

**Classical Otherness:
Critical Reflections on the Place of Philology in
Gadamer's Hermeneutics**

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ABSTRACT: *Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics rests largely on the concept of the classical. According to Gadamer, the classical stands for the continuity and the truth claim of the tradition, as transmitted by the written word. The normative character of the classical is directed against the neutrality and relativism of historicism: understanding does not occur primarily through distancing or methodological reconstruction but through belongingness to, and participation in, the past. The article shows how, given the central importance of dialogue and otherness in Gadamer's theory, the philosopher does not seem to fully do justice to the critical intention of its own dialogical and philological dimensions. On the other hand, it shows also how Gadamer's hermeneutical practice, notably in his rehabilitation of Plato, stresses the learning from otherness more explicitly than does his own theory, thus correcting, as it were, the latter. The article aims, finally, at demonstrating how, by unduly emphasizing the continuity (and sameness) in the encounter between past and present, Gadamer's theory undermines the importance of reconstructing the otherness and specificity of the classical text.*

KEY WORDS: *Alterity. Classics. Gadamer. Hermeneutics. Humanities. Interpretation. Otherness. Philology.*

RESUMO: *A hermenêutica filosófica de Gadamer, entendida como uma defesa das humanidades, assenta essencialmente sobre o conceito de clássico. Segundo Gadamer, o clássico representa a continuidade e a pretensão à verdade da tradição tal como nos é transmitida pela palavra escrita. O carácter normativo do clássico em Gadamer constitui assim uma resposta crítica à neutralidade e ao relativismo do historicismo: a compreensão não acontece primariamente graças a um processo de distanciação ou reconstrução metódica, mas sim pelo facto de, desde logo, reconhecermos que temos pertença activa no passado. O presente artigo demonstra como, dada a importância central do diálogo e da alteridade na teoria de Gadamer, o filósofo acaba por não fazer inteiramente justiça à intenção crítica inerente à dimensão dialógica e filológica do seu próprio pensamento. Mostra-se também, por outro lado, até que ponto a prática hermenêutica de Gadamer, nomeadamente no que se refere à sua reabilitação de*

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Platão, acaba por sublinhar a nossa aprendizagem da alteridade de uma forma muito mais explícita do que a sua própria teoria parece capaz de fazer. O artigo mostra ainda como, ao sublinhar de forma indevida a continuidade e, com ela, a identidade no encontro entre o passado e o presente, a teoria de Gadamer parece comprometer a importância que se deve dar ao esforço de reconstrução da alteridade e especificidade do próprio texto clássico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Alteridade. Clássicos. Filologia. Gadamer. Hermenêutica. Humanidades clássicas. Interpretação. Textualidade.

Für Ulrike

I try to interpret history, try to understand what is expressed in it, from the perspective I have gained through my own experience. What I am able to understand in this way I make my own; what I cannot understand I reject. If I have understood your view correctly, then I have to ask: How is it possible, on the basis of this view of the interpretation of history, to learn something new from history? Doesn't it make history simply a sequence of illustrations for what I want to say and for what I already know without the benefit of history?

H. Arendt to K. Jaspers, July 15, 1926.¹

I. The Classical as Continuity

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics ultimately rests upon a defense of the humanistic tradition and its truth claim. This defense centers upon the concept of the classical. This classical orientation has often been criticized as a form of traditionalism.² Instead of rejecting, as many critics do, the Gadamerian concept of the classical *in toto*, or denying its central function in *Truth and Method* (hereafter *TM*), as many sympathizing commentators do, this essay attempts to clarify its central importance and its critical potential as well as its problematic character.

The discussion of the concept of the classical in *TM*, entitled "The Example of the Classical," covers no more than six pages.³ Its central thematic importance, however, can hardly be overlooked. Gadamer, in the afterword to the third edition of *TM* (1972), characterizes the classical as "the historical-effective cate-

¹ Arendt (1992, 3); in the German original: Arendt (1985, 39): "[I]ch versuche die Geschichte zu deuten, das was sich in ihr ausspricht zu verstehen von dem, was ich aus meiner Erfahrung schon weiß. Was mir in diesem Sinn verständlich ist, eigene ich mir an, was nicht, stoße ich ab. Wenn ich nun Ihre Ausführungen richtig verstanden habe, so erhebt sich für mich die folgende Frage: Wie ist von dieser Auffassung einer Geschichtsinterpretation her möglich etwas Neues aus der Geschichte zu erfahren? Wird so die Geschichte nicht lediglich zu einer Reihe von Illustrationen für das, was ich sagen will und auch ohne die Geschichte schon weiß?"

² Habermas (1971, 283); Apel (1976, 47); Jauss (1970, 186ff.); Warning (1986).

³ *Wahrheit und Methode (WM)* in *Gesammelte Werke (GW)* 1, 290-296; *Truth and Method (TM)*, Second Revised Edition, translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, Second edition, Crossroad New York, 1989, 285-291.

gory *par excellence*" (*die wirkungsgeschichtliche Kategorie schlechthin*).⁴ Moreover, the treatment of the classical appears most significantly in the decisive chapter "Prejudices as conditions of Understanding,"⁵ immediately following the section "The Rehabilitation of Authority and Tradition." The classical embodies nothing less than the key principle of Gadamer's entire hermeneutics: the continuity of tradition as the history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and its truth claim.⁶

One must first consider the larger historical context of Gadamer's hermeneutics. His appropriation of the classical stands in the wake of German classical humanism (Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe) and of Nietzsche's revolution against historicism and its positivistic philology.⁷ Inspired by Nietzsche's second *Untimely Consideration*, (*Of the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*), Gadamer adopts "monumental history." Monumental history is understood as the establishment of great models and is opposed to what is then seen as the self-forgetfulness of objective, scientific history – "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*."⁸ Philology as conceived by Wilamowitz, especially after the Second World War, had lost its credibility and appeal for a new German generation, a generation in search of both intellectual and existential reorientation. The significance of the research for life, for contemporary life, proved of paramount importance.⁹ Like

⁴ "Nachwort zur 3. Auflage," in *GW* 2, 1972, 476.

⁵ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 281-296; *TM*, 277-307.

⁶ One exception is Weinsheimer (1985, 133), who characterizes the concept of the classical as "the first and last principle of Gadamer's hermeneutics" and "the fundamental presupposition" of *TM*. He also devotes an entire chapter to it: see Weinsheimer (1991).

⁷ "Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft," in *GW* 8, 1983, 261. On the German humanistic tradition between the two world wars, more specifically on the George Circle, Paul Natorp, Paul Friedländer and the immediate background, namely the Nietzsche-Wilamowitz quarrel, see Sullivan, "On the Philological Background of Gadamer's Early Writings," in Sullivan (1989, 17-52). Gadamer sees in the influence of George's poetry a chronological (biographical) priority of poetry as a whole upon his thinking over Heidegger's "oral teaching" in Marburg (*GW* 9, 1983, 262). For a fuller account of these and other biographical aspects see Grondin (1999a).

⁸ "Philosophie und Philologie. Über Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf," in *GW* 6, 1982, 275; Cf. "Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft," in *GW* 9, 1983, 263, 266.

⁹ *GW* 6, 1982, 274f. The turning towards monumental history, as formulated in Nietzsche's humanistic attack on the nineteenth century positivistic research programme, now associated with the great Wilamowitz, is documented in a personal letter of Paul Friedländer, Plato scholar and teacher of Gadamer in Marburg (1924-1927). This letter from July 4, 1921 to Wilamowitz, Friedländer's former teacher, has been regarded as "the most important testimony to this discussion" (Vogt, in Flashar 1979, 623). In it Friedländer (in Calder 1980, 96) writes: "Nietzsche, who has been gradually influencing my whole outlook on life since my youth, helped me in particular to form my view on 'historical knowledge' [...] I could not like others begin in 1919 where I had stopped in 1914. I now make greater demands on myself as to the necessity which things have to have for me." Friedländer in this letter mentions other names, among these the important

the Renaissance humanists, the new German generation sought in the classics aid in solving contemporary problems.

Gadamer's humanistic hermeneutics reasserts the concept of the exemplary (*das Vorbildliche*): "Hermeneutics always seeks, in a return to the original sources, to gain a new understanding of something which has been corrupted by distortion, disfigurement or misuse [...] The new efforts should be directed not merely to understanding correctly, but also to asserting the exemplary afresh."¹⁰ It is no accident that *TM* begins with the rehabilitation of the humanistic tradition.¹¹ The prime motivation of Gadamer's entire hermeneutics consists in the rehabilitation of the truth claim of the (humanistic) tradition: one ought to relearn to let tradition speak to us in an immediate and personal manner.

This plea is directed emphatically against the neutrality of historicism. The historical consciousness of the nineteenth century, as is well known, sought to relativize historically all insight: every work of art, every mode of thinking were seen as belonging to an age and to be no less and no more valuable than any other. This historical relativism rejects every normative claim, the very basis of the concept of the classical. According to Gadamer, the normativity of the classical, in reality, has never entirely been extinguished: it lives in the very continuity of the humanistic tradition, as testified among others by the survival (although now tenuous) of the ideal of liberal education.¹² The normative element has been explicitly or implicitly acknowledged in every humanism, be it the Italian Renaissance, German classicism, the so-called "Third humanism" inaugurated by W.

