**Vygotsky and Higher Moral Learning -**

**A Heideggerian-Gadamerian Interpretation**

**Introduction**

In Lev Vygotsky’s view, language and thought have different origins but are interconnected and interwoven inseparably. His view is close to a hermeneutical approach to understanding of language. This approach gives the possibility of interconnecting language to the whole development of the human being, including their moral development. According to the hermeneutic notion, language is not only a tool or instrument of communication. The hermeneutic notion of language matches with Lev Semjonovitš Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of language, in which language and thought are interwined (Vygotsky 1986, 218):

“The relation of thought to word is not a thing but process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may regard as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them.”

Vygotsky claims that contemporary psychology was in a state of profound crisis. He quotes Brentano’s words, that there exist many psychologies, but no unified psychology. We conclude, that the situation is same in our days. The duality of body and mind is one phenomenon of this crisis. Piaget tries to escape this fatal duality by remaining strictly in the realms of facts. Vygotsky claims that he fails, (Vygotsky 1986, 14) because Piaget does not solve Cartesian dualism. Vygotsky offers his own socio-cultural approach which has many commonalties with Martin Heidegger’s philosophy (Pacher & Goicoechea 2000).

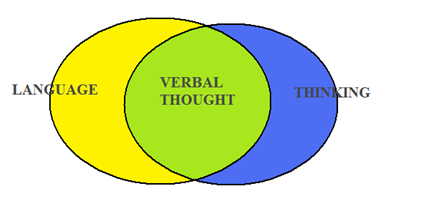
The problems of thinking and language, thought and world, have been basic philosophical issues since the beginning of Western thought. Heidegger is one of the most well-known philosophers, whose main task is to overcome Cartesian dichotomy. Thinking and language play an essential role, especially in his later philosophy. Heidegger’s student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, emphasises in a Vygotskian manner the role of dialogue in thinking and hermeneutical experience. In this article we will present a Heideggerian-Gadamerian interpretation of Vygotsky from the point of view of adult moral learning.

**Vygotsky and Heidegger**

Vygotsky sees that investigation of the problem of thought and language has two kinds of methods and they are in the opposite range of the investigation. The first one offers identification of thought and language and the second one absolute disjunction of thought and language. There is no problem left with the first one. The second method explains properties of verbal thought by breaking it up into its two elements, thought and word. Vygotsky claims that we cannot separate thought and word because they form an integrated whole. We cannot break language into thought and word in the same way in which chemical analysis breaks water down into hydrogen and oxygen, which then are separately studied. When language is analysed in this manner, a large amount of empirical information is gained, but the basic phenomenon has vanished. This kind of analysis does not provide an adequate basis for the study of the various relationships between thought and language in general, or the development of language, and we would add here the moral development. Heidegger’s criticism against so-called calculative thinking resembles Vygotsky’s argument. Heidegger uses an example of the heaviness and hardness of rock. We cannot understand what rock is, when its heaviness and shine are described only by numbers. This kind of analysis leads to generalisation, which does not tell us about the properties of the entity being studied (Vygotsky 1986, 2 – 3; 211 – 213, Heidegger 1966; 2022, 21 – 22).

As an alternative method to this analysis Vygotsky presents his own approach. He replaced analysis into elements with analysis into units. Vygotsky describes his method by stating that this method combines the advantages of analysis and synthesis, and permits adequate study of the complex as a whole. Units are the product of analysis which corresponds to specific aspects of the phenomena under investigation (Vygotsky 1986, 211 – 213). Vygotsky comes to the same conclusion as Wittgenstein and Heidegger concerning the social nature of language.

To the question, are speech and thought originally the same thing, Vygotsky’s answer is no. He describes thought and speech schematically as two intersecting circles.



