CALLING AND RESPONS(E)IBILITY AS AN APPROACH FOR INTERPRETATION

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INSPIRED OF MARTIN BUBER’S PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE THIS PAPER PUTS FORTH A NOTION OF INTERPRETATION AS UNDERSTOOD WITHIN A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CALLING AND RESPONS(E)IBILITY. ACCORDING TO THIS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, MAN’S EXISTENCE – I.E. HER EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCES AND APPEARANCES – IS A MATTER OF PAYING HEED TO, RESPONDING RESPONSIBLY AND CALLING. ACCORDING TO MARTIN BUBER’S PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE A PERSON’S EXISTENCE SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS AN EXISTENTIAL DIALOGUE, THAT IS TO SAY THAT WHAT A PERSON EXPERIENCES IS CONCEIVED AS A CALLING ADDRESSING HER. ACCORDINGLY, THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY A PERSON ARE REGARDED AS RESPONSIBLE RESPONSES TO THE EXPERIENCES FACING HER. BUILDING ON THIS NOTION, IT IS SUGGESTED THAT AN OBJECT FOR INTERPRETATION – E.G. A TEXT, A WORK OF ART, EVENTS, ETC – SHOULD BE VIEWED AS AN ADDRESSING EXPERIENCE CALLING ON THE INTERPRETER TO RESPOND, A RESPONSE COMPILED OF PAYING HEED TO, RESPONSIBLY RESPONDING AND CALLING. I WILL ALSO SHOW THAT THIS NOTION CHARACTERIZED BY EXISTENTIAL DIALOGICITY INCORPORATES AND TRANSCENDS THE COMMUNICATIVE AS WELL AS THE ONTOLOGICAL DIALOGICITY CHARACTERIZING DIALOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS RESPECTIVELY. BY PHILOSOPHICALLY CONSTRUCTING INTERPRETATION IN THIS WAY, THE PAPER OFFERS NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT INTERPRETATION, AND HENCE LEARNING.

Learning is a phenomenon conceived of in different ways, for example such as transformation of information in cognitive structures or as transformation of cognitive structures (in accordance with cognitive and constructivist learning theories respectively) or as a matter of becoming acquainted to a cultural practice, thereby being gradually more able to master its culturally tools, or as a matter of negotiating meaning in social interaction, to name a few. Most of these notions of learning could be said to presuppose interpretation, or, to put it the other way around; interpretation could be said to account for a substantial part of learning, whatever perspective one thinks learning out from. Now the object of this paper is not to elaborate on the role of interpretation vis a vis learning, but to elaborate on a notion of interpretation derived from Martin Bubers philosophy of dialogue, in the end being able to briefly reflect on the consequence this different notion of interpretation might have on the way learning might be understood.

UNDERPINNINGS FOR ELABORATING THE NOTIONS OF INTERPRETATION

In order to convey a different notion of interpretation, I differentiate between epistemological, ontological, communicative and axiological underpinnings of the notion of interpretation. When employing these underpinnings to elaborate interpretation, I think of them as alternate perspectives in conceiving the world, being, understanding etc. That means, I use them to convey interpretation (and aspects essential to the
understanding of interpretation, such as being, knowing and truth) through different lenses. The axiological perspective which I will employ to propose a new way of conceiving interpretation, is in this paper understood as a perspective perceiving things through an ontologically normative lens, that is a lens colored by normativity on an ontological level, which is a norm expressing whom a person wants to be(come). By using these underpinnings, I mean to put forth four different notions of interpretation, namely an epistemological one, an ontological one, a communicative one and an axiological one. The two first mentioned are notions well known, the first one from the hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey and the second from Martin Heideggers, Hans-Georg Gadamers and Gianni Vattimos hermeneutics. The third one I like to maintain as somewhat implicitly known, albeit maybe not denoted in any specific way up till now. What I am having in mind is a hermeneutics of reception outlined within Steven Kepnes’ dialogical hermeneutics as well as in Mikhail Bakhtins dialogism. It should be stated here from the start, that the notion of interpretation suggested here is a notion incorporating and transcending the ontological and communicative ones. The axiological notion of interpretation suggested in this paper, will incorporate and transcend the ontological and communicative notions, but exclude the epistemological one. The transcending will be obtained by way of the normativity accompanying the axiological underpinning. What this means for a different notion of interpretation will be spelled out throughout the paper, for now just clarifying that this normativity should be understood as an ontological one, by this implying a beacon (swe; ledstjärna) guiding man’s appearances by representing the person she strives to be(come).