Nietzsche-mediator, Stefan George. This letter is also cited by Gadamer in his article on Stefan George (*GW* 9, 1983, 261). Also in 1921, Friedländer writes at the beginning of his review of Wilamowitz's famous *Griechische Verskunst* the following: "Science and its devotees would do well to question, more often as is currently the case, the meaning [*Sinn*] of their works" (in: *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 1921, 409-417, 409; reissued in Friedländer 1958).

Werner Jaeger, the author of the once important but now largely forgotten *Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen* (1933-1944), for his part, emphasizes in his Basel Inaugural lecture, "Philologie und Historie" (1914, in Jaeger 1960, 1-16) the importance of a reexamination of the basic orientation and meaningfulness of all research. In his brief but momentous "Introduction" to the first issue of the new journal, *Die Antike*, founded by him, he affirms (1926, 1) that the newly conceived philology aims at "making knowledge of ancient culture fruitful for contemporary intellectual life." See also the comparable, although less programmatic, view of Karl Reinhardt, "Die klassische Philologie und das Klassische" (1942, in 1960), 334-360.

¹⁰ "Hermeneutik sucht überall in Rückkehr zu den originalen Quellen ein neues Verständnis für etwas zu gewinnen, das durch Verzerrung, Entstellung oder Mißbrauch verdorben war [...] Dem sollte die neue Anstrengung gelten, nicht bloß richtiger zu verstehen, sondern Vorbildliches neu geltend zu machen" ("Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik" in *GW* 2, 1968, 95).

¹¹ See Grondin (1995, 111-123).

¹² *WM*, in *GW* 1, 24; *TM*, 18.

Jaeger, or any other individualized attempt to return to Antiquity.¹³ Gadamer's hermeneutics attempts to show how the underlying continuity of a still living tradition – even after the rise of the historical method – is still operative and can be brought to consciousness. His attempt therefore tends to relativize the fundamental break caused by historical consciousness. The very thesis of the continuity of the humanistic tradition inevitably leads to a difficult and ambivalent rapprochement of pre-historical and post-historical hermeneutics.¹⁴ Despite the consciousness of temporal distance, both methodological and philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer claims, must recognize their common normative roots and relearn to take their bearing from them.

On the other hand, philosophical hermeneutics shares with historicism the rejection of both the humanistic canon and the unhistorical appropriation of the past by humanists. Indeed, Gadamer's defense of the classical is at the same time a critique of classicism. In opposition to the traditional canon, the classical in Gadamer is not a stylistic category or term of mere periodization. While the canon by definition is plural, determined and dogmatic, the classical in his hermeneutics is singular, undetermined and open.¹⁵ It constitutes an undetermined appeal.¹⁶ And yet humanism and the classical, as Gadamer admits, are permanently exposed to the danger of falling back into the dogmatism of the classicistic thought. This danger is no other than the tendency to sedimentation, inherent in language, as exposed in Husserl's *Krisis*. However, the classical does not necessarily succumb to this danger, as Gadamer rightly maintains, for it is capable, at least in principle, of establishing a living and critical encounter with the past.¹⁷

While the classical is not a stylistic category attached to a specific period in history, Greek classical thought, nevertheless, clearly enjoys in Gadamerian hermeneutics a privileged status. Gadamer's work is characterized by what he himself calls the "grecomania of German philosophizing."¹⁸ How does he then justify the priority of Ancient, Greco-Roman, classics? The priority, according to Gadamer, already lies in the facticity of Western history, whose origins go back to classical Greece. Philosophical hermeneutics precisely seeks to reaffirm this underlying identity, while at the same time seeing in it a privileged illustration of the phenomenon of tradition in general. The question arises however as to

¹³ See the collective work of Cassin (1992) on the diverse contemporary appropriations of Antiquity.

¹⁴ "[E]rst im Scheitern des naiven Historismus des historischen Jahrhunderts wird sichtbar, daß der Gegensatz von unhistorisch-dogmatisch und historisch, von Tradition und historischer Wissenschaft, von antik und modern, kein schlechthiniger ist. Die berühmte *querelle des anciens et des modernes* hört auf, eine wirkliche Alternative zu stellen" (*WM*, "Vorwort zur 2. Auflage," in *GW* 2, 1969, 444; *TM*, XXXIV). Cf. Krämer (1993, 178).

¹⁵ Weinsheimer (1991, 131).

¹⁶ Weinsheimer (1991, 136).

¹⁷ For the opposite view, see Scholtz' critique of the classical: Scholtz (1987, 29).

¹⁸ "Die griechische Philosophie und das moderne Denken" in *GW* 6, 1978, 3.

whether this defense of the continuity of hermeneutics truly represents, as intended, an overcoming of historicism or rather a return to pre-historical thinking. To be sure, Gadamer's hermeneutics, being an offspring of historical consciousness, is inevitably in tension with historicism.¹⁹

What does the classical, in Gadamer's view, consist in? In its inexhaustible power to speak to us through the ages.²⁰ "Classical is what stands up the test of time [...] What we call 'classical' does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its constant mediation it overcomes this distance by itself. The classical then is certainly 'timeless', but its timelessness is a mode of historical being."²¹ The classical is then that which survives history, the very continuity of tradition. This continuity supplies the conditions for all understanding, namely the belongingness (*Zugehörigkeit*) of, and his participation in, a common culture.²² Continuity is not a given, underlines Gadamer, but is achieved by consciousness. It is every time reestablished when one entirely "applies" oneself to, or take truly seriously, any object of understanding as necessarily rooted in the past. The achievement of continuity is the contemporaneity (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) of understanding. Gadamer conceives contemporaneity as *theoria* in the original, religious sense of sacral communion, that is "pure presence."²³ It is a matter of integrating that which is not contemporaneous, typically the old text, into one's own present, so that the text, despite temporal distance, may be taken seriously and experienced as present.²⁴

Gadamer in *TM* grounds the intellectual contemporaneity and immediacy of the classical in language (*Sprachlichkeit*), more precisely in the specific linguistics

¹⁹ Similar to Werner Jaeger's "Third humanism," Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics aims at a *historical* humanism and, thereby, at a difficult reconciliation of historicism and humanism, of science and life. Gadamer's hermeneutics distinguishes itself from Jaeger's programme, however, in enlarging and raising the classical to the status of a universal phenomenon.

²⁰ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 1960, 293; *TM* 287. The etymology of the word, on which Gadamer does not comment, clearly shows the normative element of the classical. A *classicus* is originally a citizen who belongs to the higher class of society and who therefore enjoys a privileged and recognized social status. Hence the later use of the word *classicus* to characterize an exemplary author, as is first testified by Aulus Gellius *Noctes atticae* XIII 17: "classicus [...] scriptor, non proletarius." The classical author is exemplary because he has passed the test of time. Cf. Horace's well-known verse: "est vetus atque probus, centum qui perfecit annos" Epistle II, 1, 35.

²¹ "Klassisch ist, was der historischen Kritik gegenüber standhält [...] Was 'klassisch' heißt ist nicht erst der Überwindung des historischen Abstandes bedürftig – denn es vollzieht selber in beständiger Vermittlung diese Überwindung. Was klassisch ist, ist daher gewiß 'zeitlos', aber diese Zeitlosigkeit ist eine Weise geschichtlichen Seins." (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 295; *TM* 290).

²² *WM*, in *GW* 1, 286f.; *TM* 282f.

²³ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 129; *TM* 123. Cf. Plato, Parmenides 131b; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 7; On the concept of the sudden (exaiphnes, *Augenblick*) see Beierwaltes (1966).

²⁴ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 132; *TM* 127.

tic element of tradition, writing (*Schriftlichkeit*). In writing lies the classical's "immediate power to speak" (*die unmittelbare Sagkraft*) to us through the ages. Writing is, for Gadamer, intellectuality (*Geistigkeit*) in its purest form: it speaks to every present "as pure spirit". This form of intellectuality consists in detaching, liberating as it were, writing from its contingent origins, from its original author and addressee.²⁵ "People who can read what has been handed down in writing produce and achieve the sheer present of the past [...]. In the form of writing, all tradition is contemporaneous with each present time."²⁶ The immediate historical conditions of a writing are therefore of secondary importance to its understanding. Gadamer thereby establishes the distinction between "remains" (*Resten*) and "texts." The rests of the past are fragments, such as ruins, which can no longer be understood by themselves. This is meant to correspond to the distinction between history and philology, which in turn parallels Gadamer's distinction question (*Frage*) and opinion (*Meinung*). This distinction is crucial for his hermeneutics. It is also problematic. For the question arises as to what entitles one to determine whether a text from the past is for the present merely a remain or whether it rather belongs to tradition. Gadamer's only possible answer: the continuous tradition itself.

Gadamer radicalizes the idealistic presupposition of the classical by explicitly appropriating Hegel's definition of it: it is "that which is self-significant and hence also self-interpretive" (*das sich selbst Bedeutende und damit auch sich selber Deutende*).²⁷ Classical is, Gadamer adds: "that which lasts, because it has in itself significance and interprets itself" (*was sich bewahrt, weil es sich selber bedeutet und sich selber deutet*).²⁸ The classical "needs no historical reconstruction, because it has in itself significance and interprets itself; it also makes its 'world' intelligible, by making us partake of this and belongs thus to our 'world.'"²⁹ However, Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel also includes a correction of Hegel's thesis of the death of (classical) art: since time is continuous, the past is never entirely gone, and the classical really is not "of the past." Gadamer concludes, again quoting Hegel, that one experiences art not so much as art, but "as religion, as the presence of the divine" (*als Religion, als Gegenwart des Göttlichen*).³⁰

²⁵ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 381; *TM* 375.

