

Hermeneutics

BY KRISTIN GJESDAL

INTRODUCTION

The term *hermeneutics* refers to the interpretation of a given text, speech, or symbolic expression (such as art). However, it is also used to designate attempts to theorize the conditions under which such interpretation is possible. From Herder, via Schleiermacher and Hegel, through Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Rorty, hermeneutically oriented philosophers have been engaged at both of these levels. The advocates of modern hermeneutics have sought to change the way in which the past (in particular the classical works of Western art, science, and philosophy) has traditionally been understood. Yet they have also reflected systematically on the conditions of possibility for our having access to (or the possible reasons for our failing to access) the meaning-carrying expressions of others, be they contemporary or past, or belonging to familiar or culturally distant traditions. With Habermas and Apel, however, we see an increasing readiness to distinguish between these levels of engagement and focus exclusively on the principled, theoretical issues brought up by interpretation. The same might be said about the recent turn to hermeneutics in Anglophone philosophy. Philosophers such as Davidson, McDowell, and Brandom have referred to, borrowed from, and transformed some of Gadamer's central ideas so as to modify their own philosophies of language and their conception of the mind-nature relation and a number of related issues in epistemology. While thematically diverse and historically long spanning, the relative coherence and continuity of the problems addressed warrant the idea of a hermeneutic paradigm in philosophy.

THE BEGINNINGS OF HERMENEUTICS

Although its origins are somewhat unclear, the term *hermeneutics* is often traced back to the ancient Greek figure of Hermes, the messenger of the gods. In Plato, hermeneutic knowledge is understood as revealed and intuitive, and hence different from truth-oriented and discursively based theory. Yet it was Plato's Socratic method, as brought to life in the dialogues themselves, that, through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, most profoundly came to influence hermeneutics ([Gadamer 1991](#) and [Gadamer 2001](#)). As argued in [Grondin 1995](#), the writings of Augustine further shaped hermeneutics in that he emphasized the speculative nature of language (i.e., its world-disclosing capacity). In the early modern period, Luther's emphasis on the individual's direct access to the scripture and the interpretation of the Bible on the basis of the text alone—*sola scriptura*—placed

hermeneutics at the very heart of biblical studies and theology (see [Ebeling 1951](#)). Another important figure is Giambattista Vico. Vico's outspoken anti-Cartesianism and his roots in the rhetorical tradition led him to emphasize the historicity of human thought and the intrinsic relation between understanding and self-understanding. Vico's humanist legacy is apparent in [Gadamer 2004](#) and [Berlin 1976](#), and is helpfully discussed in [Apel 1963](#). A good overview of the development of hermeneutics can be found in [Bruns 1995](#).

Apel, Karl-Otto. *Die Idee der Sprache in der Tradition des Humanismus von Dante bis Vico*. Bonn, Germany: H. Bouvier, 1963.

Apel's study, which has not yet been translated into English, reviews Vico's contribution to European humanism, philosophy of language, and hermeneutics.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*. London: Viking, 1976.

For Berlin, Vico's great achievements consist in his historicism and his pluralist understanding of reason. Vico represents an anti-Cartesian, anti-monolithic beginning of modernity that is later continued in the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder (see Herder on History and Understanding).

Bruns, Gerald L. *Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

Approaching the history of hermeneutics from the viewpoint of literary interpretation, Bruns offers a good overview of the theory of interpretation from the ancients, via Luther, to Heidegger. Particularly suited for students of English, modern languages, and aesthetics.

Ebeling, Gerhard. "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik." *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951): 172-230.

Brief study of the relationship between reformation theology and Luther's biblical hermeneutics. Ebeling's article sheds light on an aspect of hermeneutics that is often overlooked in philosophical surveys.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. Translated by Robert M. Wallace. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991.

Gadamer's early study of the *Philebus* offers a good introduction to the hermeneutic aspects of Socratic dialogue. The text also outlines the premises of Gadamer's later hermeneutics, in particular the dialogical nature of reason.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Beginning of Philosophy*. Translated by Rod Coltman. New York: Continuum, 2001.

This lecture series provides an informal and accessible introduction to Gadamer's life-long engagement

with ancient philosophy. The lectures move between phenomenological exegeses of Plato and Aristotle and reflections on the nature of hermeneutic work.

Gadamer, Hans–Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2d ed. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004.

First published in 1960, Gadamer's *magnum opus* is now a classic in hermeneutic philosophy. Gadamer's own position is developed through the encounter with past theories of interpretation, Vico's included.

Grondin, Jean. *Sources of Hermeneutics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

A short, clear, and accessible book that is particularly useful for understanding the ontological turn in hermeneutics. Grondin's study of the historical and philosophical sources of hermeneutics centers on Gadamer's and Heidegger's appropriations of the philosophical tradition.

MODERN HERMENEUTICS

Even though the hermeneutic tradition goes back to Aristotle, Plato, and beyond, the modern philosophy of interpretation was shaped during the second half of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th (see [Wach 2001](#)). Gadamer's groundbreaking *Truth and Method*—which, more than fifty years after its publication, still counts as a mandatory reference—views modern hermeneutics as starting with a romantic misinterpretation of Kant's aesthetics ([Gadamer 2004](#)). In Gadamer's account, 19th-century hermeneutics cut short the humanist tradition of *Bildung* (education in culture) and misrepresented interpretation as an aesthetic recreation of the original feeling to which a work or text lends voice. Gadamer's genealogy of hermeneutics was later amended in favor of the view that hermeneutics developed in and through the Enlightenment, and with its merging of the theory of interpretation with political issues such as tolerance, intercultural understanding, and education in culture ([Grondin 1994](#), [Mariña 2005](#)). A good selection of texts can be found in [Mueller–Vollmer 1989](#). [Ramberg and Gjesdal 2005](#) offers an overview of the systematic concerns and historical development of hermeneutics.

Gadamer, Hans–Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2d ed. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004.

This is the work in which Gadamer, through a discussion of Kant, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger, clarifies the philosophical importance of the hermeneutic circle, hermeneutic application, tradition, interpretation, truth, and understanding, and introduces his own philosophy of language.

Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

A historical overview of hermeneutics that is influenced by Gadamer. Grondin, however, goes beyond

Gadamer in that he offers a more sympathetic account of Schleiermacher and Enlightenment hermeneutics. The book is helpful for students across the humanities.

Mariña, Jacqueline, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

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Includes a series of helpful essays that seek to rectify Gadamer's misunderstanding of Schleiermacher and situate him as a significant voice within the paradigms of philosophical Romanticism and German idealism. For readers of hermeneutic philosophy, the contributions on Schleiermacher's ethics, dialectics, and theory of interpretation are of particular relevance.

Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, ed. *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. New York: Continuum, 1989.

A balanced collection of texts from Chladenius, via Droysen, Boeck, Bultmann, and Heidegger, to Gadamer, Habermas, and Apel. Useful for teaching purposes and for students seeking to obtain a general idea of the development of modern hermeneutics.

Ramberg, Bjørn and Kristin Gjesdal. "Hermeneutics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2005.

Offers an overview of the historical development and systematic concerns of modern hermeneutics. The encyclopedia entry is geared toward students across the humanities and provides a comprehensive bibliography.

Wach, Joachim. *Das Verstehen. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Olms Verlag, 2001.

A classic in the history of hermeneutics, Wach's voluminous study has recently been published in a handy one-volume edition. Although some of Wach's observations are now outdated—the book was initially published in the 1920s—it remains an authoritative source for understanding the historical development of hermeneutics.

