

# Interpretation

Ways of Thinking about the Sciences and the Arts

---

EDITED BY Peter Machamer and Gereon Wolters

University of Pittsburgh Press

Published by the University of Pittsburgh  
Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15260  
All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
Printed on acid-free paper  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
ISBN 13: 978-0-8229-4392-1  
ISBN 10: 0-8229-4392-1

## Contents

---

Preface	vii
1 Some Cogitations on Interpretations Peter Machamer	1
2 The Logic of Interpretation Ruth Lorand	16
3 Interpretation as Cultural Orientation: Remarks on Hegel's Aesthetics Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert	31
4 Hermeneutics and Epistemology: A Second Appraisal — Heidegger, Kant, and Truth Paolo Parrini	44
5 Davidson and Gadamer on Plato's Dialectical Ethics Kristin Gjesdal	66
6 The Interpretation of Philosophical Texts Nicholas Rescher	91
7 The Explanation of Consciousness and the Interpretation of Philosophical Texts Catherine Wilson	100
8 On Interpreting Leibniz's Mill Andreas Blank	111

9	How to Interpret Human Actions (Including Moral Actions) Christoph Lumer	130
10	Interpretive Practices in Medicine Kenneth F. Schaffner	158
11	Interpreting Medicine: Forms of Knowledge and Ways of Doing in Clinical Practice Cornelius Borck	179
12	Concept Formation via Hebbian Learning: The Special Case of Prototypical Causal Sequences Paul M. Churchland	203
13	Interpreting Novel Objects: The Difficult Case of Hybrid Wines George Gale	220
14	Classifying Dry German Riesling Wines: An Experiment toward Statistical Wine Interpretation Ulrich Sautter	234
	Index	261

## Preface

---

Interpretation is an activity that cuts across the arts and sciences. Its ubiquity served as the motivation for making this colloquium all about interpretation. We sought to cover many aspects and domains in which interpretive practices were found. So the essays collected here deal with the general nature of interpretation, with contrast or not between interpretation and hermeneutics, with the interpretation of philosophical texts, of human action, in medicine, of the brain, and finally of wine. One set of essays has an unusual structure. Nicholas Rescher wrote a paper on interpreting philosophical texts, and we asked Catherine Wilson and Andreas Blank to choose a text, and then see how well Rescher's claims tested out against their interpretation of that text. The chosen text was the mill passage from Leibniz's *Monadology*.

The essays in this volume are revised versions of presentations given at the eighth meeting of the Pittsburgh-Konstanz Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from Thursday, October 2, to Sunday, October 5, 2008. The Pittsburgh-Konstanz Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science is a joint undertaking of the Center for Philosophy of Science of the University of Pittsburgh (USA) and the Zentrum Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie of the University of Konstanz (Germany).

The program co-chairs are editors of this volume. The colloquium was sponsored by Fritz Thyssen Foundation in Cologne (Germany) and the Harvey and Leslie Wagner Endowment (University of Pittsburgh). The event was held in honor of Gereon Wolters's contribution to the Pittsburgh-Konstanz collaboration over the years.

The editors thank Barbara Diven Machamer for reading the page proofs and Tara Gainfort and Benny Goldberg for indexing the volume.

## 5

Davidson and Gadamer on  
Plato's Dialectical Ethics

Kristin Gjesdal

Temple University

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increasing interest in the relation between Donald Davidson's theory of radical interpretation and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Whereas some of this interest has been geared toward the intellectual horizon and heritage of Davidson's work,<sup>1</sup> philosophers such as Richard Rorty and John McDowell have taken Gadamer's hermeneutics to suggest a possible avenue beyond what they perceive to be the limitations of Davidson's theory.<sup>2</sup> This essay approaches the Davidson-Gadamer relation from a different point of view. My concern is not to ask about the proper location or possible limitations of Davidson's philosophy, but to address Davidson's own claims about the affinity between radical interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics.

I take as my point of departure an article that Davidson wrote for the Gadamer volume of the *Library of Living Philosophers* in 2002.<sup>3</sup> In this text, Davidson examines Gadamer's *Habilitationsschrift* from 1931, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*. Like Davidson, Gadamer started his philosophical career with a study of Plato's *Philebus*, and Davidson is astonished to find that the two have ended up, via "a largely accidental but *commodius vicus* of recirculation," in the same "intellectual neighborhood."<sup>4</sup> Davidson argues that Gadamer's reading of the *Philebus*, containing, *in spe*, the philosophical core of *Truth and Method*, represents an inquiry into "the foundation of the possibility of objective thought" and, by the same token, illustrates "his [Gadamer's] idea of

how the interpretation of any text is to proceed."<sup>5</sup> In my view, these claims are largely premature. I trace Gadamer's study of the *Philebus* back to its Heideggerian roots and argue that Davidson misunderstands the phenomenological rationale of Gadamer's turn to ancient philosophy and that he misconstrues the concerns of philosophical hermeneutics. In this way, his encounter with Gadamer's philosophy fails to set the premises for a fruitful exchange between post-Heideggerian hermeneutics and Anglophone theories of language and interpretation.

## Gadamer on the Dialogical Foundations of Objectivity

In order to understand Davidson's claim that Gadamer's 1931 study represents an inquiry into the foundation of the possibility of objective thought, a brief account of Gadamer's notion of dialogical rationality is needed. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* consists of two comprehensive essays, the first offering a general introduction to Plato's dialectics and the second a close reading of the *Philebus*. In his reading of the *Philebus*, Gadamer argues that with regard to both topic and methodology, this presumably late dialogue represents a return to Plato's earlier work. Like some of the early Socratic dialogues, the *Philebus* addresses the human aspect of the good, and the method is elenctic. In Gadamer's view, this return to the human good and the elenctic method bring out a dialogical core that unifies the work of Plato: the conviction that the human good is realized in and shaped through ongoing dialogical activity.

Gadamer frames his study of Plato's dialectical ethics by contrasting Socratic dialogue with Sophistic speech. The Sophist is driven by the desire to distinguish himself from others, and has no commitment to rationality. As such, the Sophist represents a degenerate form of speech.<sup>6</sup> Socrates, by contrast, incarnates reason, pure and simple. Having experienced how reason was literally put on trial in the case against his teacher, Plato reflectively turns from the colloquial practice of dialectical reasoning to a second-order quest, still committed to the dialogical form, for its conditions of possibility. He finds such conditions of possibility in the dialectical dialogue, in which the participants, in spite of their diverging points of view, join forces in an open-ended conversation about a given problem or subject matter.<sup>7</sup> So conceived, genuine dialogue, the ongoing process of coming to an understanding about a

given subject matter, is defined by its being (a) bilateral, (b) oriented toward a subject matter, and (c) nonconclusive.

