objects should and can be grasped as what they are through their enabling and constraining effects on the subjects handling them. Only subsequently will they be tainted through different ways of apprehending them epistemologically. And indeed, when considering the different examples they refer to this stipulation seems intuitively right. Pigs indeed cannot fly, the war in Iraq is real and the hurricane Katrina that destroyed New Orleans really happened. As we have shown, however, in order for their ‘realism’ to work they would have to show that the intransitive, mind-independent objects exhibit the constraining and enabling effects on agency out of their own nature as objects and can be grasped as what they are without recourse to human values or interests. By focussing on the role of language in making statements about the world we have shown that such an access cannot be achieved and that intransitive objects in their conceptualisations by and for humans will always be tainted by specific understandings that we bring to our enquiries. The dilemma we were left with was the choice between a reification of

observable and unobservable entities as mind-independent and graspable in a neutral way and the powers of the human mind in creating realities according to its whim. The later option was exactly the one critical realists argued against by saying that objects in the world cannot simply by what we make of them – water cannot become oil just because we decide it and neither do unobservables such as the state simply vanish if we stop talking about them. The mind can neither simply change reality nor make it disappear.

As we have said above, the core of this argument is correct. It is neither the case that the mind simply creates reality nor will it ever be possible to devise an epistemological toolset that will produce universally valid and necessary knowledge. But as we have shown, the way critical realists have chosen to respond to these problems cannot lie with a mere shift towards ontological foundationalism that posits the outer world as enabling and constraining and thereby provide a basis to start our enquiries from. This is simply another way to achieve the secure foundation where a world based on the subject-object dichotomy can be rested on.

Rather, and this is what the remainder of the thesis argued it is necessary to dig deeper in order to uncover the root conditions that lead to dead ends in all cases of foundationalism. The question that was raised was whether the dichotomy between subject and object and the concomitant substance-ontology is in fact as intuitive and natural as modern thought had made them. It was argued that instead of simply buying into these assumptions and try to find a solution within this framework we have to question the framework and try to think anew through the notion of ontology. In this way we have outlined four core elements – agency, language, truth and freedom – that in modern philosophy were closely tied to the notion of the human subject and

consciousness. By showing how these terms can be unhinged from the tradition we have shown that the modern concept of subjectivity and consciousness is itself a peculiar construction that arose with the modern worldview in which God as the central being had been transplanted by the human subject as the shaper and master of nature. By drawing upon the insights of many thinkers within the phenomenological tradition of the 20th century, most notably, Martin Heidegger, we have shown how a reconceptualisation of ontology based on the quest for the meaning of being rather than on the nature of beings can pave the way to a new and innovative approach to matters pertaining to human existence in the social and political realm. We have shown that the crucial difference between human *being* and human *beings* provides a new way to grasp our relation to the world by overcoming the monadic conception of consciousness and conceptualising intentionality into the public sphere. By being always already immersed and involved in a world and by belonging to a language community which shapes and negotiates meaning publically, the individual human being does not exhibit a self-transparent but rather a self-transcendent consciousness. Likewise, we have shown that the notion of truth can assume meaning outside the rigid corset of modern epistemology with its focus on certainty. Truth does not reside in correct representations of the world by individual consciousnesses but arises out of a rupture of reference when human beings are faced with their own finitude. Enquiries into the social and political realm do not lead to universal truths but to disclosive facets of *Dasein* and its relation to a world. This is why the modern stipulation of theoretical and objective knowledge has to be supplanted by a renewed emphasis on practices that reveal human projects and involvement in historically contextual situations. And finally, we have shown how freedom is not to be seen as a property of man but rather how man takes part in freedom

as the place where innerworldly beings assume meaning in the clearing provided by *Dasein*. The freedom that we are lets beings be, neither in a way that beings determine human action nor in the way that human can decide arbitrarily what these beings are. *Dasein* in its capacity to let beings be takes part in freedom through the instantiation of possibilities that are its own. It is thereby temporally dynamic in that past projections of its possibilities provide the framework in which future projections will be cast. Again, this does not mean that human *beings* can be whatever they want but that human *being* achieves its own realisation in developing into its own possibilities. Agency and structure as has been argued above are already second-order abstractions that arise out of a theoretical attitude. Structure in its phenomenological state becomes spatialised agency, not dependent upon human beings but realised as what it is through *Dasein*.