Herder on History and Understanding

As part of his early philosophy of history, Johann Gottfried von Herder (b. 1744–d. 1803) developed a hermeneutic theory that focuses on the importance of overcoming prejudices in historical understanding by situating a work within its original context of origin ([Herder 2002](#), [Herder 2004](#)). The emphasis on Herder's

importance for modern hermeneutics has led to a reconsideration of the epistemological and political dimensions of early 18th-century theories of interpretation. [Berlin 2000](#) argues that Herder's hermeneutics evolves around the importance of intercultural recognition and is closely related to his anticolonialist sentiments. Among the critics of Berlin's work is the political theorist Bhikhu Parekh, who disputes the relevance of Herder for contemporary theories of intercultural exchange and understanding ([Parekh 2000](#)). [Taylor 1997](#) attempts to rehabilitate Herder's philosophy of language, which Taylor sees as a promising alternative to dominant positions in contemporary philosophy. In addition, Frederick Beiser ([Beiser 1992](#)), Michael Forster ([Forster 2007](#), [Forster 2010](#)), and John Zammito ([Zammito 2002](#)) have emphasized the significance of Herder's contribution to hermeneutics, anthropology, and political thought.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

A useful study of the historical background, central arguments, and contemporary relevance of late-18th-century political philosophy. Chapter 8 reviews Herder's contribution and sheds light on his liberal mindset (his defense of the freedom of the press and liberty of conscience, among other topics).

Berlin, Isaiah. *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Within an Anglophone context, Berlin was a pioneer in defending the relevance of Herder's philosophy. Berlin reads Herder as an anti-Enlightenment philosopher and is interested in his ideas about cultural pluralism and intercultural tolerance.

Forster, Michael N. "Johann Gottfried von Herder." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2007.

Article-length overview of Herder's philosophy that covers his philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, political philosophy, aesthetics, anthropology, and hermeneutics. Also includes a comprehensive bibliography.

Forster, Michael N. *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Forster's book offers a close reading of Herder's philosophy, focusing on his philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and hermeneutics. It traces Herder's influence on Schleiermacher, the Romantics, Hegel, and Nietzsche, and discusses the relevance of his thinking. Other chapters survey Hamann's philosophy of language and Schleiermacher's theory of translation.

Herder, Johann Gottfried von. *Philosophical Writings*. Translated and Edited by Michael N. Forster.

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

A reliable translation of Herder's most important texts in hermeneutics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and political philosophy. The book contains a comprehensive introduction by the translator and serves teaching and research purposes alike.

Herder, Johann Gottfried von. *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*. Translated and Edited by Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004.

A complete English translation of one of the young Herder's most important texts in the philosophy of history. The text shows how Herder's notion of understanding is intrinsically connected to his political philosophy, in particular his critique of contemporary colonialism and Eurocentric politics.

Parekh, Bhikhu C. *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Parekh's book provides the historical background for contemporary multiculturalism and its challenges. Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the relevance of Herder's theory of culture. Parekh worries that even though Herder was progressive for his time, he can account neither for diversity within a given culture nor for transcultural standards of criticism.

Taylor, Charles. "The Importance of Herder." In *Philosophical Arguments*. By Charles Taylor, 79–99. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Taylor focuses on Herder's critique of Condillac and locates the relevance of his work in his expressivism and philosophy of language. He stages Herder's thoughts as a viable alternative to positions in contemporary philosophy of language (Davidson, among others). The collection also contains a number of important essays on other historical figures (Heidegger, Wittgenstein, among others) and the philosophical challenges of hermeneutics (the problem of rule-following, history and truth, the dialectics of recognition, to mention a few).

Zammito, John H. *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

A comprehensive study of Herder's early philosophy. Zammito reviews Herder's importance for the formation of philosophical anthropology. He carefully charts the interchange between Herder and his teachers Kant and Hamann. The book is helpful for students of Herder's philosophy, but also provides an introduction to anthropology in the era of 18th-century German thought.

Schleiermacher's Linguistic Turn

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics grew out of his philosophy of language. According to Schleiermacher (b. 1768–d. 1834), language consists of syntactical structures and semantic resources that get realized through individual application. Language inhabits a space between the universal and the particular. To understand the language use of another individual is to take into account the aspect of universality (grammar and the semantic resources available) as well as the individual way of combining the syntactic and semantic reserves in light of historical situatedness and personal and cultural background. According to Schleiermacher, interpretation proceeds by moving back and forth between a focus on language as a shared pool of grammatical and semantic resources (grammatical interpretation) and language as individualized and applied (technical or psychological interpretation). The reception of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics has been an area of much contention. This is in part due to the lack of a comprehensive, completed manuscript in hermeneutics. With the exception of an important academy lecture, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics consists of notes and student annotations ([Schleiermacher 1998](#)), and the status and order of the manuscripts have been subject to editorial disputes. Heinz Kimmerle's view of Schleiermacher as a proto-Gadamerian thinker ([Kimmerle 1957](#)) is challenged on philological grounds by Wolfgang Virmond ([Virmond 1985](#)). [Szondi 1995](#) and [Frank 1985](#) suggest that Schleiermacher's sensitivity to style and the aesthetic aspects of interpretation highlights areas of understanding overlooked by later hermeneutics. [Forster 2002](#) focuses on Schleiermacher's notion of interpretative validity and his theory of translation. Furthermore, there is a tendency in recent research to see Schleiermacher's work on interpretation as related to his ethics and social theory ([Scholtz 1995](#), [Berner 1995](#), [Gjesdal 2009](#)).

Berner, Christian. *La philosophie de Schleiermacher: Herméneutique, Dialectique, Ethique*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995.

A solid and challenging study of Schleiermacher's work and the importance of hermeneutics in his thinking. Berner emphasizes Schleiermacher's dialectics, yet views his theory of knowledge as intertwined with his ethical thinking.

Forster, Michael N. "[Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher](#)." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2002.

A good overview of Schleiermacher's philosophy and his relationship to Herder and German idealism. The article pays careful attention to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, philosophy of language, and theory of translation. It also includes a comprehensive bibliography.

Frank, Manfred. *Das individuelle Allgemeine: Textstrukturierung und -interpretation nach Schleiermacher*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985.

An important study of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, dialectics, and philosophy of language. Argues for the relevance of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and critiques the ontological turn in the philosophy of interpretation.

Gjesdal, Kristin. *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511770432](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511770432)]

This study emphasizes the interrelatedness of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and his practical philosophy, and proposes that Schleiermacher's theory of interpretation, with its orientation toward a regulative idea of validity in understanding, offers an attractive alternative to Gadamer's tradition-oriented hermeneutics.

Kimmerle, Heinz. *Die Hermeneutik Schleiermachers im Zusammenhang seines spekulativen Denkens*. PhD diss., University of Heidelberg, 1957.

A student of Gadamer, Kimmerle seeks to rectify Gadamer's misreading of Schleiermacher by showing that Schleiermacher comes closer to Gadamer than the latter himself acknowledges. Kimmerle's reading of the hermeneutics manuscripts has later been subject to dispute.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*. Translated and edited by Andrew Bowie. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

A reliable English translation of Schleiermacher's works in hermeneutics, epistemology, and philosophy of language. The book is furnished with a lengthy introduction by the translator.

Scholtz, Gunter. *Ethik und Hermeneutik: Schleiermachers Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995.

A helpful study of Schleiermacher's work. Scholtz's book is particularly valuable in that it views Schleiermacher's notion of *Bildung* as key to his philosophy and demonstrates the significance of Schleiermacher's thought for the justification of the human sciences in 19th-century philosophy.

