

LANGUAGE: THE THREAT THAT BINDS US TOGETHER.
A JOURNEY FROM ENLIGHTENMENT TO EXISTENTIALISM
TOWARDS HUMANITY

Madalin Onu, PhD

Editor-in-Chief

Brolly. Journal of Social Sciences,
London, UK

madalin.onu@lapub.co.uk

Opening Lecture held at the 16th International Conference “Methodological and Psychological Issues of Teaching Foreign Languages: Reaching for School and University Integration”.

“V.N. Karazin” Kharkiv National University.

School of Foreign Languages

26 April 2024 - Kharkiv, Ukraine

Abstract

We stand beneath the shadow of a thousand tongues, a monument not of unity, but of a fractured sky. A testament to human diversity, a divine punishment, or a blessing in disguise? Our journey begins here, with the story of Babel, as we explore the tension between unity and diversity.

I. Babel Beyond Towers and Speech. We embark on redefining unity, questioning the necessity of a singular language or monolithic culture. Instead, we propose a rich blend woven from diverse voices, exploring the stories of Babel, Rome, and forward.

II. Tradition Resiliently Challenges Almighty Reason. The Enlightenment's pursuit of a new human unity based on pure and free reason unveils the contradictions within its homogenising tendencies. We delve into the thoughts of Herder, Hegel, and neo-Kantian philosophers, who emphasise the importance of individuality and the role of language in shaping cultures.

III. Language and the War. Language, a double-edged sword, can unite and divide. We shall discuss the power of propaganda and manipulation, emphasising the need to recognize and resist its misuse. Heidegger's existential view after the Second World War and Freud's experiences after the First reveal the paradoxical force of the death drive, which compels us towards repetition. We explore the concept of *Sein-zum-Tode*, emphasizing the significance of authenticity in

language's encounter with existence, as a path forward and a solution to avoid bad infinity in history.

Conclusions. Herein lies the true magic of embracing another tongue. It's not just a collection of dusty grammar rules, but a passport to a new world, a chance to see through different eyes.

In the context of Russia invading Ukraine, with its army killing for another Wall raised towards bad infinity, language becomes a necessity for peace.

Shall we head for a more peaceful world and let us remember that unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive; instead, they are two sides of the same coin, enriching our collective human experience. By learning foreign languages and celebrating the rich blend of cultures, we build bridges, foster empathy, and a future where peace reigns in Ukraine and beyond.

Keywords: language, unity, Enlightenment, existentialism, Herder, Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ukraine, war, peace

Ladies and Gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and friends,
Good morning!

I'm honoured to stand before you as I am filled with joy by this opportunity to speak together. It is truly remarkable such events are continuing despite the cruel disruptions brought by the Russian invasion. A sombre beginning for this symposium. Yet, allow me to express my condolences and have a few moments of silence for relatives, colleagues and other innocent people who died since its beginning, in 2022.

Amidst our shared sorrow, it is also important to acknowledge the dedication and hard work that make gatherings like these happen, even in such challenging times.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Julia Shamaieva, Associate Professor of Languages at Kharkiv National University for her unwavering commitment to make this international conference possible and for inviting me. Julia has also been a valuable member of the Advisory Board of *Brolly. Journal of Social Sciences* since the beginning, 7 years ago, in 2017, when I started

editing it under London Academic Publishing. I am truly grateful for her ongoing support.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Dean of the School of Foreign Languages, Ms Svitlana Virotschenko, for extending to me an invitation from the part of the University to participate today, enclosing such kind words and thoughts. I also thank Ms Hanna Guseva, the Head of the Department, for her steadfast efforts in organizing this event during wartime. It is through the dedication and commitment of persons like them that dialogue and collaboration towards peace are made possible.

Many of us may think that Ukrainian universities are down. I recall my conversation with Julia, and I was struck by a mix of emotions. Amidst this chaos, there was a sense of shame in even questioning whether Kharkiv University still functions. But here it is, albeit under hard conditions. It is proof of strength and determination on the part of Ukrainian professors and students to make education go forth despite Russian missiles.

