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Strong Emergence and Mental Causation in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*

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Abstract

The arc of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* introduces a difficult tension between (1) the way in which the human person is fundamentally dependent upon convention and, more broadly, historical and environmental situatedness, for existence and (2) the way in which human action is not fully pre-determined by this dependence. Throughout his hermeneutic ontology, Gadamer maintains that the human being is free in a legitimate sense. The boundaries of historicity and language simultaneously limit and enable the ability to come to a self-understanding that leads to novel interaction with the world. Because Gadamer strongly resists Cartesian dualism, he describes the human person's ability to resist the causal pressures of the environment in a way that maintains both the situatedness and the freedom of the human person. As a result, his hermeneutic ontology, with its development of the concept of play, the hermeneutic circle, and the linguistic structure of hermeneutic experience, bears a certain resemblance to concepts central to strong emergentism. As a means by which it is possible to account for both the full embeddedness of an emergent while maintaining its novelty and causal efficacy with respect to its originary system, strong emergentism provides tools with which to analyze and clarify how *Truth and Method*'s post-Kantian and post-Cartesian position retains and develops a sense of legitimate free will for Dasein within the boundaries of historical and environmental situatedness.

Introduction: The Hermeneutics of Brick and Blanket

For geniuses with IQs above a certain threshold (somewhere around 130), a higher IQ is essentially less useful than a brick when it comes to predicting the person's capacity to succeed in the real world. Canadian journalist Malcolm Gladwell's description of the limits of the typical IQ test's ability to predict success in his book *Outliers* illustrates an important feature of the relevance of a strongly emergent conception of human cognition to the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer in his landmark work *Truth and Method*. Gladwell describes an alternative kind of test called a "divergence test," which he claims is a much more accurate predictor (2008, 90). The test involves the creative interpretation of (1) a brick and (2) a blanket; that is, the test-taker is given a limited amount of time to write down as many uses as possible for each. This measures the test-taker's ability to think *creatively*, as opposed to an IQ test's measure of only analytical

intelligence. For example, one particularly creative and clever test-taker interpreted the brick in this way:

> (Brick). To break windows for robbery, to determine depth of wells, to use as ammunition, as pendulum, to practice carving, wall building, to demonstrate Archimedes' Principle, as part of abstract sculpture, costh, ballast, weight for dropping things in river, etc., as a hammer, keep door open, footwiper, use as rubble for path filling, chock, weight on scale, to prop up wobbly table, paperweight, as fire- hearth, to block up rabbit hole. (Gladwell 2008, 88)

This test-taker likely had a similar range of responses for the uses of a blanket and, because of his creativity, probably scored quite high on the divergence test. Though most of us lie well below the genius IQ threshold, this divergence test is an excellent example of an idea that Hans-Georg Gadamer likely had in mind when he laid out his hermeneutic ontology in *Truth and Method*. The divergence test effectively measures the test-taker's ability to *interpret* and *understand* the brick and the blanket and to take a critical stance that does not simply conform to the conventional use of these objects, an ability that involves creativity and free thinking.

The arc of *Truth and Method* introduces a difficult tension between the way in which the human person is fundamentally dependent upon convention and, more broadly, historical and environmental situatedness, for existence on the one side and the way in which human action is not fully pre-determined by this dependence on the other. Throughout his hermeneutic ontology, Gadamer maintains that the human being is free in a legitimate sense. The boundaries of historicity and language simultaneously limit and enable the ability to come to a self-understanding that leads to novel and innovative interaction with the world. Gadamer designates this ability as "*freedom from environment*" (2004 [1989], 441). Because Gadamer strongly resists Cartesian dualism, he must explain the origin of this ability to resist the causal pressures of the environment in a way that maintains both the situated dependence and the autonomous freedom of the human person. As a result, his hermeneutic ontology, with its development of the concept of play, the hermeneutic circle, and the linguistic structure of hermeneutic experience, parallels insights drawn from strong emergentism.

In order to clarify the way in which Gadamer negotiates this complex course through an ontology of human dependence to the freedom of the human being, I suggest that his line of reasoning can be helpfully illuminated in terms of strong emergentism, which seeks to answer similar concerns. As a means by which it is possible to account for both

the full embeddedness of an emergent while maintaining its novelty and causal efficacy with respect to its originary system, emergentism provides us with tools to analyze and clarify how *Truth and Method*'s post-Kantian and post-Cartesian position retains and develops a sense of legitimate free will for Dasein within the boundaries of historical and environmental situatedness.