Szondi, Peter. *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*. Translated by Martha Woodmansee. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

[DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511597503](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511597503)]

Szondi refutes the idea of a fundamental break between Enlightenment and Romantic hermeneutics, and locates Schleiermacher in the intersection between the two. Szondi sees important parallels between Romanticism and modernist aesthetics and emphasizes Schleiermacher's modernist sensitivities. His book is particularly useful for students of literature and aesthetics.

Virmond, Wolfgang. "Neue Textgrundlagen zu Schleiermachers früher Hermeneutik." In *Internationaler Schleiermacher-Kongreß Berlin 1984*. Edited by Kurt-Victor Selge, 575–590. Berlin:

Walter de Gruyter, 1985.[DOI: [10.1515/9783110873603](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110873603)]

A thorough account of the editorial principles of the hermeneutics manuscripts in the critical edition of Schleiermacher's collected work. Useful for students and scholars who are interested in the philological background of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics.

The Schlegel Brothers

For a short but formative period of his life, Schleiermacher belonged to a circle of philosophers often referred to as the Jena Romantics. The group included Friedrich von Hardenberg ([Gjesdal 2009](#)), Ludwig Tieck, and the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich and August Wilhelm. These philosophers, poets, and journalists wrote, discussed, and sometimes even published together, though their intellectual-political outlooks and styles of philosophizing were more diverse than is typically acknowledged. Schleiermacher counts as the Romantic hermeneutician *par excellence*. However, the Schlegel brothers were engaged in philological work, reflecting on the challenges of, conditions of, possibility for, and value of understanding in the period leading up to Schleiermacher's lectures in hermeneutics ([Thouard 1996](#)). As argued in [Speight 2007](#), Friedrich Schlegel systematically addresses the interpretation of older texts and artworks. He defends a position combining philological rigor and aesthetic-intuitive sensitivity to the individual outlook and voice of the author. Furthermore, he takes into account the pre-reflective and even unconscious aspects of the meaning of the text. In Schlegel's view, hermeneutics emerges as an unending activity taking form in the dialectics between intuitive hypothesis formation and a preliminary rejection or confirmation of the hypothesis through philological work (see [Bernstein 2003](#)). August Wilhelm Schlegel, whose work as translator is much admired, added to this a set of more general reflections on the challenges of intercultural understanding. This aspect of his philosophy was partly based on his study of traditional Sanskrit texts. Furthermore, August Wilhelm's thoughts on interpretation weave into his theory of translation. Particularly important is the idea that each text requires a unique approach so as to do justice not only to its meaning letter-by-letter but also to its overall spirit (see [Hay 2010](#)).

Bernstein, Jay. *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Contains English translations of some of Friedrich Schlegel's most important texts in hermeneutics, including "Critical Fragments," "Athenaeum Fragments," "Ideas," "On Goethe's *Meister*," and "On Incomprehensibility." The collection contains key texts on interpretation and aesthetic issues by other romantic philosophers (Hölderlin, von Hardenberg) and relates romantic aesthetics to its classicist predecessors. It also includes an informative introduction by the editor.

Gjesdal, Kristin. "[Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg \(Novalis\)](#)." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2009.

Article length overview of the philosophy of von Hardenberg (Novalis), including his contributions to

philosophy of history, aesthetics, and hermeneutics. Contains a comprehensive bibliography.

Hay, Katia D. “August Wilhelm von Schlegel.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2010.

Accessible encyclopedia article on August Wilhelm von Schlegel’s philosophy, which includes relevant discussions of his hermeneutics and useful advice on further reading.

Speight, Allen. “Friedrich Schlegel.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2007.

Online survey of Friedrich Schlegel’s philosophy and his relationship to German Idealism. Speight’s article offers an overview of Schlegel’s work but also serves as a good introduction to philosophical romanticism. Includes a comprehensive bibliography.

Thouard, Denis, ed. *Critique et herméneutique dans le premier romantisme allemand*. Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996.

An annotated collection of texts on hermeneutics in the early romantic period (and beyond) that includes excerpts from works by Ast, A. W. Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Bernardi, and Dilthey, as well as a comprehensive introduction.

Hegel’s Contribution

Hegel does not have a separate hermeneutic philosophy. One could even argue that Hegel dissolves hermeneutics in a dialectical philosophy of history. Furthermore, Hegel (b. 1770–d. 1831) emerges as a most avid critic of Romantic thinking. His rejection of the Romantic notion of the centrality of feeling in art and religion derives from the idea that only that which is conceptually laid out is properly understood. Yet, two aspects of Hegel’s philosophy have been powerful in shaping the hermeneutic tradition: first, his notion of the dialectic development of reason in and through history, and second, his insistence on the intrinsic relation between understanding and self–understanding. For Hans–Georg Gadamer (b. 1900–d. 2002), these are key elements in Hegel’s hermeneutic thought. Hegel, Gadamer argues, challenges the objectivist understanding of history and the humanistic sciences (Gadamer 1976). To the extent that Gadamer appropriates these aspects of Hegel’s work, he understands himself as a Hegelian philosopher. Yet Gadamer worries about the absolutist pretensions of Hegel’s system. He rejects the idea that philosophical reason reaches a point of transparency in absolute spirit. Gadamer sees this as a foundationalist streak in Hegel and defends the view of interpretation as the ongoing self–formation of tradition. Gadamer’s reading is contested in Pippin 2002. The epistemological absolutism of Hegel’s philosophy also worries Charles Taylor, whose 1975 study of Hegel triggered a new wave of hermeneutically oriented Anglophone scholarship. In Taylor 1975, Hegel’s philosophy is brought to bear on a

number of current philosophical problems and taken to offer an expressivist theory of meaning, a holistic philosophy of language, as well as insights into the interplay between understanding and self-understanding. Even though Taylor would later author a number of significant essays in hermeneutics (see *Anglophone Philosophy and Hermeneutics*), his study of Hegel does not enter into a detailed discussion of interpretation. Such a reading, however, is offered in [Redding 1996](#), a study that clarifies the hermeneutic strands of Hegel's philosophy and surveys the wider impact of Hegel's thought in the field of interpretation theory. Recent scholarship emphasizes not only the general hermeneutic drive of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* ([Hegel 1977](#)), but also the historicist strands of his lectures on philosophy of history ([Hegel 1987](#)). [Beiser 1993](#) and [Forster 2008](#) contribute to a better understanding of Hegel's indebtedness to Herder's historicism and the consequences of his commitment to objectivity in understanding. [McCarney 2000](#) provides a detailed yet accessible discussion of Hegel's historicizing of thought.

Beiser, Frederick C. "Hegel's Historicism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. Edited by Frederick Beiser, 270–300. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

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Article-length discussion of Hegel. Beiser argues that Hegel historicizes philosophy, that he views history as entirely central to the purpose, procedures, and problems of philosophy. He also discusses the possible tension in Hegel's work between objectivity and historicity.

Forster, Michael N. "Hegel and Hermeneutics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Edited by Frederick C. Beiser, 174–204. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Article elaborating the philosophical gains and implications of Hegel's hermeneutics vis-à-vis the hermeneutic models offered by his near contemporaries (Herder and Schleiermacher). The article is helpful in that it discusses Hegel's contribution to interpretative practice as well as theory.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Hegel's Dialectics: Five Hermeneutic Studies*. Translated by P. Christopher Smith. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976.

Gadamer's studies of Hegel's hermeneutic philosophy and the implications of Hegelian thought for the ontological turn in hermeneutics. The collection also contains helpful articles on Hegel's own reading of Ancient Greek philosophy, his logic, and his notion of recognition.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Hegel's masterwork on the historical development of spirit. For students of hermeneutics, Hegel's introduction contains important reflections on reason, spirit, and the historicity of thought.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.

