

Theodore George, Gert-Jan van der Heiden (Eds.), *The Gadamerian Mind*, Routledge, London-New York 2021, pp. 581, € 190.00, ISBN 9780367194628

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The Gadamerian Mind, edited by Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden, presents a comprehensive picture of Gadamer's thought and his significance within the human sciences. The book contains thirty-eight chapters, with contributions by leading scholars of the philosophical hermeneutics, such as Günter Figal, Jean Grondin, Lawrence K. Schmidt, and Nicholas Davey. As mentioned in the "Introduction", the companion aims to provide a picture of the Gadamerian mind in the hermeneutic sense of picture, which consists not in a mere replication of Gadamer's original thought, but rather in an "increase in being" for the hermeneutic study.

To achieve this, the companion brings a wide range of topics into focus. The book comprises six parts. The first part presents an introductory overview of Gadamer's thought. In the second part, the fundamental concepts of philosophical hermeneutics, such as truth, experience, tradition, language, play, and image, are elaborated in detail. The third part gives a full account of the legacy of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Dilthey, and Heidegger in Gadamer. Gadamer's encounter with contemporary philosophers like Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida, and Vattimo is then illustrated in the following part. Moreover, in the final two parts, the increasing influence of philosophical hermeneutics in other related disciplines is carefully considered in order to present inspiring questions for further interdisciplinary study.

Given the vital importance of art in Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is not surprising that, out of thirty-eight chapters, at least fourteen are dedicated to art. This review will introduce the chapters that are mainly devoted to the ontology of the work of art, the truth of art, and Gadamer's later reflections on poetic language, to show how the companion presents a fundamental and quite comprehensive picture of Gadamer's aesthetic thought.

Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics moves from the critique of Kantian subjective aesthetics. Gaetano Chiurazzi, in the seventh chapter, "Truth", focuses on Gadamer's objection to Kantian aesthetics and interprets it as an effort to remove the traditional obstacles to the truth-claim of art. According to Gadamer, Kant

relegates the aesthetic experience to a merely subjective field, relating it to the reflective judgement and the feeling of pleasure. Under the influence of Kant, subsequent philosophies have stressed ever more the subjective character of the aesthetic experience, “to the point of making art a mere *Erlebnis*, that is, something merely ‘psychological’ that is confirmed in the domain of the mere appearance” (p.96). The outcome of such a concept of aesthetic appearance is what Gadamer calls “aesthetic differentiation”. It consists in an abstraction of the so-called aesthetic quality, by detaching the artwork from the context where it is produced and in which its significance is rooted. This leads to discrediting any possibility of knowing through aesthetic experience. Thus, Gadamer argues that, to fulfil the truth-claim of art, “the ontological definition of the aesthetic” (Gadamer 2004, p.73) is necessary. This means reinserting the work of art into its historical production and making it “an object not of aesthetic fruition, but of understanding” (p.97).

The initial concept that Gadamer employs to illustrate the ontology of the work of art is that of “play”. As explained in the seventh chapter, to understand the connection between this ontology and the concept of play, one should first free the latter from the subjectivist meaning that it assumes mainly in Kant and Schiller. For Gadamer, “the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead, the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it” (Gadamer 2004, p.103). It means that the work of art cannot be reduced to the creation of the artist or of the audience. Instead, it has its own being.

Similarly, in chapter thirty-eight, “The Ontology of the Work of Art and the Universality of Hermeneutics Reconsidered”, Markus Gabriel interprets the hermeneutic ontology of the work of art as a work-aesthetics that tries to compensate for the weakness of both reception-aesthetics and production-aesthetics by exposing both the artist and the audience to the mysterious force of artworks in which ontological truth reveals itself in an entirely uncontrollable manner. What is emphasised here is that both the artist and the audience are necessary for the artistic play.

Cynthia R. Nielsen, in the eleventh chapter, “Gadamer on Play and the Play of Art”, a chapter specifically devoted to the concept of play, also highlights the necessity of the participation of spectators in play, by saying that “the ontology of artworks are

communicative, performative events whose being requires active spectatorial or auditorial participants” (p.139).

The self-presentation character of play is emphasised in the fourth chapter, “The Poetic Word, Art, and the Arts”. For Gadamer, the experience of art is essentially an encounter with something that bears meaning and truth within itself. How is it possible? It is by means of self-presentation. Through self-presentation, the work of art presents the subject matter, its content, to the spectators that are attracted to its artistic play and makes reality come into being through the encounter with the spectators. Gadamer also introduces the Greek concept of *mimesis* to illustrate the self-presentation of the work of art. However, in contrast to Plato’s criticism of *mimesis* as the copy of the original, Gadamer argues that *mimesis* “does not imply a reference to an original as something other than itself, but means that something meaningful is there as itself” (Gadamer 1986, p.121).