(a) Any reader of Plato will know that Socrates does not always engage in a straightforward, mutual exchange of opinions. While he sometimes voices his own beliefs, he more often inquires into the unreflected presuppositions of his interlocutors. Socrates frequently pursues the path of refutation; he tests his discussant's assertions without thereby claiming to possess a final truth or objectivity. However, whereas the Sophist refutes his interlocutors in order to establish social superiority, the Socratic philosopher investigates his interlocutor's standpoint by requesting "further information" (PDE 56 / GW 5:42). The aim of the Socratic method is constructive; it is "not a process of reducing the other person to silence so as, tacitly, to mark oneself out as the knower, in contrast to him, but a process of arriving at a shared inquiry" (PDE 59 / GW 5:44). By laying bare false presuppositions, the dialogue steadily progresses toward understanding. Indeed, Gadamer takes this procedure to be a precondition for dialogical knowledge and claims that the dialogue is grounded in "a shared ignorance and a shared need to know" (PDE 59 / GW 5:44).

The commitment to dialogical knowledge requires that the interlocutors recognize the rationality of the other's point of view. When a speaker leaves behind an original claim as a result of reflective deliberation, he or she is only getting closer to knowledge as true, justified belief or, as Gadamer would say, as a progressive disclosure of the subject matter. Gadamer argues that this intersubjective process of acknowledgment is an intrinsic aspect of rationality. To the extent that it involves attentiveness to reasons, even thinking is based on the intersubjectivity of dialogue.

(b) Dialogue proper consists in testing out diverging, sometimes contradictory beliefs about a given subject matter (such as, in the *Philebus*, the human good). Yet the interlocutors share the desire to obtain knowledge about the subject matter under discussion. This common orientation is a *sine qua non* for all conversation. Socratic refutation is made possible by the desire to clarify the subject matter (PDE 59 / GW 5:44). As Gadamer puts it, "the first concern of all dialogical and dialectical inquiry is a *care for the unity and sameness* of the thing that is under discussion" (PDE 64 / GW 5:48). To the extent that self-expression is an element of dialogue, it is secondary to the orientation toward the subject matter. Dialogue proper has an essentially triangu-

lar structure. It consists of two or more parties and their shared orientation toward a *Sachverhalt*.

(c) A truly dialogical attitude involves the willingness to revise one's beliefs if, on further consideration, the subject matter shows itself in a different light. The dialogue "progressively discloses the object, continually addressing it as something different" (PDE 19 / GW 5:16). This progressive disclosure has no positive end or conclusion. In Gadamer's words, dialogue proper "does not take possession," but points "away from all supposed possession and toward the possibility of a possession which is always in store for it, because it always slips away from it" (PDE 6-7 / GW 5:9).

Against the background of this quick recapitulation of Gadamer's understanding of rationality in *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, we now return to Davidson. By and large, Davidson applauds Gadamer's reading of Plato. Yet he is concerned that Gadamer underestimates the difference between the *Philebus* and the early dialogues (430). He worries that Gadamer overlooks how, in the early dialogues, Socrates, "however ignorant [he] was of the final truth, . . . was right in what he did claim. . . . Always the interlocutor, never Socrates, turned out to have inconsistent opinions" (430). As Davidson puts it, "even though Socrates sometimes seems genuinely to think he may learn something from the discussion, we are shown no real cases where this happens" (430). However, instead of pursuing this initial point — as he should have done (I return to this point in the section below) — Davidson simply states that the *Philebus*, more than any other work of Plato's, lends itself to a philosophical discussion of the dialogical path to shared understanding. In fact, Davidson not only endorses the basic thrust of Gadamer's reading of the *Philebus* but also wishes to bolster it by offering further argumentative support. He points out that this is one of the few dialogues in which Socrates does indeed change his mind as the conversation unfolds (430). Although Gadamer himself overlooks this point, Davidson claims that it does support his case. That is, if Gadamer had only been more sensitive to the development from the early dialogues (where Socrates does not change his mind) to the *Philebus* (where he does), his argument would have been even more convincing. A more developmental approach to Plato would, in Davidson's assessment, "cohabit more happily with Gadamer's own conception of dialogue and conversation" (430).<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Davidson's reading of Gadamer takes the form of an immanent critique. He is fundamentally sympa-

thetic to Gadamer's interpretation of the *Philebus*, and, in this spirit, points out how Gadamer, through a slightly different approach, could have reinforced his reading by drawing on more adequate textual evidence.

Judging from Davidson's comments, the disagreement between the two philosophers consists in minor, interpretative nuances and could plausibly be dissolved in the course of further intellectual exchange. This, however, is a misunderstanding. Although it is presented as a minor *philological* issue, Davidson's remark covers over a set of profound *philosophical* differences.

### Objectivity, Truth, and Self-Transformation

Davidson's early interest in the Socratic elenchus, first expressed in his 1949 dissertation on the *Philebus*, is recapitulated in the essay "Plato's Philosopher" (1985).<sup>9</sup> In this article, the elenctic method is connected to a capacity for removing inconsistencies that ultimately refers to a concept of truth as coherence. Davidson focuses on the usefulness of the elenctic method for the analysis of moral concepts such as that of the good life. Whereas a Plato scholar like Gregory Vlastos, whose work Davidson generally applauds, locates this method to the earlier dialogues, Davidson argues that "at a certain point late in his career Plato returns to (if he ever departed from) both the Socratic concern with the good life, the right way to live: and that he depends on the assumption that there is enough truth in everyone to give us hope that we can learn [by proceeding through the elenchus] in what the good life consists."<sup>10</sup> In this essay, Davidson also recalls that when he initially was working on Plato's *Philebus*, he soon discovered "that by far the most profound commentary on the *Philebus* was Professor Gadamer's published dissertation."<sup>11</sup>

If we take Gadamer at his word, a philosophical position is best understood in light of the questions to which it responds.<sup>12</sup> Plato's dialogical form, he claims, responds to the crisis of reason following the trial against Socrates. What, then, of Gadamer's own work in the early 1930s? Upon turning to Plato's notion of dialogue, Gadamer does not simply wish to explore a lesser known aspect of ancient Greek philosophy. This much should immediately be granted Davidson. However, the fact that he does not engage in a merely historical exercise does not imply that he, as Davidson indicates, is seeking to

explore the foundation of the possibility of objective thought. What drives him, rather, is the perception of a fundamental crisis in the humanities in the 1920s—a crisis that is triggered by the way in which the humanities, wishing to model their notion of validity over the epistemic norms of the natural sciences, leave out the problem of self-understanding. This crisis cannot be overcome by calling for a rearticulation of the foundations for the possibility of objective thought, but demands a fundamental rearticulating of the outermost premises and self-understanding of the human sciences.

The sense of there being a crisis in the humanities was widely shared at the time.<sup>13</sup> Within phenomenological circles, this was most clearly voiced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In his later work, Gadamer repeatedly emphasizes the impact Heidegger had on him in this period. Even though he expresses some reservations with regard to Heidegger's rhetoric,<sup>14</sup> Gadamer remains clear that Heidegger's work puts up the standard against which his own hermeneutics ought to be measured (*TM* xxv / *WM* 5). Heidegger's philosophy, he suggests, is groundbreaking in that his "temporal analytics of Dasein has . . . shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself" (*TM* xxx / *WM* 2:440).