This short and relatively accessible series of lectures contains one of Hegel's most systematic discussions of methodological issues in historical work. A good place to begin for students interested in Hegel's hermeneutics and philosophy of history.

McCarney, Joseph. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel on History*. London: Routledge, 2000.

A solid introduction to Hegel's hermeneutics and philosophy of history. Discusses Hegel's philosophy of history with an eye to his notion of freedom and political theory, and offers a detailed account of the difficult notion of the end of history.

Pippin, Robert. "Gadamer's Hegel." In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Edited by Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward, and Jens Kertscher, 217–238. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

A critical reading of Gadamer's reworked Hegelianism that emphasizes the Heideggerian commitments of Gadamer's work and stages a contrast between Gadamer and Hegel with regard to historicity, self-reflection, and normativity.

Redding, Paul. *Hegel's Hermeneutics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

A discussion of the hermeneutic tenors of Hegel's work and, in particular, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Redding's study brings out the close connections between Hegel's hermeneutics and his political philosophy. It also contains interesting discussions of post-Hegelian hermeneutics (Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer).

Taylor, Charles. *Hegel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Taylor's magisterial work clarifies the arguments, importance, and relevance of Hegel's thinking. It does not deal with Hegel's hermeneutics in particular but spells out the premises of his work in a way that makes it serve as a resource for hermeneutic thinking in the broader sense of the term.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

The hermeneutic concerns of Herder, Schleiermacher, the Schlegels, and Hegel were further developed in the 19th century. However, in this period, the questions of the previous generations were radically transformed. This is the era in which Friedrich Nietzsche criticizes the idealist streak of earlier hermeneutics. Nietzsche blends his

reflections on truth, historicity, and language with a thorough critique of the academic institution itself (see Nietzsche and the Critique of Tradition). In particular, Nietzsche is critical of contemporary philosophy and philology. In the same period, Dilthey claims that the human sciences are distinctively hermeneutic by nature (see Dilthey's *Theorizing the Human Sciences*). He suggests in his work that the legitimacy of the humanities rests not with their being sciences of explanation but with their status as sciences of understanding. Though different in scope and intellectual temperament, Nietzsche and Dilthey both question how the study of the past, within dominant strands of academia, has turned into a dusty philological enterprise in which the understanding of tradition is cut loose from the understanding of the present, and objectivity is predicated upon the formation of a narrow, disinterested, and quasi-scientific gaze. Helpful overviews of this aspect of hermeneutic philosophy and the period more generally can be found in [Grondin 1994](#) and [Moyar 2010](#).

Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

Grondin traces the development of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher, via Dilthey, to Heidegger and Gadamer. The book includes helpful discussions of historicism and its influence on Betti and Habermas.

Moyar, Dean, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth Century Philosophy*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010.

Contains commissioned articles by first-rate scholars on a broad range of issues within 19th-century philosophy. The volume includes valuable essays on Dilthey and Nietzsche and situates these authors within the larger fields of problems and queries characterizing the 19th century.

Nietzsche and the Critique of Tradition

Nietzsche never viewed himself as a hermeneutic philosopher. Yet he famously claimed that everything is interpretation, and the problems of historical understanding, self-understanding through the past, and the use and abuse of history are present throughout his writings. In works such as *The Birth of Tragedy* ([Nietzsche 1999](#)), *Untimely Meditations* ([Nietzsche 1997](#)), and *On the Genealogy of Morality* ([Nietzsche 1998](#)), Nietzsche disapproves of the search for an objective, disinterested, and disengaged understanding of history. Yet, as argued by [Geuss 1994](#), Nietzsche's goal is not to reject the idea that some interpretations of the past are better or more truthful than others. His point, rather, is to spell out the relationship between past and present, emphasize how the present is shaped by and shapes our understanding of the past, and, finally, suggest that when done in the right way, the study of the past offers valuable resources for a critical and emancipatory understanding of our present moral, epistemological, and aesthetic vocabularies. Nietzsche would later champion a genealogical approach to philosophical issues. As argued by [Nehamas 1994](#) and [Nussbaum 1998](#), genealogy traces the keystones of our present self-understanding—the concepts of morality and religion, for example—back to their historical origin. The goal is not only to explain the historical genesis of present value discourse, but also to lay bare the ideological ramifications of the victory of one moral, epistemic, or aesthetic

model over competing conceptions or paradigms. Understood in this way, the past emerges as a resource for self-critique. Nietzsche's deep—hermeneutic, if one likes—insight rests with the reminder that one's view of matters of fact as well as value judgments often rely on the cultural, historical, and personal angle from which they are approached. [Poellner 2001](#) sees in Nietzsche's critique of the traditional notion of truth a viable version of perspectivism. One might also view Nietzsche's perspectivism as a reflection on the indispensable role of prejudices in understanding. Nietzsche's thinking would shape the outlook of Heidegger (see [Heidegger 1991](#)) and lend a point of orientation to Michel Foucault's political-historical criticism ([Foucault 2001](#)).

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Nietzsche*. Edited by Brian Leiter and John Richardson, 341–360. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Foucault's famous reading of Nietzsche's plea for a genealogical approach to philosophy. This short text, in which Nietzsche's work is celebrated as well as critiqued, sheds helpful light on the reception of genealogy in French, poststructuralist thought. Richardson and Leiter's collection includes a number of other important articles.

Geuss, Raymond. "Nietzsche and Genealogy." *European Journal of Philosophy* 2.3 (1994): 274–292. [DOI: [10.1111/j.1468-0378.1994.tb00015.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.1994.tb00015.x)]

Focuses on the methodological rationale of Nietzsche's genealogy and, in particular, his discussion of ascetic morality. Discusses the lack of symmetry between genealogical critique and the establishing of a positive alternative to the phenomena or values critiqued. Also discusses Foucault and Habermas's reception of Nietzsche.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche*. Vols. 1–2. Translated by David Farrell Krell. London: Harper 1991.

Heidegger's text serves as an interpretation of Nietzsche, but also as an account of Nietzschean ideas and topoi that Heidegger found helpful and stimulating (or problematic and worthy of criticism). Volumes 3 and 4 published in a separate volume.

Nehamas, Alexander. "The Genealogy of Genealogy: Interpretation in Nietzsche's Second *Untimely Meditation* and in *On the Genealogy of Morals*." In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*. Edited by Richard Schacht, 269–284. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Nehamas retrieves the genesis and philosophical justification of genealogy on the basis of the second *Untimely Meditation*. He also discusses the relationship between life and history in Nietzsche's work. Schacht's edited volume includes a number of substantial contributions on Nietzsche's genealogy.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." In *Untimely Meditations*. By

Friedrich Nietzsche. Edited by Daniel Breazeale. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale, 57–125. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

The methodological manifesto of Nietzsche's philosophy of history. This is where Nietzsche draws his famous distinction between the antiquarian, the monumental, and the critical approach to history.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan W. Swensen. London: Hackett, 1998.

Nietzsche's work on the unspoken presuppositions for and limitations of modern morality. Nietzsche makes it clear why, on his account, a philosophy of value must proceed historically.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Includes Nietzsche's early work on Greek and modern tragedy, as well as the important essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense." In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche discusses hermeneutics and genealogy but, equally important, the work exemplifies his ideas on interpretation.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Transfiguration of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus." In *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*. Vol. 1. Edited by Daniel W. Conway and Peter S. Groff, 306–330. London: Routledge, 1998.

Nussbaum discusses Nietzsche's notions of individuality and transgression in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Her article provides a detailed account of Nietzsche's interpretation of particular tragedies and compares Nietzsche and Aristotle on tragedy, but also sheds light on the deeper, philosophical motivation of his work. The multivolume *Critical Assessments* is a useful resource for students of Nietzsche's work.