With this in mind, I invite you to join me as we explore the subject of my lecture, hoping the journey ahead will captivate you.

INTRO

We stand beneath the shadow of a thousand tongues, a monument not of unity, but of a fractured sky. Think of Babel - some say a testament to human hubris, a tower to climb and pierce the heavens - stalled and crumbled, thwarted by a jealous god.

Was there genuinely a time when unity in language and thought embodied a common reality for all of humanity?

I. BABEL BEYOND TOWERS AND SPEECH

The story from the *Book of Genesis* provides compelling insights into this. In the heart of ancient Mesopotamia, humans decided to build

a city with a tower that could reach the heavens. They believed this monumental task would prevent them from scattering across the vastness of the Earth.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. (...) Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”.

But all of this seems to have been perceived as a threat by the Divine who, in response, confused their tongues, causing them to speak different languages.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech.

Human unity crumbled, leading to their dispersion across the earth. Wholeness became fragmentation, wherein linguistic diversity acts as a divine punishment.

*

Distantly following, Rome - like other empires ere and thereafter, seemed to revamp the unity, although vanquished under the weight of its own internal fractures. “The Roman Empire has had the contradiction in itself from the beginning” - Hegel, in Herder's footsteps, used to say in the 1820s, in Berlin, where he held his famous *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

This unshakeable unity of the Empire followed the Greek world of individualities - heroes and poleis.

In the Greek principle we have seen spiritual existence in its exhilaration — its cheerfulness and enjoyment: Spirit had not yet drawn back into abstraction; it was still involved with the Natural element — the idiosyncrasy of individuals. (Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 297)

After long resistance, Carthage was taken and laid in ashes.

The Romans were eager for war, destroyed Corinth in the same year as Carthage, and made Greece a province. (...)

After the conquest of Macedonia, both that country and Greece were declared free by the Romans. (Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 325)

Formed on the contradiction between patricians and plebeians, the Roman Republic faced, soon after the Conflict of the Orders (367–287 BC), a second one, on a higher level.

We observed that contradiction previously in the struggle of the patricians against the plebeians: now it assumes the form of private interest, contravening patriotic sentiment; and respect for the state no longer holds these opposites in the necessary equipoise. (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 326)

As a result of this second contradiction, *abstract sovereignty* arises, where the army, for instance, is used to gain political glory for particular individuals.

Their chief spectacles were triumphs, the treasures gained in war, and captives from all nations, unsparingly subjected to the yoke of abstract sovereignty. (...)

Ruin now broke in unchecked, and as there existed no generally recognized and absolutely essential object to which the country's energy could be devoted, individualities and physical force were in the ascendant. The enormous corruption of Rome displays itself in the war with Jugurtha, who had gained the senate by bribery, and so indulged himself in the most atrocious deeds of violence and crime. (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 326-328)

Abstract sovereignty, as well as Roman liberty or democracy, manifested though in a higher, better form compared to the Ancient World, where only one person - the ruler - was free, the others his subjects. These abstract forms reflected themselves in language during the epoch, and Latin became a language of abstract rules and speeches in front of the Senate.

This time it is language itself, a unity under one ruler and one universal people, spreading across the Colosseum to the tranquillity of the Forum, permeating the Ancient World during the height of Roman power like the aroma of exotic spices wafting through

marketplaces from Syria to Britannia; it is this type of unity manifesting in language that split humanity apart.

It wasn't Jupiter, in a moment of anger, that destroyed the empire. Instead, this happened when abstract language faced the reality of a plurality of concrete voices.

Barbarians and their hundreds of thongs took over an Empire divided in itself. Similar to what happened to Ancient Greece, world history was carried forward, and preserved, this time too, by those formerly deemed slaves. Subjects of their masters, they glimpsed through their reflections in the real world what true, concrete freedom ought to be, and felt that neither they nor the masters, possess it. Political universality and individual freedom - Rome's contradiction - was not a true one. Its terms are opposing because they both are only abstract notions, both unconscious of their unity. As Hegel would say, a resolution is thus required at a higher level.