At the time when Gadamer was still a student of Heidegger, Heidegger criticized the human sciences in general and philosophy in particular for having neglected the being of *Dasein*.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, philosophy had been reduced to a "great industry of 'problems'" (*HF* 4 / 5). The history of philosophy had been turned into an object that could be studied from a disinterested distance; the past was approached with no genuine interest, only an "industrious curiosity" (*HF* 4 / 5). Worse still, it was not only the past, but life itself that had been objectified (*HF* 28–29 / 36).<sup>16</sup> Husserl's phenomenology, the young Heidegger announces, provided an alternative to this attitude. Yet Husserl had not gone far enough (*HF* 1–3 / 1–3). In Heidegger's view, Husserl had failed to address "the radical question of whether epistemological questions might not in fact be meaningless in phenomenology" (*HF* 57 / 73). Heidegger, however, addresses this question. Moreover, he proposes a shift from traditional epistemic problems to the idea of philosophy as philosophizing.<sup>17</sup> As opposed to traditional epistemology, Heidegger's notion of philosophizing is distinguished by its insistence on (a) self-understanding, (b) self-transformation, and (c) the

notion of philosophy as being an end in itself. Each of these points is in need of further clarification.

(a) In the early 1920s, Heidegger claimed that in traditional philosophy the problem of *Dasein's* self-understanding had been "taken too lightly."<sup>18</sup> Because it overlooked the question of self-understanding, academic philosophy ceased to address genuine philosophical questions and distracted itself instead with fashionable quasi-problems (*HF* 4 / 5–6). Philosophizing, by contrast, should be "occupied extensively with . . . the radical interpretation of our own concrete situation."<sup>19</sup> This investigation yields no objective knowledge, but aspires to a better understanding of one's own existence (there-being [*Da-sein*]). Heidegger claims that this is the real problem of philosophy, the area in which it has its own rigor, as opposed to the exactness of the natural sciences.<sup>20</sup>

(b) Knowledge of our own *Dasein* leads to self-transformation. As such, it involves a first person singular perspective. Even if *Being and Time* had not been written in the authorial voice of the first person singular (like traditional meditations from Augustine to Descartes),<sup>21</sup> the treatment of authenticity presupposes this perspective. As understood by the young Heidegger, philosophizing was not primarily an epistemic matter but "an existentiell phenomenon (the preeminent one)."<sup>22</sup> As an *existentiell* phenomenon, philosophizing is an ongoing task. *Dasein* never understands itself fully. The philosophizing *Dasein* turns out to be what Heidegger, with a nod to Husserl, describes as a "genuine and constant 'beginner.'"<sup>23</sup>

(c) The process of philosophizing is an aim in itself, an autoteleological practice. As Heidegger sees it, philosophy is neither a professional occupation, nor the mastery of an academic technique, but an activity in which the philosopher is what he or she is in the activity itself.<sup>24</sup> In philosophizing, the reflective activity and the understanding that is being sought are two sides of the same coin. This, Heidegger argues, distinguishes philosophy from the other sciences. Whereas one can speak of both philosophy and philosophizing, the disciplines of, for example, philology or biology cannot be rendered in an active form (as "philologizing" or "biologizing").<sup>25</sup>

It has frequently been claimed that Gadamer's early study of Plato represents a turn away from Heidegger. In this work, Gadamer sets out to rehabilitate a philosopher Heidegger had rejected as causing the

beginning of the decline of Western thought.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he does so in order to rehabilitate a dialogical rationality that was not part of Heidegger's agenda in the 1920s. Both of these claims are correct. In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer brings out the phenomenological relevance of Plato's work by emphasizing the role of Socratic dialogue. Moreover, the very interest in dialogue represents a significant step beyond Heidegger, whose crass judgment on public speech and discussion finds expression in the distinction between *Rede* and *Gerede* in *Being and Time*.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, Gadamer's study of Socratic dialogue remains Heideggerian in spirit and responds, along the lines staked out by the young Heidegger, to the problems of (a) self-understanding, (b) self-transformation, and (c) the autoteleology of philosophy. In order to see how this challenges the idea of an affinity between Davidson and Gadamer, each of these points must be studied in further detail.

(a) With regard to Gadamer's reading of the *Philebus*, we learn early on that "the knowledge of the good" is not a kind of knowledge that some have and others do not have at their disposal; it is not a knowledge "by which only the 'wise' are distinguished" (*PDE* 53 / *GW* 5:39). According to Gadamer, "the claim to this knowledge constitutes the manner of being of human existence itself" (53 / 39). As such, knowledge of the good is not a kind of knowledge that the subject possesses but from which it is detached. Rather, to have this kind of knowledge means to understand oneself in terms of it (53 / 39). The knowledge of the good—of that in light of which *Dasein* understands itself—can be vague and implicit and thus reflect what Gadamer calls an average self-understanding. Expressing himself in overtly Heideggerian terms, Gadamer explains that "Dasein's average self-understanding contents itself with the mere appearance of knowledge and cannot give an accounting of itself" (54 / 40). Socrates does not so much wish to convey knowledge about the good as to demand that his interlocutors give an account of the highest good in light of which they lead their lives. And, as Gadamer points out, "Everyone must be able to answer this question, because *it asks him about himself*" (54 / 40; emphasis added). Self-understanding characterizes humanity, and Socratic dialogue seeks to make explicit the implicit self-understanding of the interlocutor, and ultimately also of the reader of Platonic dialogue. This dimension of self-understanding is what Gadamer has in mind when he claims that Plato's dialogical ethics, while motivated by the experience of reason's

slipping into empty, Sophistic speech in the period leading up to the trial against Socrates, is based on “an unlimited willingness to justify and supply reasons for everything that is said” (52 / 39).

(b) Gadamer argues that the problem of self-understanding characterizes Socratic conversation in general. “Even when the initial topic of the conversation is not knowledge about one’s own being but a claim to knowledge in a specific area,” it is the case that “the Socratic testing of this claim leads back to oneself” (PDE 54 / GW 5:40). This is a knowledge of what Heidegger would call the “for the sake of which” of one’s own existence (*Worum-willen der eigenen Existenz*, 54 / 5:40). The good is the ultimate “for the sake of which” that provides individual *Dasein* with existential direction. Insofar as *Dasein* knows the good, “it does everything that it does for the sake of this” (60 / 44). The “for-the-sake-of-which” of *Dasein*’s everyday practice gives way to the “knowledge of the ‘for the sake of which’ of its own being” (60 / 44). This knowledge, Gadamer continues, “brings *Dasein* out of the confusion into which it is drawn by the disparateness and unfathomableness of what impinges on it from the world into a stance towards that, and thus into the constancy of its own potentiality for being” (60 / 44–45). Hence, knowledge of the good, the subject of Plato’s *Philebus*, leads to self-transformation and, ultimately, a better and more truthful existence.