Poellner, Peter. "Perspectival Truth." In *Nietzsche*. Edited by John Richardson and Brian Leiter, 85–118. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

This article outlines and discusses Nietzsche's perspectivism over against other alternative conceptions of epistemic and value-related perspectivism. It also contrasts and compares Nietzsche's position to contemporary anti-realist and pragmatist standpoints.

Dilthey's Theorizing on the Human Sciences

Like Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey (b. 1833–d. 1911) questioned the predominant paradigm of philology and was skeptical of aestheticizing attitudes to the past (see Nietzsche and the Critique of Tradition). However, unlike Nietzsche, Dilthey's work evolves around the historical genesis and scientific legitimacy of the humanities.

Dilthey is thus a key figure in 19th-century theory of interpretation. He was a pioneer in writing the history of hermeneutics and broke new ground in seeking to provide the humanities with their own scientific justification. However, his most valuable contribution consists in the combining of these two accounts. According to Dilthey, the justification of the human sciences must go hand in hand with an account of the historical development of hermeneutics. This aspect of Dilthey's philosophy is highlighted in [Makkreel 1975](#) and [Makkreel 2008](#). Dilthey was the first to acknowledge the hermeneutic importance of Hegel's early work. Furthermore, he produced a comprehensive biographical study of Schleiermacher. Indeed, one could even suggest that Dilthey sought to combine the resources of Hegel's historical turn in philosophy with Schleiermacher's attentiveness to issues of individuality, method, and validity in understanding. Together, these strands of thinking enable a critique of historical reason, which is how Dilthey pitches his philosophy (see [Dilthey 1985–2010](#)). For Dilthey, the human sciences comprise the humanities and social sciences alike. The human sciences span literature, psychology, and sociology, as well as anthropology and economics. In these areas, human beings are not confronting law-like natural events, but freedom, normativity, and self-expression. These domains do not beg *explanation*, but invite self-reflection and self-critique, which Dilthey characterizes as *understanding*. [De Mul 2004](#) underscores this aspect of Dilthey's work. Dilthey later turns to the concept of life. Life, he argues, is the natural impetus of the human, the way in which nature gets articulated within the areas of culture and symbolic expression. Dilthey finds it helpful to think of particular symbolic expressions as manifestations of lived experience. These experiences, he further argues, are unique and cannot be captured by nomothetic, generalizing procedures. What is needed, rather, is a feeling or intuition of the individual action or text as individual, yet as symbolically expressing the larger cultural and societal whole of which it is a part. [Makkreel 1975](#) places this in a Kantian framework and argues that reflective judgment is central to Dilthey's hermeneutic thinking.

Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Selected Works*. 6 vols. Edited by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985–2010.

A reliable and well-edited translation of Dilthey's work. For his hermeneutic philosophy see in particular Volume 1, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*; Volume 3, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*; and Volume 4, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*.

de Mul, Jos. *The Tragedy of Finitude: Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life*. Translated by Tony Burrett. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

A concise discussion of the key concepts of Dilthey's philosophy that portrays Dilthey as torn between Romanticism and positivism. Draws on biographical data as well as the wider context of German culture in order to understand and explain Dilthey's status, along with Nietzsche and Heidegger, as a philosopher of finitude.

Makkreel, Rudolf. *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975.

A key text in Anglophone Dilthey studies. Makreel surveys the development and strengths of Dilthey's position and the subtlety of his hermeneutic vocabulary. He pays particular attention to Dilthey's concept of imagination. The work also compares Dilthey's account of the human sciences with his predecessors (Schleiermacher and others) as well as later philosophers such as Edmund Husserl.

Makkreel, Rudolf. "Wilhelm Dilthey." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2008.

An informative article-length overview of Dilthey's work. Includes a comprehensive bibliography.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

Dilthey's work in hermeneutics prepared the ground for Heidegger and Gadamer. Yet Heidegger and Gadamer both wished to mark a critical distance from Dilthey. In their view, Dilthey represents an undue scientific attitude in hermeneutics. Understanding, they argue, is not first and foremost the method of the human sciences. Rather, understanding characterizes the particular way in which humans inhabit the world. This marks the shift from an epistemological to an ontologically oriented hermeneutics. Like previous hermeneutic philosophers, Heidegger and Gadamer ask: How is understanding possible? (See Schleiermacher's Linguistic Turn and Dilthey's Theorizing the Human Sciences.) Yet unlike Schleiermacher and Dilthey, they are not primarily interested in the interpreter's access to texts from culturally or temporally distant eras. Nor do they answer the "how possible?" question by reference to transcendental arguments or the formal structure of mind and language. As summarized in [Grondin 2001](#), Heidegger and Gadamer explore the fundamental disclosure of a field of intelligibility in which interpretation and assertive judgment take place. Human practice, in their view, is historical and linguistically mediated throughout. Hence, understanding is not a scholarly attitude or method that distinguishes the humanities from the natural sciences. Nor is it a tool for dealing with old or inaccessible texts and artworks. It is, rather, the most fundamental feature of human existence (see [Wachterhauser 1994](#)). In the phenomenological vein, philosophy itself is a hermeneutics of facticity. [Bernstein 1983](#) draws helpful comparisons between Gadamerian hermeneutics and the concerns of Anglophone philosophy of language.

Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

Bernstein situates the concerns of German hermeneutics within the framework of Anglophone epistemology and philosophy of language, and aims to undermine the division between European and Anglophone approaches. The book offers a lucid picture of anti-Cartesian currents in 20th-century philosophy and is useful for undergraduate and graduate students alike.

Grondin, Jean. *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer. Unterwegs zur Hermeneutik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001.

Overview of the development in hermeneutics from Heidegger to Gadamer and a good exposition of the motivations behind the ontological turn in hermeneutics.

Wachterhauser, Brice R., ed. *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994.

A valuable collection of essays by German and American scholars. The collection covers the ontological turn in hermeneutics by focusing on the question of truth and includes articles that address topics spanning from Heidegger's notion of world-disclosure to Gadamer and Davidson.

Heidegger's *Being and Time*

In *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996), Heidegger reintroduces the term “hermeneutic circle.” In Schleiermacher's work, the “hermeneutic circle” refers to the relationship between the understanding of the parts and the understanding of the text as a whole (see Schleiermacher's Linguistic Turn). Heidegger, however, expands it to include the way in which Dasein (his term for human being) is always already situated within a historical and culturally coded context of practice and interaction. Dasein understands itself through an understanding of these practices, yet this understanding changes Dasein so that a final and fully lucid self-determination is always out of reach. It is the task of the hermeneutic philosopher to spell out the ontological structures of Dasein's hermeneutic being. This is Heidegger's undertaking in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996). *Being and Time* first found an Anglo-American readership through Kaufmann 1956 and the effort to situate Heidegger in the existentialist tradition from Kierkegaard to Sartre. In this reception, the hermeneutic aspects of Heidegger's work were toned down so as to highlight his analysis of Dasein's finitude and his phenomenological description of anxiety and death. In German philosophy, the hermeneutic aspects of Heidegger's work prompted a turn to his notion of truth. Ernst Tugendhat's study on Heidegger and Husserl is groundbreaking in this context (Tugendhat 1992). More recently, the hermeneutic streak of Heidegger's early work, as developed in his lectures on Aristotle and Augustine, is brought to attention in Kisiel 1993 and van Buren 1994. Rorty 1991 finds in Heidegger a promising critique of the orientation toward epistemology in post-Cartesian philosophy. For Rorty, there is a significant affinity between the hermeneutic strands of Heidegger and his own pragmatic philosophy. A slightly different approach is pursued in Dreyfus 1991, which emphasizes the intrinsic pragmatism of Heidegger's hermeneutics. Heidegger, Dreyfus suggests (against Kaufmann 1956 and the first generation of Anglophone Heidegger readers), is not an existentialist. Of importance is how human beings encounter the world in and through practice. Over the past years, Dreyfus has paid more attention to Heidegger's philosophy of the self and sought to integrate this into his pragmatist readings. As evidenced by Wrathall and Malpas 2000, Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger lays the premises for much contemporary Heidegger scholarship, including contributions by Carman, Haugeland, Blattner, and Okrent. Heidegger's hermeneutics has also been appropriated and discussed within Robert Brandom's pragmatist framework (Brandom 2002). For Brandom, *Being and Time* is valuable in that it offers sustained reflections on the conceptual, explanatory, and social nature of normativity.