*

On this thread of thought, I dare say, the Babylonian linguistic unity had a similarly contradictory character. It was an illusion of unity, an incipient *apparition* - in a Kantian manner of speaking - instead of its true *appearance*. God as well might have only appeared jealous, although it is about a blessing in disguise, with the diversity of languages preventing a singular dull, potentially destructive, goal.

There is no way to throw a physical bridge to the heavens. This compels us to reassess our understanding of what unity genuinely means. Should unity necessitate a singular language, a monolithic culture? Or can it exist in a richer framework shaped by the interplay of diverse voices?

Babel and Rome were both manifestations of abstract unities, both of them unaware of their otherness, and unaware, secondly, that true unity resides in dialectically overcoming such otherness through - as paradoxically it may sound - acknowledgement and internalisation.

Language has always been a bit of a tricky puzzle, wouldn't you agree?

II. TRADITION RESILIENTLY CHALLENGES ALMIGHTY REASON

Thus began, our journeys shall soon encounter another horizon to explore the tension between unity and diversity. That is Enlightenment and the rise of a new human unity, this time based on a superior principle, which is reason; pure and free reason, a guiding light, universal in itself, uniting not only among people but humankind with the wholeness of the universe.

Humanity, exulting once again over their moment of glory, will soon discover that not only does the contradiction unity-diversity appear through, and should find its resolution in language, but language has in itself many such others: personal will vs. universal law; pure reason - impurities of tradition; meaningful - formal discourse, and so many others.

Language henceforth commenced internalising and gaining awareness of itself as a two-edged sword, both uniting and splitting apart.

II. 1.

Imagine this: A glade bathed in the whispers of countless hearts. Each blossom, a language vibrant with tales, songs, and the rustlings of unique lives.

This is the essence of Herder's vision, a champion of individuality, a man of letters and philosopher of history, who challenged the Enlightenment's homogenising tendencies. Nearing the twilight of his Epoch, once with the *Sturm un Drang* Movement, Johann Gottfried von Herder tempered the enlightened joy of finding reason as common to humanity in genre and the universe, with a universal language capable of fully grasping reality. He showed the illusions of reason and gave rise to a new concept of *Humanity*.

Language is now understood as the soul of a nation, shaping who we are, allowing us to step into the shoes of another culture, to feel the sting of a foreign proverb and the warmth of a shared laugh,

thus expressing the richness of human experience. It enhances understanding, serving as a stage for personal and collective *Bildung* – the cultivation of fully realised *Humanity* in people.

II. 2.

In 1774, ten years before the first volume of his extensive work *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*) (1784–91) was printed, and 15 years before the French Revolution, Herder published a brief yet dense essay titled *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (*This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*), *Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts* (*Contribution to Many Contributions of the Century*).

Behind the pamphlet-like title, his core theory - aimed not only against thinkers such as Voltaire or Iselin, but also against authors with opposing conceptions, such as Hume or D’Alambert, and which remained prevalent in his main work - was, in short, that contemporary Europe is not at its peak stage, nor its unity is such Enlightened as people liked to think about themselves (Spirit (*Geist*) - Hegel would later say - was not yet fully aware of itself as Spirit).

For him, the Enlightenment is neither the last nor the ultimate stage of humanity’s formation. The reason it promotes is not self-sufficient, nor does it constitute an autonomous force of historic creation; also, due to the abstract formalism it conceals, it does not confer upon morals those high standards that it claims.

II. 3.

Thus, the idea of progress (*Fortschritt*) in history loses its front position. In its stead, the German author prefers to speak of a progression (*Fortgang*) in which – and this is the first principle I would like to set forth,

- (1) Every culture, built on former ones, brings with it simultaneously a series of innovations and losses.

Concomitantly, (2) the values, aesthetic taste, political concepts, the passions and inclinations underlying them, change. Hence, their comprehension must be undertaken according to each particular historical moment.

Moreover, for Herder, unlike his professor from Königsberg, Immanuel Kant, (3) reason itself undergoes changes and developments throughout history.

Regarded through this lens, the status of civilised Rome was established through force and plunder. So that, after some years, “rude barbarians were requisite, to give it new people, new laws, new manners, and new courage” (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, XIV, III, 411).