The Sophist lacks this orientation. This is why Gadamer speaks of Sophistic talk as inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) (PDE 44 / GW 5:33; see also TM 363 / WM 369). His talk effects no deepened self-understanding. The Sophist does not expose himself to the subject matter that is being discussed, and no dimension of self-transformation is involved in his rhetorical tour de force.

(c) In Gadamer’s own environment, Plato research had branched out into a number of major camps. There were, for example, the neo-Kantians who insisted that Plato’s dialogues should be read as conducive to a philosophy of science.<sup>28</sup> And there was the visionary poet Stefan George and his aestheticizing interpretation of Plato as a philosopher-poet.<sup>29</sup> Against both of these lines of interpretation, Gadamer proposes that Plato’s dialogical form sits at the very heart of his understanding of truth and rationality. Plato performatively demonstrates a notion of philosophy as philosophizing, a practice that is not a means to an external end, but an end in itself. His philosophy, Gadamer explains, “is a dialectic not only because in conceiving and compre-

hending it keeps itself on the way to the concept but also because, as a philosophy that conceives and comprehends in that way, it knows man as a creature that is thus ‘on the way’ and ‘in between’” (PDE 3–4 / GW 5:6). Human good is the striving for knowledge, and Socratic dialectic does not relate to this as an object to be studied at a critical distance, but “it carries out, itself, what it sees human existence as” (4 / 6–7). Philosophy investigates the human good by exercising it; the good is not comprehended as an abstract idea, but implemented in philosophical practice—it is the very realization of this practice itself (4 / 7).

In light of the Heideggerian background of Gadamer’s study, it is evident, first, that Gadamer’s reading of Plato does not simply seek to provide a philosophical foundation for the possibility of objective thought or emphasize a triangular structure that involves the mutually acknowledging interlocutors and the subject matter at stake. Rather, Gadamer wishes to stress the intrinsic relation between knowledge and life. Second, given that Gadamer is not primarily interested in the foundations of objective thought, but in the self-transformation involved in philosophical dialogue, the difference between the early dialogues and *Philebus* is not as central as Davidson takes it to be. Davidson, as we have seen, develops his theses about Plato’s return to the elenchus in critical interaction with Vlastos’s developmental claim that Plato would ultimately leave this method behind.<sup>30</sup> As far as Gadamer’s reading goes, however, this concern is slightly off center. In Gadamer’s reading, it does not matter whether Socrates ends up changing his point of view (as he allegedly does in the *Philebus*, but not in the early dialogues). What matters, rather, is his capacity to make the interlocutors realize that the issues they engage with work back on how they lead their lives. Therefore, the fact that it is mainly his interlocutors and not Socrates himself who changes his meaning is not a problem for Gadamer, but has been presupposed throughout. Socrates’ authority does not depend on the fact that he knows the subject matter better than his interlocutors but on his understanding of philosophy as an ongoing, transformative process of edification. In this way, Socrates plays the same role for the young Gadamer as the canonical texts of the past will later play in *Truth and Method*. Like the eminent texts of tradition, Socrates approaches his interlocutors with an ethical imperative demanding, like the Torso of Apollo in Rilke’s poem, that “Thou must alter thy life.”<sup>31</sup> This Socratic-hermeneutic imperative involves a

conception of truthfulness that entails a lot more than Davidson's notion of the foundations of the possibility of objective thought.

In addition to his claim about Gadamer's focus on the foundation of the possibility of objective thought, Davidson points to a second aspect of Gadamer's work that, again, supposedly confirms the affinity between the two philosophers. This latter aspect concerns the hermeneutic rationale of Gadamer's interpretation of the *Philebus*, that is, the way in which Gadamer is performatively "illustrating . . . his idea of how the interpretation of any text is to proceed."<sup>32</sup>

### Interpreting the Past

The late Davidson seems generally sympathetic to the concerns of European philosophy. In "Dialectic and Dialogue," he describes how "a remarkable rapprochement . . . is now taking place between what for a time seemed two distinct, even hostile, philosophical methods, attitudes and traditions" and emphasizes how Continental and Anglo-American philosophy share "a common heritage." In line with this attitude, Davidson, in spite of his indebtedness to Vlastos and the horizon of Anglo-American Plato scholarship, sees Gadamer as a "superb classicist" and claims that while he touches upon textual problems when appropriate, "his [Gadamer's] interest in the *Philebus* is entirely centered on its philosophical content." In Davidson's view, this makes Gadamer's text "a stunning essay on the origins of objectivity in communal discussion," but, equally importantly, also "a demonstration of what the interpretation of a text can be." The underlying message seems to be that unlike the historicizing approaches of traditional European thought, Gadamer avoids all contextualization and focuses directly on the subject matter of the text, thus approaching Plato in a way that is compatible with the orientation of analytic philosophy.<sup>33</sup>

Yet again Davidson's endorsement is premature. Surely, Davidson is correct in pointing out the close relationship between Gadamer's interest in dialogical ethics, on the one hand, and the hermeneutic rationale of his reading of Plato, on the other. But having overlooked the deeper motivation of Gadamer's philosophy—having presented his 1931 study as an investigation into the foundations of objectivity, rather than a defense for a nonobjectivizing humanistic discourse—Davidson fails to note how Gadamer's interpretation exemplifies the very idea of self-transformation that he ascribes to Socratic dialogue. In order to

see this, it is necessary, yet again, to consider the young Gadamer's indebtedness to Heidegger.

Nearly all of Heidegger's lecture courses from the early 1920s examine classical works of European philosophy. His philosophizing is played out in the interpretation of texts by Augustine, Aristotle, Luther, and Kierkegaard. In fact, more than anything, the very idea of philosophizing is directed against the philological approaches to the past that, in Heidegger's understanding, were predominant within the human sciences at the time. These approaches, he argues, drown the philosophical content in an obsession with historical details. However, when dealing with the classical works of tradition, "Objectivity and calmness" are not desired qualities but "instances of weakness and indolence."<sup>34</sup> Rather than treating these works as objects to be scrutinized by the disinterested historian, we need to engage with the past in an *interested* way.<sup>35</sup>

For the young Heidegger, a proper—interested—engagement with the past demands a refashioning of philosophy. Previously, he claims, the texts of the past have been handed down to us through a gradually developing body of historicizing commentaries. What we now need, Heidegger argues, is a way of making the works of tradition matter to us anew. Still indebted to the program of Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger envisions his philosophy as a *destruction* of the tradition.<sup>36</sup> His choice of terms is potentially misleading. The aim of the destruction is not negative.<sup>37</sup> At stake, rather, is a philosophical rescue operation through which the works of the past are made to speak to the interpreter anew and brought yet again to matter to the present—an interpretative maneuver that breaks through petrified patterns of understanding and meaning-ascription, thus recovering the texts as well as the tradition in which these texts were originally produced or kept alive.