²⁶ "Wer schriftlich Überliefertes zu lesen weiß, bezeugt und vollbringt die reine Gegenwart der Vergangenheit [...] In der Form der Schrift ist alles Überlieferte für jede Gegenwart gleichzeitig" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 169, 393; *TM* 163, 390).

²⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Ästhetik* II, Werke 14, 13; *WM*, in *GW* 1, 294; *TM* 289.

²⁸ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 294; *TM* 289. See Scholtz' critique of Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel: Scholtz (1987, 24). Gadamer himself (*GW* 2, 1972, 461) admits to having made "a quite vague use" (*einen recht vagen Gebrauch*) of Hegel.

²⁹ "[Das Klassische] braucht die historische Rekonstruktion nicht, weil es sich selbst bedeutet und deutet, aber es gibt mit sich selbst auch seine 'Welt' zu erkennen, gibt uns Anteil an dieser Welt und gehört dadurch auch schon zu unserer Welt." (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 295; *TM* 290).

³⁰ *WM*, in *GW* 2, 1972, 472.

The closely related objections often raised against Gadamer's concept of the classical and, more generally, of tradition as a whole, are twofold: these are insufficiently historical or critical.³¹ This criticism, as we shall see, is only partly valid. Gadamer's concept of the classical is in tension with his principle of the historical and dialogical structure of all understanding, conceived as in-between (*Dazwischen*). In *TM* one reads the following: "the place between strangeness and familiarity, which the tradition has for us, is the in-between between the character of the distant object with its historically determined intention and the belongingness to a tradition. In this between lies the true locus of hermeneutics."³² The classical, being contemporary and immediate to every present, "does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its own constant mediation it overcomes this distance by itself."³³ The problem appears to be the following: the classical lies beyond the hermeneutical in-between, defined as the true locus of hermeneutics, thus abolishing the dual character of every genuine hermeneutical experience.³⁴ Gadamer insists, it is true, upon the undogmatic character of the classical: the conservation (*Bewahrung*) of the classical only occurs through constant testing (*Bewährung*).³⁵ But, in actuality, the truth of the classical, defended by him, appears to have been decided from the outset: it is by definition a superior truth which one necessarily acknowledges if one understands at all.³⁶ The classical, conceived as the past which is meaningful to us, really is a hidden present, a quasi-timeless contemporaneity secured by continuity.³⁷ Thus understood, the classical appears deprived of the historical structure of question and answer, and overcomes – albeit *per impossibile* – temporal distance.

Herein lies the decisive difference between Gadamer's humanistic hermeneutics and Heidegger's critical "dismantling" (*Destruktion*) of the tradition. While Heidegger's dismantling of the tradition forms a kind of "methodological" prin-

ciple, understanding for Gadamer occurs "always already" through the "life of language" itself. Gadamer speaks, it is true, of the historical distortion of the "original" or "natural" interconnection between speaking and thinking. His ambivalent position towards the Heideggerian project of dismantling is manifest in the following passage: "This changed relationship of word and sign is at the basis of concept formation in science and has become so self-evident to us that it requires a special effort of memory of its own to recall that, alongside the scientific ideal of unambiguous designation, the life of language itself continues unchanged."³⁸ The task of dismantling is regarded as meaningful and necessary only when forgetfulness has taken place. Dismantling occurs mostly by itself through language itself.³⁹ There exists therefore a tension in Gadamer's own hermeneutics between, on the one hand, language as dialogue, which is capable of continual self-generation and, on the other, the (partial) "dismantling" task as an historical and special effort.

E. Tugendhat formulates the challenging thesis that the "late" Gadamer opts for a return to Heidegger's critical conception of hermeneutics.⁴⁰ In "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" (1972) for instance, highlighted by Tugendhat, reflection upon and critique of one's own prejudices become the principal task of hermeneutics: interpretation is even identified with Nietzsche's demand for the critique of consciousness: "Now interpretation refers not only to the actual intention of a difficult text. Interpretation becomes an expression for getting behind the surface phenomena and data."⁴¹ Tugendhat sees in this a turning point in Gadamer's thinking and a return to the Heidegger of the twenties.⁴² It is undeni-

³¹ Jauss (1970, 186ff.); Warning (1986, 77-100).

³² "Die Stellung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit, die die Überlieferung für uns hat, ist das Zwischen zwischen der historisch gemeinten, abständigen Gegenständlichkeit und der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Tradition. In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 300; *TM* 295).

³³ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 295; *TM* 287.

³⁴ Lang (1982, 23).

³⁵ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 295; *TM* 287.

³⁶ Lang (1982, 24). Gadamer himself formulates the problem as follows without however really offering a solution: "Die Dialektik von Frage und Antwort, die ich entfaltet hatte, wird hier nicht ungültig, aber sie modifiziert sich: Die ursprüngliche Frage, auf die ein Text als Antwort verstanden werden muß, hat hier [...] von ihrem Ursprung her Ursprungsüberlegenheit und -freiheit an sich [...], Sprechend ist es [...] immer nur dann, wenn es ursprünglich spricht. d.h., als wäre es mir gesagt [...] was so spricht, setzt dadurch ein Maß. Hier liegt das Problem. Die ursprüngliche Frage, auf die der Text als Antwort verstanden wird, nimmt in solchem Fall eine Sinnidentität in Anspruch, die immer schon den Abstand zwischen Ursprung und Gegenwart vermittelt hat" (*GW* 2, 1972, 476).

³⁷ "Ich glaube nicht an eine Wiederkehr prä-historischer Hermeneutik, sondern an ihren tatsächlichen Fortbestand" (Gadamer 1978, 9).

³⁸ "Dieses verwandelte Verhältnis von Wort und Zeichen liegt der Begriffsbildung der Wissenschaft insgesamt zugrunde und ist für uns so selbstverständlich geworden, daß es einer eigenen kunstvollen Erinnerung bedarf, daß neben dem wissenschaftlichen Ideal eindeutiger Bezeichnung das *Leben der Sprache* selber unverändert weitertreibt" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 437; *TM*, 433-34; our emphasis).

³⁹ "Begriffsgeschichte als Philosophie," in *GW* 2, 1970, 84f.

⁴⁰ Tugendhat (1992).

⁴¹ "Interpretation meint nun nicht nur die Auslegung der eigentlichen Meinung eines schwierigen Textes: Interpretation wird ein Ausdruck für das Zurückgehen hinter die offenkundigen Phänomene und Gegebenheiten" ("Hermeneutik als praktische Philosophie" (1976b, 93); "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" in Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (trans. by F.G. Lawrence), Boston, 1981, 100. Cf. "Semantik und Hermeneutik" in *GW* 2, 1968, 182; "Semantic and Hermeneutics," in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (trans. by D.E. Linge), Berkeley, 1976, 93.

⁴² Tugendhat (1992, 431f.) writes: "for Gadamer the study of history is not a necessary condition for arriving at something else (self-clarification), but is presupposed as a fact, as something going on anyway, whereupon the question is raised of how it can become meaningful." With respect to the article "Hermeneutik als praktische Philosophie" (in Gadamer, 1976b, 78-109), Tugendhat goes on (*Ibid.*): "Gadamer pursues this thought further. He points out that since Nietzsche the concept of interpretation has acquired a depth-dimension: to interpret means to go behind the phenomenon of consciousness. He thus rediscovers that concept of hermeneutics with which Heidegger had started out."

able that Gadamer, in response to critics, notably J. Habermas, has gradually melted down his anti-methodological position and sought to incorporate in it a critical reflection.⁴³ Indeed, Gadamer increasingly insists upon the consciousness of one's hermeneutical prejudices as a condition to any openminded encounter with the tradition: one may not read an author of the past purely and simply from the point of view of the present.⁴⁴

Still, Tugendhat's thesis of a "turn" in the "late" Gadamer appears somewhat overblown. For Gadamer's hermeneutics in the seventies and eighties, notwithstanding this noticeable and significant change of emphasis, betrays a lingering ambivalence between appropriation and critique. This ambivalence is apparent in the central concept of the "consciousness of effected history" (*das wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein*). The "consciousness of effected history" has a two-fold meaning: it denotes at once the consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) of historical determination and the consciousness which knows itself to be determined (*Bewußtsein*). The polemical intention of *TM*, directed against the self-understanding of the human sciences and the model of the natural sciences, lies in the emphasis upon historical determination. Language is, according to one of Gadamer's famous assertions, "more being than consciousness" (*mehr Sein als Bewußtsein*).