The same occurred for the people of Carthage. In their age of glory, says him, they suppressed all other neighbouring nations, treating them as barbarians, being themselves “barbarous auxiliaries of a barbarian” (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, XII, IV, 340). As a Roman colony, however, Africa was no longer that same horn of plenty.

(...) it was a granary for the people of Rome alone, a menagerie of wild beasts for their amusement, and a magazine of slaves. (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, XIV, III, 413)

All such facts made Herder say: “The history of the Romans is the history of the rule of inferno”. The Romans left behind them many nations that were destroyed, far from having reached their maturity, but full of lifeblood and vigour. From Greece were left only ruins “which the barbarous spoilers carried away with them in triumph”.

Das menschliche Gefäß ist einmal keiner Vollkommenheit fähig; muß immer verlassen, indem es weiterrückt. (Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, 310)

The human container is capable of no full perfection all at once; it must always leave behind in moving further on. (Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History*, 288)

In this dynamic, language is a record of local conditions and experiences. Contrary to the French way of universality, he recommends all nations (not only Germans) develop their own one.

The cultivation of its mother tongue alone can lift a nation out of a state of barbarism. (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, XIX, II, 575)

By championing local cultural identities over monolithic homogenising tendencies and conformity, he challenges the universalist approach, fostering a profound reflection on the nature of cultural formation. This thoughtful stance sets the stage for his incisive critique of the Enlightenment. This era marked by intellectual vigour and innovative ideas paradoxically reveals a profound gap between thought and action. The warmth of its ideals stands in stark contrast to the coldness of its deeds, suggesting that such a society, despite appearing strong and free on the surface, is fundamentally weakened by deeper issues such as despotism and greed.

Herder also exposes the inconsistency in the European claims of moral superiority: while it congratulates itself on abolishing slavery domestically, it simultaneously exploits and enslaves others, non-Europeans, in distant lands for economic gain. This makes us confront the selective morality that condemns barbarism at home while perpetuating it abroad under the guise of trade and civilisation.

This cyclical pattern of exploitation, driven by the lust for wealth and imperial greed reminds us that the pursuit of economic gain often overrides ethics and morals, leading to suffering and injustice that reverberate through history.

Every classical humanist [Schöndenker] who considers our century's civil administration the non-plus ultra of humanity has an opportunity (...) to rave about our century's light, that is, about its superficiality and unrestraint, about its warmth in ideas and its coldness in actions, about its seeming strength and freedom, and about its real *weakness-unto-death* and exhaustion under unbelief, despotism, and luxury. (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, 307)

What miserable Spartans they were who used their Helots for agriculture, and what barbaric Romans who shut up their slaves in prisons in the earth! In Europe, slavery has been abolished because it has been calculated how much more these slaves would cost and how much less they would bring in than free people. Only one thing have we still permitted ourselves: to use as slaves, to trade, to exile into silver mines and sugar mills, three parts of the world – but those are not Europeans, not Christians, and in return, we receive silver and gemstones, spices, sugar, and – secret disease; thus for the sake of trade and for the reciprocal brotherly help and community of the lands. (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, 328)

(...) what were the Roman spoilers doing in Numantia, in ancient Spain, a country that had never harmed them? Gold and silver mines. Spain was to them, what America is now forced to be to Spain, a place for plunder. (Herder, *Philosophy of the History of Man*, 415)

II. 4.

Humanity means something more. As we've come to realise: 1) *cultural understanding* is a cornerstone. Then arises 2) *cultural exchange*. Herder believed in the exchange of ideas and cultural expressions among diverse communities. Encouraging dialogue and collaboration between them helps break down barriers and stereotypes, fostering mutual respect and cooperation. This results in 3) *respect for diversity*.

Such ideas make Herder a vehement critic of imperialism and colonialism. Using the example of Rome to make people aware of their contemporary issues, he advocated for the recognition of cultural autonomy and the right to self-determination. Respecting the sovereignty of nations and peoples is crucial for maintaining peace and stability in the world.