Because *Dasein* is itself historically situated, the investigation of the past is but a self-investigation and, conversely, a phenomenologically adequate self-investigation must, by definition, entail a historical component. Hence, historical critique is not "a mere exercise in providing convenient historical illustrations, but rather a fundamental task of philosophy itself" (*HF* 59; *HdI* 75). While the philosopher wishes to "appropriate the past genuinely for the first time,"<sup>38</sup> he or she cannot rely on the existing consensus of the scholarly community. Rather, he or she must make the past his or her own, that is, enter a process of appropriation or *An-eignung*. By doing this, the interpreter under-

stands himself or herself better and, by the same token, the past is brought to matter as an arena of self-understanding. History and philosophy are no longer merely academic disciplines, but “modes of interpretation, something which Dasein itself is, in which it lives” (HF 39 / 48).

When Gadamer published his *Habilitationsschrift* on Plato’s dialectical ethics, he had still not arrived at his hermeneutic account of tradition and historicity. Only in *Truth and Method*, published nearly thirty years after his study of the *Philebus*, are these concepts systematically explored. Yet even in the *Philebus* study, Gadamer reflects on the philosopher’s relation to the tradition. His thoughts on this issue echo Heidegger’s concerns throughout the 1920s. Gadamer himself makes no secret of this but retrospectively grants that when turning to Plato, his ambition was nothing less than to do for Plato what Heidegger had done for Aristotle. Should it not, Gadamer asks in the preface to the second edition of *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*, be possible for him too “to see Greek philosophy, Aristotle and Plato, with new eyes — just as Heidegger was able in his lectures on Aristotle to present a completely uncanny Aristotle, one in whom one rediscovered one’s own, present-day questions in startlingly concrete form?” (PDE xxxii / GW 5:161). From Heidegger’s teaching in Marburg, Gadamer had learned to avoid “both the learned airs of the scientific fraternity and, as much as possible, the traditional technical terminology, thereby bringing it about that the things (the facts of the matter) almost forced themselves upon one” (xxxii / 161). Placing himself within the phenomenological tradition, he “tried to lay aside all scholarly knowledge for once and to take as [his] point of departure the phenomena as they show themselves to us” (xxxii / 161). Just as the interlocutors of Socratic dialogue were committed to the subject matter under discussion, the young Gadamer claims that “We would be poor readers of Plato if we did not allow his dialogues to lead us to the things, the facts of the matter, themselves, rather than reading them as mere material from which to reconstruct Plato’s doctrine of principles” (xxxiii / 162). Hence, looking back at his early work, Gadamer concedes that his intention “was really only to apply the art of phenomenological description, which [he] had just learned, to a Platonic dialogue” (xxviii / 159).

In this spirit, the young Gadamer declines to engage with the secondary literature on Plato. He felt, in his own words, like “a first reader of Plato” and “tried to lay aside all scholarly knowledge” (xxxii / 161).

The same applies to an analysis of the consistency of Plato’s argument — this would be but another way of objectivizing the text. That is, even if a close, argumentative analysis could bring Plato to speak to contemporary readers, it could not make him address us in the way Socrates had addressed his interlocutors, namely, with the demand that we reflectively investigate our own unexamined prejudices and take responsibility for our prereflective understanding of our own being. As Gadamer would cast this point in *Truth and Method*, it is not primarily that the interpreter examines the text, but rather that the interpreter makes the text his or her own by being exposed to its truth.

Furthermore, Gadamer is not so interested in Plato’s doctrine (or theory of the foundations for the possibility of objective thought) as he is in retrieving the Socratic way of doing philosophy. This is what gets lost when later philosophy turns from dialogical to conceptual analysis, which, in Gadamer’s understanding, is what characterizes philosophy after Plato (PDE 8 / GW 5:10). Gadamer locates such a turn in Aristotle. Although he discovers a significant overlapping between Plato’s dialogical form and the insights espoused in Aristotle’s ethics (PDE 3–5 / GW 6–8), he claims that with Aristotle “conceptual investigation itself is necessarily understood on the level of the concept if it is supposed to be understood philosophically” (7 / 9). By this turn, however, “the inner tension and energy” of Plato’s philosophizing dissolves and the gain in comprehensibility is paid for with a loss “in stimulating multiplicity of meaning” (7 / 9). This is so because the “part of lived reality that can enter into the concept is always a flattened version” (7 / 9). Given that we, as later readers, are more accustomed to conceptual analysis than dialogical philosophizing, we have a tendency to read Plato’s work “via Aristotle” (8 / 10).<sup>39</sup> Hence, the challenge for philosophical hermeneutics is to counter the narrow cultivation of conceptual analysis and keep alive the stimulating multiplicity of meanings at stake in Socratic dialogue. Only thus can hermeneutics integrate an element of self-transformation and transcend the search for objectivity in interpretation. This dimension of Gadamer’s work gets lost in Davidson’s recapitulation of *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*.

#### Philosophical Hermeneutics and Radical Interpretation

At this point, one could argue that Davidson’s 2002 essay provides an interpretation of Gadamer’s early work that is correct, but not exhaus-

tive. That is, one could argue that given his late focus on the shared roots of European and Anglo-American thinking, Davidson is right in centering on Gadamer's effort at dialogically rearticulating the foundations of the possibility of objective thought, but that he fails to pay attention to the self-transformative aspects of hermeneutic experience. Given that Davidson's aim is to show how he and Gadamer, both starting out with a study of the *Philebus*, end up in the same intellectual neighborhood, he may appear justified in focusing only on the half of the story that best complies with this particular purpose.

Davidson appears to be aware of this risk. In the last section of the essay on Gadamer's Plato, he reflects on the differences between philosophical hermeneutics and radical interpretation:

Where I differ (and this may merely show I have not fully understood Gadamer) is that I would not say a conversation presupposes a common language, nor even that it requires one. Understanding, to my mind, is always a matter not only of interpretation but of translation, since we can never assume we mean the same thing by our words that our partners in discussion mean. What is created in dialogue is not a common language but understanding; each partner comes to understand the other. And it also seems wrong to me to say agreement concerning an object demands that a common language first be worked out. I would say: it is only in the presence of shared objects that understanding can come about. Coming to an agreement about an object and coming to understand each other's speech are not independent moments but are part of the same interpersonal process of triangulating the world.<sup>40</sup>