The question remains what status this new ontology can achieve in the scholarly debates in IR. In order to assess this question more clearly we will first turn to the inherent limits of the ontology presented here and then move on to more concrete examples within the scholarly debate that might profit from this new social ontology.

The new social ontology – limits and perspectives

As was shown above, what held the different elements of the new social ontology proposed here together was the critique of the modern notion of consciousness and its alleged powers. This focus on a critique of consciousness seemed warranted in light of the scholarly debates this ontology seeks to influence – debates evolving around the social and political aspects of human existence. And yet, it has to be clearly stated that

this depiction of ontology is itself necessarily written from a specific perspective and not to be understood as an objective account. The perspective in which the new social ontology was framed was guided by the critique of consciousness. The resulting conceptualisation is therefore itself only one of many possible *Abschattungen* in which this ontology can appear. In order to show elements that were only intrinsically dealt with or even sidelined in the current endeavour it is necessary to demonstrate how the proposed ontology, without substantially changing, can alternatively be portrayed.

One element that comes through here and then in the above conceptualisation but is never fully discussed is the notion of time. Especially with focus on Heidegger's work, the notion of time is nevertheless central and the ontology as it was presented here could have easily been written not as a critique of Cartesian consciousness but as a reconceptualisation of time as being. Time or temporality for Heidegger is central and closely tied to his concept of being in that human being in particular can only be individualised through time. The experiences individual beings make through their constant involvement in projects and the equally constant breakdown of their instruments in pursuit of these projects can assume meaning only in time. There is certainly research left to be done in the respect of this notion of time that is concomitant to the new ontology sketched here.

Secondly, we also have to recognise that human being in all its temporality is nevertheless a spatial being. It has a corporeal existence as body which, again starting with Descartes has been naturalised as a *res extensa*. It seems, however, important to develop the notion of embodiment and the role of the body within the life and world of the individual human being as something closely connected to the realisation of its own possibilities of *Dasein*. Heidegger himself very much neglected the corporeal aspects of

human existence and was righteously criticised for this omission. A reconceptualisation of the body as central to human existence would hereby present another *Abschattung* of this new social ontology, a perspective that will postulate the same underlying claims but from a different angle. How central the body is for phenomenological thought can be seen most impressively in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, particularly in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Again, in respect to the role of the body future research has to be conducted and the role of spatiality in human existence has to be linked to social questions.

Finally, the conception of the new social ontology as it has been begun here does not explicitly deal with the ethical ramifications of this thought. When challenging the predominant conception of agency as mainly characterised by monadic subjectivity the subsequent corollaries for ethical thought and action have to be outlined. In the majority of modern thought, the conception of ethics, although presented in a myriad of different views, prescriptions and claims relied centrally on the monadic individual which was submitted to a *Destruktion* in the above chapters. Again, we find nothing in Heidegger directly concerning the role and conception of ethics in human existence. Other thinkers in the phenomenological tradition, most notably and further afield, Emmanuel Levinas, have pointed to the centrality of ethics in human life and conduct. This *Abschattung* has to be explored thoroughly since it pertains to human social and political life as one of its central pillars of concern.

These three aspects that have not been discussed at length in the preceding chapters leave ample room for future research and substantial additions to the ontology presented above. It has, however, to be pointed out at the same time that the lack of these three perspectives does by no means invalidate the findings and arguments presented above.

Again, in line with the position presented here, the current enquiry started with a specific problem in relation to the modern conception of ontology and the question therefore made it appropriate to answer this question from a specific angle. There are questions in relation to human being that have not been addressed or even raised here and these admittedly will prompt and demand the conceptualisation of this new ontology from different angles. This ontology will never be grasped as a whole and described from an imagined ‘outside’. It will always remain bound to a perspective that is equally guided by the questioner as it is guided by the problem raised. Any conception in this way will provide a new clearing opened by the enquirer who lets the problem unfold in front of herself, immersed and involved in a world and occupied with future projects and possibilities.

The new social ontology – Paths for future research in International Relations

The last section will now turn to the more concrete ‘added value’ of the above presented social ontology. As was repeatedly emphasised throughout the thesis, the conceptualisation of this new ontology was not concerned with a particular problem or event in the international scene but aimed at critiquing and overcoming one of the most naturalised positions exhibited in many instances of research in IR. As such it had to be conducted on a very abstract level which made it not immediately apparent how this critique can influence research projects in the field of IR specifically. Therefore, we will now proceed to outlining two exemplary fields of interest in which this new social ontology could open new perspectives and roads to research in IR.