4) Humanity is not innate in man but must be cultivated by each individual. It is inherent within us as a predisposition only and, as such, it needs to be ceaselessly educated (Herder, *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, 140). Specifically, we must cultivate those basic components that define it: freedom, reason and equity (*Billigkeit*), among its other second terms.

Did Herder's insights convince his contemporaries? Well, the trajectory of their formation (*Bildung*) seems to have slid away. And Spirit, as a consequence, alienates and becomes estranged from itself.

II. 5

Der sich entfremdete Geist; die Bildung (Self-Alienated Spirit. Culture) is called one chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It depicts what resulted when almighty reason confronted concrete reality and tradition.

Cultural formation, originated as a deliberate choice between good and bad, portrays - when applied to reality - state power as good vs. personal wealth as bad, and the reverse. Their resolution lies in virtuous consciousness - who uses both for noble purposes - as is to be opposed by the consciousness of baseness. Both reflect themselves in language until goodness becomes a *facade* only, a semblance carried by formalities and so-called noble gestures, but devoid of true substance.

Its peak, the concept of *utility*, produces an irreconcilable conflict among human beings - as occurred during the regime of Terror, following the French Revolution. The possibility of getting out of this circle is an extreme one. Only by perceiving its own suppression as imminent (the fact of being suspicious, the guillotine - a result of *absolute freedom*), consciousness returns or, better said, is forced to return upon itself, to perform the absolute negation (the negation of the negation) and take its own self as an object, thus becoming - in Hegel's journey - moral spirit.

(...) a negation, moreover, of the individual as a being existing in the universal. The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore death, a death too - which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water. (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360)

Language again, the rational language of human freedom and

fraternity shows itself as a sharp guillotine blade, cleaving not only humanity from itself but the individual too. A Morgana, again and again, destructive on both sides: universal and personal unity.

II. 6.

These thoughts had powerful echoes in the next century, as many thinkers facing the fast-developing industrial era strived to clarify the meaning of *objectivity* in Humanities. The neo-Kantian school of Baden, especially Heinrich Rickert's theory of *Begriffsbildung* (on how our concepts are formed or constructed) as facing the positivism of the Vienna Circle are powerful examples of many doubts and question marks concerning language.

Can we really use the power language? What is truth and what are only justifications for crimes? With these new questions and the considerable difficulties in answering them, the failure had unfortunately terrifying consequences, as the First World War was just to explode.

III. LANGUAGE AND THE WAR

Beware the serpent's hiss in the garden of words, as it fuels the power of language to divide. Language can be a weapon too, a poisoned chalice filled with formal rhetoric and hate. It can build walls of misunderstanding, incite wars, propaganda and manipulation – all that nasty business masqueraded as communication.

Thus, genuine language turns into a wistful memory - evoking the thoughts of Sartre and Camus - before it fades into silence. All those empty speeches that fuelled two World Wars in just half of the XXth Century stopped valuing anything in front of death coming from trenches as it was in front of the guillotine during Terror.

As soon as humanity has reached a new, higher, unity and well-being as a result of the technological revolution, language splits again the unity and spreads death - this negative silence that puts everything into parentheses. But language is still there. And a second World War is to come.

III. 1.

Heidegger's existential assessment of language from *Sein und Zeit* delves into authenticity versus inauthenticity, as they operate on different levels of human beings (*Seienden*). These levels, he termed *ontic* and *ontological*, where *ontic* denotes the impersonal, the anyone (*das Man* - in German) and everydayness, whilst the second, the *ontologic*, is the horizon where Being (that Being that gives essence to beings - *Sein (Seiendheit) des Seienden*) might be unveiled.

I chose to speak about this because Heidegger's viewpoint, in the context of the Second World War, resonates with the guillotine. Similarity is high. *Dasein* - the individual present here and, some sort aware of itself, reaches its state of authenticity only due to an existential shock. The existential leap between *ontic* and *ontologic* occurs, here too, when consciousness confronts its negative in the extreme: his *Being-toward-death (Sein-zum-Tode)*. Thus, it starts regarding itself and acknowledges its state of being “thrown in the world” as well as its end, becoming able to hear and listen to the “question of Being”.

