15. Old and New in Gadamerian Hermeneutics: A Comparison between Gadamer and Olympiodorus[1]

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> *Erst im Scheitern des naiven Historismus des historischen Jahrhunderts wird sichtbar, dass der Gegensatz von unhistorischen-dogmatisch und historisch, von Tradition und historischer Wissenschaft, von antik und modern, kein schlechthinniger ist. Die berühmte querelle des anciens et des modernes hört auf, eine wirkliche Alternative zu Stellen.*[2]

I. Relevance of an Unusual Comparison

Gadamer's magnum opus *Wahrheit und Methode*[3] opens on a rehabilitation of the "humanist tradition" the validity of which the author wishes to defend against the self-understanding of the historical sciences, in contra-distinction to their actual practice. He seeks historically to relativize the break brought about by the emergence of the historical conscience and its method, rejecting the notion of an opposition between past and present, old and new, in the name of the continuity of the tradition (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) in which both the scientific and ancient hermeneutics take form. Gadamer's remark quoted above encapsulates this position. The continuity thesis raises two questions: (1) What is the relation, from the theoretical and practical point of view, between ancient and Gadamerian hermeneutics, particularly with regard to Plato (Gadamer's privileged author)? (2) To what extent is Gadamer's thesis about the continuity between ancient and modern hermeneutics justified?

Given Gadamer's rejection of the opposition between past and present, a comparison between Gadamer and ancient interpreters such as Olympiodorus of Alexandria (c. AD 505-c. 565) is not as preposterous as it may seem at first sight. This type of comparison may strike some as an impossible task: how can one compare or bring together two commentators who are so different and who inhabit two periods so far apart?[4] It is no accident that there exists no such comparative study. Yet it is my

[1] This is the revised version of a paper given at a conference held at the *Istituto svizzero di Roma* ("Ermeneutica e interpretazione di Platone dall'Ottocento a oggi - Platoninterpretation und Hermeneutik vom 19. bis 21. Jahrhundert," 7-9 February, 2008) which will be published in the original French version in the second volume of *Argumenta in dialogos Platonis: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Interpretation Platons und deren Hermeneutik von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart* (ed. Ada Neschke, Michael Erler, Thomas Leinkauf, Theo Kobusch, Basel: Schwabe Verlag). I would like to thank the lively audience for their helpful questions and remarks which I have tried to take into account for the revised and somewhat extended version, as well as Laurence Arrighi and Jeremy Hayhoe for kindly proofreading the text.

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Vorwort zur 2. Auflage," GW2 : 444.

[3] Gadamer, GW1.

[4] The contrast may indeed seem total between the philosopher Gadamer, who insists above all on change and the new in the act of interpretation, and the mere commentator Olympiodorus, who is almost exclusively intent on preserving Plato's philosophy as an unsurpassable apex. It should, however, be pointed that Gadamer is one of the most "philologist" of the philosophers of the twentieth century. On account of the close links in his work between exegetical practice and hermeneutic theory, some have even spoken of a "philologization" of philosophy. According to Reiner Wiehl for instance, Gadamer's great merit lies precisely in the preservation, within philosophy, of the methodological rigor characteristic of classical philology

contention that this kind of study is likely to open up a new perspective on Gadamer's hermeneutics as well as on ancient hermeneutics as defended and practiced by Olympiodorus. I intend to present some key points of convergence and divergence with respect to hermeneutic principles between these two Plato commentators and to formulate a few critical reflections.

But first of all, why choose Olympiodorus as the representative of ancient hermeneutics on Plato? He is the only ancient commentator of whom we possess complete commentaries on Plato, commentaries that include the treatment of two dialogues often considered today as "Socratic": the *Alcibiades Major* and the *Gorgias* (the *Pheado* commentary is incomplete).[5] From him we also have a (complete) commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* and another on the *Meterology*.[6] In the shadow of the great speculative neo-Platonic thinkers and often scorned, Olympiodorus practices an exegesis that has the clear merit of being more sober and more "philological," because distinctly less theological, than that of Jamblicus or Proclus.

Admittedly, both in his studies in Greek philosophy (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5-7) and elsewhere Gadamer does not often refer to the neo-Platonists as a source of inspiration. It is even possible that he never actually read Olympiodorus' commentaries. However, Gadamer had a fairly good knowledge of Olympiodorus' illustrious predecessors: he cites Porphyry on many occasions and Proclus a few times. Moreover, the continuity in exegetical methods between these great neo-Platonic thinkers and our more modest Olympiodorus is quite strong. Gadamer's relative silence[7] is no doubt due at least in part to a fundamental divergence that will be

(Reiner Wiehl, "Aus den Diskussionen," in Helmut Flashar, ed., *Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 392). Herbert Schnädelbach, on the contrary, sees in this "philologization" a weakness, namely the hypertrophy of philosophy's historical dimension leading to the paralysis of critical thought and the forgetfulness of the true problems. See Herbert Schnädelbach, "Morbus hermeneuticus. Über eine philosophische Krankheit," in idem, *Vernunft und Geschichte. Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987), 279. These diametrically opposed judgments confirm the importance of philology (and therefore the conception of philosophy as commentary) in Gadamerian theory and thus underline an easily underestimated affinity with the ancient commentators.

[5] Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. Leendert G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1956), henceforth *In Alcibiadem*; idem, *Olympiodori in Platonem Gorgiam commentaria*, ed. Leendert G. Westerink (Leipzig: Teubner, 1970), henceforth *In Gorgiam*, Engl. trans. Robin Jackson, Kimon Lycos, Harold Tarrant, *Olympiodorus: Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Leendert G. Westerink, ed. and trans., *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo I: Olympiodorus* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1976).

[6] *Olympiodori Prolegomena et in Categorias commentarium*, (= *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, ed. Adolf Busse (Berlin: Academia litterarum regiae Borussicae, 1902), henceforth CAG XII/1; *Olympiodori in Aristotelis Meteora commentaria* (= *Commentaria in Aristotelem Gracea* XII/2), ed. Wilhelm Stüve (Berlin: Academia litterarum regiae Borussicae, 1900). Thus Olympiodorus is also the only ancient commentator from whom we possess complete commentaries on both Plato and Aristotle.

[7] Gadamer has written very little specifically on the ancient Platonic tradition. His sole study devoted to neo-Platonism,"Denken als Erlösung. Plotin zwischen Plato und Augustin," GW7: 407-417, is on Plotinus and emphasizes religious interiority in the latter's thought. Despite the paucity of direct references to neo-Platonic authors, in the last part of *Wahrheit und Methode* Gadamer describes the task of philosophy today as the retrieval of the basic questions stemming from the Platonic tradition and so seeking the rehabilitation of metaphysics (conceived as finite):

discussed below, namely the opposition between Gadamer's "skeptical" or aporetic interpretation of Plato and the neo-Platonists' "dogmatic" or systematic reading. In this regard Gadamer's interpretation would be more akin to that, for instance, of Cicero.