Gadamer's claim, however, is not that understanding requires a common language in the narrow meaning of the term. He, too, would see understanding as a matter of translation. Yet Gadamer stresses that both understanding and translation are enabled by a primordial linguisticity through which the world, as a field of intelligibility and meaning, is disclosed. Only against the prereflective meaning totality of the world (as distinct from a mere environment) can things present themselves to beings of our kind. Things present themselves to us as, say, a hammer, a table, a poem, or a work of art, rather than as bare objects that the individual language user, through a secondary reflection, labels, according to the semantic resources of his or her particular language, as an object of a certain kind. The process of linguistic world-disclosure is an enabling condition of interpretation. Hence, the problem to which Davidson responds — paradigmatically expressed by the example of the interpreter who encounters a speaker who utters the

words "Sta korg" whenever a red object is in plain sight and then reckons that "Sta korg" means red — is foreign to Gadamer.<sup>41</sup>

Even though Davidson may be correct in pointing out that the inquiry into the foundation of the possibility of objective thought is *one* dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics, his reading misses out on the more fundamental orientation of Gadamer's philosophy. Gadamer's aim is not to bring out a non-Cartesian notion of objectivity, but to question the way in which post-Cartesian philosophy has overlooked the self-transformative dimension of philosophy: the disclosure of the insights of tradition and the self-understanding that, given the shared linguisticity of human cultures, is reached through engagement with the meanings of the eminent works of the past. That is, if Gadamer criticizes modern philosophy for not taking into account the dialogical aspects of thinking and rationality, he wishes not only to rehabilitate a dialogical notion of objectivity, but also, more fundamentally, to bring to the fore a type of hermeneutic experience that allows the encounter with the other — be it the discussant (as in his early work on the *Philebus*) or the eminent texts of tradition (as in *Truth and Method*) — to trigger a self-transformation of the kind that Socrates prompts in his interlocutors. The task of replacing a monological notion of objectivity with a dialogical one may be a necessary step toward the articulation of philosophical hermeneutics; a sufficient step, however, it is not. What is needed is a notion of interpretation that takes the dialogical-hermeneutic experience to be intrinsically linked to the possibility of self-transformation.

The idea of self-transformation is threatened by the orientation toward objectivity, yet it fares no better in other areas of modern life. In Gadamer's work, even in the 1930s, the critique of modern rationality is only one example of the impoverishment of reason in modern philosophy. In *Truth and Method*, he approaches this problem not only, as the title suggests,<sup>42</sup> in light of a critique of modern science, but also through a critique of the subjectivization of art and beauty in the tradition of Kant and the romantics. By Gadamer's lights, modern aesthetics reduces art to a source of subjective pleasure that occasions no truth or existential self-understanding (*TM* 42–55 / *WM* 48–61). Art occurs as an autonomous aesthetic phenomenon, but by the same token it loses its place within the larger, ethical-political context of its society. Gadamer sees in this the emergence of a philistine, aesthetic humanism. Aesthetic humanism believes that its emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of

tradition provides a genuine alternative to the scientific worldview. Herein lies its naïveté. For by defining art and aesthetic experience in terms of a *subjective, noncognitive* pleasure, aesthetic humanism confirms, rather than challenges, a reduction of truth and objectivity to scientific truth and objectivity only. The very idea that art addresses us in terms of our self-understanding, that it questions our way of life and demands an ethical transformation, is not considered by aesthetic humanism. Gadamer, by contrast, wishes to emphasize this aspect of art, and this is why *Truth and Method* begins with a discussion of the subjectivization of art in post-Kantian aesthetics and ends with the rehabilitation of the world-disclosive truth of art.

Precisely because Gadamer's philosophy responds to a broader problem concerning truth, self-understanding, and the meaning of tradition, the critique of modern science (and the corresponding foundation of objectivity) is just one out of a number of ways to circle in and diagnose the problems of modern philosophy: a loss of genuine historicity and a failure to own up to our own historical existence by letting ourselves be addressed, in a binding way, by the truth of the eminent works of the past. Gadamer's philosophy is a comprehensive effort, in the tradition of Heidegger and the phenomenological movement, to respond to the modern loss of a relationship with the continually evolving tradition in which *Dasein* is situated. This is not a problem that can be solved by the transition from a monological to a dialogical paradigm of rationality, nor by rearticulating the foundations of objectivity. What Gadamer requires, rather, is that we turn to tradition and experience it as a totality that grants meaning and direction to finite, historical creatures of our kind. In Gadamer's early work, this is not yet brought to the fore at the level of philosophical content. It is, however, very much present at the level of his methodological-historical approach: that is, in the wish to do for Plato what Heidegger had done for Aristotle, subject his work to a destructive-phenomenological reading, hence making it matter to the present in a way that the more philological, historicizing studies of Plato had failed to do.

However, by returning to Gadamer's early work, Davidson does not just want to say something about the affinity between himself and the young Gadamer. He also suggests that this affinity extends beyond the early years, so that the two philosophers, both starting out as students of Platonic dialogue, arrive in the same intellectual neighborhood. Hence, we must consider the possibility that the self-transformative

aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics is simply an early, Heideggerian infatuation of his, something that the more mature philosopher would leave behind in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*.

During the almost thirty years between *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* and *Truth and Method*, Gadamer wrote a short monograph on Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volk und Geschichte im Denken Herders* (1941), but also continued to work on Plato.<sup>43</sup> In this period, he published the essays "Plato and the Poets" and "Plato's Educational State," as well as a number of review articles on contemporary German Plato scholarship. Not surprisingly, then, there is a thematic continuity between *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, the essays from the 1930s and 1940s, and the hermeneutic issues addressed in *Truth and Method*. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer still refers to Platonic dialogue and emphasizes Socrates' capacity to prompt reflection and self-transformation in his interlocutors. At this point, however, he significantly suggests that it is the ability to ask questions that characterizes the Socratic way of philosophizing. The Socratic *docta ignorantia*, we now learn, points the way to the "superiority of questioning" and the affinity between the structure of openness that characterizes the question and the nature of hermeneutic experience as such (TM 362 / WM 368). Furthermore, the paradigmatic, hermeneutic situation is no longer limited to a dialogical interaction between two or more discussants, but involves the entire relation to the tradition in which the interpreter finds himself or herself situated. Tradition is ascribed a normativity no individual interpreter could ever possess. As Gadamer puts it, "The most important thing is the question that the text puts to us, our being perplexed by the traditional word, so that understanding it must already include the task of the historical self-mediation between the present and tradition" (374 / 379). This moment of perplexity is only made possible by the fact that "the relation of question and answer is, in fact, reversed. The voice that speaks to us from the past — whether text, work, trace — itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness" (374 / 379). Tradition always provides the more fundamental and comprehensive meaning-totally of which the interpreter is a part and in light of which he or she understands herself. Only when acknowledged as authoritative can tradition call on and question the self-understanding of the interpreter. This is no dialogue between equals (even less so, one could add, than is generally the case in Socratic dialogue). The adequate response to the call of tradition does not only consist in accountability, reason-giving,

and rational consideration. Whether she recognizes it or not, the interpreter participates in and belongs to the meaning-totality that tradition ultimately is. Gadamer illuminates this belonging by reference to the structure of game-playing. Taking on the call of the tradition, the interpreter lets go of the aspiration to autonomy and lets himself or herself be absorbed in an experience of “ecstatic self-forgetfulness” (128 / 133). Only this kind of experience — and not the give and take of communal reason-giving and reflective deliberation — triggers the self-transformative experience that Gadamer seeks. Gadamer emphasizes that “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (379 / 384). According to Gadamer, truth is ultimately about gaining a more fulfilling life. This is the point at which the young Gadamer’s *Habilitationsschrift* anticipates the most central ideas of *Truth and Method* and also the reason why the mature Gadamer, looking back to Heidegger’s early lectures and seminars, maintains that *Truth and Method* is but an attempt to justify philosophically what Heidegger was doing in his early teaching in Freiburg and Marburg. Gadamer’s interest in hermeneutic self-transformation is therefore no early, Heideggerian whim of his, but a concern that runs through and unifies his work.