As well as in Hegel's example, consciousness manages to exceed the space of everydayness in a hard way. Although, for both philosophers, everydayness has never had bad connotations. And, in both cases, it is precisely this everydayness that constitutes the soil both to begin this movement and find possible other solutions than such premature death.

On the other hand, this also signifies that the very act of human understanding and interpreting the world around us is not something external, but an inherent component of factic life,

directed towards the ambient world, towards consciousness that I am, and consciousnesses that are the others around me.

H. G. Gadamer, one of Heidegger's former students, correlated both views (Hegel's and Heidegger's) to make us understand how important tradition is for comprehension, as well as that trying to eliminate its traces is a path that leads nowhere. The universe of everydayness is the place where the event or a text exists, and from which comprehension receives, more or less visible, its orientation. Historicity – the medium in which they occur – should be brought to consciousness. In other words, it must be acknowledged as an opening place.

Historicity, Gadamer also insists, should not be understood as suppressing the truth. Instead, its perfectibility resides in a “dialogical model” aiming for improvements through constant engagement with the negative - the concrete reality. That is precisely what is missing from the Enlightenment's imperative to eliminate prejudices through reason, and which produced the *absolute suppression* of the self. The requirement Gadamer draws forth consists of maintaining a constant openness to otherness, which does not imply eliminating prejudices and preconceptions, but a continuous revision of them in accordance with the object.

Yet all of these, I repeat, happen within the ontic horizon of everydayness. Authenticity and the “voice” of ‘Being’ still remain unperceivable.

My point is that such deathly silence wasn't a solution, neither in history nor even for Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit* is, in fact, an unfinished book. After hearing its voice, the voice of Being, nothing really happens. The author closes it and, in the following years, he undergoes a period of *Kehre* - the famous tournure that took Heidegger's philosophy nearing World War II, meaning that the question of Being should not start from Dasein anymore, but from Being itself towards Dasein. In short, Heidegger turned to aesthetics and Holderlin's poetry, as places to pierce the meaning of a Being... that is not really Being.

On its side, language continued to make innocent victims of war.

III. 2.

That's why I feel it's worthy to exist at this point from Heidegger's text and reconsider it by adopting Gadamer's hermeneutical principles, namely to take a look at it by starting from its own everydayness - the year 1927, and those destructive ones that came after.

The interwar years were also a terrain for another significant shift in the understanding of human instincts and desires. Sigmund Freud too underwent some sort of a *Kehre*.

Freud's experiences in treating soldiers returning from the frontlines led him to realise that human behaviour is influenced by more than just basic instincts - namely libido. This turning point made him write, in 1920, a book called *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Beyond the Pleasure Principle), thus bringing forth the notion of "death drive" (*Todestrieb*).

Heidegger's *Sein-zum-Tode* and the very fact that during this time he felt it necessary to include such a concept in his philosophy of Being, echoes, for me, with Freud's newly discovered "human drive".

Trieb (drive) and *Instinkt* oppose each other: when established, the death drive causes behaviours opposite to those dictated by vital instincts. *Todestrieb* is a diametrically opposed force to libido and, therefore to life, compelling us towards repetition. Eros, the sexual instinct of life, is not blocked, as in the case of his former patients suffering from neuroses, but is replaced because of this death drive, the drive of self-destruction.

Todestrieb, explains him in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, leads to repetition instead of evolution. The soldiers he treated suffered from recurrent dreams of the trauma, contrary to the expectancy of pleasure from sleep. This drive made them repeat the traumatic experiences instead of reminding them as something belonging to the past, thus in a cycle defying the natural inclination towards healing and evolution.

III. 3. BAD INFINITY

I shall call this, using a Hegelian expression from his *Science of Logic*, bad, false or spurious infinity (*Schlechte Unendlichkeit*), meaning repeating traumatic experiences at the same level, unable to dialectically move to the next stage.