The method of analysis that follows will involve the exposition of Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology in *Truth and Method* translated into emergentist terms, showing how the two frameworks of thought naturally converge on similar conclusions. This compelling convergence will both clarify Gadamer's ontology and pave the way for a compelling case for strong emergence reinforced by Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology in *Truth and Method*. The paper will be divided into three parts. The first will briefly outline the relevant concerns in the emergentism literature, and the second will develop Gadamer's concepts of play and the hermeneutic circle in terms of emergentism. The final part will draw out the implications for Gadamer's strong emergentism for mental causation and, ultimately, a case for the possibility of free will based on emergence, which will be developed as a breed of downward causation.

Setting the Stage

To begin, because Gadamer stands on the shoulders of Martin Heidegger, it is essential to explicate the Heideggerian basis of certain relevant aspects of Gadamer's project. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines "understanding" as "*the existential being [Sein] of the ownmost potentiality of being of Dasein itself in such a way that this being [Sein] discloses in itself what its very being is about*" (1996, 144). For Heidegger, understanding always involves sifting through the various possibilities for one's future activity from moment to moment. These possibilities present themselves always and only in terms of a world. Sifting in such a way allows the various possibilities to be interpreted in terms of "servic*eability*, us*ability*, detriment*ality*" (Heidegger 1996, 144). The process of developing and arriving at an understanding of the availability and quality of possibilities, then, is what Heidegger calls "interpretation." So when Dasein interprets, it comes to understand *itself* in terms of the possibilities available for its activity, always and only in relation to the object(s) of interpretation. Understanding and interpretation, from a Heideggerian point of view, move beyond Cartesian dualism and the Kantian subject-object schema, placing the being of Dasein *in* the act of interpretation itself in such a way that Dasein exists as external to itself (so to speak). Understanding, then, is not a matter

of collecting knowledge; it is a fundamental mode of Dasein's being, which Donatella Di Cesare describes as being as close to us and as inescapable as breathing (2013, 38).

Showing his Heideggerian hand in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer notes that his use of the term *hermeneutics* "denotes the basic being-in-motion of Dasein that constitutes its finitude and historicity, and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world" (2004 [1989], xxvii). For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not simply the interpretation of texts; it is a fundamental mode of being in which a person exists in the world. The path Gadamer takes to develop this claim in *Truth and Method* is through an ontology of human dependence upon the world in which both "subject" and "object" have their being only in a relationship to each other (in *presentation* and *interpretation*), a relationship that always runs both ways between them. Gadamer identifies this relationship as "play" and establishes it as the dynamic that enables interpretation in general.[1] For Gadamer, interpretation is *the* fundamental mode of being of the human being. So it is not that we, as transcendental subjects, deign to enter into a relationship of interpretation, but rather that we are always already relationally involved in a historical world and express our being through the dynamics of interpretation. *Tradition* and *prejudice*, in Gadamerian terms, fill in the content of the human person's historical situatedness and constitute the way in which we inextricably belong to history (2004 [1989], 278). In this way, as Stefano Marino explains, Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology is a re-conception of what it means to be human that converts philosophical hermeneutics into a practical philosophy, taking into account the way in which humans are always already situated and involved in a complex natural, social, and historical environment (2011, 217). Once again aligning with Heidegger in an attempt to make clear the structure of interpretation, Gadamer says: "Everything that makes possible and limits Dasein's projection ineluctably precedes it" (2004 [1989], 254). Dasein has no being, let alone self-understanding, apart from its being already embedded in and relationally connected to a world. This embeddedness limits what Dasein can do and consider doing but at the same time constitutes the array of possibilities available to interpreting Dasein.

At this point, a problem is introduced that requires resolution. In Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology, there is heavy emphasis on the historical constitution of Dasein

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1. Though in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's explicit use of the concept of play is used mostly in reference to his ontology of the work of art, along with Monica Vilhauer (2010, xiii-xiv), I suggest that the concept of play is a foundational concept for his hermeneutic ontology in general. As such, it establishes a foundation upon which to build his more broadly scoped ideas.

and the way in which Dasein gets caught up in interpreting and interacting with the world. This poses a challenge to maintaining a robust sense of Dasein's free will: if Dasein is fully pre-constituted by its historicity and embeddedness in a world, is it possible for Dasein to have the ability to choose between possibilities in a way that is not already predetermined by its situatedness? Are legitimate possibilities ever presented to Dasein as having equipotentiality, or is every projection fully determined by Dasein's historical constitution? Can Gadamer maintain that Dasein is profoundly and ontologically dependent on historical situatedness and still account for any sense of legitimate freedom of the human being without reverting back to Cartesian dualism? I suggest that Gadamer's account of freedom in the hermeneutic ontology of *Truth and Method* successfully deals with these issues, and, in doing so, crosses paths with strong emergentism.