Using the conceptual underpinnings mentioned, my intention in the following is to elaborate upon four basic aspects that I regard as essential to the way interpretation might be conceptualized, namely how being, coping with the world and truth is conceived of. By doing that, I intend to outline a kind of theoretical blueprint conveying a ground for thinking interpretation – and hence learning – in a different way.

To Be means to be called and responsibly respond

Since the notion of coping with the world as well as the one of truth is reliant on the notion of being. Now while understood inside the epistemological paradigm being is well known – and might be said to have been taken for granted – as a presence, inside the ontological paradigm, being has been more carefully thought thru and then delineated as a question of being-in-the-world or coming-into-presence, for instance. Inside the communicative paradigm then, how might being be conceived of there? Well, as I see it, a communicative notion of being is to be found in the dialogism of Mikhail

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1 As described by e.g. Gadamer, Hans-Georg 2000; Kepnes, Steven 1992; Vattimo, Gianni 1996.
3 Exploring this notion of reception one might, I would like to maintain, also find traits of this communicative hermeneutics within the writings of Martin Heidegger (1992a; 1992b); Hans-Georg Gadamer (2000) and Gianni Vattimo (1996).
4 See e.g. Heidegger, Martin 1993; 1998; Vattimo, Gianni 1996.
6 See Nancy, Jean-Luc 2000.
Bakhtin\(^7\), and might accordingly be suggested to be conceived of as a matter of responding and addressing the world, since this is a paradigm putting forth existence as an existential dialogue. "The very being of man..." writes Bakhtin, "...is a profound communication. To be means to communicate".\(^8\) In Holquist's wording man's existence means "...that we are – we cannot choose not to be – in dialogue, not only with other human beings, but also with the natural and cultural configurations we lump together as "the world". The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i. e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity."\(^9\)

Inside a communicative paradigm, the world thus is to be understood as composed of utterances on the one hand addressing man, and on the other representing man's responses to these. Being, accordingly, becomes a matter of being addressed and responding. As stated, the axiological paradigm transcends the ontological and communicative paradigm by adding normativity. By this adding, being might be understood as a matter of coming-into-presence by being called – you might even say summoned – by the worlds utterances, paying heed to and responding to these, by that addressing the world, while taking responsibility for putting forth one's utterances in accordance to the person one wants to be(come). Being, thus, includes being called, paying heed to and responding in a responsible way to one's beacon, which also could be stated as a matter of answering to (swe; svara inför) and be true to one's beacon.

**Knowing as a Matter of Paying Heed To**

Following Rortys (1980 p 320) suggestion not to think of hermeneutics as another way of knowing but as another way of coping offers, I think, a vocabulary more adequate for speaking of knowing in other terms than epistemological ones. That is because while there is no problem speaking of knowing in epistemological terms – by that having in mind apprehending (swe; få grepp om, begripa) either empirical facts or rational ideas – the term knowing do not lend itself quite as adequate to denote ontological, communicative and axiological notions of what it means to cope with the world. Within an ontological paradigm, knowing has been delineated by Martin Heidegger as a matter of understanding one's being-in-the-world, and an adequate way of conceptualizing knowing within a communicative paradigm would, I think, be to think of it in terms of perceiving (swe; uppfatta, höra), in the way Mikhail Bakhtin describes the way man copes with utterances addressing her. In the axiological paradigm, to cope with the world means paying heed to its callings. This way of coping with the world incorporates an ontological aspect of understanding one's being-in-the-world as well as a communicative aspect of perceiving utterances addressing you. But it also transcends these ways of coping with the world by conceiving the utterance as a summon, thereby making "knowing" into a matter of paying heed to that summon.

**Truth understood as fidelity**

What then, do this interpreting act lead to? Well, while the epistemological way of conceiving the result of the knowing act (as well as other knowing

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\(^7\) See Bakhtin, Mikhail 1993; Todorov, Tzvetan 1984.