**Figure 1.** Relation of thinking and language in adults according to Vygotsky (1986, 88).

The overlapping part represents verbal thought, where thinking and language are connected. Vygotsky emphasises that this verbal thought does not include all forms of thinking or all forms of speech. The roots and developmental course of the intellect differ from those of speech, but at a certain point the two lines of development meet, and speech becomes rational and thinking verbal. The primary function of speech is communication and social contact. This goes for children as well as adults. The question is, what kind of relation is there between speech and thinking? For example, is inner speech the same as thinking? Vygotsky does not give a simple answer and he admits that inner speech is one of the most difficult phenomena to investigate (Vygotsky 1986, 98 – 99). The question of inner speech is also crucial to the theory of moral development. What is called our conscience is actually our inner moral speech. The genesis of morality is the genesis of our inner moral speech. That is why the theory of genesis of speech is elementary to the theory of morality and moral development.

For Heidegger and Gadamer, the world is language. The verbal thought -section corresponds this in Vygotskian relation. The major difference is that Heidegger and Gadamer do not have a theory of the genesis and development of language. According to Heidegger and Gadamer we always find ourselves *in-the-world* with language and with others. Outside of the world is nothingness. Nevertheless Heidegger comes close to Vygotsky when he says that little child takes part in the mother’s *being-in-the-world*. This is because the child is a *being-in-the-world* and at the same time is still tied to the ways of another human being’s *being-in-the-world*. This, if anything, is the social start of human development, analogous to Vygotsky’s idea of the development of social speech (Heidegger 2001, 163).

Vygotsky presents his theory of the genesis of speech as following. The earliest speech of the child is essentially social. The argument for this is that the primary function of speech is social at every age. Social speech is later sharply divided into egocentric speech and communicative speech. Egocentric speech in time leads to inner speech, which serves thinking. The schema of development is: first social speech, then egocentric speech and thirdly inner speech. Inner speech is speech for oneself and external speech is for others. Inner speech and outer speech have different kinds of structure. Inner speech is, in a sense, the opposite of external speech. External speech is the turning of thoughts into words, their materialisation and objectification. With inner speech, the process is reversed, going from outside to inside. Vygotsky describes this when he writes that “overt speech sublimates into thought” (Vygotsky 1986, 225 – 227).

The question of development changes from biological to socio-historical and the problem of thought and language thus expands beyond the limits of natural science. Verbal thought is not a natural form of behaviour. In other words, it must be learnt. Heidegger expresses the same opinion by saying: “We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves are thinking. If our attempt is to be successful, we must be ready to learn thinking” (Heidegger 2004, 3). And just like verbal thought is not natural form of behaviour, morality and moral awareness are not natural forms of behaviour but need thinking, language and concepts. Heidegger sees thinking like handicraft, like building a house (Heidegger 1986, 17).

“We must keep our eyes fixed firmly on the true relation between teacher and taught—if indeed learning is to arise in the course of these lectures. We are trying to learn thinking. Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a ‘handicraft.’”

Heidegger asked in his lecture course in Freiburg in 1951: *Wass Heisst Denken? -- What is called thinking?* (Heidegger 1986). He did not actually answer this question. It seems that questioning is more important to Heidegger than answering; the path of thinking is more important than the result, dynamic is better than static. If you give a perfectly accurate and all-inclusive answer to the question, you need not think any more.

The question of thinking is peculiar one. When we ask ‘what is thinking’ or, like Heidegger, demand that we must learn to think, we are already thinking. Only by thinking can we say something about thinking, and only by speaking can we study language. Thinking is a social act: it cannot be learned without other people. The same pattern goes for moral thinking. To put his long lectures in a nutshell, Heidegger’s main argument is that we must learn to think, because we are not yet capable of thinking. This learning of thinking is very difficult, but the teaching is even more difficult (Heidegger 1986, 15):

“Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. Indeed, the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than— learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we really learn nothing from him, if by ‘learning’ we now automatically understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn.”

This ‘letting learn’ can be seen as Heideggerian formulation of Vygotsky’s *zone of proximal development, ZPD.* Letting learn gives bounds to the teaching and learning: these bounds are our *being-in-the-world within-others*. You are never just a teacher or just a learner, but both.