I. Emergence: A Third Way

Much like Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology, the renewed interest in emergentism in philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion has been motivated in large part by the ongoing failure of the scientific pursuit of a complete explanatory reduction of the universe to a single set of laws (i.e., physics) (Clayton 2006, 1). With the apparent futility of this project on one side and the well-established uneasiness with Cartesian dualism on the other,[2] philosopher of religion James W. Haag endorses emergentism thus: "Emergentism, by occupying the gap between reductive Physicalism and substance Dualism, provides a viable worldview" (Haag 2008, 12). As such, emergentism allows for the possibility that a phenomenon or entity can be "at once *grounded in* and yet *emergent from* the underlying material structure with which it is associated" (O'Connor 1994, 91), thereby making way for an antireductionistic means by which to describe the universe without either falling into substance dualism or writing off the legitimacy of the physical sciences. Walking this tightrope, Michael Silberstein

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2. One of René Descartes' most significant contributions to Western philosophy consisted of a distinction between the human body and the mind, between *res extensa* ("thing that is extended physically") and *res cogitans* ("thing that thinks"). This dualism led to what has come to be known as the mind-body problem, a problem which many Western philosophers aim either to solve, resolve, or dissolve. However, before blaming Descartes for all the problems in Western philosophy, it should be noted that Descartes himself offered what he considered to be a solution to the mind-body problem. Mark A. Bedau notes that Descartes developed an account of how *res cogitans* and *res extensa* interact, even though they are two types of substances, based on the idea that *res cogitans* was emergent from a bodily organ (Bedau 1986). The mind-body problem was extended and complicated by post-Cartesians who took up Descartes' problem without accepting his proposed solution.

argues for a version of strong emergence (which he refers to as "ontological emergence"), describing the position as a way to maintain compatibility between metaphysical monism and ontological pluralism (2006, 206). The appeal of emergence theory lies in its explanatory power as a legitimate third way that acknowledges the complex relations in the world and the irreducibility of these relations to a single vocabulary or substance (e.g., elementary particles).

Broadly, an emergent property may be defined as follows: "a property P is *novel* in x if x has P, and there are no determinates P' of the same determinable as P, such that any constituents of x have P'" (Spencer-Smith 1995, 117). That is, an emergent (P) shows up in, or as a result of, a system (x) and cannot be reduced to the components of x; the origin of P requires the entire system and cannot be traced back to individual components. However novel an emergent might be, it is always a property of the system as a whole, never of simple component parts (Georgiou 2003, 240). Stuart Kauffman gives this principle a temporal spin, offering emergence as an alternative to simplistic Newtonian physics. Emergence, for Kauffman, is marked by a novelty that is not time reversible. Whereas according to Newton's laws, an object traveling in one direction can retrace its steps and remain the same object, a human being's experience of being-in-the-world (for example) creates a state of constant flux from one moment to the next in which a human consciousness, as emergent from its being-in-the-world, cannot remain precisely the same through time. "[A]s Humpty Dumpty famously discovered," writes Kauffman, "we are not time reversible. Neither is the world around us" (Kauffman 2008, 13).

So a theory of emergence must accept some variation of the basic thesis on the origin of novel emergents and will typically grapple with at least four additional criteria, such as those identified by Philip Clayton: (1) ontological monism; (2) property emergence; (3) the irreducibility of the emergence; and (4) downward causation (2006, 2). These four criteria, however, are far from representing a consensus in the literature. Rather, they are four of the primary points of contention among emergentists. Of the four, however, downward causation is perhaps the most polarizing, leading to a stark bifurcation of the field. Disagreement on downward causation (that is, the idea that an emergent "exert causal influence 'downward' to affect the processes at a lower basal level" [Kim 2006, 198]) birthed a difference between "strong" and "weak" emergence. A "strong" position will claim the legitimacy of downward causation (often simultaneously challenging ontological monism). More formally, strong emergence consists in the following:

Property P is an emergent property of a (micrologically-complex) object O iff:

1. P supervenes on properties of the parts of O;

2. P is not had by any of the object's parts;

3. P is distinct from any structural property of O; and

4. P has direct ('downward') determinative influence on the pattern of behavior involving O's parts (O'Connor 1994, 98).

On the other hand, a "weak" position will deny the actual existence of an emergent as an entity or property capable of downward causation, limiting emergence to an explanatory shortcut, useful for describing the behaviour complex wholes.