Given this relative silence and especially this fundamental opposition, the many parallels between Gadamer and Olympiodorus are all the more striking. The comparison I propose will be concerned with four issues relative to basic hermeneutic principles which are still the subject of much debate in current Plato scholarship. With the exception of the fundamental disagreement I have just pointed out, these issues reveal significant points of convergence. I shall identify these points first and then discuss them separately:

(1) Plato's œuvre is conceived in terms of unity or continuity, as opposed to the hypothesis of development (Gadamer does not however assign to Plato an overall pedagogical intention);

(2) The dialogue form is viewed as fundamental and inseparable from the argumentation or philosophical content;

(3) The main issue of disagreement resides in Gadamer's "skeptical" or aporetic reading, in opposition to Olympiodorus' "dogmatic" and systematic interpretation;

(4) The philosophical, more precisely maieutic approach is promoted (although of two very different kinds), by contrast to the exclusively historical method originated in the nineteenth century.[8]

Another important question would deserve treatment here, but I shall be able to discuss it only very briefly, namely the non-written doctrines (*agrapha dogmata*). But it should be said generally that Gadamer has an ambivalent relationship to the School of Tübingen, which can be succinctly summarized as follows: (1) Aristotle and the indirect tradition remains according to him indispensable for the interpretation of Plato, but the core elements of that teaching can nevertheless be found in the dialogues; (2) and above all, this oral teaching must be conceived of as an open dialectic, not as a

"*In dieser Tradition des Platonismus* [sc. the doctrine of beauty] *wurde das begriffliche Vokabular ausgebildet, dessen das Denken der Endlichkeit der menschlichen Existenz bedarf* [with a reference in a footnote to the *Symposium*, 204a1]. *Auch die Affinität, die sich zwischen der platonischen Schönheitslehre und der Idee einer universalen Hermeneutik ergabt, bezeugt die Kontinuität dieser platonischen Tradition*" (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 490). Another retrospective remark by Gadamer on *Wahrheit und Methode* is also worth quoting: "*Die Begriffe, die ich in meinem Zusammenhang verwende, sind durch ihren Gebrauch neu definiert. Es sind auch gar nicht so sehr die Begriffe der klassischen aristotelischen Metaphysik, wie sie Heideggers Ontotheologie uns neu aufgeschlossen hat. Weit mehr gehören sie der platonischen Tradition an. Ausdrücke wie* Mimesis, Methexis, Partizipation, Anamnesis, Emanation*, von denen ich manchmal in leichter Abwandlung Gebrauch mache, z.B. im Falle von* Repräsentation*, sind platonische Begriffsprägungen.*" Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik. Versuch einer Selbstkritik," GW5: 12.

[8] Another important area of agreement pertains to the harmony thesis between Plato and Aristotle, although Gadamer finds it primarily in ethics and Olympiodorus in logic. On the joint reading of the two classics in Gadamer and in Olympiodorus respectively see François Renaud, "Introduction," in idem, ed., *Gadamer, Interroger les Grecs: Études sur les Présocratiques, Platon et Aristote* (Montréal: Fides, 2006), 34-40; idem, "Tradition et critique: lecture jumelée de Platon et Aristote chez Olympiodore," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 64 (2008): 89-104 [special issue entitled *Le commentaire philosophique dans l'Antiquité et ses prolongements: méthodes exégétiques I*, ed. Martin Achard and François Renaud].

system available to the initiated only, as the Tübingen School claims. For his part, Olympiodorus hardly speaks of an esoteric teaching (perhaps in part on account of his predominately Christian audience, which requires from him prudence and a conciliatory attitude), except notably in his very elaborate interpretation of the myth at the end of the *Gorgias*, the profound meaning of which would remain hidden from or incomprehensible to non-philosophers.[9]

[9] I must respond to a fundamental objection, raised in Rome by Christoph Horn, that questions the very legitimacy of a comparison between Olympiodorus and Gadamer *qua* Plato commentators. The objection can be formulated as follows. How is it possible to speak of Plato as an *object* of study in Gadamer as it is evidently possible and appropriate in the case of Olympiodorus, since the central thesis of Gadamerian hermeneutic consists in denying the very possibility of distinguishing between the original meaning (*Bedeutung*) and its meaning for us (*Bedeutsamkeit*)? This is *to some extent* a real problem (for this comparative study but also for Gadamerian hermeneutics in general), but it is more complex and nuanced in Gadamer's work than is often taken to be (see section II.4. of this study). It is perfectly true that what Gadamer seeks to accomplish as Plato's interpreter is not so much a philological or historical reconstruction, as a phenomenological recovery of Plato's "intention." Gadamer means by the "intention" of an author or (more properly) of a text, the latter's implicit question, since according to him it is impossible to understand a text without understanding the question to which the text is an answer (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 376). But what exactly does Gadamer mean by the question to be reconstructed or retrieved? He sometimes writes as if it were simply the *question of the interpreter* which the latter puts to the text. But in reality, as stated in *Wahrheit und Methode* and repeatedly in his studies in Greek philosophy (especially after 1960), it is the *question of the text*. The key passage deserves to be quoted in full: "*Am Anfang steht vielmehr die Frage, die uns der Text stellt, das Betroffensein von dem Wort der Überlieferung, so dass das Verstehen derselben immer schon die Aufgabe der historischen Selbstvermittlung der Gegenwart mit der Überlieferung einschliesst. Das Verhältnis von Frage und Antwort hat sich also in Wahrheit umgekehrt. Das Überlieferte, das uns anspricht—der Text, das Werk, die Spur—stellt selbst eine Frage und stellt damit unser Meinen ins Offene. 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 würden das aber gar nicht können, ohne den historischen Horizont, der damit bezeichnet ist, fragend zu überschreiten. Die Rekonstruktion der Frage, auf die der Text die Antwort sein soll, steht selbst innerhalb eines Fragens, durch das wir die Antwort auf die uns von der Überlieferung gestellte Frage suchen. Eine rekonstruktuierte Frage kann eben niemals in ihrem ursprünglichen Horizont stehen*" (Ibid., 379-380). Three distinct moments are therefore to be distinguished in the relationship between the interpreter and the text: (1) the text's question posed to the reader; (2) the question of the interpreter which the latter poses to the text in order to be able to understand the question of the text; (3) the interpreter's independent thinking which goes necessarily beyond the historical horizon of the text. See Giuseppe Cambiano, *Il ritorno degli antichi* (Rome: Laterza, 1988, 58). The theoretical problem (to which Gadamer's hermeneutics is confronted and which it does not succeed entirely in overcoming) is giving an adequate account of and doing justice to the otherness of the text's question as an integral part of a successful interpretation. In fact, Gadamer's insistence on the understanding of a *common* question (given our belongingness to tradition and its truth claims) leads to relegating the notion of dialogue to the background and therewith the otherness and facticity of the other (be it a text or an immediate interlocutor). This hermeneutic approach that gives primacy to *self-understanding* over *understanding of the other* is part of a radically maieutical conception of knowledge that tends to compromise the very idea of a source of knowledge distinct from self and thus the very notion of *object*. However Gadamer is conscious of this difficulty, and his distinction between a "problem" and a "question" (or more exactly the specific way in which a question is asked: *Frage* and *Fragestellung* respectively) seeks precisely to overcome this difficulty. This distinction aims at subverting the neo-Kantian conception of a history of problems (*Problemgeschichte*), according to which the philosophical problems are permanent or eternal, while avoiding the doxographical neutrality of historicism. So there is a problematic *tension* in Gadamer concerning the notion of object (whether it is a doctrine or a question). But it would be wrong to claim that the notion of object is in Gadamer disposed of or simply absent;