The problem of the non-dialectical or dogmatic character of the classical is closely linked to the Gadamerian conception of writing (*Schriftlichkeit*). The classical is meant to characterize the peculiarity of the work of art, notably the eminent text. Gadamer's underlying position seems, at first, to equate philosophy and art. It is, however, doubtful whether philosophy belongs to literature in the same fundamental manner as, for instance, poetry. Gadamer's observations on the relationship between philosophy and poetry remain ambiguous.⁴⁵ Following Heidegger, he chiefly emphasizes the common ground: both dialogue and poetry are living language and therefore search for the right word, that is participation in

common meaning.⁴⁶ Concerning Plato, the philosopher who in Gadamer's eyes most perfectly combined in his writings art and philosophy, Gadamer writes: "Today I would see the unique contemporaneity of the Platonic dialogues precisely in the fact that it transcends all ages *almost* in the same way as great master pieces of art."⁴⁷ What does this curious, restrictive "almost" imply? What exactly does the difference between philosophy and art consist in? In "Philosophy and Literature" (1981) Gadamer clearly asserts that the principal difference lies in the peculiar language of philosophy, namely in its conceptuality.⁴⁸ The conceptuality of philosophy is not fixed once and for all, but is fundamentally changing. While the work of art is closed and autonomous, the philosophical text remains, through its unfixed and groping language, incomplete and open.

Gadamer relativizes writing by subordinating it to language (*Sprachlichkeit*). The hermeneutical task consists in the overcoming of the self-alienation inherent to writing, so as to regain the original force of living speech. He above all stresses the proximity between the spoken and the written word. He maintains, against Derrida, that the introduction of writing does not bring about any fundamental changes to language.⁴⁹ Thus, in explicit disagreement with Heidegger's critique of "the language of metaphysics," Gadamer writes: "For this reason, philosophical texts really are not texts or works but contributions to a dialogue handed down through the ages."⁵⁰ The function of writing, as expounded in Plato's *Phaedrus*, is merely a help for the remembrance of the spoken word. Philosophical works are "on the way to language" (*unterwegs zur Schrift*).⁵¹

Gadamer's fundamental tendency to seek the common in the different here becomes problematic. Indeed the virtual non-differentiation between written and

⁴⁶ Gadamer ends his article "Philosophie und Literatur" (*GW* 8, 1981, 256f.) as follows: "Philosophie [hat] dieselbe Art von unerreichbarer Ferne und Fernwirkung und zugleich von absoluter Gegenwärtigkeit [...], die dem Pantheon der Kunst für uns alle zukommt. Fortschritt gibt es weder in der Philosophie noch in der Kunst. In beiden und gegenüber beiden kommt es auf etwas anderes an: Teilhabe zu gewinnen."

⁴⁷ "Heute würde ich gerade darin die einzigartige Aktualität der platonischen Dialoge sehen, daß sie die Zeiten *fast* so überschreiten, wie alle großen Meisterwerke der Kunst es tun" ("Platos dialektische Ethik" – beim Wort genommen", in *GW* 7, 1989, 126; "Gadamer on Gadamer", in Silvermann 1991, 19; our emphasis).

⁴⁸ "Philosophie und Literatur," in *GW* 8, 1981, 240-257.

⁴⁹ *GW* 7, 1983, 262. See the collection of essays on hermeneutics and deconstruction edited by D.P. Michelfelder and R.E. Palmer (1989).

⁵⁰ "Die Texte der Philosophie sind aus diesem Grund nicht eigentlich Texte oder Werke, sondern Beiträge zu einem durch die Zeiten gehenden Gespräch [...]. Plato hat vielleicht recht: die philosophischen Texte, die wir so nennen, sind in Wahrheit Interventionen in einem ins Unendliche weitergehenden Dialog [...]. Vielleicht liegt gerade darin eine innere Nachbarschaft von Philosophie und Poesie, daß sie sich in einer äußersten Gegenbewegung begegnen: die Sprache der Philosophie überholt sich beständig selbst – die Sprache des Gedichts [jedes wirklichen Gedichts] ist unüberholbar und einzig [...]. Denken ist dieses ständige Gespräch der Seele mit sich selbst" (*GW* 8, 1981, 256f.).

⁵¹ "Unterwegs zur Schrift?," in *GW* 7, 1983, 258-269.

⁴³ "Replik zu 'Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik,'" in *GW* 2, 1971, 254.

⁴⁴ "Idee und Wirklichkeit in Platos *Timaios*," in *GW* 6, 1974, 242; "Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaios*," in Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic* (trans. by C. Smith), Yale University Press, 1980, 156. This critical position is also to be found in Gadamer's earliest publication (1924, 70): "In platonische Probleme etwa einfach die Problemforschung unserer Tage hineindeuten, heißt, von vornherein auf die Ausschöpfung der platonischen Gehalte verzichten und Plato zum undifferenzierten Vorläufer der Gegenwart machen [...] auch dort, wo das eigene Verhältnis zu den Sachen so sehr ein anderes ist, daß gerade diese Andersheit die fruchtbare Auseinandersetzung mit vergangener Philosophie und ihren Einzelleistungen ermöglicht."

⁴⁵ The relevant texts of Gadamer on the problem on the relationship between philosophy and poetry are: "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik" (*GW* 2, 1985, 13), "Philosophie und Poesie" (*GW* 8, 1977, 232-239), "Der eminente Text und seine Wahrheit" (*GW* 8, 1986, 286-295), and above all: "Philosophie und Literatur" (*GW* 8, 1981, 240-257. Cf. Dostal (1990).

spoken language appears untenable. For it disregards the losses and gains inevitably occasioned by the passage of the spoken to the written word. Literature, similar to law or religion, requires the subordination of the reader. This subordination, however, is foreign to philosophy. Philosophy requires from the reader a greater, more critical participation, one which takes place in the same language of the text and in the logic of question and answer. While the critical answer to philosophy is mostly philosophy, the critical answer to poetry is no longer poetry.⁵²

If indeed tradition is to be conceived as dialogical and critical, as intended by Gadamer, then it evidently cannot simply be a continuum. Nor can its (uncertain) continuation be the sufficient condition for the truth of the classical. There always exists the possibility that a text hitherto regarded as a "fragment" (*Rest*) may eventually become classical, or conversely. The concepts of the classical and of continuity do not necessarily coincide: something can eventually prove "classical" without however having been regarded so far or for all intellectual history as such. Classical art for instance appeared at its inception not yet "classical." The status of the classical and therewith of tradition as a whole proves precarious.⁵³

Gadamer's hermeneutics rests on the assumption that there is only one stream of tradition. This assumption implies however an all too unitary and harmonious concept of tradition, whereby the phenomena of plurality, selections and conflicts are insufficiently taken into account. This approach is exemplified in the privileged metaphors of hearing (*Hören*) and belongingness (*Gehören*), both paradigmatic of tradition. One is addressed by tradition and cannot escape its truth claim: "he who is addressed must hear, whether he wants to or not."⁵⁴

The problematic character of the concept of continuity lies above all in the self-justification of one's own prejudices. The study of classical thought can be justified in two possible ways. First, by its similarity to us (its significance for us); second, by its difference from us (its original meaning). The two corresponding models are that of continuity, on the one hand, and that of otherness, on the other.⁵⁵ Gadamer's hermeneutics takes its bearing from the first model. The main strength of the model of otherness is to permit a confrontation between the present and the past, more specifically between ancient and modern philosophy.⁵⁶ It is a misleading simplification to regard the classics of the tradition as

⁵² Dostal (1990, 81).

⁵³ Kuhn (1961); Berti (1983, 162f.), Cambiano (1988, 62). Here again, one is tempted to cite the young Gadamer against the later Gadamer (1924, 60): "Lehrt nicht die Geschichte, daß Einsichten einst zu unvergleichlicher Klarheit erhobene Sachverhalt anderen Zeiten rettungslos verschlossen sind".

⁵⁴ "[W]er angeredet wird, [muß] hören, ob er will oder nicht" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 466; *TM* 462).

⁵⁵ Cf., Nietzsche, "Wir Philologen," Vol. 8, 11-80; Schadewaldt, (1960, Bd. 2, 528ff.); Hölscher (1965, 81ff.); C. Meier (1989).

⁵⁶ Cf. Bubner (1992 14ff.). Gadamer sees in G. Krüger's, K. Löwith's and L. Strauss' diagnosis of a "modern crisis" and of the opposition between modernity and Antiquity the

purely and simply the embodiment of our prejudices, as a possession or even a burden of one's identity. In the history of thought there appear to be, strictly speaking, no linear continuity as such, but rather intermittent encounters with the past.⁵⁷

While the hermeneutical concept of tradition purports to be multi-faced and dynamic, it tends in reality to be monolithic and irenic. Gadamer invariably speaks of the tradition in the singular.⁵⁸ He thereby implicitly presupposes the unity of the Western tradition, understood as the continuous history of dialectic, whose origins go back to Plato.⁵⁹ On the other hand, however, his recourse to certain forgotten insights of the same Platonic tradition is no less constant and insistent. One must conclude from this, first of all, that Gadamer's position necessitates a plurality of traditions. The critical intention of his Plato interpretation presupposes the possibility of judging, correcting or even rejecting the coherence of certain receptions. The judgment, correction or rejection, in turn, requires the reflection upon our inherited prejudices concerning Plato, notably the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and Neokantian pre-conceptions. This reflection, however, is in tension with the principal thesis of his hermeneutics, namely the fundamental rootedness and belongingness of all understanding.