Strong emergence, with its inclusion of downward causation, was central to early evolutionary theory, particularly since the work of Conway Lloyd Morgan, who observed that evolution consists of a series of emergent steps, each of which introduce something new to the evolutionary progression that changes its course (Morgan 1927, 1). Explaining the emergence of life from this perspective, Kim Sterelny calls one point at which downward causation begins to occur the "organism threshold." Above this threshold, "natural selection typically acts directly on organisms and indirectly on [self-replicating proteins]" (Sterelny 2001, 23). The organism threshold marks the point at which the behaviour of the whole organism directly affects how the genetic material is selected. In this view, organisms are characterized by "emergent properties not found at the level of their molecular components" (Baetu 2012, 434). Even among strong emergentists, however, there is considerable disagreement about how exactly downward causation works. Debates about downward causation are inextricably linked to concerns central to philosophy of mind such as intentionality and mental causation, as well as to the nature of the mind in general. Many strong emergentists maintain that mental causation is a clear example of downward causation (Kim 2006, 198), giving these theorists a fresh framework within which to analyze human behaviour and individuality. Thus, the richness of emergentism's contributions to philosophy of mind creates fertile ground for new positions on the question of determinism versus the free will of emergents (in particular, human persons).

In recent years, many emergentists have begun to lose faith in the weak emergentist's loyalty to the project of scientific reductionism. Whereas the British Emergentists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, heavily influenced the work of J. S. Mill, G. H. Lewes and others, welcomed a strong conception of emergence, the later century's intense optimism in the project of the scientific reductionism made way for weak emergence to become something of an orthodoxy in the field by the late 20th century (Haag 2008, 43–44). Recent years, however, have seen a reawakening of openness to strong emergence in the literature

(Clayton 2006, 27), and with it, a new philosophical interest in an emergentist take on what may be considered irreducible aspects of the world, including human historicity, life as such, and human social reality (Kauffman 2008, x). While this does not necessitate the abandonment of faith in the pursuits of the physical sciences, it does signify movement toward a wider and more nuanced understanding of the universe and of human existence. Not only this, but weak emergentism's insistence on ontological reductionism results in a truncated view of human freedom that does not adequately account for the perception of our own agency that we experience every day. Whereas weak emergence tends to go hand in hand with the determinism of a reductionist ontology, strong emergence remains open to the possibility of human free will. I suggest that this increasing openness to strong emergence is movement closer to Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology. Thus, having traced some of the core concerns of emergence theory, a foray into Gadamer's *Truth and Method* will prove fruitful in the defense of strong emergence. As I will show, Gadamer converges on a theory of strong emergence with regard to human consciousness that maintains a non-reductive view of human free will and downward (mental) causation.

II. Gadamer's Strong Emergentism

There is a recent precedent for connecting Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology to positions related to emergentism in philosophy of mind. In his article "The Source of the Subjective," Bjørn Ramberg argues for the juxtaposition of Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology against an analysis of intentionality that is based on the understanding that the mind "exists *as* a system of relations" between the human person and environment (1997, 467). Although Ramberg does not explicitly delve into emergentism for support of this thesis, his suggestions are deeply compatible with the core intuitions of strong emergentism, and the connections he makes in this article neatly pave the way for this juxtaposition to be developed.

Play and the Conditions for Emergence

To unpack Gadamer's compatibility with strong emergentism, I will begin with an exposition of his concept of *play*, juxtaposed against an emergentist ontology. Whereas much of the secondary literature on Gadamer deals with the concept of play primarily in relation to his ontology of the work of art, Monica Vilhauer suggests that therein lies the key to understanding Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. She suggests that this key concept

> elucidates the very process of understanding *in general*—the understanding which stretches through all our hermeneutic experience, including encounters with art, with text, with tradition in all its forms, with others in dialogue, and which even constitutes our very mode of being-in-the-world. (Vilhauer 2010, xiii-xiv)

Considering that the Heideggerian sense of *understanding* and *interpretation* describes a fundamental way in which Dasein is oriented toward the world, the concept of play, as the dynamic that animates both understanding and interpretation, brings Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology into focus.