II. Points of Convergence and Divergence

II.1. *Œuvre's Unity*

The great principle of Olympiodorus' hermeneutics (and generally one of the main *topoi* in the introductions, or *prolegomena*, to the late neo-Platonic commentaries) is the unity of meaning and intention (*skopos*) of each dialogue, conceived as a living being, minutely arranged, each part of which fulfilling a precise and necessary function with a view to the economy of the whole. This principle is moreover formulated by Plato himself (*Phaedrus* 264b-c).[10] It corresponds in many respects to the Gadamerian concept of "the anticipation of perfection" (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*). According to that notion, every reader wishing to understand that which he reads always and necessarily presupposes the text's unity (or coherence) as condition of its intelligibility.[11] The ancient principle of unity as applied to Plato's dialogues (Aristotle's writings too) is however made in Gadamer into a general *a priori*, similar to the principle of charity. This hermeneutic principle is surely still worth defending today and its ethical implications would deserve to be explored in another context.[12]

The unity principle in Olympiodorus (and the other neo-Platonists) is not only applied to the dialogues individually, but also to Plato's œuvre as a whole.[13] Hence the order (*taxis*) of reading that is central in the neo-Platonic curriculum.[14] Olympiodorus explains the apparent contradictions from one dialogue to another not in terms of development but of Plato's dialectical and didactic strategies.[15] Thus in interpreting the

rather it is conceptually redefined and in part foreign to modern "epistemology" (see the subject-object antinomy), but by no means entirely foreign to the ancient one as will be discussed below. For a comprehensive defense of and explorative essay on "object" and "objectivity" in (Gadamerian) hermeneutics, see Günter Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2006); see also Jean Grondin, "La fusion des horizons: La version gadamérienne de l'*adaequatio rei et intellectus*?" *Archives de philosophie* 68 (2005): 401-418.

[10] See *Olympiodorus*, *In Alcibiadem,* 56. 14-18; Leendert G. Westerink, ed., *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon*, trans. Jean Trouillard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990), 15.1-7.

[11] Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 299.

[12] See e.g., the comprehensive endeavor of Oliver R. Scholz, *Verstehen und Rationalität. Untersuchungen zu den Grundlagen von Hermeneutik und Sprachphilosophie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999 [2nd rev. ed. 2001]); Jean Greisch, "Le principe d'équité comme 'l'âme de l'herméneutique' (Georg Friedrich Meier)," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 29 (2001): 19-42.

[13] The dogmatic or systematic interpretation (inspired notably by the Stoics and their tripartite division of philosophy into logic, physics and ethics) includes the establishment of a group of canonical texts (the expository dialogues more than the zetetic ones; see the classifications of Albinus and Thrasyllus). This systematic reading rests on a conception of (Greek) philosophy as a fundamental unity and more generally on a conception of truth as coherence and universality. Olympiodorus' hermeneutic principles are largely those of Jamblichus, although he softens the latter's strong theological and mystical tendencies.

[14] According to Elias (David), belonging to the "School of Olympiodorus," the commentator must know all the works of Aristotle. *Eliae (Davidis) in Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* (CAG XVIII.1), ed. Adolf Busse (Berlin: Academia litterarum regiae Borussicae, 1900), 123.7-9.

[15] See Charles Griswold Jr., "E Pluribus Unum? On the Platonic 'Corpus,'" *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999): 361-397; Christopher Gill, "Dialectic and the Dialogue Form," in Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe, ed., *New Perspectives on Plato: Modern and Ancient* (Cambridge,

Gorgias or the *Alcibiades* he makes frequent use of the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. This approach is opposed to the developmental hypothesis, dominant in Plato scholarship since the nineteenth century but increasingly called into question in recent years.[16] Here again there is convergence between Olympiodorus and Gadamer. According to the latter, the dialectical context of each dialogue, particularly the ways in which Socrates adapts his argumentation to his interlocutor's initial opinions and dispositions, contributes to explaining the doctrinal or methodological discrepancies in the Platonic corpus.[17]

II.2. *Unity of Form and Content*

Similarly to Gadamer, Olympiodorus thinks that what Plato has his characters say depends on who speaks and to whom (s)he speaks, that is, on the reasons why what is said is said.[18] For example, according to Olympiodorus, Socrates' argumentation with the young and ambitious Alcibiades, in the eponymous dialogue, appeals first to the latter's conventional values in order to refute and liberate him from his double ignorance.[19] In the *Gorgias* Plato recognizes an authentic, philosophical rhetoric that is practiced by Socrates in a dialogue dominated by a caustic criticism against conventional rhetoric.[20] For Olympiodorus the *Gorgias'* dramatic structure, in three successive exchanges and with three different characters (Gorgias, Polos and Callicles), is to be explained by the fact that each character typifies one way of being and living, since "one character alone could not have represented all the incompatible positions" which Plato wishes to discuss.[21] Similarly in his interpretation of the *Lysis* ("Logos und Ergon im platonischen *Lysis*"),[22] which is in this regard paradigmatic of his Plato

Mass.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2002), 283-310.

[16] See Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); David Sedley, "Socratic irony in the Platonist commentators," in Annas and Rowe, ed., *New Perspectives on Plato*, 37-57. The Ancient systematic classification also applies to Aristotle. This non-chronological, didactic classification, which has the Aristotelian curriculum begin with the *Categories*, is opposed to the modern genetic approach as defended in the twentieth century by Werner Jaeger, *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923). Another question still debated today, with regard to Aristotle as well as to Plato, pertains to the meaning to be given to the apparent discrepancies among some dialogues or treatises, namely either in terms of development or of the various dialectical, polemical or pedagogical aims.

[17] See Nicholas Denyer, *Plato, Alcibiades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25. For a study which takes the dialogue form as starting point without however giving up the development hypothesis, see Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see idem, "On Platonic Chronology," in Annas and Rowe, ed., *New Perspectives on Plato*, 93-127.

[18] See *Diogenes Laertius: Vitae Philosophorum,* 2 vols., vol. I: *Libri I-X; vol. II: Excerpta Byzantina*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Stuttgart & Leipzig: Teubner, 1999), III, 65: *tinos heneka leleketai*.