In defense of Gadamer's hermeneutics, however, one must acknowledge its intended critique. First, the critical potential of the tradition is implicit in the central concept of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is the self-critical process of conservation which fosters the development of the individual and society as a whole.⁶⁰ Secondly, and more importantly, Gadamer's interpretative practice rectifies as it were his concept of the classical.⁶¹ Indeed, Gadamer, the philologist and interpreter of Plato, intends to reject dogmatic Platonism and aims at discovering the genuine, dialogical Plato afresh. His Plato thus becomes a remote figure both in respect to contemporary Plato scholarship and, to some extent, to the self-understanding of the present age. Hence the eloquent passage placed programmatically in the introduction of *TM*, which is worth quoting: "The naive self-esteem of the present may rebel against the idea that philosophical consciousness admits the possibility that one's own philosophical insight may be inferior to that of Plato or

untenable extremism of Nietzsche (*den Extremismus Nietzsches*) (*GW* 1, 1960, 130). On Krüger's Nietzschean orientation see his unambiguous statement in Krüger (1939, XV). The young Nietzsche writes in "Wir Philologen" (Bd. 8, 28): "Die Stellung des Philologen zum Altertum ist *entschuldigend* oder von der Absicht eingegeben, das, was unsere Zeit hoch schätzt, im Altertum nachzuweisen. Der richtige Ausgangspunkt ist der umgekehrte, nämlich von der Einsicht in die moderne Verkehrtheit auszugehen und zurückzusehen – vieles sehr Anstößige im Altertum erscheint dann als tiefsinnige Notwendigkeit." Nietzsche underestimates here the dependence of every age upon its past. This is nevertheless an exaggeration in the right direction.

⁵⁷ Cf. Brague (1992, 110ff.).

⁵⁸ *GW* 1, 1960, 281-295.

⁵⁹ *GW* 2, 1985, 13.

⁶⁰ Cf. Mitscherling (1989).

⁶¹ Teichert (1992, 146).

Aristotle, Leibniz, or Hegel. One might think it a weakness that contemporary philosophy tries to interpret and assimilate its classical heritage with this acknowledgement of its own weakness. But it is undoubtedly a far greater weakness for philosophical thinking not to face such self-examination but to play at being Faust.⁶² This passage emphatically expresses the – intended – critical function of the classical in Gadamerian hermeneutics.⁶³

II. Reconstructing Otherness

In his self-critique of 1985, Gadamer underlines the *crux* of his entire hermeneutical theory as follows: "The decisive question [is] to what extent I succeeded [...] not in eliminating but in preserving the otherness of the other."⁶⁴ The question of otherness must therefore be discussed here in connection with the concept of reconstruction.

The model of Gadamer's hermeneutics is philology. In the philological model lie both the strengths and weakness of his hermeneutics. The "philologization of philosophy" could be regarded, as R. Wiehl maintains, as "the real achievement of Gadamer which one ought to underline emphatically [...]. In an age in which the scientific character of philosophy [...] is deeply dubious, Gadamer tried to bring philosophy at least back to the standards which philology still has."⁶⁵ The twofold question arises as to the significance of (classical) philology

⁶² "Das naive Selbstgefühl der Gegenwart mag sich dagegen auflehnen, daß das philosophische Bewußtsein die Möglichkeit einräumt, seine eigene philosophische Einsicht sei der eines Platon und Aristoteles, eines Leibniz, Kant oder Hegel gegenüber geringeren Rangs. Man mag eine Schwäche des gegenwärtigen Philosophierens darin sehen, daß es sich der Auslegung und Verarbeitung seiner klassischen Überlieferung mit solchem Eingeständnis der eigenen Schwächen zuwendet. Sicher ist es aber eine noch viel größere Schwäche des philosophischen Gedankens, wenn einer sich einer solchen *Erprobung* seiner selbst nicht stellt und vorzieht, den Narren auf eigene Faust zu spielen" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 2; *TM* xxii; our emphasis).

⁶³ One must nevertheless note that this affirmation of Gadamer about the *possible* superiority of the classical tradition is in tension, with the sentence immediately preceding it, where he presupposes the insuperability, as it were in principle, of the classical past over the present: "Es gehört zur elementaren Erfahrung des Philosophierens, daß die Klassiker des philosophischen Gedankens, wenn wir sie zu verstehen suchen, von sich aus einen Wahrheitsanspruch geltend machen, den das zeitgenössische Bewußtsein *weder abweisen noch überbieten kann*" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 2; *TM*, XXII; our emphasis).

⁶⁴ "Die entscheidende Frage [ist], wie weit es mir gelungen ist [...] im Verstehen die Andersheit des Anderen nicht aufzuheben, sondern zu bewahren." ("Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik. Versuch einer Selbstkritik", in *GW* 2, 1985, 5).

⁶⁵ "[D]ie eigentliche Leistung von Gadamer, die man nachdrücklich hervorheben muß [...] In einer Zeit, in der der Wissenschaftscharakter der Philosophie [...] doch zutiefst fragwürdig ist, hat Gadamer versucht, die Philosophie zumindest auf die Standards zurückzubringen, die die Philologie noch hat" ("Aus der Diskussion", in Flashar 1979, 392). Schnädelbach (1987, 279) on the contrary sees in the "Philologisierung der Philosophie"

for Gadamer's hermeneutics and, conversely, as to the significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics for (classical) philology.⁶⁶

Gadamer, in principle, acknowledges the restricted legitimacy of methodological hermeneutics and therewith that of the concept of objectivity.⁶⁷ The importance of the text as object of understanding lies in its capacity to question and, possibly, to correct our prejudices.⁶⁸ In other words, Gadamer's hermeneutics does seek an unbiased, openminded understanding of the past. The criterion for adequate understanding is, according to Gadamer, the coherence of the interpretation – a reflection of the statement's or the text's own presumed coherence.⁶⁹ In a rather unusual and for this reason revealing passage, he emphasizes the limiting character of interpretation: "the task of understanding is restricted. It is restricted by the resistance offered by statements or texts."⁷⁰ Interpretation is limited, for it is an interpretation of something.⁷¹ In opposition to Nietzsche and Derrida, Gadamer distinguishes between text and interpretation, and implicitly between meaning (*Bedeutung*) and significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*). Moreover, Gadamer's concept of the text's meaning is in one sense Kantian. The text is to meaning what the Kantian phenomenon is to the thing-in-itself: the interpreter deals only with

what he disparagingly calls "the hermeneutical illness". By "Philologisierung der Philosophie" Schnädelbach understands the reduction of philosophy into a fetishism of philology and science (*Wissenschaftlichkeits-Fetischismus*), and therewith a hypertrophy of the historical, hampering independent thinking and leading to the forgetting of the philosophical problems, as deplored and criticized by Nietzsche in the second *Untimely Consideration*. Still, one cannot criticize Gadamer for being traditionalist with regard to Plato in the same way that Neo-platonists can be; according to the latter's concept of reception (*diadoche*) all truths are old truths and every innovation (*to neoterizein*) was invariably looked upon with suspicion. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 8.

⁶⁶ Flashar, "Zur Einführung," in Flashar (1979, 16).

⁶⁷ "Wir unterscheiden sehr genau zwischen angemessenen und 'unerlaubten' oder 'stwidrigen' reproduktiven Interpretationen von musikalischen oder dramatischen Werken [...] Die Selbstinterpretation des Künstlers ist bekanntlich von fragwürdiger Geltung. Der Sinn ihrer Schöpfung stellt *gleichwohl* der praktischen Interpretation eine eindeutige *Approximationsaufgabe*. Die Reproduktion ist durchaus nicht beliebiger Willkür überlassen" (*GW* 2, 1968, 104; our emphasis).

⁶⁸ "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," in *GW* 2, 1959, 57, 60; Cf. *WM*, in *GW* 1, 274. Cf. R. Berstein (1991, 248) underlines otherness in Gadamer: "For Gadamer [...] when we are engaged in dialogue [...] there is always something 'other' to which we are being responsive, that speaks to-and-fro movement that enables us to constitute a 'we' that is more than a projection of my own idiosyncratic desire and beliefs. But for Rorty there never seems to be any effective constraints on *me* and *my* interpretation."

⁶⁹ "Die Einstimmung aller Einzelheiten zum Ganzen ist das jeweilige Kriterium für die Richtigkeit des Verstehens" (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 296; *TM* 291).

⁷⁰ "Hermeneutik als Philosophie", in Gadamer (1976b, 105); "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy", in Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, 109.