Gadamer considers play to be the actual mode of being of a work of art (2004 [1989], 102). That is, a work of art only has its being in *being played* by, and thereby presenting itself to, an observer or participant. However, this self-presentation goes both ways. Thus, play is not only the mode of being of the art object but is also an occasion in which the human person engages in interpretation, which, understood in a Heideggerian sense, also constitutes the being of the person: "in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out. The self-presentation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing—i.e. presenting—something" (Ibid., 108). The player engages with the game or the work of art as the "space" in which to project and imagine possibilities (Ibid., 250). This projection is what Gadamer identifies as one's "ecstatic self-forgetfulness," which he suggests paradoxically "corresponds to [one's] continuity with [oneself]" (Ibid., 124). Therefore, the human person, according to Gadamer, only exists as always already engaged in play, that is, always extended into (and, I suggest, emergent from) relationships with the world. There is an emergence that takes place here through the mode of self-understanding by which one who understands something in the world (i.e., "projects oneself upon his possibilities" [Ibid., 251]) understands oneself. This interpretation of Gadamer's use of the Heideggerian concept of understanding allows Dasein to be constituted by components that do not exhaust its being; Dasein emerges out of a system of interrelationships in the world within which it is caught up in play, and Dasein is only intelligible to itself in terms of these pre-established interrelationships.

The concept of play is a key component to illuminating an interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology that is amenable to a strong emergentist account of consciousness. Vilhauer suggests that Gadamer, through the concept of play, offers a solution to the mind-body problem, simultaneously challenging the Kantian view that a person is a subject as opposed to objects and the Cartesian view that the mind is a distinct kind

of entity from the body. Rather, as a result of the relational and ontological significance of play, Vilhauer's Gadamer offers a view in which the human person "is a being that is primordially in contact with the world of meaningful things and people, apart from which this thing cannot exist" (Vilhaeur 2010, 112). Similarly, developing a juxtaposition of hermeneutics and intentionality, Bjørn Ramberg maintains that mental properties, in an externalist (and, I might add, emergentist) view of mentality and intentionality,

> are not autonomous, intrinsic features of some entity; they are essentially relational. They are individuated, and constituted (in part) by objects beyond the subject or person. A person's mental properties are a system of relationships between the person and her environment. (Ramberg 1997, 467)

In the same way that a strong emergentist is able to consider mental activity as a process of interaction between "mutually embedding and embedded systems, tightly interconnected on multiple levels" (Silberstein 2006, 208), rather than an inner quality of an individual, Gadamer also views the human person as constituted by this very dynamic, which he calls hermeneutics (i.e., "the basic being-in-motion of Dasein" [Gadamer 2004 [1989], xxvii]). Such a view of the human person is summed up in the words of Warren Brown's (and John Dewey's) insistence that "mind" should be understood as a verb and not a noun (Brown 2007, 200). In the same way, for Gadamer, the concept of play illustrates a view of consciousness as always in motion and always caught up in the world.

The Hermeneutic Circle and the Dynamics of Emergence

Using the image of the hermeneutic circle, fortified by a nuanced understanding of *tradition* and *prejudice* as essential components of the human person's fundamental constitution, Gadamer moves from the concept of play to conceiving of the human person as historically embedded. If self-presentation in play corresponds roughly to Heidegger's notion of projection, Gadamer's conceptions of tradition and prejudice correspond to Heidegger's notion of heritage. Gadamer affirms and alludes to something similar to Heideggerian heritage as a way to describe the human person as belonging to history (2004 [1989], 278): "Everything that makes possible and limits Dasein's projection ineluctably precedes it" (Ibid., 254). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, the emergence of a self that is capable of authentic projection is not possible apart from being already conditioned by a historical situation. One's historical constitution consists in a set of prejudices that makes possible all understanding and serves to direct and orient inquiry (Ramberg 1997, 460-461). A human person always begins with a set of prejudices, or in more Heideggerian

terms "fore-conceptions" (Gadamer 2004 [1989], 269), that are primordial as a result of being always and already immersed in a tradition (i.e., a heritage). However, for Gadamer, these prejudices initiate a process of ongoing interpretation. When these prejudices are challenged by the "text" (i.e., the object of interpretation), they cause the interpreter to be "pulled up short" (Ibid., 270) by it, and the interpreter is able to replace previous prejudices with new, more appropriate interpretations (Ibid., 269). So prejudices, for Gadamer, are more than just biases; they *constitute the historical reality of [a human person's] being*" (Ibid., 278).