[19] As Socrates himself says in the *Alcibiades*, his discourse directly addresses the young man's soul (*pros tên psychên*, 130d9-10); see Olympiodorus, *In Alcibiadem,* 7.5-9.

[20] *Phaedrus* 271c-d, *Gorgias* 521d-522a; see Harold Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 124-139. The controversial question of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric includes many others, such as Plato's spokesman or spokesmen and the status of irony.

[21] Olympiodorus*, In Gorgiam,* 25. 1.

[22] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Logos und Ergon im platonischen Lysis," GW6: 171-186.

studies, Gadamer presents the general thesis of "the Dorian harmony" between argumentation (*logos*) and action (*ergon*), between that which one thinks and that which one is: "*Die Harmonie oder Untrennbarkeit von Logos und Ergon, Reden und Tun, auf der Platons gesamtes literarisches Werk beruht, ist das eigentliche Lebensgesetz der sokratischen Dialoge*."[23] Gadamer insists on the fact that philosophy, in the Platonic dialogues, is never pure theory, but is always situated and personalized discussion; the Socratic dialogue that proceeds by questions and answers is above all a dialectical practice. In other words, according to both Olympiodorus and Gadamer, the interpretation of any Platonic dialogue requires that we incessantly pass from the semantic (or explicit) to the pragmatic (implicit) dimension and vice versa. Thus this hermeneutic approach (and the Platonic position corresponding to it) takes into account the moral conditions and aims of dialectic: the harmony between words, or logical coherence, must go hand in hand with a larger harmony between words and actions.[24] Indeed, according to Olympiodorus, Socrates' discourse with his interlocutor occurs simultaneously on the plane of life (*zoê*) and that of knowledge (*gnôsis*).[25] The ideal of unity between words and action is meant to resist the Sophistic tendency of separating them. Gadamer, however, draws more radical or "existential" consequences of the harmony between *logos* and *ergon* in defending the primacy of practice over theory, to which I shall return at the end. Both commentators nevertheless conceive the Platonic dialogue as an imitation of the original, oral activity of a Socratically lived philosophy.

II.3. *Skeptical Reading, Dogmatic Reading*

In the ancient quarrel opposing the "dogmatic" and the "skeptical" interpretations of Plato, Olympiodorus is, of course, firmly on the side of the former. Like the other neo-Platonists, he assumes that Plato has a single, distinct and determinable philosophical position which he endeavours as an interpreter to explicate.[26] Olympiodorus thus considers the relationship between the dialogue form and the doctrinal content as fundamentally complementary. The quest for unity (*skopos*) and order (*taxis*) in the dialogues leads him (and the other neo-Platonists) to seek in them a logically coherent system.[27] According to him, the aim

[23] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," GW2: 501; idem, "Destruktion und Dekonstruktion," GW2: 370. See Plato, *Laches* 188c-e; *Letter VII* 343d7). See the section of *Wahrheit und Methode* devoted to Plato, entitled "Das Vorbild der platonischen Dialektik," 368-375; Michael Frede, "Doxographie, historiographie philosophique et historiographie historique de la philosophie," in *La doxographie antique* [special issue of *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 97, 307-416], ed. André Laks (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 216.

[24] Olympiodorus, *In Categorias*, 10.3; see Ilsetraut Hadot, "Der fortlaufende philosophische Kommentar," in Wilhelm Geerlings and Christian Schulze, ed., *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter. Beiträge zu seiner Forschung* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 196-199.

[25] Olympiodorus, *In Gorgiam*, 8.1.

[26] See ibid., 40.5; Ineke Slutter, "Commentaries and the Didactic Tradition," in Glenn W. Most, ed., *Commentaries—Kommentare* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 180-182.

[27] See Pierluigi Donini, "Testi e commenti, manuali e insegnamento: la forma sistematica e i metodi della filosofia in età postellenistica," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 11/36.7 (1994): 5092.

of the Platonic dialogue is to teach (*didaxai*) the reader the common notions (*koinai ennoiai*), which are universally shared although not necessarily well understood and often largely forgotten.[28] These common notions include: "the good is that which one ought to search for"; "that which is just is admirable (*kalon*)."[29]

However, like the majority of the Plato scholars today who take interest in the dialogue form, Gadamer assumes that the choice of this mode of communication corresponds to a conception of philosophy as an unfinished and unfinishable quest.[30] For Gadamer, the Socratic dialectic of question and answer is by nature endless.[31] From the theoretical point of view, the two principles of Plato's oral teaching–the one and the indeterminate duality–, traces of which can be found in the dialogues, notably in the *Philebus* (which Gadamer comments in detail in his 1931 *Habilitationschrift*),[32] are as it were promoted to equality: the one is not raised over the duality (or multiplicity) to form the transcendent One of neo-Platonism, as the School of Tübingen claims.[33] On the contrary, these two principles express, according to Gadamer, the impossibility of science in the strong sense of the term (*epistêmê*). So Gadamer's resolutely Socratic Plato takes the opposite view of the dogmatic and dualist Platonism attacked by Nietzsche and Heidegger.[34]

With regard to the neo-Platonic reading, modern scholars often refer to what they consider as a complete omission of the Socratic element in Plato. In additional to the

[28] Olympiodorus, *In Gorgiam*, 4.1, 32.2. More generally, Olympiodorus is of the opinion that "searching [*zêtêsis*] is more profitable than teaching [*didaskalia*]." Ibid., 40.5.

[29] Ibid., 20.2, 21.1; see 39.6. Ibid. 27.2, 44.7. The maieutics of the common notions in Olympiodorus includes the idea of a Socratic quest in which the reader is called on to *come nearer* to these as true opinions to be elucidated ever more. On the dialectic of common notions in Olympiodorus, see Harold Tarrant, "Olympiodorus and the Surrender of Paganism," *Byzantische Forschungen* 24 (1997): 180-192; François Renaud, "Rhétorique philosophique et fondement de la dialectique: le commentaire du *Gorgias* par Olympiodore," *Philosophie antique* 6 (2006): 145-151 and 154-157.

[30] This is why the skeptical reading of the New Acadamy, as opposed to the neo-Platonic interpretation, sometimes appears as a prefiguration of modern non-dogmatic readings; see e.g., Christopher Gill, "Afterword: Dialectic and the Dialogue Form in Late Plato," in Christopher Gill and Mary M. McCabe, ed., *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 283-310.

[31] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation," GW2: 351; Pierre Hadot, "La préhistoire des genres littéraires philosophiques médiévaux dans l'Antiquité," in *Les genres littéraires dans les sources théologiques et philosophiques médiévales: définition, critique et exploration*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications de l'Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1982), 3.

[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Platos dialektische Ethik. Phänomenologische Interpretation zum *Philebos*," GW5: 3-163. On Gadamer's interpretation of the Philebus, see the recent collection of essays Hermeneutic Philosophy and Plato: Christopher Gill and François Renaud, ed., *Gadamer's Response to the Philebus* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2010).