The true negation of the negation, for Hegel, does not return us to the initial moment, repeating it, but generates a third one which resolves the first two. Instead, *Schlechte Infinity* denotes a perpetual movement from one member of the contradiction to the other, “from the limit to its non-being, and from the latter back again to the other” (Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 192). It is only the expression of contradiction, not its solution:

(...) because of the continuity of one determinateness in the other, the progress gives rise to the *semblance* of a resolution in a union of the two. (Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 191)

The progress *ad infinitum*, unlike the true infinity (*die wahrhafte Unendlichkeit*), is “neither an advance nor a gain but rather a repetition of one and the same move” (Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 192).

Just one example. The mistake of the Enlightenment, according to H.-G. Gadamer, consists, as we already saw, of the illusion that reason could eliminate tradition and prejudices. This claim is itself a prejudice. The consciousness of the interpreter is *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* - a historically affected consciousness. What is to be done, and it is productive to be done, is to capitalise on them.

For a dialectical experience to be completed, it is not enough for the opposites to overcome the contradiction between them, but also to conserve it - meaning to acknowledge their own internal contradictions, which caused, in fact, the first one, then to assimilate and memorise them. This is the meaning of one of the most famous Hegelian concepts: *Aufhebung* - overcoming and, at the same time, preservation.

The luggage of memories is enhanced by every new experience. On the one hand, it prevents consciousness from repeating what it overcame. On the other, it makes us capable of better understanding the new object. Heidegger, at this point, captures well this aspect when he defines consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) as *fact-of-being-conscious* / *fact-of-being-aware* (*Bewußt-sein*) - as a result of all memorised experiences.

I remember precisely not to repeat what I have overcome, nor to relive it for the purpose of fetishist pleasure of original identity or as a morbid memory of trauma, whereby to compensate for the present incapacibilities.

III. 4.

Similarly, Eastern Europe may ask anything, as long as the judgements on the interwar period reveal positive values, like those of today, and those of the post-World War II negative ones. The monuments of the first period, for example, are perceived as objects of contemplation; those of the last, only as places of trauma produced by communism.

In Berlin, one of the main boulevards can still bear the name of Karl Marx and be preserved as an object of patrimony. At the main entrance, Humboldt University is still displaying one - the most famous - of his *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach*. In the East, such street names have been replaced and most objects from that period destroyed. That is because Berlin has overcome, at least for the time being, the need to maintain the ban on questioning about such issues. The East, on the other hand, prolongs the fetish precisely because the answer would shatter the current state of affairs. The true Unity does not occur, but only an illusion of it, produced by the infinite wandering between the two opposites, without a resolution that adapts accordingly.

CONCLUSIONS: LANGUAGE AND FALSE INFINITY

My friends and esteemed colleagues, I took these pictures [of the Berlin Wall] one week before this wonderful conference, during a short stay in Berlin - a city indelibly marked by the war, followed by the building of a wall that once divided East from West. As born and studying in Eastern Europe, I resonate with the pain of a fractured neighbouring nation. There, near that fallen wall, the echoes of your struggle feel deeper.

What Russia generated our days by invading Ukraine reiterates toward bad infinity not just the imperial scene before the French Revolution, as criticised by Herder. In less than 35 years, it started again building the wall. *Schlechte Unendlichkeit* repeats trauma for all Eastern European countries inside or outside the EU and fuels a perpetual conflict.

As we journeyed from the ancient story of Babel, passing near the complexities of existentialism, until the present days' new higher unity - based, this time, on the brand new digital enormous power of connection, language emerged as a threatful force, yet one that binds us together.

Language can be a weapon, wielded to sow discord and fuel flames of conflict. As such, disinformation and propaganda overthrow its purpose of fostering understanding.

Misunderstanding, division, and the erosion of cultural richness come into its place. Yet, language also holds the key to peace. It's a bridge across divides, a celebration of the magnificent mosaic of humankind.

Let's assess some conclusions:

1. *Peace Through Understanding.* Our exploration revealed that genuine unity does not necessitate a singular language or culture but thrives in the rich blend of diverse voices. The story of Babel taught us that diversity, far from being a curse, is a blessing, preventing singular, potentially destructive goals. Instead, embracing linguistic diversity

may foster understanding, kindness and, ultimately, peace among nations.