The process of testing prejudices against objects of interpretation is suitably deemed the "hermeneutic circle," which I suggest illustrates the process by which an individual *emerges* as a free individual out of thrownness: "The circle…is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter" (Gadamer 2004 [1989], 293). To recall Stuart Kauffman's idea that an emergent emerges in a way that is not time-reversible, Gadamer's hermeneutic circle suggests the same. The movement of interpretation from prejudice to reformulation necessitates that understanding, which constitutes the very being of Dasein, is in a constant state of flux. A new understanding of the world cannot be erased without tampering with Dasein's primordial being-in-the-world. In this way, the emergence of Dasein from its heritage is not time-reversible but is diachronic and profoundly historically contingent.

From an emergentist's perspective, this means that there is no mind or consciousness at all apart from historical embeddedness. To suggest otherwise falls into a dualistic idea that the mind leads a separate existence from historical and physical embeddedness, a position that strong emergentists (and Gadamer) reject. This amounts to the idea that a brain in a vat can never have the same experiences as an identical brain in a body embedded in a historical situation (Silberstein 2006, 211). In fact, apart from this embeddedness, there is no possibility of a hermeneutic circle, and therefore, no possibility of the understanding that is constitutive of consciousness itself.

Where the hermeneutic circle does occur, however, an emergence takes place. This emergence is marked by the ability of the emergent (Dasein) to "foreground" a prejudice. In Gadamer's terminology, "Foregrounding (abheben) a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us" (2004 [1989], 298). The ability to take such a critical stance on a prejudice requires the interpreter to resist the pressure it exerts. The human person, when actively involved in the world as an interpreter, emerges through the hermeneutic circle as something *more* than simply a bundle of prejudices, pre-determined by historical and social situatedness, even though these prejudices ground its being. So while a

human person only comes into being, so to speak, when engaged with the world in a play relationship marked by the hermeneutic circle, the being that has come into being emerges as more than the sum of the component parts that conditioned the possibility for its existence.

For Gadamer, the "more" that emerges out of the movement of the hermeneutic circle is marked by a "state of new intellectual freedom" (2004 [1989], 251). He goes on to explain that when a person comes to an understanding, this "implies the general possibility of interpreting, of seeing connections, of drawing conclusions" (Ibid., 251). I suggest that the freedom Gadamer attributes to Dasein (as an emergent) thus takes the form of *critical creativity* with respect to its thrownness, which means that such a person is able to prevent novel questions and lines of inquiry from being covered over by inherited prejudices (Ibid., 361). Such an ability is marked by the possibility of "taking a critical stance with regard to every convention" (Ibid., 551), which opens up the possibility of freedom from the pressures of these conventions. Persons who *understand* are thus not completely pre-determined by their inescapable historical constitution and their belonging to a tradition. The ability to engage critically with convention (i.e., one's thrownness into a tradition) results from tracing the path of the hermeneutic circle to arrive at a new self-understanding: "This cultivated understanding and self-understanding constitutes for us a newfound *freedom* in which we feel at home in what may have previously been strange and posed a limitation for us" (Vilhauer 2010, 65). In this way, the hermeneutic circle is the mechanism by which the human person emerges out of its tradition, and a new freedom is established for that which has emerged.[3]

III. Emergent Causation and Linguisticality

Truth and Method's account of what I have suggested can be identified as emergence is further clarified by a distinction between *world* and *environment*. For Gadamer, to have a *world* means to have an orientation toward it, or, in other words, to be able to establish

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3. This interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutics in *Truth and Method* supports Paul Ricoeur's attempt, in response to the debates between Gadamer and Habermas, to develop an account of hermeneutics that is compatible with a critique of tradition and authority (Piercey 2004, 263). I suggest, along with Ricoeur, that Habermas' distaste for tradition rests on a misunderstanding about the primordiality of hermeneutics, and his critique of ideology itself cannot be "detached from hermeneutic presuppositions" (Ricoeur 1991, 271). The interpretation I have provided of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* diffuses Habermas' concern that hermeneutics leaves no room for a critique of authority and tradition, suggesting that Gadamer's conception of the human person as emergent rests on the ontological possibility of creative critique and appropriation of an inherited tradition.