Brandom, Robert. *Tales of the Mighty Dead*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Brandom's essays in the history of philosophy include his inferentialist interpretation of Hegel, Heidegger, and Gadamer. For students of hermeneutics, the essays on Heidegger and Gadamer (in particular the latter) are valuable in that they explicate Brandom's own take on a problem such as objectivity in understanding.

Dreyfus, Hubert. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

A pragmatist reading of the first part of *Being and Time* that gave shape and content to much debate among Anglophone Heidegger scholars. The book offers an accessible introduction to *Being and Time*, but also represents a novel interpretation of Heidegger's work by a philosopher who seeks to bridge the gap between the European and the Anglophone traditions in philosophy. Dreyfus is also the author and editor of a number of important articles and volumes on Heidegger.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Heidegger's *magnum opus* from 1927 counts as a classic in 20th-century philosophy. Both Division 1 and Division 2 contain insights that are fundamental to the understanding of contemporary hermeneutics.

Kaufmann, Walter, ed. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. London: Penguin, 1956.

An example of the first generation of American Heidegger scholarship. This is a collection of texts that presents Heidegger as part of an existentialist tradition that encompasses authors from Rilke to Kafka, along with philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre.

Kisiel, Theodore. *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

A detailed study of Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy prior to and including *Being and Time*. Kisiel draws on material from Heidegger's earliest lectures and correspondence in order to illuminate the philosophical motivation of his work. He helpfully compares the drafts to *Being and Time*—now published in their own right (as *The Concept of Time* and *History of the Concept of Time*)—with the book as we now know it.

Rorty, Richard. *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. Philosophical Papers 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511609039](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609039)]

Rorty's pragmatist reading of Heidegger makes up the first part of this collection, which also includes essays on Foucault, Habermas, Lyotard, and Castoriadis. For readers with an interest in European philosophy, the book nicely complements the perspective developed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (see [Rorty 1979](#), cited under Anglophone Philosophy and Hermeneutics).

Tugendhat, Ernst. "Heidegger's Idea of Truth." Translated by Christopher Macann. In *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*. 4. vols. Edited by Christopher Macann, 79–92. London: Routledge, 1992.

In an article that summarizes his previous research, Tugendhat argues that Heidegger's hermeneutic concept of truth—truth as the disclosure of a field of meaning and intelligibility—should not be isolated from but complement the more traditional notion of truth as representation. Macann's *Critical Assessments* is an indispensable guide to the different strands of contemporary Heidegger scholarship.

van Buren, John. *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

A study of Heidegger's philosophy in the period leading up to the publication of *Being and Time*. Van Buren emphasizes the theological backdrop of Heidegger's thinking and pays particular attention to his idea of the end of philosophy and the call for a new (ontological) beginning.

Wrathall, Mark, and Jeff Malpas, eds. *Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*. Vol. 1, *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

A collection of that largely respond to Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger. The essays are organized around topics such as authenticity, modernity, selfhood, coping, and intentionality. Includes responses by Dreyfus. The second volume is published as *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science*.

Gadamer and the Dialogue of Understanding

Gadamer started out as a student of Heidegger. In his first book-length study ([Gadamer 1991](#)), however, Gadamer goes beyond his teacher to foreground the fundamental role of dialogue and intersubjective understanding in the search for truth. The hermeneutic impact of this book, and of Gadamer's Plato studies in general, is emphasized in [Wachterhauser 1999](#). In his work on Socrates and Plato, Gadamer argues for a non-objectivizing notion of history and tradition and emphasizes the processual nature of human rationality. This later constituted a crucial aspect of his attempt to critically adopt Hegel's thought of an interplay between self-understanding, truth, and historical consciousness. For Gadamer, the challenge of hermeneutics consists in reflecting on these ideas without committing to the assertion that dialectics transfers into the point of view of

absolute reason (see Hegel's Contribution). In *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 2004), he develops a philosophy of understanding and interpretation, providing a set of systematic reflections on the hermeneutic circle, tradition, and the humanistic ideals of education (*Bildung*). According to [MacIntyre 2002](#) and [Warnke 1987](#) there is, in Gadamer's view, an intrinsic relationship between understanding and self-understanding. Gadamer is concerned mainly with the interpreter's access to the constitutive texts of his or her own tradition. Tradition, Gadamer argues, is a condition of possibility for historical understanding. For this reason, he proposes a reevaluation of the term "prejudice." A prejudice, he suggests, is simply a judgment that is not (yet) subjected to critical assessment. Prejudices make up the thick fabric of beliefs and practice that enables historical understanding and, as such, cannot be overcome *en masse*. What must be sought, rather, is a fusion between the text of the tradition and the outlook of the interpreter: an expansion of the horizon of understanding ([Gadamer 1976](#)). [Taylor 2002](#) emphasizes this aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics. In Gadamer's view, the meaning of the text is not constituted prior to or independent of its application. The very distinction between meaning and application is sublated into a paradigm where the meaning of the text consists in its being realized in a number of different and always changing interpretative circumstances. Hence, the meaning of the text is infinitely rich; it is brought to life in and through tradition itself. A number of contemporary discussions of Gadamer, many of which approach his work from within Anglophone philosophy of mind, are collected in [Hahn 1997](#) and the more recently published articles in [Malpas and Zabala 2010](#).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated and Edited by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

The articles in this collection make for an excellent starting point for readers seeking better knowledge of Gadamer's work. This especially applies to the first part of the collection, "The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection," which addresses a number of problems pointed out by Gadamer's critics in the wake of the publication of *Truth and Method*.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*. Translated by Robert M. Wallace. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991.

This study of Socratic dialectics lays out the premises of Gadamer's later hermeneutics. The work clarifies Gadamer's notion of the dialogical rationality of reason, but is also important in that he, in the beginning of this work, sketches his own procedure of interpretation and positions himself with regard to Heidegger.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2d ed. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004.

A classic within modern hermeneutics, Gadamer's main work starts out with a critique of Kant and the aesthetic tradition (Part One); moves on to a discussion of available positions in hermeneutics (Part Two); and rounds off with an account of truth, tradition, and language (Part Three).

Hahn, Lewis Edwin, ed. *The Philosophy of Hans–Georg Gadamer*. Library of Living Philosophers 24. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

A solid collection of essays by leading theorists of interpretation, spanning the Anglophone as well as the Continental traditions of philosophy. Includes a biographical essay by Gadamer. Gadamer also wrote individual responses to the articles. Along with the *Cambridge Companion* (Taylor 2002) and *Gadamer's Century* (see MacIntyre 2002), this book makes an excellent starting point for students and scholars interested in current debates in hermeneutics.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. "On Not Having the Last Word: Thoughts on Our Debts to Gadamer." In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans–Georg Gadamer*. Edited by Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward, and Jens Kertscher, 157–173. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

A significant voice in American hermeneutics, MacIntyre discusses the relevance of the notions of dialogue and self–understanding. The article is part of an important collection of essays by leading scholars in the field of hermeneutics.