[33] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Amicus Plato magis amica veritas," GW6: 79-80. See Hans Krämer, "Platons ungeschriebene Lehre," in Theo Kobusch and Burkhard Mojsisch, ed., *Platon. Seine Dialoge in der Sicht der neueren* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 249-275; Hans J. Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie* (Heidelberg: Universität Verlag Winter, 1959); Konrad Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1963); Konrad Gaiser, "Plato's enigmatic lecture 'On the Good,'" *Phronesis* 25 (1980): 5-37; Thomas A. Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie: Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985); idem, *Das Bild des Dialektikers in Platons späten Dialogen* [= *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*, vol. 2] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

[34] Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," GW2: 508.

doctrinal structure usually accompanying neo-Platonic commentaries, there are frequent references to the standard questions which fulfill among others a pedagogical function and to which the commentator must give an answer in his Introduction. It must first be remembered, however, that Olympiodorus' commentaries deal with two dialogues which display Socratic dialectics (*Alcibiades*, *Gorgias*) and are sensitive to their dialogical dimension. Moreover, while the question-answer scheme is by Olympiodorus' time part of a scholastic tradition, it can nevertheless be seen as belonging to a mixed form midway between open questioning and systematic exposition, thus partaking in the spirit of inquiry[35] and capable of nuance in the analysis of literary and rhetoric features of Plato's elusive text.

II.4. *Maieutic Hermeneutics of the Implicit*

According to both Olympiodorus and Gadamer, the reader must seek the text's meaning not only in that which is said *expressis verbis*, but also in that which is merely alluded to or implied. Just as Socrates' irony aims at provoking the interlocutor's attention, likewise the aim of the Platonic dialogue is to encourage the reader to search beyond the immediate results of the argument and read between the lines. This kind of approach, which can be called a maieutical hermeneutics of the implicit, is routinely criticized by modern scholars as responsible for anachronistic and arbitrary readings that allow the interpreter to promote his own ideas. Before trying to probe the difficulties that this kind of approach does involve, let us first briefly underline its presuppositions as well as its legitimate claims.

It must, however, be pointed out at once that Olympiodorus and Gadamer conceive this maieutics very differently. According to Olympiodorus, the results to be discovered by the reader are well defined, fixed and definitive. The interpreter must by himself discover these truths by following the author's indications. After the fashion of Middle Platonic and neo-Platonic predecessors, Olympiodorus considers Plato to be writing with a set of doctrines that are already fully developed.[36] According to Gadamer, the results to be discovered by maieutical reading are open and indeterminate, as Plato seeks above all to provoke and make his reader think without offering final answers. The true dialogue, endless in nature, occurs between the reader and Plato, more exactly between the reader and the text.[37] The reader must therefore go beyond the written dialogue and pursue the countless implications of the questions discussed. The dialectics of questions and answers thus cannot have any closure, any more than can the hermeneutic circle (of the whole and its parts). Thus the Socratic dialogue is in Gadamer's views the model of all processes of understanding.

Olympiodorus and Gadamer agree at least in part in their non-subjectivist conception of truth. According to Olympiodorus and the neo-Platonists, truth is common and universal, and thus impersonal or anonymous; it transcends its author, including Plato, the most canonical of authors.[38] Moreover, the author who discovers and expresses

[35] See Hadot, "La préhistoire des genres littéraires philosophiques médiévaux dans l'Antiquité," 3.
[36] See Gill, "Afterword: Dialectic and the Dialogue Form in Late Plato," 301-304.
[37] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die neue Platoforschung," GW5: 223.
[38] See Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, "Introduction," in idem, ed., *Le commentaire: entre tradition et innovation* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 6. Another open question in current research is whether this conception necessarily implies, in the case of the neo-Platonists, a religious authority which

the truth always necessarily says the same thing on the same subject, as does his interpreter.[39] It follows from this that the philosophical truth to be discovered by interpretation cannot possibly be the author's property. In other words, according to this philosophical approach, common to both Olympiodorus and Gadamer, the act of interpreting is inseparable from the act of philosophizing. This conception implies the rejection of the widespread modern distinction between historical and philosophical truth. This hybrid conception is not always explicitly defended, but most of the time merely presupposed by the ancient commentators. While certain hermeneutic presuppositions are, among the neo-Platonists, operative and occasional (limited to Plato or some other author), Gadamer defends them explicitly and in his hands they become formal principles of all understanding.[40]

III. Two Intermediaries between Olympiodorus and Gadamer

So how are these divergences and above all convergences between Gadamer and Olympiodorus to be explained? In terms of historical affiliations, they must be understood, I claim, in the light of the combined influence of Schleiermacher and (German) classical humanism on Gadamer's hermeneutics.

III.1. *Schleiermacher*

Schleiermacher is Gadamer's principal authority in Platonic matters.[41] Despite his overt criticism of the neo-Platonic interpretation, Schleiermacher appropriates some of its components, among which two fundamental premises: (1) each dialogue is a whole, an overall unity (notably in the unity of the literary form

guarantees the infallibility of the canonical author; see Pierre Hadot, "Théologie, exégèse, révélation, écriture, dans la philosophie grecque," in Michel Tardieu, ed., *Les règles de l'interprétation* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 22; Sedley, "Socratic irony in the Platonist commentators," 110; for a criticism of the infallibility thesis in the case of Olympiodorus, see Renaud, "Tradition et critique: lecture jumelée de Platon et Aristote chez Olympiodore," 96-104.

[39] *Gorgias* 482a-b; see Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreter's*, 67.

[40] For a study of the distinction between operative and explicit concepts, see Eugen Fink, "Operative Begriffe in Husserls Phänomenologie," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 11 (1957): 321-337.

[41] See e.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Schleiermacher als Platoniker," GW4: 383: "der Entdecker der platonischen Dialogform." On the question of Schleiermacher's Platonism, see also the studies of Ada Neschke, "Platonisme et tournant herméneutique au début du XIXème siècle en Allemagne," in André Laks and Ada A. Neschke, ed., *La naissance du paradigme herméneutique: Schleiermacher, Humbolt, Boeckh, Droysen* ((Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1990), [2nd revised and augmented edition: *La naissance du paradigme herméneutique: De Kant et Schleiermacher à Dilthey*, 2008]), 121-153, as well as André Laks, "Platonisme et système chez Schleiermacher: des *Grundlinien* à la *Dialectique*," in ibid., 155-181. According to Neschke's "maximalist" thesis, Plato's dialectic constitutes the foundations of Schleiermacher's own hermeneutics (Neschke, "Platonisme et tournant herméneutique," 125; see ibid., 131-132), while Laks insists on the limits of this appropriation (Laks, "Platonisme et système chez Schleiermacher," 180-181); see Thomas A. Szlezák "Friedrich Schleiermacher und das Platonbild des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in Jan Rohls and Günther Wenz, ed., *Protestantische und deutsche Literatur* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 125-144.