Language speaks, says Heidegger and this means that language does not have any other ground than itself (Heidegger 1971, 198). Language is not the production of a need for communication or is not based on thinking. Is thinking based on language? Heidegger did not take a stance on this question. He wrote: “And only when man speaks, does he think – not the other way round” (Heidegger 1986, 16). Without speaking, whether it is Vygotskian inner silent speaking or ordinary loud speaking, there is no thinking.

Vygotsky describes the development of verbal thought by showing how spontaneous concepts, as against every day and scientific concepts, develop. The development of a child’s spontaneous concepts proceeds upward and the development of her scientific concepts downward. The origin of an everyday concept can be traced to a concrete situation, where we are confronting different things, while a scientific concept involves a mediated attitude toward its object. Even if concepts are developing in opposite directions, the two processes are closely connected. The everyday concept must have reached a certain level for the child to be able to absorb a related scientific concept. The two conceptual systems are in essence interrelations between actual development and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1986, 191 – 195).

The division between everyday concepts and scientific concepts can also be applied to moral thinking. We do not support the notion of “scientific morality” but we can make a division between “everyday morality” (ordinary moral attitude; moral virtues; morality as *Zuhanden*) and “deliberative morality” (morality as principles; reflective moral virtues; morality as *Vorhanden*). So, in our interpretation, Vygotsky’s everyday language and scientific language are analogous to Heidegger’s *readiness-to-hand* and *presence-to-hand*. Vygotsky’s use of Claparède’s law of awareness supports this interpretation, especially when we consider Heidegger’s famous hammer illustration of *readiness-to-hand* and *presence-to-hand* (Heidegger 1992, 98; 100 –101).

Social speech happens *in-the-world* in a Heideggerian sense and it can only exist in the condition of *being-with* other *Daseins*, with “other social speakers”. Speaking and thinking are essentially social. Vygotsky defines his concept of the social situation of development in a Heideggerian manner (Vygotsky 1998, 198):

“The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual.”

One of the most important elements in Heidegger’s philosophy is *Ereignis*. *Ereignis* means that everything has the nature of happening. There are no static meanings or things, but happening of truth and Being. Vygotsky sees similarly that the relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. According to Vygotsky, thought is not merely expressed in words: thought happens in words and in speech. This movement is happening of truth in the Heideggerian sense. Something emerges into the world in this back-and-forth-movement between thought and word. And, like Heidegger, Vygotsky assumes that poetry and art possess more value than solely aesthetic value, because art has more of this kind of oscillation (back-and-forth-movement) than normal language. Also, moral innovation happens in words and likewise moral feelings come true in words. Morality as a social phenomenon has emerged into the world through the process of happening. At some point of human history, language users have come to the point where the moral aspect or dimension comes to light (Vygotsky 1986, 213 – 214).

In *Being and Time* (1986), Heidegger explains that our being in the world discloses accordingly our *state-of-mind* (*Befindlichkeit*), our *attunement* (*Gestimmheit*) and our *mood* (*Stimmung*) (Heidegger 1992, 172). The *state-of-mind* is an *exsistentiale* in Heidegger’s thinking. Human beings and *Dasein*, which is Heidegger’s counterpart to human beings in *Sein und Zeit*, have a different mode of being in the world than any other entity, and Heidegger calls this different kind of being *existentiale* (Mulhall 1966, 76-77). Heidegger does not give any complete list of *existentialia*, but he states that there are three fundamental *existentialia* – care, understanding and *state-of-mind*. These *existentialia* are fundamental, where the main purpose is to ask the question of the meaning of Being. The “they”, das Man, is a special *existentiale*, because it is a primordial phenomenon; and truth is also *existentiale*, when understood in the most primordial way (Heidegger 1986, 167). There are other *existentialia* like worldhood, making-room, solicitude, end, totality, and de-severance. Accordingly we are always attuned to the *state-of-mind* *existentiale*: the world is disclosed in some way and this makes mood possible. Hubert Dreyfus argues that the best translation of *Befindlichkeit* is *“*Being found in a situation where things and options already matter*”* (Dreyfus 1991, 168). This is a very apt and informative translation, but we must settle for *state-of-mind*. We always find ourselves *being-in-the world* in some way already attuned, and the manifestation of *attunement* and *state-of-mind* is *mood* (Heidegger 1992, 174):

“In a state-of-mind Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has.”