By presenting only a piecemeal version of Gadamer’s work, the early Plato text as well as the later hermeneutic contributions, Davidson misses out on its real philosophical thrust. His is a deflationary reading that evades, rather than confronts, the genuine points of disagreement between the phenomenological tradition and his own. Davidson overlooks the larger conceptual and philosophical context of Gadamer’s work, he overlooks the very question to which philosophical hermeneutics represents an answer, and he ignores the largely Heideggerian roots of Gadamer’s Plato scholarship. Hence, he misses the difference between his own philosophy and that of Gadamer — and potentially also the opportunity to discuss in more detail the achievements as well as the potential problems of philosophical hermeneutics when judged from the perspective of radical interpretation.

## NOTES

1. This has largely been understood as a question of whether Davidson’s writing is best understood as a last step in the tradition evolving from the Vienna Circle, logical positivism, and Quine or as part of the tradition of post-Kantian European thinking. Davidson comments on the influences from philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Kant in his “Intellectual Autobiography,” in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 63–64.

Studies of Davidson’s relationship with European philosophy include Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bjørn T. Ramberg, *Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 1989); and Jeff Malpas, “Gadamer, Davidson, and the Ground of Understanding,” in *Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward, and Jens Kertscher (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 195–216.

2. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), chap. 8. See also John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 115–19, and “Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism,” in Malpas et al., *Gadamer’s Century*, 173–94. Robert B. Brandom pleads for a return to Gadamer in *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), chap. 3.

3. Donald Davidson, “Gadamer and Plato’s *Philebus*,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (Open Court: Chicago, 1997), 421–32.

4. *Ibid.*, 421; hereafter cited in the text by page number.

5. Hans Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1994), hereafter cited as *TM*; *Wahrheit und Methode, Gesammelte Werke*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990), vol. 1, hereafter cited as *WM*; unless otherwise noted, *WM* refers to vol. 1. Davidson, “Gadamer and Plato’s *Philebus*,” 421. Davidson also praises Gadamer in his “Intellectual Autobiography,” in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, 27.

6. On the Sophist’s mind is the desire to stand forth as an individual to be admired or, possibly, to take down orators of all scales, thus confirming his own standing. The Sophist has no genuine interest in getting closer to the truth about a given subject matter. Whether he aims at gaining the agreement of others or refuting them, his speech does not try “primarily to make the facts of the matter visible in their being and to confirm this through the other person but rather to develop in speech, independently of the access that it creates to the facts of the matter, the possibility precisely of excluding the other person in the function . . . of fellow speaker and fellow knower.” In Sophistic speech, the other is assigned no essential role in contributing to the subject matter of the conversation. As Gadamer puts it, “Part of the essence of such talk . . . is to avoid dialogue.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*, trans. Robert B. Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 46; *Platos dialektische Ethik, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1999), 34–35. Further references to the English translation will

be abbreviated *PDE* (*Plato's Dialectical Ethics*). References to *Gesammelte Werke* will be given as *GW*, followed by volume. The quote above is from *PDE* 48 / *GW* 5:36.

7. According to Gadamer, this shared commitment to the disclosure of the *Sachverhalt* is characteristic of speech as such. In its primordial form, speech is defined as "a shared having to do with something" (*PDE* 29 / *GW* 5:23).

8. I return to the question of the interpretative rationale of Gadamer's reading of Plato below. Before proceeding that far, however, another question needs to be addressed: whether Davidson is right in claiming that what Gadamer is after, in this early work, is to provide an account of the foundation of the possibility of objective thought.

9. Donald Davidson, *Plato's Philebus* (New York: Garland, 1990), "Plato's Philosopher," *Truth, Language, and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 225–40.

10. Davidson, "Plato's Philosopher," 226–28, 230.

11. Donald Davidson, "Dialectic and Dialogue" (1994), in *Truth, Language, and History*, 252.

12. "[A] person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question" (*TM* 370 / *WM* 375).

13. For a critical study of German academia in the period between 1919 and 1933, see Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1990).

14. Gadamer worries that Heidegger's way of doing philosophy "made it easy to raise the charge of mythological thinking against him." See Gadamer, "Historicism and Romanticism," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 128. From this background, Gadamer claims that the early work on Plato, written when he was still a student of Heidegger's, was driven by the wish to "emancipate" himself "from the style of Heidegger" (Gadamer, "Writing and the Living Voice," in Misgeld and Nicholson, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History*, 66). Yet, in emancipating himself from his teacher, Gadamer does not wish to leave behind the insights of Heidegger's philosophy; in particular, he did not wish to leave behind the hermeneutic challenge that Heidegger had laid out in his early seminars on Aristotle. Gadamer claims that he was "later to justify in theory and to represent" the perspective of these influential seminars. See "Selbstdarstellung Hans-Georg Gadamer" (*WM* 2:485), and Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), 49; Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre. Eine Rückschau* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 216.

15. As he puts it in the lecture course from the summer semester of 1923, a "fundamental inadequacy of ontology in the tradition and today" is that "it blocks access to that being which is decisive within philosophical problems: namely, *Dasein*, from out of which and for the sake of which philosophy 'is.'" Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1999), 2; *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, *Gesamtausgabe*, II. Abteilung: *Vorlesungen*, vol. 63 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 3. Hereafter cited in the text as *HF*.

16. See also Heidegger's critique of Dilthey and Harnack in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 120–21; Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 60 (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1995), 166–67; hereafter cited in the text as *PRL*.

17. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 32–35; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 61 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 42–46.

18. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 6; *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, 8.

19. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 32; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 42.

20. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 7; *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, 10.

21. For a helpful discussion of this point, see Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Structure of Descartes' Meditations," in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 9–11.

22. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 42; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 56.