Central terms in international politics

The first area in which the ontology developed above could open new ways of understanding lies in the central notions that guide international relations discourse, such as trust, fear and uncertainty.

In recent publications the notion of trust and its relation to uncertainty and fear has been scrutinised in order to illuminate ways in which trust can be created in the international system. (see for instance Booth and Wheeler, 2008) One of the main starting points for these studies was the contention of a certainty of uncertainty. It was argued that the initial feature of the international system consists in the all-encompassing lack of knowledge coupled with an equally important lack of a sovereign authority on the international stage. Out of this picture a constant state of uncertainty evolves which necessitates trust in order to enable a chance for peaceful coexistence or even cooperation in the international scene.

Without having to immerse too deeply into the particulars of how trust can be achieved it seems generally that the actual starting point for this approach lies actually, and against the stipulation presented above, with certainty rather than uncertainty for mainly two reasons. First, the underlying assumption assumes the certainty of uncertainty in the international realm. But where and how do we achieve this certainty? The most obvious answer is that it can be observed when analyzing facts of international politics such as state behaviour (so for example the behaviour of the US towards Iran). As was argued above, however, it is impossible to state neutrally what this behaviour exhibits because there are always a number of incompatible interpretations for each fact leaving the desired outcome uncertain in itself. The positing of an ‘intransitive’ object or fact that

simply exists independent of the human mind begs the question of how we can come to know it in its independence if the only way we have to approach it lies with the capacity of our minds. This was, as we remember the starting point for this thesis.

Secondly, the account of uncertainty relies upon certainty because uncertainty is understood as the mere absence of certainty. Here certainty and uncertainty are conceptually on a qualitatively different level. Absolute certainty can theoretically be grasped without the concept of uncertainty but uncertainty cannot be grasped without a prior conception of certainty. In other words, uncertainty is only defined in negative terms and lacks a ‘positive’ and substantial delineation of its conceptual characteristics.

This now leaves one with two alternatives. Either one admits that the actual starting point lies with certainty (the certainty of uncertainty) but then it is necessary to account for this certainty, i.e. what makes one certain of uncertainty which will run into difficulties in its search for this certain point of departure.

Or, and this is the second and much more promising alternative, one can actually try to flesh out what the notion on uncertainty entails substantially, i.e. how and when uncertainty emerges independent of the concept of certainty. In this way, certainty is still important but uncertainty is now elevated to a qualitatively equal level of conceptualization. If one substantiates the concept of uncertainty on its own terms, however, it seems that an epistemological approach alone does not get very far since uncertainty in epistemological terms always only describes a ‘lack of knowledge’ and therefore remains negatively conceptualized.

A more promising way seems to lie with the ontological manifestation of uncertainty which usually is only treated as a consequence of epistemological uncertainty (so for

instance if I am uncertain of what I will be or what will happen to me after my death, the usual argument would be that this uncertainty derives simply from my lack of knowledge about death). In fact, however, this sequence is not as clear as it seems. The question can be raised whether it is not rather the case that I experience my inevitable death in everyday life and thereby my finitude as human being first through the pre-theoretical understanding of being characteristic of Dasein. Out of this experience (my being-towards-death) I then raise the epistemological question regarding my death which remains inconclusive. My awareness of my own finitude as human being is not established through a theoretical reflection but is already derived from a pre-epistemological understanding of what it is to be human. Knowledge and the different ways to obtain it derive from the attempt to grasp and manage this already perceived finitude more clearly and must be seen as derivative. In this sense one can argue that uncertainty does not derive from human thought or lack of knowledge but rather that human being takes part in uncertainty as the finitude and the being-towards-death which is the very being of human being. Uncertainty hereby becomes the conditionality of human being and the ground of the possibility of being human.

In the same way one could ask how we should conceptualise the relation of trust and uncertainty. Is it really the case that uncertainty is the basis for the need for trust or is it rather that trust is an occurrence in our everyday lives that reveals the uncertainty we face. This is by no means a trivial question since it jeopardizes any epistemological primacy and would refocus the approach towards the ontological dimension of being human.

If this, however, is the case, we can subsequently argue that our approach to uncertainty in its epistemological dimension is not the only and probably not even the fundamental

dimension we would have to consider when talking about trust. It certainly stays valid but will show itself as derivative from an ontological encounter with uncertainty. The question we would therefore have to ask is: Where and how do human beings encounter uncertainty in their being human?