and doctrinal content), and (2) all the dialogues taken together constitute a system, conceived in the light of the *Phaedrus*.[42]

Schleiermacher has *re*discovered the dialogue form in Plato, after the ancients (Albinus, Proclus, Olympiodorus and others) had made relatively detailed observations on it. These include the structure, the setting, the characters, as well as the relationship of those elements to the doctrinal content.[43] Schleiermacher's originality resides undoubtedly in the decisive importance given to the author's intention or design (*Absicht*, *Absichtlichkeit*) and especially in his subtle remarks on the devices (*Kunstmittel*) which Plato uses to achieve his maieutical aims with regard to the reader. The importance of these remarks on Plato's rhetorical and literary devices is insufficiently appreciated today. Among Plato's devices, Schleiermacher identifies the following: the enigma left unsolved, the deliberate lack of unity or coherence, the use of omissions, and more generally various allusions of indirect communication.[44]

Schleiermacher defends a unitary or more exactly progressive (proleptic) reading of a pedagogical kind, quite similar to that of Olympiodorus. According to this reading, an idea merely presupposed or left undeveloped in one dialogue is formulated or elaborated in another. Schleiermacher's pedagogical ordering of the dialogues, beginning with the *Phaedrus*, is considered today by nearly all Plato scholars as

[42] Marie-Dominique Richard ("La méthode exégétique de Schleiermacher dans son application au platonisme," in Tardieu, ed., *Les Règles de l'interprétation*, 224) draws attention to a certain irony in the reception of Schleiermacher: "il est très surprenant que ceux qui se sont fondés sur la notion de 'forme dialogique' pour conclure au caractère 'provisoire, inachevé, fragmentaire, ouvert' de la philosophie platonicienne n'aient pas tenu compte de ce que F. Schleiermacher lui-même a considéré Platon comme le premier philosophe systématique et émis l'idée selon laquelle chaque dialogue forme un tout et l'ensemble des dialogues un système."

[43] See François Renaud, "La conoscenza di sé nell'*Alcibiade I* e nel commento di Olimpiodoro," in Maurizio Migliori, ed., *Interiorità e Anima. Psychè in Platone* (Milan: Vita & Pensiero, 2007), 225-244.

[44] The relevant passage in Schleiermacher's general introduction deserves to be quoted *in extenso* (Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Einleitung," in Peter M. Steiner, ed. (with Andreas Arndt and Jörg Jantzen), *Über die Philosophie Platons. Geschichte der Philosophie. Vorlesungen über Sokrates und Platon (zwischen 1819 und 1823) - Die Einleitungen des Platon (1804-1828)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1804) (same pagination as the 1804 edition), 20-21): "*Hierzu nun wird erfordert, dass das Ende der Untersuchung nicht geradezu ausgesprochen und wörtlich niedergelegt wird, welches Vielen, die sich gerne beruhigen, wenn sie nur das Ende haben, gar leicht zum Fallstrick gereichen könnte, dass die Seele aber in der Notwendigkeit gesetzt wird, es zu suchen, und auf den Weg geleitet, wo sie es finden kann. Das erste geschieht, indem sie über ihren Zustand des Nichtwissens zu so klarem Bewusstsein gebracht wird, dass sie unmöglich gutwillig darin bleiben kann. Das andere, indem entweder aus Widersprüchen ein Rätsel geflochten wird, zu welchem die beabsichtige Idee die einzig mögliche Lösung ist, und oft auf ganz fremdscheinende zufällige Art manche Andeutung hingeworden, die nur derjenigen findet und versteht, der wirklich und selbsttätig sucht. Oder die eigentliche Untersuchung wird mit einer andern, nicht wie einem Schleier, sondern wie einer angewachsenen Haut überkleidet, welche dem Unaufmerksamen, aber auch nur diesem, dasjenige verdeckt, was eigentlich soll beobachtet oder gefunden werden, dem Aufmerksamen aber nur noch den Sinn für den innern Zusammenhang schärft und läutert. Oder wo es auf die Darstellung eines Ganzen ankommt, da wird dieses nur durch unzusammenhängende Striche angedeutet, die aber derjenige, dem die Gestalt schon im eigenen Sinne vorschwebt, leicht ergänzen und verbinden kann. Dieses ungefähr sind die Künste durch welche es dem Platon fast mit jedem gelingt das zu erreichen, was er wünscht, oder wenigstens das zu vermeiden, was er fürchtet*." See Szlezák, "Friedrich Schleiermacher und das Platonbild des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," 128; See also Gary Alan Scott, ed., *Philosophy in Dialogue*: *Plato's Many Devices* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

untenable. Moreover, since in this approach the *Republic* is the focal point toward which everything converges, this ordering also proves incomplete insofar as the second half of Plato's œuvre is insufficiently accounted for. The hypothesis of a pedagogical plan is nevertheless suggestive and deserves to be explored anew with due attention to the results of stylistic research conducted since Schleiermacher.[45]

A progressive or proleptic reading need not be of a pedagogical kind. This approach today has an heterogeneous group of defenders, whom one can consider as–in part recalcitrant–heirs, of Schleiermacher: the School of Tübingen, that of Leo Strauss, but also commentators taken individually, such as Paul Shorey and Auguste Diès at the beginning of the twentieth century or more recently Charles Kahn,[46] Michael Erler[47] and Christopher Rowe[48] to name but a few. The starting point of the unitary or progressive approach (independently of the pedagogical hypothesis, which can take either a central or a very secondary place in the analysis) is the refusal of the–by no means self-evident–assumption that each dialogue expresses everything its author thinks or knows at the time of writing,[49] as if the dialogues could be read as "thermometers" of the mind, if not the emotional state, of the philosopher. Schleiermacher and his recent disciples or allies start instead from the (more likely) heuristic principle that Plato chooses various treatments as appropriate according to the dialogical context and that therefore these treatments in the various dialogues are always more or less partial or incomplete, though complementary.[50]

In general Gadamer takes up Schleiermacher's unitarist, literary and maieutical hermeneutics, while nevertheless rejecting the notions of the author's (psychological) intention and that of a global pedagogical plan. It is important, however, to clarify an often ill-understood aspect of Schleiermacher's pedagogical and "dogmatic" reading. The hermeneutics of the implicit admittedly defends a fixed and closed maieutics, the results of which are already known to the author: while the discoveries to be made by the reader truly become his own, these have first belonged to the author, who proposes them to him. But it is equally true, inversely, that while the discovery of the truths in

[45] See Vittorio Hösle, "Der Platonimus und seine Interpretation: Die drei Paradigmen und ihr Ort in der Geschichte der Hermeneutik," in idem, *Platon interpretieren* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 43.

[46] Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*.

[47] Michael Erler, *Platon* (Munich: Beck, 2006); Erler, *Platon* [*Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, begründet von Friedrich Ueberweg, völlig neubearbeitete Ausgabe, Helmut Flashar, ed., *Philosophie der Antike*, vol. 2/2] (Basel: Schwabe, 2007).