Heidegger is using *attunement* and *state-of-mind* like synonyms. The mood discloses the world and makes it possible to direct oneself towards things (Heidegger 1992, 176). The *state-of-mind* directs how the mood discloses the world.

There is a certain typical kind of passivity in Heidegger’s thinking. We cannot force the happening of truth in the work of art; we cannot understand Being with hard work. This is why it is a little surprising and even contradictory, when Heidegger writes (Heidegger 1992 175):

“Factically, **Dasein can, should, and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods**; in certain possible ways of existing, this may signify a priority of volition and cognition.”

Although he stresses immediately (Heidegger 1992 175): “Only we must not be mislead into denying that ontologically mood is a primordial kind of being of Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself prior to all cognition and volition, and beyond their range of disclosure.”

Vygostsky use Stanislavsky’s instructions in the play *Woe from Wit* as an example of “scaffolding” the motivation. Stanislavsky gives instruction to actors in their attempt to reveal the motives behind the words (Vygotsky 1986, 252-253) and thus master one’s mood. According to Vygotsky, to understand another’s speech it is not enough to understand another’s words. One must also understand his thought and motivations (Vygotsky 1986, 253). Actor using Stanislavsky’s method is doing exatcly that. Further more actor is mastering his or her mood (*Stimmung*) in order to expand his or her ZPD as an actor:

**Text of the Play Parallel Motives**

SOPHYA:

*O, Chatsky, but I am glad you’ve come.* Tries to hide her confusion.

CHATSKY:

*You are glad, that’s very nice:* Tries to make her feel guilty by

*But gladness such as yours not* teasing her. Aren’t you ashamed

*easily one tells.* Of yourself! Tries to force her to

*It rather seems to me, all told,*  be frank.

*That making man and horse*

*catch cold.*

*I’ve pleased myself and no one else*

LIZA:

*There, sir, and if you’d stood*  Tries to calm him. Tries to help

*on the same landing here.* Sophya in a difficult situation

*Five minutes,no, not five ago.*

*You’d heard your name clear as clear.*

*You say, Miss! Tell him it was so.*

SOPHYA:

*And always so, no less, no more.* Tries to reassure Chatsky. I am

*No, as to that. I’m sure you* not guilty of anything!

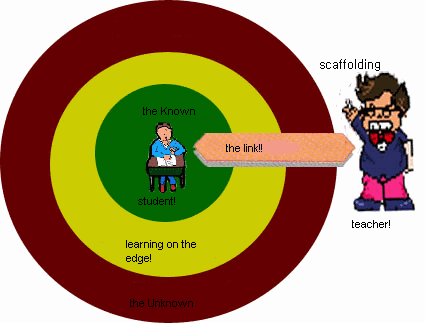
*can’t reproach me.*

**Figure 2.** How Stanislavsky let actors learn to master their mood (Vygotsky 1986, 252-253).

To become master of our mood means that we can affect our mood through our free will and cognition. We are always thrown into the world in a certain time and place, or, as Vygotsky would say, a certain socio-historical situation; we have the possibility of mastering how the world is opening to us. It is the task of teacher let children learn how to master mood in a way that expanding of ZDP is possible.

**Vygotsky, Gadamer and ZPD in moral learning**

The *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) is a very important concept for adult learning and adult moral growth. ZPD has an interesting connection with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Vygotsky defines ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978, 86). In the following figure, the light green area signifies the zone of proximal development. The term ‘scaffolding’ is mentioned in the figure. To be precise, this is not Vygotsky’s original term. The theory of scaffolding was created by Jerome Bruner, but the underlying idea can be found in Vygotsky’s citation above (see Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976):



**Figure 3.** Learning on the edge (ZPD) and the teacher’s scaffolding (Karpinski 2012). The zone of the known is the comfort zone.