More than any other art form, Gadamer regards the image (*Bild*) as the most suitable example to illustrate the mimetic presentation of art. In *The Gadamerian Mind*, there are three chapters, the fourth, the seventh, and the thirteenth, that discuss the mimetic character of the image. All three chapters interpret the image under Gadamer’s understanding as a presentation rather than as a secondary representation of the original. For Plato, the image, being the representation of the original, involves an ontological decrease and thus a distance from truth. Gadamer, instead, argues that the original, in its being presented through an image, is neither ontologically weakened nor undermined, but is rather intensified. In other words, the image brings an “increase of being” to the original through its presentation.

The artistic truth appropriate to the self-presentation character of the work of art is discussed in two chapters. In chapter seven, the hermeneutic truth of art is firstly clarified as manifestation or self-presentation, in the sense of Heidegger’s truth as *aletheia*. By means of self-presentation, the work of art uncovers what is “there”. In this particular sense, art provides us with access to the world. In the wake of this, Gaetano Chiurazzi also introduces the formative and transformative character of the hermeneutic truth of art. For him, philosophical hermeneutics is not a “theory of truth”, since it does not explain what truth is, but is rather “a theory of the experience of truth”, for it says what we can derive from the experience of truth. Truth shows the transformative nature of knowing, which involves an increased knowledge not

only of the world, but also of ourselves. That is how the experience of truth enables us to cultivate our specific modes of being in the world.

This cultivation function of the experience of artistic truth is also related to what Gadamer calls “hold upon nearness”, which James Risser clarifies in the fourth chapter. The form of knowing that is appropriate to the mimetic character of the work of art is recognition. Gadamer defines it as the recognition of “something as something that has already been seen” (Gadamer 1986, p.99). In other words, art provides us not only with access to the world, but also with an enhanced familiarity with the world, that makes us feel at home in the world.

Apart from the topics related to the ontology of the work of art and the truth of art, this companion also includes studies on Gadamer’s later thought on poetic language, especially from the perspective of the internal affinity between poetry and philosophy, which illuminates a truly inspiring direction to reconsider the crucial importance of art for philosophical hermeneutics.

Following Heidegger, Gadamer attempts to narrow down the gap between philosophy and poetry. As James Risser claims in the fourth chapter, “The Poetic Word, Art, and the Arts”, “both poetry and philosophy place themselves within the medium of language in a way that our ordinary use of language does not” (p.54). In the ordinary use of language, we are directed to the referents of words, to what is being talked about, rather than to words themselves. However, the language of both poetry and philosophy claims autonomy for itself. It does not refer back to any original expression or author’s intention, but rather “speaks for itself as a saying-word” (p.55). In other words, poetic language, like philosophical language, does not disappear in our act of understanding, but instead continually stands there confronting our understanding. Thus, poetic language has the ability, as Gadamer puts it, “to come back to itself”. It comes back to itself insofar as it authenticates itself with respect to its meaning.

Similarly, in chapter twenty, “Gadamer’s Heidegger: On Language and Metaphysics”, also Niall Keane points out the affinity between philosophy and poetry. According to his interpretation, Gadamer believes that neither philosophy nor poetry “refer to an ‘object’ that exists in a sphere beyond the speaking, and in fact refer both to the experience of reality and to the self-actualization of thought in a speech that wants to reach the other and be heard” (p.266). What is emphasised here is that

poetic language is recognised by Gadamer as an authentic method to return to the living experience of the world. It is exactly what Heidegger's so-called "destruction of the history of ontology" desires to achieve, in resisting "the absolutizing excesses of speculation and the attempts to overcome language by means of concepts and ideas" (p.265). Gadamer finds in both poetising and philosophising the dialogical model of ancient Greek philosophy, a mode of expression that brings to light what remains unfulfilled in the living language within the horizon of communication. Thus, poetic language has the creative power to achieve the self-actualization of thought in the event of the encounter with the other.

As for the ontology of poetry as a dialogue with the other, one can find in chapter twenty-four, "Poem, Dialogue, and Witness: Gadamer's Reading of Paul Celan", a compelling exemplification. According to Gert-Jan van der Heiden, the author of this chapter, Gadamer's understanding of the poem as a dialogue involves not only the interaction between the text and the reader, but also the poem's dialogue with its other. Indeed, according to Gadamer's interpretation, the other in Celan's poems is the You toward whom the I is consistently on the way, as well as the subject matter with which the poem intends to have a dialogue. The language of Celan's poetry is characterised by the fragmentation of sense and the lack of answers. According to Gert-Jan van der Heiden, the incomplete and unsaid meaning of poetic language functions as an invitation to the other to join in the dialogue with the poem. It is in doing so that Celan's poetries keep a free space in which the other can dwell. Thus, the poetic word does not simply speak about the subject matter, it gives its word to the other so that the other can speak.

To conclude, *The Gadamerian Mind* is a useful companion on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It introduces a wide range of topics, thus presenting a comprehensive picture of Gadamer's thought and its implication within the domains of both philosophical inquiry and other related disciplines. In particular, the chapters devoted to art bring into focus the fundamental concepts related to the ontology of the work of art and provide us with multiple perspectives to understand the hermeneutic truth of art and to clarify Gadamer's later thoughts on poetic language. Generally speaking, the book presents itself as a reliable introduction to the hermeneutic world of art.

Bibliography

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