23. *Ibid.*, 12/13. Husserl speaks about the need for a new beginning in philosophy in *Erste Philosophie*. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, he notes how the radical beginning philosopher should "carry out meditations with the utmost critical precaution and a readiness for any — even the most far-reaching — transformation of the old-Cartesian meditations." In initiating such a beginning, phenomenology redeems the secret longing of earlier philosophy. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), 48, and *The Paris Lectures*, trans. Peter Koestenbaum (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964). The German texts are published as *Husserliana I, Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. S. Strasser (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 48. Helpful discussions of these points can also be found in David Smith, *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2–3; and Ludwig Landgrebe, "Husserl's Departure from Cartesianism," *The Phenomenology of Husserl* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 66–121.

24. Heidegger compares this to the playing of music (*musizieren* — "poetizing" in the English translation, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 36; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 47), yet emphasizes that "it is incumbent on us to avoid from the very outset the opinion that this analogy implies a kinship between philosophy and art" (37 / 48).

25. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 36; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 47.

26. As Brice Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 14–15, 35–36, notes, Gadamer, throughout his life, remained critical of this aspect of Heidegger's philosophy.

27. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962); *Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1977), 167–70 (German standard pagination).

28. As Gadamer recounts Natorp's reading of Plato (and his 1921 revision of *Platos Ideenlehre* from 1903),

Natorp's conception of the Platonic "idea" was one of the most paradoxical theses ever presented in historical research. He understood the idea from the point of view of natural law, in the sense in which it is fundamental to Galilean and Newtonian science. . . . Right here is the root of the neo-Kantian image of Plato. The idea is certainly what truly is, what as real being is fundamental to phenomena. But this foundation, the hypothetical idea, is as little an existing being alongside existing beings as is the mathematical scheme of the equation in modern science. (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 25; *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 66)

See also Paul Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961).

29. To some extent, Gadamer was himself associated with the George circle in Marburg (Friedrich Wolters, Hans Anton, and Max Kommerell). Yet he criticizes the George circle's readings of Plato in "The Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 185; "Selbstdarstellung," *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2:501. For an extensive analysis of the George circle, see Robert E. Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). For a more general account of the reception of Plato within the German tradition, see Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

30. See Davidson, "Plato's Philosopher," 232f. and 238f.

31. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" (1964), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 104; "Ästhetik und Hermeneutik," *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 8, *Ästhetik und Poetik I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 8. For Rilke's poem, see Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems*, ed. and trans. Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, 2001), 183; *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 503.

32. Davidson, "Gadamer and Plato's *Philebus*," 421.

33. Davidson, "Dialectic and Dialogue," 251; "Gadamer and Plato's *Philebus*," 422.

34. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 4; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 2.

35. Later on, Heidegger retrieves and reinterprets the (Kantian) idea of disinterestedness. In his lectures on Nietzsche's critique of subjective aesthetics, he discusses how Schopenhauer mistook Kantian disinterestedness for a "sheer apathetic drift." Against this, Heidegger insists that in Kant's work, "interest" does not signify that something is meaningful and significant for us, so that, concomi-

tantly, an attitude of *disinterestedness* would imply a neglect of this significance or meaning. Rather, the term "interest" invokes an effort to gain something "for oneself as a possession, to have disposition and control over it." According to Heidegger, to take an interest in the object implies to approach the object as a mere means, rather than an end in itself. Against this background, the notion of *disinterestedness* does not signify a sheer neglect. Rather, with Kant's conception of disinterestedness, "the essential relation to the object itself comes into play. . . . for the first time the object comes to the fore as pure object and . . . such coming forward into appearance is the beautiful." Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 108–10; *Nietzsche. Wille zur Macht als Kunst. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 43 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 126–28.

36. Heidegger introduced the idea of a destruction, or phenomenological *Kritik* of tradition, in 1919. His notion of destruction was broadly speaking Husserlian: a process in which theoretical constructions were led back to the less abstract context of the life-world. However, Heidegger soon expanded the notion of destruction so as to make it include a radical reading of the past. See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 493–94.

37. "To bury the past in nullity is not the purpose of this destruction; its aim is *positive*," as Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time / Sein und Zeit*, 23.

38. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 49; *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, 65.

39. Gadamer took Werner Jaeger to represent such a view. Gadamer was one of the first to attack not only Jaeger's (Spengler-influenced) appropriation of Aristotle, but also his interpretation of the relation between Plato and Aristotle as a transition from mythology to empirical science. See Gadamer's review, "Werner Jaeger, *Aristoteles*" (1928), *GW* 5:286–93. See also Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923).

40. Davidson, "Gadamer and Plato's *Philebus*," 432.

41. Davidson, "The Socratic Concept of Truth," in *Truth, Language, and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 245.

42. Gadamer himself had initially suggested the title *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, which his publisher found too obscure.

43. Gadamer, *Volk und Geschichte im Denken Herders* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1941). The essay was originally given in French as a lecture for French officers in a camp for prisoners of war in Paris and then rewritten and translated into German. Gadamer briefly refers to this talk in "Selbstdarstellung Hans-Georg Gadamer," *WM* 2:490, and in *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. In spite of the political rhetoric that saturates the German version of the essay—including a praise of how the German notion of *Volk* offers a promising alternative to the democratic paroles of the West (*Volk und Geschichte*, 23)—Gadamer later defends it as a "a purely scholarly study" (it is unclear whether Gadamer here refers to the German or the French version of the text) (*Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 99; *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 118). In German, the passage from *Volk und*

*Geschichte* reads: "Dies unpolitische Erahnen und Vorbereiten des Kommenden war überhaupt das deutsche Schicksal seiner Epoche, und vielleicht ist das Schicksal solcher politischen Verspätung die Voraussetzung dafür, daß der deutsche Begriff des Volkes im Unterschied zu den demokratischen Parolen des Westens in einer veränderten Gegenwart die Kraft zu neuer politischer und sozialer Ordnung erweist." For the French text, see "Herder et ses théories sur l'histoire," in *Regards sur l'histoire* (Fernand Sorlot: Paris, 1941), 9–36.

# 6

## The Interpretation of Philosophical Texts

---

Nicholas Rescher

University of Pittsburgh

### 1. The Problem

It should be made clear from the outset that when one speaks of interpreting a philosophical text in the setting of the present discussion it is specifically an *exegetical* interpretation that is at issue — an elucidation of what it maintains, a clarification of its claims and contentions.

A good interpretation of this sort consists in providing a set of explanations that would facilitate a paraphrase of the text that gives a fuller restatement of the information and ideas that it conveys. In this way, an interpretation seeks to realize what is clearly one of the central missions of the enterprise, that of providing a clear and accurate view of the meaning and purport of the text in relation to the position or thought-system of its author.

In philosophy, after all, the pure purpose of text interpretation is to facilitate comprehension. And, preeminently, this means removing obstacles to understanding: avoidable complications, inconsistencies, seeming paradoxes, and the like. Interpretations exist to ease our cognitive access to texts: *the rational economy of cognitive effort is the governing principle of exegetical text interpretation.*

To be sure, interpretations can proceed at the macro- as well as the micro-level. But at every level, the exegetical interpretation of philosophical texts seeks to make smooth the path to understanding — to