Vygotsky’s notion of ZPD can be linked to Gadamer’s notions of hermeneutic experience, hermeneutics circle and fusion of horizons. According to Gadamer, hermeneutic experience broadens our horizon and enables us to see something differently than we had in the past. Hermeneutic experience is essentially negative in nature. It breaks down typical or restricted ways of seeing things. It is not just that we first had a deceptive view and “now we know better”; rather, we have constructed a new and wider perspective on other things and other people (Gadamer 1998, 353):

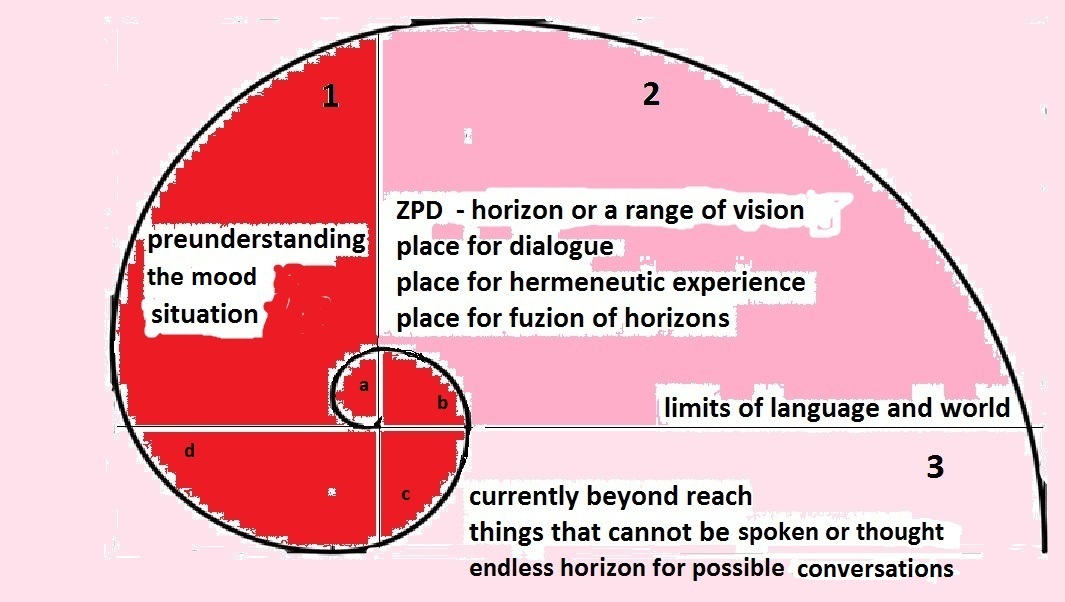
“…we use word ‘experience’ in two different senses: the experience that conform to our expectation and confirm it and the new experiences that occur to us. This latter – ‘experience’ in the genuine sense – is always negative.”

To put it into educational terminology, ordinary experience happens in the comfort zone and this conforms to the person’s expectations. Hermeneutic experience is a shaking learning experience and it widens the person’s comfort zone and ZPD. Trivial experiences do not make us more “experienced” in the Gadamerian sense (*Erfahrener*) and we do not learn anything new. Trivial experiences do not widen comfort zone and ZPD. According to Gadamer, experienced persons are individuals who have experienced a series of hermeneutical experiences, which have widened their horizon, in other words their comfort zone and ZPD. Hermeneutic experience is a world-shaking experience. After hermeneutic experience one looks at the world through different eyes. One sees new things that one has not seen before or paid attention to. Also the agent (experiencer; *Dasein*) changes because of the power of hermeneutic experience. Imagine reading a book that has shaken your world view. After the reading your world (horizon) changed and you changed too. Gadamer preserves the term hermeneutic experience for this kind of experience.

In Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, the idea of hermeneutic experience is connected with the concept of horizon. When a person remains in a comfort zone – example because of the mood – and within his or her preunderstanding, hermeneutic experience or expansion of the horizon will not happen. Heidegger would say that truth will not happen (*Ereignis*). In Figure 4, Section 1 illustrates the comfort zone or preunderstanding (current understanding, knowledge, and skills). This comfort zone and preunderstanding including the mood (*Stimmung*) facilitate a situation where hermeneutical experience could happen.

Gadamer writes on horizon (Gadamer 1998, 302): “We define the concept of ‘situation’ by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of ‘horizon*’*. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of possible expansion of horizon, of opening of new horizon, and so forth. Since Nietzsche and Husserl, the word has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded. A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, ‘to have a horizon’ means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, weather it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry...”

With suitable preunderstanding, situation and mood (*Stimmung*)*,* hermeneutic experience could occur. Hermeneutic experience expands the existing horizon. Everything that one could understand with one’s current preunderstanding is within one’s ZPD and horizon. The limits of the ZPD are also the limits of language and the world (as one knows it). One cannot speak or even think of things that are beyond those limits (Section 3 in Figure 4). The sections in the spiral are moving forwards. Sometimes movement is slow and at other times it is rapid. The sections marked a, b, c and d signify earlier preunderstanding, ZPD and things currently beyond reach. ZPD is also a place for dialogue with teachers, mentors, friends, strangers, traditions, other cultures, etc. Preunderstanding, mood (*Stimmung*) and the hermeneutical situation facilitate the range of such dialogue. When dialogue – possibly in a playful manner – is fruitful, hermeneutic experience and fusion of horizons might occur. Then the limits of language and the world move:

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**Figure 4**. Spiral of hermeneutic experiences and the limits of language and the world.

After a series of hermeneutical experiences, a person has turned their attention to the nature of the events of this experience and has become more aware of their ability to attain transformative experiences. This person is reflectively aware about their ability to learn new things and widen their meaning perspective[[1]](#footnote-1). Gadamer says (Gadamer 1998, 354): “The experiencer has become aware of his experience; he is ‘experienced’. He has acquired a new horizon within something can become an experience for him”. In educational literature such a person is referred to as a “reflective learner” (see, for example, Ertmer & Newby 1996): a reflective learner is an expert in learning who possesses good metacognitive skills.

For Gadamer, an experienced person (*Erfahrener*) refers also to life experience and reminds us of Aristotle’s notion of *megalopsyche* (great spirit; AUTHORS). The nature of the learning in this case – the case of adult learning – is different from the cases that Vygotsky discusses. Vygotsky is interested in children’s learning and development. Gadamer’s *Erfahrener* and Aristotle’s *megalopsyche* refer to learning in adult age. Perhaps we should use a different concept from ZPD. We would like to introduce a concept of *hermeneutic zone of proximal development* (HZPD) in order to signify those learning processes or hermeneutical experiences that lead to the experienced person in the Gadamerian sense (*Erfahrener*). When we speak about learning in adult age or learning from life, it might be that the term ‘development’ is not appropriate. Vygotsky relates ZPD to children’s development. With the notion of HZPD we do not refer to development precisely in the Vygotskian manner, but nevertheless hermeneutic experience is a learning experience. As a learning experience, hermeneutic experience widens a person’s horizon, and the HZPD is the zone in which this widening occurs.

The *Erfahrener,* orexperienced person in the Gadamerian sense has a very wide HZPD. In contrast to the *Erfahrener* we can postulate the experienced person in the Shakespearian sense with a narrow HZPD. This is a person who also has a long life experience, but thinks that there is “nothing new under the sun”. Such person could say that “I have seen it, done it, been through it, so there is nothing new for me to experience”:

**Figure 5.** The experienced person in the Shakespearian sense.

The experienced person in the Shakespearian sense is not sensitive to new (learning) experiences. So they have a great current horizon owing to their life experience, but the person’s *hermeneutical zone of proximal development* is very narrow. Consequently many skills, knowledge, ideas, points of view or moral stances that are currently beyond reach will always stay beyond reach. Put in Heideggerian terminology, the experienced person in the Shakespearian sense has the wrong mood (*Stimmung*) for further learning or hermeneutic experiencing. They have prejudices (*Vorurteil*) which effectively restrict the HZPD. The experienced person in the Gadamerian sense, on the other hand, has just the right mood (*Stimmung*) for hermeneutic experiences. The *Erfahrener* is a kind of reflective learner in learning from life. For the *Erfahrener,* almost everything that one human can grasp in a lifetime lies in the zone that the person can learn in some part of their life.