[48] Christopher Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[49] See the influential Plato scholar Gregory Vlastos (Myles Burnyeat, ed., *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 125): "In my previous book on Socrates [*Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 1991] I blocked out the hypothesis on which my whole interpretation of Plato's dialogues depends: Plato makes Socrates say in any given dialogue 'whatever *he*–Plato–thinks at the time of writing would be the most reasonable thing for Socrates to be saying just then in expounding and defending his own philosophy.'"

[50] For caveats about the use of cross-references among the dialogues as a means to solve inconsistencies or anomalies among them, see Mary L. Gill, "The Platonic Dialogue," in Mary L. Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 136-150.

question are inherited ones, those truths are nevertheless acquired by an autonomous effort similar to the one involved in an independently-acquired knowledge (*selbsttätig*, in Schleiermacher's phrasing). In other words, the distinction between an open and a closed maieutics is fundamental and sets Gadamer and Schleiermacher in opposition to each other, yet it is not absolute: the "dogmatic" character of this interpretation is perfectly compatible with a certain independence of thought, as it presupposes the promotion of such independence as the ultimate aim of the pedagogical model.

III.2. *Humanist Tradition*

As pointed out at the outset, Gadamer deliberately returns to humanism, historicism's archenemy. From this humanism, stemming from the tradition of the classical literature and culminating in German Classicism and Romanticism, Gadamer takes over "monumental history" (Nietzsche) aiming at erecting great models capable of guiding the present, as did many others of his generation.[51] The young Gadamer is also inspired by Werner Jaeger's "Third Humanism." Here again Gadamer's proximity to Olympiodorus and the neo-Platonists is striking. For Gadamer and the ancients, the philosopher is not a solitary thinker who constructs a system in splendid isolation (one thinks of Descartes' proclaimed program), but someone who thinks in a tradition[52] and in dialogue with his eminent predecessors.

It is precisely from the "classical" (*das Klassische* as opposed to *die Klassik*) and of the humanistic tradition, conceived as unitary and continuous, that Gadamer attempts to operate the reconciliation between pre-scientific hermeneutic evoked at the beginning of this study. The rehabilitation of tradition clashes head-on with the monopoly of the historical sciences stemming from the nineteenth century, which monopoly is still defended today. Let us recall that historicism rests on two fundamental presuppositions: (1) the principle of neutrality (placing itself as it were outside of the object of study), and (2) the principle of historical, irreducible (or indeed incommensurable) otherness; thus the attempt to understand the authors of the past as contemporaries is bound to be thought naive and illusory. Gadamer's philosophical approach–and that of Olympiodorus too–requires, on the contrary, the interpreter's engagement with the tradition and the decompartmentalization of the text's horizon with regard to its original context.[53] This approach thus claims the contemporaneousness (*Gleichzeitigkeit*)

[51] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Philosophie und Philologie. Über Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff," GW6: 275-276; Gadamer, "Die griechische Philosophie und das moderne Denken," GW6: 3; Helmut Flashar, ed., *Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979); Helmut Flashar and Sabine Vogt, ed., *Altertumswissenschaft in den 20er Jahren. Neue Fragen und Impulse* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995).

[52] Hadot, "Théologie, exégèse, révélation, écriture, dans la philosophie grecque," 22.

[53] On the conception of a philosophical reading as decompartmentalization from the immediate context, let me quote Moraux's eloquent defense of it (Joseph Moraux, *Le sens du platonisme* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1967), v-vi): "Le sens d'une doctrine philosophique ne peut être saisi si l'on n'a pas conscience des problèmes auxquels elle prétend apporter réponse; or cette prise de conscience suppose une réflexion qui déborde l'analyse philologique et qui doit s'inspirer auprès des grands philosophes de tous les temps. C'est, en effet, le propre des problèmes philosophiques que d'être toujours renaissants; ils se posent, sous des formes

of the Classics with us, without renouncing the tools of the historico-philological method.[54] In other words, in that perspective, the commentator must not only explicate the text's meaning, but also judge its truth claim.[55] In short, both the ancient commentators and Gadamer presuppose the tradition's continuity and takes seriously the truth claims of the classical texts. For Gadamer, the encounter with the "classical" avoids the dogmatism of classicism, in maintaining a living dialogue with the tradition.

IV. Separation or Integration?

We may now return to the second question raised in the introduction: Does Gadamer succeed in relativizing the break between humanist hermeneutics and historicism, and in integrating it into his philosophical hermeneutics? The radical historicization of hermeneutics defended by Gadamer does have its share of problems, but it involves salutary effects that should be underscored. First, this historicization reminds us that progress in the historical sciences is almost inevitably accompanied by losses and oversights, which a naïve progressive ideology is unable to recognize.[56] Secondly, Gadamer's antihistoricism takes up the question of truth (*Sache*), which necessarily transcends the authors' intention and historical context. Neo-Platonic exegesis likewise includes philosophical originality, although this novelty occurs as it were in spite of the commentators, insofar as these do not dispose of a clear consciousness of the historical distance from their object of study nor of a theory designed to bring to light the conditions of their own exegetical activity. Gadamer conceives his hermeneutics as a middle way between anachronistic re-actualization and doxographical neutrality, namely in attempting to read Greek philosophy as a source of truths capable of questioning some of our own habits of thinking.[57] In other words, he privileges an approach of mediation and dialogue.[58] But does he succeed in this enterprise? This is a large question to which I can only offer here the outline of an answer.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics seeks to supplement the requirements of historical exactness by subordinating it to the question of truth. Two arguments among others militate in favor of this orientation. First, if indeed there were only discontinuity and incommensurability, as historicism and some postmodernisms claim, it would be strictly impossible to understand or translate Greek texts today; those texts would no longer have anything to tell us, much less to teach us. Secondly, in seeing in its objects

nouvelles, à toutes les époques; apercevoir la permanence de ces problèmes, ce n'est pas confondre les doctrines, assimiler entre elles les solutions proposées; c'est, au contraire, la condition requise pour apprécier chacune d'elle dans son originalité historique."

[54] Gadamer, "Vorwort zur 2. Auflage," 444; Gadamer, "Hermeneutik und Historismus," GW2: 419.

[55] Olympiodorus, *In Categorias*, 10. 25-27; see Elias (David), *In Categorias*, 122. 25-27.

[56] Hösle, "Der Platonimus und seine Interpretation," 28.

[57] See Mario Vegetti, "Perché la storia della filosofia antica è diventata noiosa?," in Valeria Andò and Andrea Cozzo, ed., *Pensare all'antica: A chi servono i filosofi?* (Palermo: Carroci, 2002), 17-21.