Considering this question, the answer we can find is that uncertainty is encountered in our everyday lives through the finitude of humans in its different shapes (only one of which is the finitude of our knowledge). Finitude is most worryingly encountered in the fact that we have to die. To be clear, this encounter is not an abstract one which simply consists in our knowledge that death is inevitable but in the ontological comportment towards death, i.e. in our being human. The knowledge of death is only derivative because we do not primordially stand back from ourselves and take ourselves as objects but relate to our being in a much more direct way. Uncertainty in this way is an encounter with ‘nothingness’ which is captured in the primordial mood of *Angst* (anxiety or dread). Anxiety is a non-directional mood that brings human beings into the presence of the totality of the world and reveals the finitude and powerlessness of human being in face of the vastness of the environment it is situated in.

Human being always flees in the sight of anxiety and conceals it through a redirection towards different other moods. Two of the ways in which human being conceals anxiety is arguably fear and trust. Both redirect the direct experience of nothingness towards something. Fear is an inauthentic occurrence here because it merely serves to conceal the much deeper and frightful occurrence of anxiety. If we fear something we at least can focus on something rather than nothing and try to devise methods to protect

ourselves from it – we cannot protect ourselves from nothing exactly because it is nothing and not something.

In this way it can be suggested that it might be worthwhile to consider trust as another inauthentic occurrence that conceals our primordial mood of *Angst* in the face of nothingness. This would exactly ground trust in an existential analytic of human *Dasein*. Such a conceptualization, however, would have far-reaching consequences for our conceptualisation of trust because trust is encountered not in thought or consciousness but is expressed in action. There is a clear difference between the utterance of trust and the action of trust. I can say to myself or to someone else that ‘I trust X’, but this declaration alone does not constitute trust, in fact it already exhibits a certain degree of mistrust since I obviously considered consciously whether to trust or not. By doing so, however, there already must have been reasons for this consideration, i.e. reasons to be mistrustful. Pure trust, therefore, one could argue, does by no means depend upon consciousness or thought but in fact shows itself in non-conscious behaviour. One can tell oneself a million times that one trusts X but there might still remain mistrust which cannot be overcome by conscious willing – trust is necessarily praxeological, emotive and intrinsically non-conscious.

This conception of trust, however, causes huge problems in the light of recent arguments that aim at devising trust-building measures. If trust is not a conscious and wilfully producible outcome, the question of how trust can be ‘engineered’ becomes of primary importance. Trust is then not simply a calculated outcome of consciously devised action but always exhibits a strong ‘irrational’ component that is beyond the direct control of the human will. That is not to say that trust is not possible in the international sphere but it is to say that first the outcome will never be determinable in

respect to its causes because the ‘irrational’ component and its influence in trust-building is not measurable and secondly that subsequently no ‘method’ can be devised that should facilitate trust-building in the international sphere. In other words the occurrence of trust cannot be subsumed under any form of technique but remains in its frequency and emergence intrinsically idiosyncratic and situational.

Furthermore, the fact that trust cannot be controlled consciously by will and thought opens questions regarding the way ontology has been understood so far, namely as substance-ontology. Here we come full circle to the original problem in Wendt, Wight and other scientific realists. In his account Wight takes the subject-object divide as a primordial state of affairs and tries to solve the concomitant problems by shifting from a sure method of the attainment of knowledge (epistemological foundationalism) to the existence of ‘intransitive objects’ (ontological foundationalism). This move, however, is only possible, when remaining within the purview of a substance-ontology in which every object of study can be defined according to a neutral set of characteristics untainted by human values. Such a conception favours the theoretical attitude which, however, can actually be shown as derivative in comparison to the situatedness in an understanding of being which we always already share and which undermines any attempt to grasp entities in their ‘objective’ and ‘real’ occurrence of being.

Even in these short remarks one can see how an ontological appropriation pertaining to matters of trust (and uncertainty) can help open new perspectives and generate new insights.