⁷¹ Dostal (1990).

the phenomenon of the text, that is, with its meaning as mediated through the history of effect of the text.⁷²

However, Gadamer does not pursue further this point concerning the restricting character of statements or texts. Rather, he insists upon the historicity and multiplicity of interpretations. The difficulty is that this insistence obscures the possible incompatibility among this multitude of interpretations.⁷³ The criterion of coherence should not be confused with that of productivity. An incoherent, inadequate interpretation may, as is well known, prove in some important respects productive also.⁷⁴ The provocative or even violent character of an interpretation can, however, only possess a propaedeutic function. Violent, although productive, interpretations belong to another category of interpretations, namely those which, while saying little about the text itself, lead to fresh, independent thinking. These are legitimate, indeed important, for they make new, more open-minded interpretation possible. Productivity thus cannot be played against coherence, nor can it be the sole characteristic of persuasiveness.⁷⁵

⁷² It is to be noted that Gadamer in his hermeneutical practice does not hesitate to criticize and reject some interpretations as inadequate or simply mistaken (*Fehlinterpretationen*). A few typical and revealing examples might suffice. Concerning an interpretation of Democrit's theory he writes: "It is fundamentally wrong [*im Grunde falsch*] to speak of atomistic mathematics, but equally wrong [*verkehrt*] to speak of genuine mathematics of continuum in Democritus" (GW 5, 1935, 273). Hegel's interpretation of *Sophist* 259b he regards as a "complete misunderstanding" (*totales Mißverständnis*) (GW 3, 1961, 18). In his review of the first volume of Guthrie's monumental *A History of Greek Philosophy* Gadamer raises the critical question as to whether his interpretation is not guilty of anachronism, namely "whether G[uthrie] does not [...] carelessly [*sorglos*] utilize Platonic-Aristotelian concepts of our philosophical tradition" (Gadamer 1969, 136). For in Gadamer's views both the "interpretatio aristotelica" and the "interpretatio hegeliana" have become untenable (*hinfallig*) (GW 6, 1964, 59). The ironic interpretation of Plato's *Republic* Gadamer regards as the only correct interpretation [*allein richtig*] (GW 2, 1976, 489). Gadamer's hermeneutical retrieval of the classical past aims at being more than a creative transformation of that past. Hence Seebohm's severe but justified judgment on the matter (1972, 190f.): "Gadamer's arguments are valid [in the debate against Betti and Hirsch] if and only if his interpretations of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, etc., are valid. To ask this question is, however, meaningless, since he has denied the possibility of objectivity in interpretation [...] He claims that his hermeneutics would make a new approach to the ethics of the ancients possible. It is not without irony that Gadamer [...] presented an argument with Strauss and Ritter about Aristotle's concept of natural right which, if it makes sense as an argument [...], implies the recognition of objectivity and validity in interpretation."

⁷³ Cambiano, "Il tradizionalismo animistico di Gadamer," in Cambiano (1988, 46).

⁷⁴ Cambiano, *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ In a interview, published in Italian, Gadamer (1982, 173) does precisely this: "Heidegger molto raramente ha interpretato il testo in maniera filologicamente corretta. Tuttavia ogni interpretazione, pur errata, che egli ha compiuto, è feconda per la nostra meditazione, ci affascina, ci stimola e acquista così credibilità. Nel mio caso, invece, acquistano credibilità

The task of reconstruction is either difficult, but approximately possible and consequently legitimate, or else simply impossible and consequently meaningless and illegitimate. Gadamer vacillates between these two theses. The relationship of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to those of Schleiermacher and Böckh, or Betti and Hirsch, therefore remains ambivalent. Gadamer never accepts explicitly and unambiguously the distinction between meaning (*Bedeutung*) and meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*),⁷⁶ nor the thesis of approximation (to the original meaning of the text). Indeed, the central tenet of *TM* – that understanding is always understanding differently in the light of one's own hermeneutical situation – appears incompatible with these two theses. Approximation implies a kind of progress which Gadamer always emphatically opposes and replaces by participation.⁷⁷ A question then arises: are methodological and philosophical hermeneutics two incompatible levels of reflection or, rather, two stages of a single development of a hermeneutical theory and as such complementary to one another?⁷⁸ In the rest of this paper, I will attempt to show Gadamer's problematic ambivalent stance to this central question.

Understanding occurs, Gadamer argues, when one understands the *question* to which the text is an answer: "The most important thing is the question that the text puts to us [...]. We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the traditional text is the answer. But we will be unable to do so without going beyond the historical horizon it presents to us."⁷⁹ There appear to be three differ-

solo le interpretazioni corrette: io non possiedo la persuasività suggestiva di un Heidegger" (Our emphasis).

This oscillating position between productivity and plausibility, through coherence, as sole criterion can also be found in P. Aubenque (in Cassin, 1992, 25): "La valeur d'une interprétation ne se mesure pas au fait qu'elle est littéralement fidèle ou non à un objet – le texte – qui se dérobe, mais au fait que [...] elle est ou non 'intéressante' et 'féconde'." A few pages later (35) however he affirms: "Il y a des interprétations impossibles, mais il y a [...] plusieurs interprétations plausibles. Entre ces interprétations [...] on s'efforcera de choisir celle qui garantit au texte à la fois le maximum d'intelligibilité (celle qui intègre le plus de parties de l'oeuvre) et le maximum de productivité (celle qui donne le plus à penser)."

⁷⁶ Grondin (1991, 166), in a defense of Gadamer against Hirsch and Betti, affirms the reconciliation, in a way which Gadamer himself could not ever explicitly accept: "Bettis Unterscheidung ist sehr wohl hermeneutisch einlösbar. In der Praxis können wir nicht umhin, zu starke modernisierende Deutungen als solche zu erkennen und von der ursprünglichen Bedeutung eines Textes abzuheben. Ansonsten bliebe das Interpretieren ein rein willkürliches Unternehmen [...] Bedeutung geht nicht in modernisierende Bedeutsamkeit auf."

⁷⁷ Scholtz (1992, 105f.).

⁷⁸ Rodi (1990, 91f.).

⁷⁹ "Am Anfang steht vielmehr die Frage, die uns der Text stellt [...]. Um diese uns gestellte Frage zu beantworten, müssen wir, die Gefragten, selber zu fragen beginnen. Wir suchen die Frage zu rekonstruieren, auf die das Überlieferte die Antwort wäre. Wir wer-

ent moments in the dialectical relationship between the text and its interpreter. First, the question of the text which speaks to us; second, the question the interpreter puts to the text in order to be at all capable of answering the question of the text; and third, the independent thinking of the interpreter which necessarily goes beyond the historical horizon of the text.⁸⁰ The last step needs to be explained in more detail. Gadamer rightly observes, in his critical discussion of Collingwood, that in order to comprehend, for instance, Plato's criticism in the *Theaetetus* of the sensualistic thesis one has to compare the modern presuppositions with it and then suspend these. Understanding therefore, he advances, cannot occur on the basis of the Platonic context alone.⁸¹ This is in a sense undeniably true: one must start from what is first for us, namely from our own hermeneutical situation. However, the comparison between the Platonic context and our own seeks the suspension of modern conceptuality and hence the openness to the original, ancient context. To understand a classical philosophical text means to understand both the question (*Frage*), and possibly the answer, which the text provides. This is the goal and criterion to be presupposed for judging any interpretation of a classical text. The difficulty, or even unattainability of the goal, does not in the least compromise its legitimacy.⁸² The necessity of going beyond the answer of the text in order to regain for oneself that question which gave rise to the text, does not make the task of understanding the opinion (*Meinung*) or answer of the text irrelevant. For, if we are to learn something new from a classical text, we must then regard both the question implied in the text and the answer (or opinion) expressed in it as possibly true, and then let ourselves at first be guided by it. To that extent, modest philological work appears as a necessary condition for self-critique.⁸³

It is necessary, according to Gadamer, always to interpret the texts with philosophical interest, that is with primary concern for its truth claim, and therefore

den das aber gar nicht können, ohne den historischen Horizont, der damit bezeichnet ist, fragend zu überschreiten (*WM*, in *GW* 1, 379; *TM* 374).

⁸⁰ *GW* 1, 379f.; *TM* 374f. Cf. Cambiano (1988, 58).

⁸¹ "Hermeneutik und Historismus," in *GW* 2, 1965, 397; *TM* 515.

⁸² Cf. Strauss (1952, 583-85).

⁸³ Cf. Strauss (1952, 575f.): "One must abandon the attempt to understand the past from the point of view of the present." Insofar as Strauss seeks to understand Plato not from the point of view of the present but from that of Antiquity, his Plato interpretation acquires for him a still greater importance. For his Plato interpretation needs to be correct or adequate, otherwise he loses the standpoint from which he may judge the present. See Burnyeat's vigorous criticism of Strauss' Plato interpretation (1985). This can be said of Gadamer only in a qualified way, that is only to the extent to which he accepts the contrast or any rate the difference between modernity and Antiquity. This recognition is, however, only an aspect of Gadamer's project. For apart from his hesitation between adequacy and productivity as criterion for judging an interpretation, he also postulates, as seen above, the continuity of a (partly) Platonic tradition, thus considering to that extent the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* as a false opposition.

to subordinate philological and historical research to it.⁸⁴ Subordination presupposes, however, distinction. Two different, legitimate hermeneutical goals must therefore be distinguished. While the ultimate goal of interpretation is judging the truth of a given statement or text, its initial goal remains determining or reconstructing the question implied and the opinion expressed in it.⁸⁵ This is a logically, if not temporally, different task. The importance of the primary goal consists in letting the authors of the past speak to us and question us, as partners in a dialogue. We must therefore try to let their questions, not ours, guide the dialogue. The question and answer of the author are indispensable if one is to know not only what, but also how the author sees. The question and answer of the author are of course rarely sufficient, since the question of how an author sees something presupposes, as a rule, the other question of what he sees.⁸⁶ Therefore, the self-understanding of an author, although not the only criterion of interpretation, is an important constituent of "objectivity," as opposed to the endless plurality of interpretations generated by the various traditions of reception.⁸⁷

The hermeneutical interpretation consists primarily and chiefly in the reception of a foreign thought within its own perspective. The greatest obstacle to the retrieval of past thinking resides precisely in our presupposition of what philosophy is. Hence the need for reconstruction as a controlling instance against the misuse of the past for one's own purposes. Yet, reconstruction is not only to be achieved for the sake of the past, but also and above all for the sake of one's learning. Openness, the hermeneutical category *par excellence*, is only possible through the liberation or any rate suspension of one's own prejudices, thus allowing for a way of reading which lets the voice of the other speak. This philological concept of interpretation is the indispensable weapon against the misleading receptions of, say, Plato and Aristotle. Any serious Ren-

⁸⁴ *GW* 7, 1989, 124.