**Figure 6.** The experienced person in the Gadamerian sense with a Socratic attitude: “I know that there is so much that I do not know but I can learn”.

The distinction between the experienced person in the Gadamerian and Shakespearean senses also concerns moral learning. In the field of morality there is the possibility that a person can gain what we might call an *Erfahrener*-level of moral cognition and sensitivity of moral feelings. *Erfahrener*-level moral learning happens in the adult years. *Erfahrener*-level is the phase that Paul Duncan Crawford calls “genuinely moral conduct” (Crawford 2001). We would like to think that “higher moral learning” happens at the *Erfahrener-*level or in genuinely moral conduct but of course we cannot be sure, because we are not there yet personally. Moral higher learning involves Socratic knowledge of morality (moral issues; moral aspects) – knowing that there is so much to learn within the field of morality. Neither Lawrence Kohlberg nor Carol Gilligan has considered this kind of possibility in moral learning. According to Kohlberg and Gilligan there are no major moral learning experiences left after a person has gained the mature level in moral consciousness. Especially if we consider morality only as a rule-following behaviour – either the rules of an existing society or universal moral laws – the prospect for lifelong moral learning or hermeneutical experiences in the moral sphere is limited.

We support Crawford’s notion of morality (moral ability) as dialogical meaning-creating activity (Crawford 2001). Moral higher learning is not (only) rule-following activity or solitary contemplation of sophisticated moral philosophy. Crawford claims that moral learning or moral development is Vygotskian style socio-cultural meaning-making activity that facilities a personal way of *being-in-the-world* in the Heideggerian sense (Crawford 2001, 118). Moral learning is “the quintessential sociocultural activity” (Moll 1990, 1) where fusion and expansion of horizons could happen. Like all learning, meaning-making activity in the moral sphere, it is essentially dialogical. So in a sense one cannot have “private morality” like one cannot have “private language” (see Candlish & Wrisley 2012; Wittgenstein 2001, §243, §244-§271 and §256-§271).

Dialogical meaning-making on moral issues belongs to the sphere of outer speech. Concurrently a person carries out an internal dialogue or inner speech, listening to their moral voice. One’s own moral voice is actually the instance which is doing the learning in the *hermeneutical zone of proximal development*. The most important task in adult learning and lifelong learning is the self-education of one’s moral voice. Moral self-education (*Moralische Selbstbildung*) includes critical self-reflection on one’s moral judgements, moral virtues and moral feelings. Higher level (adult age) moral self-education includes such activities as re-appraisal of moral choices, improving moral imagination, especially concerning so-called fellow feeling, and dissimulating unproductive moral feelings in order to convert them into productive moral feelings (see Maxwell & Reichenbach 2007). The purpose of critical self-reflection of one’s morality (moral voice) is to transform “everyday morality” (ordinary moral attitude; un-reflective moral virtues; morality as *Zuhanden*) into “deliberative morality” (morality as principles; reflective moral virtues; morality as *Vorhanden*) as much as possible. Moral self-education is never ending growth from morality as *Zuhanden* to morality as *Vorhanden.*