Malpas, Jeff, and Santiago Zabala, eds. *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years after Gadamer's Truth and Method*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010.

A nice collection of essays that cover the systematic aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics as well as his own work in the history of philosophy. Some of the articles address the recent discussion of Gadamer's work from within Anglophone philosophy of language. The ethics and politics of hermeneutics are subject to critical review.

Taylor, Charles. "Gadamer on the Human Sciences." In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Edited by Robert J. Dostal, 126–142. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

[DOI: [10.1017/CCOL0521801931](https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521801931)]

Helpful discussion, by an important voice in Anglophone hermeneutics, of Gadamer's contribution to the methodological self–reflection of the humanities and social sciences. The *Cambridge Companion* is also available in an online edition.

Wachterhauser, Brice R. *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post–Platonic Hermeneutic Ontology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

A detailed study of Gadamer's Plato scholarship and the importance of his Plato studies for his hermeneutic philosophy. Wachterhauser's book also draws lines to Hegel and Heidegger and works well as an (advanced) introduction to Gadamer's work.

Warnke, Georgia. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Valuable in that it discusses Gadamer from a critical point of view, partly influenced by Habermas's call for a dimension of normativity in understanding. Warnke has since expanded her research to include topics such as hermeneutics and feminism.

CRITICAL THEORY, DECONSTRUCTION, AND ANGLOPHONE THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION

Over the fifty years that have passed since the publication of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's work has established a permanent point of reference for hermeneutic discourse (see Gadamer and the Dialogue of Understanding). From within a German tradition, Habermas and Apel have endorsed the linguistic turn in hermeneutics and the emphasis on the dialogical nature of rationality (see Critical Theory and Tradition). Yet these philosophers have also been critical of what they view as a conservative streak in Gadamer's philosophy (see [Lafont 1999](#)). Within French philosophy, there has been an emphasis on the affinities and contrasts between Nietzschean critique and ontological hermeneutics, on the one hand, and the concerns of deconstruction and poststructuralism, on the other (see Poststructuralism and Genealogy). And, more recently, there has been a renewed interest in Gadamer's work from within Anglophone philosophy of language. Robert Brandom and John McDowell are only two of the names worth mentioning in this context (see Anglophone Philosophy and Hermeneutics). Other Anglophone approaches to the historicity of philosophy can be found in [Rorty, et al. 1984](#). Another philosopher who has addressed hermeneutic issues with reference to Nietzsche and Critical Theory is Raymond Geuss (see [Geuss 1999](#) and [Geuss 2005](#)). Finally, [Skinner 2002](#) contains challenging reflections on the epistemology of historical work.

Geuss, Raymond. *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The collection includes essays in the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, as well as a number of articles on Adorno and art.

Geuss, Raymond. *Outside Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

This collection is dedicated mainly to topics in political philosophy and aesthetics, yet two of the essays tackle problems in the philosophy of history (chapters 9 and 13) and will be of interest to students of hermeneutics.

Lafont, Cristina. *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*. Translated by José Medina. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Lafont traces the linguistic turn back to Hamann's critique of Kant and discusses the hermeneutic

contributions of Humboldt, Gadamer, and others. The second part of the book deals with Habermas's theory of communicative action and rationality.

Rorty, Richard, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, eds. *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

[DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511625534](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625534)]

Essays addressing philosophy's relation to its past. Metaphilosophical discussions as well as articles of a more interpretative nature. Contributions by Taylor, MacIntyre, Hacking, Skinner, Burnyeat, Sluga, Frede, and others.

Skinner, Quentin. *Visions of Politics. Vol. 1, Regarding Method*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

The three-volume *Visions of Politics*, in which Skinner discusses early modern political theory, opens with an advanced discussion of epistemological issues in historical research. This is a resource that should be of relevance to students of historicism and hermeneutics.

Critical Theory and Tradition

Although his teacher Theodor W. Adorno had been extremely critical of Heidegger's hermeneutics ([Adorno 2003](#)), Habermas was among the first to enter into a critical dialogue with Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. [Habermas 1990](#), a review of Gadamer's work, misses a clearer orientation toward the question of validity. Gadamer, Habermas claims, entertains a potentially naïve and stifling notion of tradition. He views tradition as a line of great, canonical works. However, this approach overlooks how the canonical status of these works might have been ideologically distorted in ways that escape the attention of the interpreter, whose point of view is typically a product of the very same tradition. Similar concerns have been voiced by Karl-Otto Apel. In [Apel 1997](#), he worries that Gadamer, even though he leaves behind the rhetoric of fundamental ontology, follows Heidegger in emphasizing a hermeneutic world-disclosure that is prior to reflection and considerations of normative nature. Similarly, [Tugendhat 1992](#) argues that Gadamer's notion of truth ultimately is based in the ontological world-disclosure that he ascribes to art. The tension between an orientation toward norms and a commitment to ontology came to guide—and, to some extent, still guides—the discussion of hermeneutics in Germany and the United States. From the point of view of political philosophy and an interest in practical rationality, Alasdair MacIntyre deploys a hermeneutic vocabulary to address the challenge of conflicting traditions and intercultural dialogue and understanding ([MacIntyre 1998](#)). In [Warnke 2007](#), the engagement with hermeneutics triggers an investigation of issues related the politics of race and gender.

Adorno, Theodor W. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. 2d ed. Translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will. London: Routledge, 2003.

Adorno's critique of Heidegger's philosophical language is unyielding, yet articulates a number of challenges to which contemporary hermeneutics ought to be responsive. First published 1964 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).

Apel, Karl-Otto. "Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening: An Attempt at Determining the Logos of Hermeneutics." Translated by Ralf Sommermeier. In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Edited by Lewis E. Hahn, 67-94. Library of Living Philosophers 24. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

Apel summarizes the outcome of a lifelong engagement with hermeneutic issues and theory of interpretation. He offers a thought-provoking critique of Gadamer's turn to tradition and outlines the intellectual orientation of his own discourse ethics.

Habermas, Jürgen. "A Review of *Truth and Method*." Translated by Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy. In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Edited by Gayle L. Orminston and Alan D. Schrift, 213-244. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Habermas's critique of Gadamer is mandatory reading, although he later developed a more positive approach to *Truth and Method*. Serves well as an introduction to Habermas's own thoughts on reason in modernity. The translators of this essay, Dallmayr and McCarthy, are themselves doing important work in the intersection between critical theory and hermeneutics.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *The MacIntyre Reader*. Edited by Kelvin Knight. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.

A collection of essays and excerpts by the author of works such as *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* Although the collection does not center on MacIntyre's engagement with theory of interpretation, it offers an overview of MacIntyre's position and centrality as a hermeneutic thinker.

Tugendhat, Ernst. *Philosophische Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

This collection of essays by a distinguished German philosopher includes an interesting critique of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (in English). Tugendhat worries that Gadamer, against his own intentions, ends up aestheticizing the tradition, and that, as a consequence, his hermeneutic aspirations fail.

Warnke, Georgia. *After Identity: Rethinking Race, Sex, and Gender*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Warnke, a leading voice in feminist hermeneutics, expands her previous discussions of hermeneutics and critical theory to the politics of identity.