⁸⁵ One thinks of Husserl's well-known appeal in *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (1910): "Nicht von den Philosophien, sondern von den Sachen und Problemen muß der Antrieb zur Forschung ausgehen." Cf. Larmore (1986, 163).

⁸⁶ Turk (1982, 141).

⁸⁷ L. Strauss, perhaps more than any other contemporary, defended self-understanding as the sole criterion. He formulates his hermeneutical principle as follows (1989, 209): "The task of the historian of thought is to understand the thinkers of the past exactly as they understood themselves, or to revitalize their thought according to their own interpretation of it." According to Strauss, the self-understanding of the author is "the only practical criterion of objectivity in the history of thought." Self-understanding as *sole* criterion rests on the untenable presupposition that the author has understood himself or herself in one way only, that is perfectly. This presupposition makes Gadamer's *regulative* principle of the "anticipation of perfection" (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*) into a nearly *descriptive* one. Cf. Gadamer's criticism of Strauss in "Hermeneutik und Historismus," *GW* 2, 1965, 414-423, bes. 421f; *TM* 532-541, esp. 538.

aissance or humanistic revival today must also be based upon strict historical research and criticism.⁸⁸

The understanding of classical thought with concern for its possible contemporary relevance remains, of course, legitimate; it is even indispensable to the vitality and *raison d'être* of the study of history. However, one must remain wary not to fall into what may be called a hermeneutics of identity.⁸⁹ A hermeneutics of otherness is indispensable as complementary counterpart to a hermeneutics of identity.⁹⁰ The controlling instance of a hermeneutics of otherness may provide a way, although of course no guarantee, of breaking the arbitrariness of the present's self-projections into the past.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Cf. Skinner (1984). As the "early" Gadamer writes (1936, 338f.): "Die Reihe der philosophischen Erneuerungen des Platonismus, die mit dem Neuplatonismus der Spätantike beginnt und in der das Zeitalter der 'Renaissance' seinen ausgezeichneten Ort hat, ist etwas grundsätzlich anderes gegenüber den Plato-Deutungen des 19. Jahrhunderts: sie alle sind grundlegend bestimmt durch das geschichtliche Bewußtsein, mit dem sie an Plato herangehen, d.h. aber, für sie ist der Platonismus nicht mehr eine selbstverständlich wirkende Traditionsmacht, ihre geschichtliche Bemühung um Plato ist vielmehr Ausdruck der Gebrochenheit dieser Tradition, die sich in dem unhistorischen Plato-Bild Kants letztmalig vollzog."

⁸⁹ Buck (1989, 364).

⁹⁰ Hölscher (1965, 80f.); Szondi (1975, 142ff., esp. 145).

⁹¹ Nietzsche and Heidegger, although intent on understanding the Greeks in their otherness, indeed in their strangeness, do not succeed in avoiding the dangers of a hermeneutics of identity. Nietzsche in his second *Untimely Consideration* (Bd. 1, 251): "Um diesen Grad und durch ihn dann die Grenzen zu bestimmen, an der das Vergangene vergessen werden muß, wenn es nicht zum Todtengräber des Gegenwärtigen werden soll, müßte man genau wissen, wie groß die plastische Kraft eines Menschen, eines Volkes, einer Cultur, ich meine jene Kraft, aus sich heraus eigenartig zu wachsen, Vergangenes und Fremdes umzubilden und *einzuverleiben*" (Our emphasis). For a far greater affirmation of the hermeneutics of "assimilation" (vol. 12, 209): "Alles Denken, Urtheilen, Wahrnehmen als *Vergleichen* hat als Voraussetzung ein '*Gleichsetzen*', noch früher ein '*Gleichmachen*'." *Einverleibung*, *Gleichmachen* are concepts of a hermeneutics of assimilation and identity, which exclude, from the outset the possibility of learning from the otherness of the other. Cf. Horstmann (1976). Heidegger in a well-known passage of *Sein und Zeit* (32, 152f.) writes: "Das Entscheidende ist nicht, aus dem Zirkel heraus-, sondern in ihm nach der rechten Weise hineinzukommen [...] In ihm verbirgt sich eine positive Möglichkeit ursprünglichsten Erkennens, die freilich in echter Weise nur dann ergriffen ist, wenn die Auslegung verstanden hat, daß ihre erste, ständige und letzte Aufgabe bleibt, sich jeweils Vorhabe, Vorsicht, und Vorgriff nicht durch Einfälle und Volksbegriffe vorgeben zu lassen, sondern in deren Ausarbeitung aus den Sachen selbst her das wissenschaftliche Thema zu sichern." However, he immediately adds: "Weil Verstehen seinem existenziellen Sinn nach das Seinkönnen des Daseins selbst ist, übersteigen die ontologischen Voraussetzungen historischer Erkenntnis grundsätzlich die Idee der Strenge der exaktesten Wissenschaften." The radical ontologization of understanding obscures the epistemological question and therewith the otherness of the interpretandum. Cf. Hoy (1978, 106ff.).

The thesis of the continuity of tradition forms, as already discussed, an important limitation of Gadamerian hermeneutics. As a result it does not remain entirely faithful to his own model of historical dialogue. The concept of the "fusion of horizons," understood here as contemporaneity, transcends the historical difference of two diverse horizons and hence minimizes "the dialogical process of interpretation as translation of and exchange with tradition."⁹² In the end, this leaves one single horizon, whereby the fusion is supposed to have already taken place. The distinction between meaning and meaningfulness, which Gadamer's unitary concept of application fuses, must be maintained.⁹³ Without the recognition of the original horizon as different from the one of the interpreter, the dialogue degenerates into a monologue and mere self-legitimation.⁹⁴ The hermeneutic conception of understanding as dialogical self-understanding of a common subject matter "pushes the second, simultaneous interest in dialogue [...] into the background," namely understanding the other in his otherness.⁹⁵

Gadamer's anti-subjectivistic conception of language is closely linked to his thesis of the continuity of tradition. His anti-psychologism leads to the collusion of meaning (*Sinn*) and subject matter (*Sache*). Meaning is thus abstracted from human, historical consciousness.⁹⁶ This idealistic abstraction disregards the historical differences between present and past.⁹⁷ Language understood as autonomous and speculative implies, as M. Frank correctly observes, "an unbroken continuity of meaning out of itself and excludes absurdity [*Widersinn*] permanently": alterity always proves to be a mere moment of self-consciousness.⁹⁸ The continuity of tradition as the authority of the history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) signifies the dissolution of the other "in the speculation of dialectical self-reference."⁹⁹ Gadamer's insistence upon the truth as the sole criterion leaves a dubious either-or structure: either incorporation as one's own or rejection as unintelligible.¹⁰⁰ The meeting of two different traditions, in Gadamer's hermeneutics, is only possible through the subordination of one to the other.¹⁰¹ A

⁹² Böhler (1981, 49); Kögler (1994, 317ff.).

⁹³ Betti (1962); Krämer (1993, 180).

⁹⁴ Hence Krämer's emphatic and polemical formulation (1993, 185): "Die innovative Erfahrung des Anderen und die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit ihr werden dadurch *a limine* blockiert und kupiert und durch eine harmonische, aber kontraproduktive Selbstduplikation und Selbstaffirmation." Cf. Betti (1962, 30); Frank (1977, 34).

⁹⁵ Szondi (1975, 679).

⁹⁶ Hirsch (1965, 304); Frank (1977, 30).

⁹⁷ Pannenberg (1978, 315); Krämer (1993, 185).

⁹⁸ Frank (1977, 29f.).

⁹⁹ Frank, *Ibid.*, 26. Gadamer (GW 9, 1983, 267) defines historical consciousness as a "Sensibilität für das, was über unseren eigenen Horizont hinausgeht", but adds immediately after, "was gerade dadurch als eine eigene Stimme in unser Gespräch mit uns selbst hineinspricht."

¹⁰⁰ Kögler (1994, 323).