a critical stance with regard to it (2004 [1989], 440-441). In contrast, an *environment* in this context denotes the nexus of relations that exert causal pressure within which an organism finds itself (Ibid., 441). Gadamer explains that the freedom from this pressure is characteristically human and is effected by language: "To rise above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world means to have a language and to have a 'world'" (Ibid., 441). Whereas most animals experience a straightforward embeddedness in the environment, according to Gadamer, language allows its users a certain distance from particular aspects of this embeddedness, which affords the language user freedom with respect to the environment that simply embedded organisms cannot experience (Vilhauer 2010, 143).

Essentially, Gadamer argues a point here that is remarkably similar to one made by emergentist philosopher Warren Brown. Brown uses the idea of "action loops" to describe the way in which the behaviour of organisms never actually begins or ends; rather, it is a feedback loop in which an organism continually modulates its behaviour. The idea of action loops effectively reframes the discussion of causation, in that causation becomes modulation of pre-existing behaviour rather than the "triggering of action in an otherwise inert organism" (Brown 2007, 208). Significantly, Brown explains a basic structure of behaviour in terms of action loops in a way compatible with Gadamer's description of animals embedded in the environment. Further, Brown suggests that in more complex organisms (such as humans), who enjoy higher-level emergent properties (e.g., mind/conscious thought), there emerges multiple levels of supervisory systems that regulate and contain the more simple action loops (2007, 211). As a result, Brown considers humans to be able to rise above their simple action loops in the same way that Gadamer considers them capable of rising above the environment.

Converging on remarkably similar conclusions as Gadamer, Brown goes on to describe the ways in which language influences the emergence of supervisory systems. According to Brown, "scaffolding" refers to the ways in which organisms use their being-in-the-world to supplement mental processing. In an emergentist view of the mind, scaffolding suggests that mental activity in general is not simply internal to an organism but is fundamentally relational because it is supplemented to a certain extent by the environment. Language, suggests Brown, is "the primary form of external scaffolding of higher human mental abilities" (2007, 214). As such, language allows an organism to employ it as a tool with which to solve complex problems and to innovate in the world.

Gadamer continues on what seems to be an even more extreme path, claiming that "man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic" (2004 [1989], 440). However, understood in terms of the distinction between world and environment, this begins to

sound less extreme and more plausible. While being embedded in an environment may not necessarily be a linguistic phenomenon, rising above it (or developing supervisory systems for action loops) occurs as a result of the linguisticality of our being-in-the-world. Jean Grondin elucidates Gadamer's claim in this way: "putting into language is parallel to putting into understanding" (2003, 128). In other words, anything that is intelligible and understandable *can be described* and has significance. Grondin goes on to explain that for Gadamer, "everything presents itself to us under an aspect, because it concerns us and we participate in its manifestation" (2003, 149). When a human person is engaged in interpretation of something in the world, the object of interpretation presents itself "as" something to the interpreter (e.g., a cup *as* something to drink out of). Language is what allows the "as" structure of interpretation to bring objects in the world into relevance for an interpreter. Describing this structure of interpretation, Vilhauer explains that "[e]xplicit language is what allows some subject matter to be brought to presentation 'as' something, so that it becomes a distinct, meaningful part of our world" (2010, 143). Apart from language, creativity with respect to interpreting the world would not be possible, and we would be simply embedded in the environment rather than able to stand at a critical distance from certain aspects of it.

The primordially linguistic being-in-the-world of the human being is what creates the possibility for novel interaction with the world in general. Gadamer explains that when interpretation occurs and new understandings emerge, the interpreter is presented with "various possibilities for saying the same thing" (2004 [1989], 442). For example, learning that the world is round allows us to describe the world either according to our perceived experience or according to the new understanding (Ibid., 446). For Gadamer, however, description is not only wordplay; it is a manifestation of the ability to see new "as" structures, and therefore to envision new (equipotential) possibilities for activity in the world. Thus, as Robert Brandom suggests, because understanding, in the Heideggerian sense, is fundamental to being-in-the-world, and because language increases the possibilities for understanding, a new set of novel activities or performances is opened up by an interpreter's use of language (Brandom 1985, 186). Given the linguistic structure of human experience, we are able to draw conclusions about Gadamer's position on the origin of these novel performances and what mental or "downward" causation might look like for emergent Dasein.