For Adam Smith, the elementary concept in moral self-education is cultivation of the sense of propriety[[2]](#footnote-2) (TMS i.1.3.-4.). Tronto explains Smith’s sense of propriety as follows (Tronto 1993, 46): “Propriety refers to the sentiment we share, being by nature sociable, that makes us eager to be sure that others perceive us as proper. If we did not develop a sense of propriety, perhaps we would be able to ignore the situations of others. But our desire to be accepted, our sense of propriety, causes us to develop an ability to put ourselves in others’ positions.” The sense of propriety is related to Smith’s idea of the impartial spectator. If we are engaged in moral conflict, our instant moral feelings might be more or less biased. The task of moral self-education is to learn to imagine the reaction of others who have no particular favourable emotion towards any engaged party. We should learn to imagine what kind of moral feelings the impartial spectator would feel (TMS, iii.2.31-31). As a moral maxim, it sounds easy, but it is actually extremely difficult to carry out. It takes a life time (or more) to really learn to feel those moral feelings that an impartial spectator would feel. According to Erich Fromm, to learn to really love impartially and in a non-egoistic way is a rare achievement (Fromm 1956, vii). That is the essence of the Frommian art of loving. The starting point of Fromm’s school of love is to learn how to love oneself in non-egoistical manner. A person cannot truly love another person if that person does not love all of mankind, including themselves. To do that, one must be a master of love (Fromm 1956, chapter III). To be a master of love is the ultimate goal when cultivating a sense of propriety.

This moral self-education – cultivation of the sense of propriety and love and critical self-reflection on moral judgements – is a never-ending task. In this way Aristotle understood Oracle’s maxim in Plato’s Phaedrus: “know thyself”. For Nietzsche, this maxim means that one should overcome oneself by becoming what one is. Thus knowing oneself is a process of self-transcendence. We modify this maxim into a new form: “Know your hermeneutical zone of proximal development in the moral sphere”!

**Conclusion**

Vygotsky, Heidegger and Gadamer agreed that language is not just an instrument for communication. They all support a socio-cultural theory of language, in which language and thought are closely interwined. Relation between thought and word is dynamic process where a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and vice versa happens. This process is not monological but dialogical. Relation of language and thought is continuous process from external speech to thinking (internal speech) and from thinking to external speech. Same dialectic applies to human morality (moral thinking and moral speech). Morality emerges from the oscillation between individual internal world and public external world. Morality can exists only in shared social world. We can call this oscillation as a play in Gadamerian sense and a happening of truth in Heideggerian sense.

We can conclude that dialogue is the genesis of thinking and morality. Inner speech or inner dialogue is essential for adult morality. The main purpose of moral learning in adult age is self-education of one’s moral voice or inner speech. With right kind of attitude and mood (*Stimmung*) a person can have extremely wide *hermeneutical zone of proximal development* in the sphere of morality. Such kind of person we can call experienced in Gadamerian sense.

Experienced person in Gadamerian sense has ability to manage his or her mood in Stanislawskian manner. Such person possess just right mood for moral higher learning in the extremely wide *hermeneutical zone of proximal development.* We would like to think that truest moral learning – moral higher learning – happens in adult age and it is connected to the learning from life. If a person considers that there is nothing major to learn concerning the moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character[[3]](#footnote-3) (see Rest 1994, 9), then this person is not experienced in Gadamerian sense but only in Shakespearian sense. Improving these four dimensions of morality is a lifelong task (task of lifelong learning) and there is always a possibility to mind blowing hermeneutical experience – experience that widens the limits of (moral)language and (moral)world.

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1. Hegel in Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit conceives outcome of dialectical movements of experience like Gadamer: In some point experiencer comes reflectively aware of his ability to experience unseen terrain (see Hegel 2013). According to Hegel this this self-reflective experience (a.k.a. reflective logic) will finally lead to absolute self-knowledge in which there is nothing alien in world or in oneself. For Gadamer there is no end in the dialectics (hermeneutics) of experience. Unseen terrain in world (language) and in oneself (Vygotskian outer speech) has no other limits than moveable limits of language (world). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Smith’s concept of propriety was influenced by Aristotles notion of prepon. See Mckenna 2006, 36-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These four components of morality that James Rest has nicely formulated correspond well with Smith’s notion of the sense of propriety. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)