¹⁰¹ L. Krüger (1984, 90f.).

greater recognition of and attention to the specific cultural facticity of diverse perspectives is required.¹⁰² In a word, reconstruction and speculation, epistemology and ontology, are to be regarded as complementary aspects of any philosophical hermeneutics.¹⁰³

The phenomenological and hermeneutical concept of intention cannot be separated from the historical context. Gadamer, it is true, recognizes formally the importance of the historical context of a text.¹⁰⁴ But, at the same time, his concept of the classical is meant completely to detach the text from its original, contingent conditions. The basis of his philosophical position is, in this respect, close to the Platonic, timeless anamnesis. To that extent, Gadamer's rehabilitating interpretations of classical thinkers, such as Plato, are not intended so much to reverse the history of Western philosophy through a dialectical, non-dogmatic interpretation, as to demonstrate the trans-historical and dialectical character of thinking. Therein lies the humanistic, pre-historical or un-historical character of Gadamer's hermeneutics.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² On Gadamer's well-known assertion, "Sein, das verstanden werden kann ist Sprache," L. Krüger (1984, 90f.) rightly observes: "My criticism is directed precisely against this kind of post-Kantian speculation concerning the unity of world, language and reflexive consciousness [...] the hermeneutics [of Gadamer] by its own internal logic (though, perhaps, against its own spirit) always refers to a particular tradition, viz. that tradition with respect to which occupying one's place constitutes the event of understanding. In Gadamer's approach it remains an unsolved problem to analyse the structure of those events of communication that bring together two independent traditions, except in term of the subordination of one to the other." Cf. Teichert's similar criticism (1992, 152).

¹⁰³ Gadamer's hermeneutics is either a description of what unavoidably occurs in every understanding, and hence the self-understanding of the human sciences is irrelevant, or else it describes what occurs in every genuine understanding, and hence the hermeneutically justified self-understanding is an indispensable condition for it, but if so, the *quaestio juris* is posed. Gadamer's solution consists in the concept of productivity: tradition itself decides the *quaestio juris*, independently of the will of individuals. Cf. Hinman (1980, 534) and Rockmore (1990, 555). On the other hand, however, if the self-interpretation of the human sciences is inherent in them, then hermeneutics describes not only what is, but also what should be. Gadamer's hermeneutics as a whole (1975, 312) conceives of itself, after all, as a correction of a modern, purely technical understanding of practice, a degeneration of what practice really means. Gadamer (1978, 10) himself admits as much: "Ich wäre mißverstanden, wenn man nicht ernst nähme, daß ich ein *falsches Denken* über ein Verfahren berichtigen möchte, das, dort wo es gelingt (d.h. etwas an der Überlieferung wirklich *aufschließt*), selber richtig ist." Such a critique of modern historicist methodology does presuppose the *quaestio juris*.

¹⁰⁴ *WM*, in *GW* 1, 170; *TM* 166.

¹⁰⁵ "Überall, wo Philosophieren versucht wird, geschieht in dieser Weise Seins-Erinnerung [...] Erinnerung [...] ist Erinnerung an eine verschollene Frage. Alle Frage aber, die als Frage gefragt wird, ist nicht länger erinnerte. Als Erinnerung an das damals Gefragte ist sie das jetzt Gefragte. So hebt das Fragen die Geschichtlichkeit unseres Daseins und Erkennens auf. Philosophie hat keine Geschichte" (*GW* 2, 1977, 503). This passage speaks for Verra's strong thesis (1980, 33), that dialectic in Gadamer is to be

However, since the emergence of the historical consciousness the conception of an immediate access to the classical model is untenable. There can no longer be for us any natural symbiosis with Antiquity or indeed with any past. Phenomenological immediacy, namely the attempt at seeing the phenomena themselves directly, cannot dispense with the humble detour through historical and philological work. The necessity of extensive historical knowledge becomes patently clear as soon as one tries to read the classical text in the original languages.¹⁰⁶ The limits imposed on the interpretation of a classical text (or of a work of art) lie partly in the historical conditions of the original context, partly in the conditions of reception, that is its addressee.¹⁰⁷ Our fragmentary historical knowledge condemns our understanding of past thinkers to incompleteness. It is indeed true and important to observe, with Gadamer, that we are unconsciously influenced by a partly continuous past. However, we must also see that that of which we are still unconscious may be for us of very great importance. Granted that full clarity about one's own prejudices is not possible, nevertheless, instead of passively accepting these limits and raise them to a supreme principle, one must rather fight them with the various weapons available to the historian, so as to reconstruct, as much as we possibly can, historical otherness.¹⁰⁸ We remain, of

understood as the contemporaneity or timelessness of philosophizing: "Non si tratta, per così dire, di rovesciare di segno la storia della filosofia, attraverso una interpretazione positiva del pensiero di Platone come suo nucleo tuttora vivo e vivificante, ma piuttosto di comprendere che il rapporto dialettico-dialogo è qualcosa che supera la stessa storicità del pensiero nella sua storia. In questo senso, anzi propriamente la filosofia non 'ha' storia." Herein lies one of the Platonic roots of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

¹⁰⁶ MacIntyre, for his part, appears guilty of a hypertrophy of historicization, when he rejects the possibility of translation as a whole (in MacIntyre (1988, 370-388). He argues as follows. Every tradition is embedded in a specific language and culture (371). Such a language is a "language-in-use" (373f.). Furthermore, every "language-in-use" is inseparably linked to a system of values and convictions (379). Cosmopolitanism therefore is always rootless. The belief in the possibility of translation is itself a form of the universalistic belief of modernity. It is certainly true that something is lost in every translation, however good. MacIntyre points to the important task to see "where and in what respects utterances in the one are untranslatable into the other" (375). Every language has its own strengths and limits, and these vary according to stage of its development, as for instance the differences of Homeric Greek from Platonic Greek with respect to abstraction. Moreover, several allusions and puns in Plato's dialogues are no longer intelligible to us. It is, however, an untenable exaggeration on the part of MacIntyre, to think that the essential is always missed. The possibility of translation is not one of principle, but of degree.

¹⁰⁷ Krämer (1993, 183).

¹⁰⁸ Misgeld (1979, 237) writes: "Gadamer thus seems to face a dilemma [...] [he] must either side with a naive belief in the persistent continuity of prescientific traditions of historical understanding or with a historical-critical consciousness. He in fact does neither; rather, he believes that continuity of tradition, understood in a specific sense, can be reconciled with a historical critical attitude [...]. To the extent to which hermeneutics does

course, free to accept or reject certain aspects of the past, so long as we first endeavour to be clear about the specificity and self-understanding of the past. In other words, classical and historicist thinking must remain open to one another.¹⁰⁹

Gadamer's hermeneutics nevertheless holds true against historicism in one crucial respect: modern science, notably the historical sciences, rest upon the dubious concept of development. Modern science dogmatically presupposes its own superiority over tradition. Moreover, the concept of development is commonly regarded as an epistemological principle, indeed as self-evident. Therefore, historical sciences, very much against their ideal of neutrality and objectivity, tend to project their own positivistic categories into the past. In so doing, they inevitably create anachronism and distortions, vices they attribute primarily to classicism and humanism. However, the question about the possibility of regaining the fundamental questions of classical thought can only be answered after the attempt has been made to grasp a given classical thought in its specificity and self-understanding.

On Gadamer's concept of critique P. Ricoeur rightly observes: "the recognition of a critical instance is a vague desire constantly reiterated but constantly aborted, within hermeneutics."¹¹⁰ It is no accident if the title of Gadamer's *magnum opus* "Truth and Method" has been understood by several critics as "Truth or Method."¹¹¹ The polemical dichotomy between truth and method hinders, as we have seen, the recognition of otherness and of a critical instance. Distancing is not to be regarded as an obstacle to but rather as a condition of understanding. Two different meanings of "application" (*Applikation, Anwendung*) must therefore be distinguished. The first moment of "application" is the immediate concern for the past's truth claim. On the other hand, however, this truth claim constitutes the challenge of a possible, not of a necessary, truth. Understanding does not necessarily presuppose agreement.¹¹² The second "application" is the moment of decision to say yes or no to the past. The moment of decision suspends as it were the tradition and thus reveals its precariousness.¹¹³ The genuine en-

not deny, but is itself an awareness of discontinuity, the whole critical apparatus assembled in the humanities should be put to use."

¹⁰⁹ Even some historians of philosophy recognize the necessity of a reciprocal openness: for instance Lafrance (1986, 287) and Goldschmidt (1970, 244): "Le bon usage de l'historicisme, et la leçon qu'il nous reste, aujourd'hui, à en dégager, c'est de retrouver, avec l'histoire, les distances (et les sens des distances) qui nous séparent des Anciens (et d'un Hegel), par le temps et, dans l'intemporalité, pour leur stature." Cf. Derbolav (1965, 187).

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur (1986, 363).

¹¹¹ Turk (1982).

¹¹² GW 2, 1985, 16.

¹¹³ Heidegger also (1979, 187): "Die Aufnahme der Tradition ist *nicht* notwendig Traditionalismus und Übernahme der Vorurteile. Die *echte Wiederholung* einer traditionellen Frage läßt ihren äußerlichen Traditionscharakter gerade verschwinden und geht vor die Vorurteile zurück."

counter with the past does not consist in dogmatic appropriation, but in open encounter.¹¹⁴ The power of dialogue thus gains priority over the power of tradition. The critical potential of hermeneutics depends first of all upon its capacity to preserve the difference, the historical as well as the thematic difference of the classical text.¹¹⁵

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¹¹⁴ Kuhn (1961, 395).

¹¹⁵ The willingness to learn from the past need not presuppose the classicistic position. The resignation of Bolgar (1954, 389), for instance, appears unjustified: "it is unlikely that we should ever equal the [Renaissance] humanist achievement, since we lack that final purpose which breathed life into their work. We do not read the Classics in order to learn to write or in order to solve our daily problem of conduct." One merely needs to presuppose that our age does not necessarily represent the peak of history and that it is always possible to learn from the past something decisive for one's own practical life.

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