The politics of co-anairesis or dying-with – a phenomenological approach to genocide

Another field that could profit from the perspective of the new social ontology is the study of politically motivated mass death. Although many scholars in various fields work on and contribute to the understanding of the emergence of mass death in the 20th century, we can hardly find a contribution that reflects on the meaning of the phenomenon as such – mass *death*. It seems that in most accounts we find the pursuit and development of means to reconcile, allocate responsibility, punish or proactively deal with matters of mass death within political contexts. (see for instance Staub, 2002; Baumann, 1989; Valentino, 2004) Death, however, the phenomenon around which all these efforts evolve, hardly ever features in these accounts. Important here seems to be the question: What characterises political mass death? By that we do not mean a scientific or essentialist enterprise that determines for instance how many deaths there have to be before one can speak of mass death? What it does mean is a central re-evaluation of death as an event within the political sphere. Is it, for instance, appropriate to deal with (political mass) death always as individually experienced destruction of large numbers of human beings? Surely, the first reaction to this question would be that it is necessarily individual since individual humans meet death on their own even in a technologised event of mass annihilation. This initially obvious observation, however, already reveals a commitment to a specific view of the notion of the human agent and her relation to the environment she lives in. In this case it is the classic Cartesian notion of the subject, a monad that lives and dies individually as it was critiqued above. It is often just assumed that the individual is the organic unit of human existence and, as Louiza Odysseos has shown, that coexistence is merely understood as composition, the mere living side-by-side of already constituted individuals. Coexistence, however,

implies more than just this notion of composition. It is characterised by the ontological intersection of different life-projects based on their common characteristic of being placed in a world that is beyond the individual's reach or control (Heidegger's thrownness.) In very much the same way, death is, even when it occurs in the form of political mass death, always already framed within the modern notion of subjectivity and individuality. The event of mass death is a process of annihilating individuals in large numbers, a composite death of numerous monads. It can, however, be argued that when human co-existence is defined by thrownness, i.e. by the stipulation that the totality of human existence and experience is always already beyond the reach of the individual, the process of co-death or dying-with must also be understood as reaching beyond the physical destruction of individuals. This is meant by the term *co-anairesis*.

It is therefore possible to re-thinking the phenomenon of mass death from a new angle that on the one hand challenges the existing notion of death as necessarily individual by enquiring into the phenomenon of the 'death-event' which can assume an individual as well as communal character. Secondly, it provides new inputs in the discussions evolving around the notions of suffering, responsibility, justice and reconciliation in cases of political mass death.

The starting is provided by the notion of engaged agency as we can find in many instances of post-Husserlian phenomenology and related interpretive approaches as for instance in Charles Taylor's work. This notion of engaged agency that embeds the human agent in a world which he can never fully master or control necessitates a re-evaluation of death, especially mass death. First, we would have to show what it actually means to die for a human agent. As will be argued death does not necessarily

describe physical destruction but can also entail the de-humanisation of humans. With de-humanisation we do not mean a specific physical or psychological treatment but the denial of thrown-projections and concomitantly the essentialisation of the human agents in question. As has been pointed out by many thinkers in the phenomenological tradition, human existence is essentially an existence in time where the individual being projects herself permanently into the future. In this sense we can never speak of 'what' a human being is but only 'how' he or she is given the contextual circumstances and the projected possibilities. In this sense in many cases of mass deaths in the 20th century we can actually observe the destruction of the *human* agent before the physical killing of the human *agent*. This conceptualisation of death as a rupture of and in time is connected to the larger claim that in many instances in which events or processes are analysed, the existential characteristic of time and its relation to human being-in-the-world is neglected in favour of the spatial element that often takes precedence in strategic or analytic assessments.

Very closely related to any conceptualisation of the human agent is the use and role of language that in the cases of mass death necessarily changes its meaning. The projection of future possibilities is normally expressed through the medium of language which operates within the social realm of competing and complimentary life projects. With the advent of mass death, language ceases to express life projects and is transformed into either a designative tool of suffering for those affected or a medium of memory and grief for the survivors or friends and families. Language in both cases is transformed into a medium of remembrance - it is silenced towards the future. An appreciation of mass death therefore must also include a close and thorough reflection on the language of death.

Likewise, life within these zones of death changes its character, not just in a material sense of inflicting suffering on those targeted but in its existential structure of *Dasein* itself. It seems we have to differentiate very clearly between different spheres of human existence here. Primordially we encounter the ‘life-world’ which describes the pre-theoretical and praxeological level in which human agents are embedded in their everydayness. This life world leaves open the possibility to project oneself qualitatively into the future. Secondly, and this is a modern phenomenon, we encounter the technological society which arose out of the ‘life-world’ and aims at quantifying the environment we live in in order to master and subdue nature. This drive of modern technological human beings has been described and critiqued by quite a few critics of the Enlightenment project. It has also been pointed out repeatedly that the intertwinement between this technologisation of society and the increased capacity to inflict mass death upon fellow humans is inextricable. What seems to be in need of further scrutinising is the occurrence and meaning of political mass-death as such which arises out of this technological society.