[58] See Michel Narcy, "La philosophie ancienne au pays de Descartes," in Livio Rossetti, ed., *Greek Philosophy in the New Millenium: Essays in Honour of Thomas M. Robinson* (Sankt Augustin: Akademia Verlag, 2004), 271.

of inquiry nothing but an antiquarian interest, historical research tends to forget that it is itself part of a tradition (notably that of science, both ancient and modern) and that it has therefore a share in the truth claim raised by it. In a word, without the ideal of the search for truth (be it historical or philosophical), on which all historical research necessarily rests, the latter's very *raison d'être* vanishes.[59]

Inversely, however, Gadamer's radical historicization of hermeneutics *tends* to reject the modern methodological and epistemological heritage. This is why the title *Wahrheit und Methode* has often been interpreted as meaning *Wahrheit gegen Methode*! Such an historicization of pre-modern and modern hermeneutics (or others) renders them all equally legitimate by excluding, in theory at least, the possibility that there may be interpretations objectively or intrinsically superior to others: understanding does not mean understanding better, but always understanding differently (*immer anders verstehen*).[60] The emphatically non-normative, descriptive (or ontological) orientation of Gadamerian theory implies a unitary conception of application (*Applikation*, *Anwendung*). Application does not involve, according to Gadamer, the interpreter's will, that is a methodic control, but rather occurs necessarily whenever we understand (a text or some other thing). Given its strong emphasis on belongingness to a tradition, his hermeneutics is bound to reject the idea that there can exist *two* independent horizons not only after but also before the "fusion of horizons."[61]

One of the principal implications of Gadamer's main thesis is the primacy of practical reason, the dependence of philosophy on pre-philosophical knowledge and the ultimate ethical finality of all *theôria*. According to this view, all understanding necessarily implies an application in existential practice. This conception tends to reject–rather than to complement, as Gadamerian conciliatory hermeneutics intends to do–the cognitive or theoretical ambitions raised by ancient hermeneutics and preserved to some extant in modern (methodological) hermeneutics.[62] This more modest perspective inevitably leads Gadamer to discard the "dogmatic" or "rationalist" conception of philosophy in Ancient Greece, the great *leitmotiv* of which remains the desire to understand the whole (*kosmos, physis*) as something eternal and in principle intelligible. These ancient metaphysical claims are, in Gadamer's interpretations, consequently underestimated and to some extent distorted, in favor of a (Heideggerian) conception of Being as fundamentally mysterious and of a (Kantian) notion of truth as an unattainable end.[63] So this immanent and practical conception of *theôria* tends to deny the accessibility and

[59] See Günter Figal, "Platonforschung und hermeneutische Philosophie," in Thomas A. Szlezák and KarlHeinz Stanzel, ed., *Platonisches Philosophieren. Zehn Vorträge zu Ehren von Hans Joachim Krämer* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2001), 19-29; Walter Mesch, "Platons Dialoge als hermeneutisches Problem," *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik* 4 (2005), 41.

[60] Hösle, "Der Platonimus und seine Interpretation," 28.

[61] Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 311-312; see Hans Krämer, "Hermeneutik–Wissenschaft—Kultur—Praxis," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 51 (1997), 397; idem, *Die Kritik der Hermeneutik. Interpretationsphilosophie und Realismus* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007).

[62] See Ada Neschke-Hentschke, "Introduction historique," in Ada Neschke-Hentschke (with Francesco Gregorio and Catherine König-Pralong), ed., *Les Herméneutiques au seuil du XXIème siècle: Évolution et débat actuel* (Louvain & Paris: Editions Peeters, 2004), 23.

[63] For a general account and partial assessment of Gadamer's interpretation of Plato, see François Renaud, *Die Resokratisierung Platons. Die platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamers* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1999).

indeed the relevance of the pure theoretical ideal.[64] It is true, as Gadamer insists, that philosophy as a way of life is foremost an activity and only secondarily the result of that activity,[65] and that the ideal of *theôria* always presupposes participation, that is belongingness to a community (*êthos*). As he himself acknowledges, *theôria* is never morally neutral but on the contrary oriented toward the Good; it is, in other words, teleological in nature.[66] However, the question then arises as to how Gadamer's explicitly immanent hermeneutics can possibly give an account of the classical teleological, that is metaphysical thought which it seeks to retrieve. This *aporia* in Gadamer's hermeneutic practice, combined with the fundamental theoretical disagreement between the two hermeneutics, which is at the root of this *aporia*, confirm the necessity of methodic distanciation as a means to guard so far as possible against the projection of one's prejudices upon the object of study–a tendency which Gadamer recognizes as problematic (especially after 1960) but as largely inevitable.

A full integration of the two hermeneutics, beyond these incompatibilities, proves necessary and has yet to be realized. Such reflective work on hermeneutic principles is increasingly present in current Plato scholarship. This questioning is in some ways linked to current interest in philosophical commentary in Antiquity.[67] Our comparison between the Gadamerian hermeneutic principles and those Olympiodorus thus aimed to clarify key issues in Gadamer and to indicate, albeit indirectly, how and to what extent the ancients' way of reading Plato might enrich ours. The relevance of ancient hermeneutics such as that of Olympiodorus' lies in the threefold principle of unity referred to above: the unity of the work, the unity of form and content and the unity of theory and practice. In his dialogues Plato has left this threefold unity largely *implicit*, which suggests that he deliberately avoided expounding the aim and content of (his) philosophy in an abstract and systematic manner, in favor of a concrete and immanent presentation of it that is capable of revealing the origins and obstacles of philosophical questioning as well as some (final or provisory) doctrinal conclusions.[68] Together with Plato's own implicit poetics,[69] ancient and modern "alternative" hermeneutics (such as Gadamer's insofar as it remains faithful to the Platonic spirit)[70] need to be integrated into a truly comprehensive hermeneutics.

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[64] See Catherine H. Zuckert, "Hermeneutics in Practice: Gadamer on Ancient Philosophy," in Robert J. Dostal *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220.

[65] Gadamer, "Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles," GW7: 226.

[66] See Plato, *Republic* 505 d-e.

[67] See Annas and Rowe, ed., *New Perspectives on Plato*; Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters*; Harold Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato's* Meno (London: Duckworth, 2005); Dirk Baltzly and Harold Tarrant, ed., *Reading Plato in Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2006); Gyburg Radke, *Das Lächeln des Parmenides. Proklos' Interpretationen zur Platonischen Dialogform* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2006); Martin Achard and François Renaud, ed., *Le commentaire philosophique dans l'Antiquité et ses prolongements: méthodes exégétiques* I [special issue of *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 2008, 64: 5-125]; II 2008, 64, 3: 581-690.

[68] Olympiodorus, *In Alcibiadem*, 56; Mesch, "Platons Dialoge als hermeneutisches Problem," 36.

[69] The expression is Micheal Erler's : «To Hear the Right Thing and to Miss the Point: Plato's Implicit Poetics», in Ann N. Michelini, ed., *Plato as Author: The Rhetoric of Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill 2003), 153-173.

[70] Hösle, "Der Platonismus und seine Interpretation," 28.

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edited by

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(2011)

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