Poststructuralism and Genealogy

Like Gadamer, Jacques Derrida (b. 1930–d. 2004), the most well-known representative of French deconstruction, was influenced by Heidegger (see [Derrida 1989](#)). A dialogue between Gadamer and Derrida was initiated but did not lead to a genuine conversation. Nevertheless, the so-called Gadamer–Derrida exchange, which focused on the very possibility of understanding a text, left a mark on Anglophone hermeneutics. While Derrida never saw himself as a hermeneutic philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (b. 1913–d. 2005) wholeheartedly identified with and wished to leave his imprint on hermeneutics (see [Ricoeur 1974](#)). [Ricoeur 1981](#) shares Gadamer's interest in the interplay between language and tradition. However, from Ricoeur's point of view, a fully adequate hermeneutic account must also reflect a Freudian attentiveness to the pre-reflective and unconscious aspects of meaning. That is, it ought to be a hermeneutics of suspicion, or, as he also called it, an anthropological hermeneutics ([Dauenhauer 2005](#)). A similar orientation, though rooted in the framework of Nietzschean genealogy, can be found in [Foucault 1998](#). [Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983](#) emphasizes Foucault's indebtedness to Heidegger. Foucault, however, doubts the relevance of hermeneutics. Nonetheless, he enters into a dialectical exchange with the hermeneutic tradition and even speaks of the hermeneutics of subjectivity (see [Gutting 2005](#)).

Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity, and Truth. Vol. 1 of The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1998.

The first volume in a valuable three-volume collection of texts covering Foucault's thoughts on ethics, aesthetics, politics, power, epistemology, and history. Volume 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, includes a number of historiological and meta-philosophical essays of particular relevance for students of hermeneutics. Volume 3 is titled *Power*.

Dauenhauer, Bernard. "Paul Ricoeur." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. 2005.

Online article that deals in detail with Ricoeur's anthropological hermeneutics and addresses his philosophy of the self, time, narrativity, and history. The Stanford entry lists suggestions for further reading.

Derrida, Jacques. "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer–Derrida Encounter*. Edited by Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, 52–54. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Derrida's critique of Gadamer, which is followed by Gadamer's response. The collection also includes a number of interpretative essays addressing the tension between hermeneutics and deconstruction. The collection might be helpful for students of hermeneutics and literary theory.

Dreyfus, Hubert, and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

A clear overview that pitches Foucault as carving out a methodological alternative beyond hermeneutics. It also discusses his approach to the human sciences and his critique of modern subjectivity.

Gutting, Gary, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[DOI: [10.1017/CCOL0521840821](https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521840821)]

This volume centers on Foucault's philosophical production and includes articles on Foucault's theory of history and his reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The *Cambridge Companion* also covers Foucault's relevance for feminist philosophy, as well as his ethics, aesthetics, and engagement with psychoanalysis.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations*. Edited by Don Ihde. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

A collection of essays addressing hermeneutic topics and issues, such as hermeneutics and philosophy of existence, hermeneutics and structuralism, and hermeneutics and psychoanalysis. A good place to start for students interested in learning more about Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Edited and translated by John B. Thompson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Central essays by Ricoeur and a lucid introduction by the editor. The essays address issues in the history of hermeneutics, but also discuss the epistemologies of the social and human sciences.

Anglophone Philosophy and Hermeneutics

In the work of Donald Davidson (b. 1917–d. 2003), interpretation and translation are discussed from within the context of analytic philosophy of language ([Davidson 2001](#)). Nonetheless, Davidson maintained that there was a significant affinity between his own position and that of Gadamer (see [Davidson 1997](#)). The possibility of such an affinity, while not developed by Davidson himself, has been explored by [Ramberg 1989](#). As opposed to Davidson, [Rorty 1979](#) engages in a more direct dialogue with the tradition of European hermeneutics. Richard Rorty (b. 1931–d. 2007) adopts Heidegger's critique of Cartesian epistemology, yet doubts that Heidegger himself manages to steer clear of the pitfalls of this tradition. According to Rorty, Heidegger, with his notion of fundamental ontology, ultimately falls prey to the same kind of foundationalist thinking that his hermeneutics is meant to overcome. Although Rorty remains preoccupied with Heidegger all the way to his last publications, he is more optimistic about the prospects for a Gadamerian hermeneutics. In Gadamer's work, Rorty finds not only a helpful critique of epistemology, but also a conversational account of philosophy. Though Rorty's reading of Heidegger and Gadamer is somewhat eclectic, he seeks to stage a genuine dialogue between European and Anglo-American philosophy. Another point of intersection between these two traditions can be found in

McDowell 1994. McDowell has been particularly interested in Gadamer's notion of education in culture (*Bildung*). In McDowell's work, this notion is cast in terms of an Aristotelian idea of "second nature." McDowell's point is not to offer a faithful interpretation of Gadamer *per se*, but rather to show the relevance of certain Gadamerian motives within the framework of contemporary philosophy. This is also made clear in his exchange with Dreyfus over the so-called myth of the mental (**McDowell 2007**). The same applies to Robert Brandom (b. 1950), whose recent work appeals to Gadamer's idea of historical interpretation, but also to Hegel and Heidegger (**Brandom 2002**). Another philosopher who successfully synthesizes resources from the analytic and continental traditions is Charles Taylor (b. 1931). His magisterial *Sources of the Self* accounts for the emerging of the modern notions of subjectivity, self-understanding, and self-expression (**Taylor 1989**). Taylor's numerous articles on the social and human sciences, many of which are collected in *Philosophical Papers* (**Taylor 1985**), also need to be mentioned in this context.

Brandom, Robert B. *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Brandom traces inferentialist motives in philosophers from Leibniz and Spinoza, via Kant and Hegel, to Heidegger, Wiggerstein, and Sellars. The book also includes Brandom's reading of Gadamer.

Davidson, Donald. "Gadamer and Plato's Philebus." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Edited by Lewis E. Hahn, 421–433. The Library of Living Philosophers 24. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

Davidson's (mostly affirmative) reading of Gadamer's early work on Plato's *Philebus*. Davidson himself wrote his dissertation on this dialogue, and from this point he develops his thoughts on the possible intersections between hermeneutics and Anglophone theory of interpretation.

Davidson, Donald. *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

[DOI: [10.1093/0199246297.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246297.001.0001)]

A collection of seminal papers in philosophy of language from the 1960s and 1970s, including Davison's essays on truth and meaning, and radical interpretation.

McDowell, John. *Mind and World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

In his efforts to overcome the philosophical myth of the given, McDowell introduces a number of issues that converge with traditional hermeneutic thinking from Hegel onwards. McDowell's discussion of Gadamer's notion of *Bildung* establishes a point of reference for later contributions to the dialogue between hermeneutics and Anglophone philosophy of language.

McDowell, John. "What Myth?" *Inquiry* 50.4 (2007): 338–351.

[DOI: [10.1080/00201740701489211](https://doi.org/10.1080/00201740701489211)]

McDowell responds to Dreyfus's charges that his position involves a return to the myth of the mental. The article is followed by Dreyfus clarifying his critique and an exchange between Dreyfus and McDowell.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Rorty's critique of Cartesian currents in epistemology and his call for a hermeneutic alternative that avoids the model of a mind mirroring the world. The last part of this work deals with Kuhn, Gadamer, and other examples of edifying, hermeneutic philosophies.

Ramberg, Bjørn T. *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

Ramberg's book offers an overview of Davidson's philosophy of truth, language, and interpretation. He also discusses the hermeneutic relevance of Davidson and draws parallels between Davidson and Gadamer.

Taylor, Charles. *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. 1, *Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

First of two volumes (Volume 2 is *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*) containing a number of important essays addressing topics spanning from agency and autonomy, via philosophy of mind and language, to political and social philosophy.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Taylor's study analyzes the birth of the inner man in the modern era. In encounters with philosophers from Augustine to Descartes and beyond, Taylor develops his own version of expressivism and his concept of modernity.

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