2. *Herder's notion of Humanity*. Historical examples, such as Rome and Carthage, demonstrate the consequences of imposing one culture's values on others. Whilst the Enlightenment championed reason and universalism, Herder celebrated the individuality and inherent value of diverse cultures embodied in language. His advocacy for respecting each culture's autonomy and right to self-determination echoes the importance of respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and its people's right to determine their own future. Conflicts and wars sparked by linguistic and cultural imperialism highlight the urgent need for mutual respect and dialogue to resolve the tensions in Ukraine and similar regions. By fostering open communication, we pave the way for a better unity and horizon of understanding, a contemporary realisation of Herder's vision of *Humanity*.

3. Unfortunately, the long series of opposition residing in language has not yet come to an end in our contemporary world. Amidst the pursuit of unity - as Babel revealed only an abstract one - we encounter the obstacle of *false infinity*, wherein conflicts persist, in a fetishist manner, despite efforts to overcome them. The case of the Berlin Wall exemplifies this phenomenon, as the conflict between East and West still perpetuates on similar terms.

But there are other shapes too.

4. *Learning foreign languages is a necessity for peace*. Not to remake Babel's original unity, nor to be bound by an external reason - as happened in Eastern Europe when the Soviet Union - or unity, isn't it? - imposed the Russian language and excluded the others. USSR managed thus to throw upside down the very act of language learning which should have unlocked empathy and knowledge.

The path to unity lies not in forced homogeneity, but in embracing the beauty of linguistic diversity.

In Ukraine, linguistic and cultural differences perpetuate a cycle of tensions and instability, impeding efforts towards reconciliation. Overcoming false infinity demands a concerted commitment to addressing underlying grievances and forging a nation of unity.

This is where the beauty of acquiring another language comes in. It's not merely about memorising vocabulary or dusty grammar rules, but a jolly good adventure, a passport to experience otherness and handshake across the chasm. It's about, building bridges of understanding across cultures and divides.

Wouldn't that be a powerful weapon for peace?

5. Such is the paradoxical Hegelian way to overcome contradictions. Unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive. It is through this diversity that humanity was able to spread and populate the Earth, each group developing its own unique culture and way of life. And that gives us hope to transform conflicts into steps towards a higher truth.

Ukraine's rich tapestry is its strength, not its weakness. Let us not fall into the trap that repeats trauma *ad infinitum*. Instead, let us use language as a bridge that overcomes through internalising and acknowledgement of historicity and tradition, thus embracing our differences, confronting false infinity, and fostering a path for lasting peace and harmony.

Language showed itself as both a threat that binds us together and the key to unlocking a more unified humanity. May we be ever mindful of its power, both to divide and to unify, and let us choose to use it as a bridge, a celebration of the magnificent shared humanity. By acknowledging its potential for division, we learn to wield language and its power with responsibility and care.

In the context of Russia cruelly invading Ukraine, with its army killing to raise another Wall not towards the sky but towards bad infinity, let's use languages to spread empathy, kindness, understanding, and build a future where peace reigns in Ukraine and beyond.

REFERENCES

- Gadamer, H.-G. 1987. *Gesammelte Werke*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1970. *Werke in 20 Bänden*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 2001. *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. Kitchener: Batoche Books.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 2008. *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 2010. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1949. *Brief über den 'Humanismus'*. Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1970. *Hegel's Concept of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1972. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1999. *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1773. "Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker." *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst. Einige fliegende Blätter*. Hamburg: Bode.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1800. *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*. New York: Bergman Publishers.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1965. *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2 Bände. Berlin und Weimar: Herausgegeben von Heinz Stolpe.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1971. *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*. Berlin und Weimar: Herausgegeben von Heinz Stolpe.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1971. "Von Ähnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst." *Sturm und Drang*, Band 1. München: Winkler.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1978. "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit." *Sturm und Drang. Weltanschauliche und ästhetische Schriften*, Band 1. Berlin und Weimar: Herausgegeben von Peter Müller.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 2002. "This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity." *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. 2002. *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.