Emergent Causation

To speak of mental causation is one way of describing the limits of human free will. Free will, understood as the ability for mental intentionality to effect action in the world, is necessarily a form of causation (Haag 2008, 113). Considering the human person to be emergent, strong emergentism allows for the development of free will out of a strong sense of downward causation. However, a strong emergentist also acknowledges the fundamental interdependence of the human person and the world. Describing the downward causal efficacy of cognition, emergentist philosopher Michael Silberstein argues that "[t]he social embeddedness of human cognition means that social features of an individual's life will help determine some of his or her psychological and neurochemical properties, not just the other way around" (2006, 213). That is, downward causation holds that the behaviour of an organism affects its lower-level functions at the same time that its lower-level functions affect its behaviour.

A weak emergentist position that advocates for a strong sense of global supervenience (that is, "the principle that two worlds that are microphysically identical will be or must be identical in all other macroscopic respects" [Silberstein 2006, 205]) also amounts to a denial of the possibility of *equipotentiality*. Equipotentiality is a term borrowed from Michael Polanyi that describes how a situation, a particular configuration of components in the world, may have more than one predetermined course, that is, that "lower level particulars can be regulated in more than one way, all of which have equal potential for producing a higher level performance (Dias 2008, 207). Openness to the possibility of equipotentiality, on the other hand, allows for moments of indeterminacy when an agent has no predetermined course of action and, therefore, has the freedom to choose from an array of equipotential possibilities. A strong emergentist position that emphasizes the embeddedness of cognition will likely resist global supervenience in favor of the possibility of some form of equipotentiality. The acceptance of strong emergence and downward causation opens up the possibility that an emergent may affect its originary system in an unexpected and unique way that may not be duplicated in an identical system (contrary to global supervenience). The denial of global supervenience as a blanket claim allows for the possibility that "under *exactly the same* circumstances agents are capable of doing different things" (Achim 2010, 187). Strong emergence, complete with downward causation, is the missing piece here that accounts for this ability.

I suggest that Gadamer's position amounts to a denial of global supervenience and an affirmation of equipotentiality, which arise out of his notion that the human person is capable of and is always engaged in "purposiveness," which, for Gadamer, is the ability to choose from a variety of suitable means to an end (2004 [1989], 470). Purposiveness

requires the ability to envision a variety of solutions to the same problem, or, in other words, it requires the ability to rise above the environment into a position of critical creativity. In this way, purposiveness is a special sort of downward causation, funded by the creativity enjoyed only by an emergent Dasein that is in a position of "*freedom from environment*" (Ibid., 442). Becoming (partially) dislodged from embeddedness in the pressures of the environment allows various possibilities to present themselves as equipotential, thereby opening up the possibility of the downward (mental) causation of purposiveness.

Conclusion: The Hermeneutics of Interdependence

To sum up, I have explored the constructive juxtaposition of strong emergence and Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology. Using Gadamer's notions of play, the hermeneutic circle, and linguisticality as touchstones, I hope to have demonstrated how each of these corresponds to a helpful way forward in defense of strong emergence. The benefits of a strong emergentist position include the affirmation of a robust sense of human free will and responsibility, along with a sense of human dependence on and belonging to the world and a tradition. Gadamer's compatibility with strong emergentism, like Heidegger's, offers a novel third way between dualism and reductive materialism, one that paves the way for an ontologically robust sense of ethical responsibility and indebtedness to the world and to the historical situation in which we find ourselves. This analysis of Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology in *Truth and Method* yields surprising evidence for Lauren Swayne Barthold's notion that, at bottom, Gadamer's hermeneutics is really about ethics:

> Understanding is ethical, then, to the extent to which it requires dialogical engagement with another; it is dialectical to the extent that we are caught in-between our own finitude and our longing to transcend it. Gadamer's dialectical hermeneutics helps us acknowledge our long forgotten kinship as the very offspring of Hermes. (Barthold 2010, 127)

As emergent persons, we are fundamentally constituted by our interactions with others and with the world, and yet we are inescapably responsible for our actions. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that just as we effect change in our world, our world effects change in us.

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