\(^8\) Se Todorov 1984 sid 96; LLLvar Bakhtin?..LL

\(^9\) Holquist, Michael 2002 p 30; Compare Martin Bubers (1995b sid 85) way of putting this, stating that man should not be seen as leading a dialogue, but as being one.
acts) is established in terms of correspondence (to reality per se) or as coherence (with other truths), the ontological, communicative and axiological ways of conceiving truth is quite different. Ontologically speaking, truth is, as delineated among others by Martin Heidegger, about being true, that is; about appearing (coming-into-presence) in a way that allows for the realization of one’s potentials in accordance with one’s true being-in-the-world. Communicatively speaking then? In what way might truth be conceived when understood as a response to an utterance? Well, exploring the theoretical grounds of Mikhail Bakhtins dialogism, leads me to suggest truth derived from such communicative underpinnings as something possible to be denoted as correspondence, albeit in this context implying an utterance responding to/addressing the issues and statements put forth in the utterance it responds to, thereby making way for denoting this kind of truth as co-respondence (swe; mot-svara). But what I eventually strive for here, is to suggest an axiologically underpinned notion of truth. Including, as implied earlier, the ontological and communicative notions, the axiological notion might be conceived as a matter of co-responding to an utterance (that is; to phenomenon in the world addressing you), by way of an utterance that addresses the issues and statements put forth within that addressing utterance, in a way that represents your true way of being-in-the-world. But then, as well implicated earlier, the axiological notion of truth transcends the ontological and communicative notions, and does so by adding normativity. Now what does that mean? It means that man’s appearances is guided by her beacon, that is; by the person she strives for to be(come). To be true, then, becomes a matter of responding in a way that acknowledges responsibility for one’s way of appearing, or, in other words; being true means to pay heed to the calling of one’s beacon, thereby acknowledging fidelity to your beacon. According to this way of conceiving truth then, you might say that truth is a matter of fidelity in that it is about answering to your beacon for the way you chooses to appear in the world.

**INTERPRETATION AS BEING SUMMONED TO RESPONS(E)IBILITY**

By elaborating the notion of being, coping with the world and truth in the light of their theoretical underpinnings, I now mean to put forth a notion of different interpretation different from the epistemological, ontological and communicative ones I mentioned introduction wise. As stated in the introduction, the axiological notion suggested in this paper includes and transcends the ontological and communicative notions of interpretation but leaves the epistemological one out. In accordance with the consequences of the “linguistic turn” interpretation is here thought of as a dialogical matter. Dialogue as a way of thinking interpretation has its roots in “the linguistic turn” and might be found in Martin Heidegger’s, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s, Steven Kepnes’ and Gianni Vattimo’s hermeneutics as well as in Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism. Epistemologically seen, there is no dialogue in the interpreting act, only a monologue. Elaborating ways of conceiving interpretation from out the linguistic turn, I suggest the notion “talk about” to denote this epistemological way of conceiving our coping with the world.

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To “talk about” (or “of”) thus is a matter of apprehending a presence in its correspondence or coherence with other presences, an enterprise recognizable from e.g. Friedrich Schleiermacher’s and Wilhelm Dilthey’s hermeneutical theories, as I see it. Ontologically seen, the being-in-the-world was from the start delineated as a matter of being linguistically immersed, thus making interpretation a matter of coming to understand and being able to spell out one’s being-in-the-world in words. Following Mikhail Bakhtin, this could be denoted as a matter of “authorizing” oneself, while my alternative – to accord this term to the others I suggest – is to denote this ontological and linguistic way of interpreting as a matter of “articulating” (swe; ut-tala, språksätta) one’s true being-in-the-world. Communicatively seen, I suggest the wording “talking with” (swe; tala med, sam-tala) to denote the act of addressing and responding to utterances in a way that makes these utterances co-respond (swe; mot-svara) to each other. And at last, the axiological notion of interpretation. This, I would like to denote in terms of “calling and respons(e)ibility” (swe, till-tal och an-svar, där an-svar konnoterar både till svara an och ansvara för), since interpretation from out axiological underpinnings, according to the elaboration made here, is about responding in a responsible way to the callings of the world, which means; in a way acknowledging fidelity to one’s beacon.

Now what does this mean, more precisely, when it comes to actually interpret, say a work of art, a text or maybe information given in a lecture. It means that, if we are to take this suggested notion of interpretation seriously, we would not settle for conceiving the dialogue between the interpreter and her object as a matter of coming to understand a work of art and by that being able to articulate one’s true being-in-the-world. Neither would we settle for conceiving the interpretive dialogue as a matter of responding in a co-responding way to a text, that is; addressing its issues and statements by authoring a new text. As I see it, we kind of would do both these things, by that including these aspects in the interpreting event, but then we would transcend them, by conceiving of, say; information given in a lecture, as a calling we should pay heed to (swe; hörsamma) because it actually is summoning us to respond to that information given and to do that in a way that acknowledges the “whom do I want to be(come)” of our beacon.

**Concluding remarks on learning**

Applied to the notion of learning, this axiological way of conceiving interpretation tells us that what we present to our students – might it be text, speech, questions, answers, theories, examples, substance or form – they conceive of as callings summoning them to respond – might it be by posing or answering questions, writing papers or by the way they carries out their assignments in their future vocation – in accordance with whom they strives to be(come).

Now what responsibility this way of conceiving learning puts on our teaching, is another question to be elaborated.
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