The third level in this respect describes the specific situation of occurring mass deaths and can in a Heideggerian fashion be labelled the ‘death world’. The death world is not congruent to technological society but it arises out of it in the same fashion as technological society arose out of the ‘life-world’. It presents simply an actualised possibility of human development. The death-world in this sense tries to achieve two things: first, it strives at reinstating meaning into the meaningless void of quantified categorisation that arises out of technological society by means of destruction. Secondly, once the malign elements that are ‘worthy’ of destruction have been identified it aims at a suspension of time or the collapse of temporal existence. This

process is an extension of the first point. In the quest for meaning the death-world essentialises those in society that are perceived to hinder the projection of future possibilities, those that are seen as parasitic on the society and a drain on its resources for future development as projected by those dominant in the community. This whole process can again be linked to the notion of *Angst* which human beings are confronted with in any breakdown of their projects. The stigmatisation of a real or imagined group serves hereby as a tool to redirect the non-directional mood of *Angst* towards a directional and inauthentic mood of fear. The group of people declared unworthy to live are not only locked away and systematically killed (i.e. physically destroyed). As a first step they are de-humanised by a process of essentialising their existence.

A person that was labelled a Jew under the Nazi regime, for instance, was by this essentialising act already robbed of her humanity by literally de-temporalising her existence. The past was forgotten and the future denied for those labelled superfluous and dispensable. Many German Jews fought in WWI but they were not spared as patriotic as they were. In the same vein, the future is taken away from them since their incarceration and destruction cuts them off from their own life-projects and their life ceases to be a possibility into which they developed and instead remains stagnant. They are existentially ripped out of the flow of time which characterises them as *human* beings. Instead they can now be defined, the meaning of their lives and their identities can be fixed exogenously as they find themselves bereft of power to project themselves into the future. The death-world signifies not only the physical destruction by technological means but the suspension of time and therefore the denial of humanity for those singled out. As it becomes clear from these short remarks the notion of death is

not confined to the physical destruction of individuals but assumes a new meaning in the vortex of ‘life-world’, technological society and ‘death-world’.

Again, it is only possible to outline this approach towards the notion of dying-with or *co-anairesis*. Nevertheless, it shows clearly how the above developed conception of a new social ontology can be brought to bear upon themes within the political and social sphere, producing new and substantial insights into phenomena and opening new ways of research.

The examples given here are only two of many more that become possible in light of the findings presented above. It is important to point out once more that the main aim of the thesis does not lie with closing spaces of research by introducing a new orthodoxy into the field of IR and demanding that every research project has to work within its confines. It was pointed out time and again throughout the thesis that the critique delivered here does not ‘rule out’ or ‘invalidate’ other approaches and methods but that it shows the underlying assumptions and convictions that 350 years of modern philosophy reified beyond questioning. It is intended to provide a contribution to the increasing philosophical and methodological sophistication in the academic field of International Relations that was identified at the beginning of the thesis. After the disillusion experienced in the breakdown of the Enlightenment’s quest for secure and indubitable foundations out of which certain and objective knowledge can arise new paths had to be explored and it is certainly fair to say that this process of exploration is far from over.

In light of these challenges the more and more diverse representation of International Relations as a strongly interdisciplinary field must unreservedly be welcomed. Rather than predicting chaos and a loss of parsimony and rigour as some of the old ‘gatekeepers’ do in face of the waves of new and critical scholarship, there is undeniably a need to react to the historical and intellectual challenges in a vibrant academic environment. International Relations as a comparably young area of study opens in this respect the possibilities for unorthodox and undogmatic scholarship to explore the different facets of social and political life. One of these facets must concern our relation as scholars and human beings in general to the world we are trying to understand. Ontology and ontological assumptions, albeit abstract in their philosophical and methodological conceptualisations, are inherent in all accounts of engagements with the social and political world and therefore assume an immediate importance in everyday research. The foundations upon which this research rests belong to the academic endeavours in IR to the same extent as does empirical research and without continuously engaging with these foundations we will risk to loose the dynamic and critical edge which prevents the fall into a narrow dogmatism.

In this sense the thesis is a beginning and not an end. and we again feel reminded of Heidegger’s dictum that served as a motto for chapter I. “The most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.” In this sense, it remains to hope that the arguments presented in this thesis will spark new thinking.

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