Chun Lin
Università degli Studi di Padova

Gadamer, in a late essay titled *Between Phenomenology and Dialectic. An Attempt at a Self-Critique* claims that his hermeneutics lies somehow between phenomenology and dialectic and can reconcile the tension between the two. A question thus arises as to whether Gadamer has succeeded in reconciling what he takes to be two different approaches to philosophy. Robert J. Dostal's latest book, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, provides a thorough response to the query. The book offers a comprehensive and critical account of Gadamer's intricate relation to phenomenology and classical philosophy in seven thematically organised chapters. Gadamer's simultaneous embrace and critique of the two approaches are explicitly illustrated with reference to his specific thought on the Enlightenment, humanism, language, aesthetics, and science.

In the opening chapter, Dostal makes a noteworthy observation concerning Gadamer's ambivalence toward the Enlightenment. In the contemporary context centred on the contestability of modernity, there are disputes on whether Gadamer qualifies as a significant contributor to the anti-modern camp. According to Dostal, Gadamer cannot be simply categorised as pro- or anti-modern since, because, in addition to his sharp critique of the modern Enlightenment, we can also see his positive acceptance of some aspects of it. According to Dostal, Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment is mainly due to its theoretical promotion of epistemological representationalism and its practical demotion of prudence (*phronesis*). For Gadamer, the Enlightenment is "bad" because of its methodologism, scientism, moral utilitarianism, and instrumental view of language, together with its devaluation

of prejudice, rhetorical tradition, and authority. Dostal notices that Gadamer's critique of the subjectivism of representationalism is mainly indebted to Heidegger. Additionally, he draws certain distinctions between Gadamer and other representative figures of the counter-Enlightenment movements, namely, the Frankfurt School and French postmodernism. As for Gadamer's positive identification with the Enlightenment, Dostal finds the crux to be Kant's practical philosophy: "Gadamer aligns his hermeneutics with Kant's philosophy inasmuch as he calls his hermeneutics 'practical'; [...] he sees in Kant's distinction of theory and practice a mode of preserving the Aristotelian distinction between *phronesis* and *theoria* (and also *techne*)" (pp. 43-44).

Gadamer refers to his hermeneutics as a practical philosophy mainly because of its fundamental concern with man's practical and ethical life. His hermeneutics is avowedly a rehabilitation of the humanistic tradition. However, Heidegger rejects humanism. Thus, Gadamer's intellectual debt to Heidegger and reclaim of humanism seem to be at odds with one another, an issue that Dostal addresses in the second chapter. At the centre of Heidegger's critique of Sartre's essay *Existentialism Is a Humanism* is the notion that humanism is subjectivistic. Heidegger claims that humanism, although it makes the human the measure of things, "has not found a high enough place or role for the human" (p. 58), as it ignores the more fundamental question of Being. Gadamer follows Heidegger in criticising contemporary subjectivism, but disagrees with the fact that humanism must necessarily be a form of subjectivism. Contrarily, the humanist tradition, according to Gadamer, is "a corrective of contemporary subjectivism" (p. 64). Dostal interprets Gadamer's humanism as civic humanism, since the central concept of Gadamer's humanism, *Bildung*, has both ethical and political connotations. Gadamer regards *Bildung* as a revival of Aristotelian *phronesis*. When considered in the context of hermeneutics, the cultivation of *phronesis* refers to the formation of virtues associated with the hermeneutical dialogue, such as openness, trust, charity, humility, and goodwill towards others. Thus, *Bildung* fosters our friendship and solidarity with others. This civic friendship then

provides the web of relations required for politics, namely, "the ethical basis for any politics" (p. 78).

The focus of the next chapter is a detailed examination of Gadamer's appropriation of Plato and Aristotle. Dostal especially emphasises Aristotle's significance for the hermeneutical problem of application. A contentious claim of Gadamer's hermeneutics is that the understanding of a text necessitates its application to one's own life: "To understand is to apply" (p. 90). Gadamer does not turn to Kant for the solution to the problem of application, since ethics, for Kant, is a matter of rule-following, while there is no rule for applying rules. Kant acknowledges that "the power of judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced" (p. 90). It is in Aristotle's *phronesis* that Gadamer finds access to the phronetic understanding of one's concrete situation. Dostal highlights "three closely related aspects of phronetic understanding" (p. 90): (1) phronetic understanding is not an understanding of objects, but rather of one's moral situation; (2) self-understanding is involved in phronetic understanding; (3) there is no distinction between the normative and the cognitive in phronetic understanding. Besides, Dostal also pays attention to Gadamer's argument on the ethical and metaphysical proximity between Plato and Aristotle. According to Gadamer, the principal ideas of Aristotle's ethics can already be found in Plato's *Philebus* and *Statesman*, in which Plato provides an account of the good life. Gadamer would also have Aristotle save Plato from Platonism, in that Aristotle's critique of Plato's ideas is unjustified. Plato's concept of "coming into being", developed "in order to overcome as a false illusion the idea of any actual separation between the two worlds, a world of ideas and a world of appearances" (*GR*, p. 209), is indeed a predecessor to Aristotle's concept of *energeia*.

We can also see Gadamer's rehabilitation of Plato and Aristotle in his recovery of *mimesis*, a central concept of his aesthetics. Dostal introduces the concept of *Bild*, which is typically translated as "picture" or "image", and discusses its significance for Gadamer's ontology of the artwork in the fourth chapter. Gadamer employs the notion of *Bild* to emphasise the non-differentiation between the picture and the pictured. Dostal notes that although Gadam-

er attempts to appropriate Plato's idea of *mimesis* to indicate the ontological relation between the original and the image, it is in Aristotle that Gadamer ultimately finds a more convincing justification of this idea: "Mimesis then does not imply a reference to an original as something other than itself, but means that something meaningful is there as itself" (*RB*, p. 121). Here, the Heideggerian language of "letting beings be" is used to demonstrate that what *mimesis* reveals is precisely the real being of the thing. The artwork recognised ontologically as a mimetic picture makes the thing pictured present in its mimetic presentation. In this way, Gadamer justifies the truth claim of the experience of art. Dostal also mentions Gadamer's response in his later essays to the criticism that his conception of art as mimetic fails to account for modern art, especially non-representational art. Gadamer argues that the picture depends more on what it presents than on what it alludes to. Modern non-representational art uses lines and colours to present the order of the *kosmos*, namely, the order of our worlds, and thus is also mimetic.

After illustrating Gadamer's account of the mimetic relation between the picture and the pictured thing, in the fifth chapter, Dostal moves on to Gadamer's ontological view of language to demonstrate how it presents the relation between the word and the thing. Gadamer's concepts of *Sprache* and *Sprachlichkeit* are typically translated as "language" and "linguisticality". Dostal prefers to translate them as "speech" and "speechiness", as Gadamer is more concerned with what is entailed in our conversation with others rather than with linguistic details. Any conversation should culminate in a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener. In other words, any hermeneutical conversation is destined to agreement. Following Socrates' rightness requirements for good speech, Gadamer considers truth an indispensable requirement for good speech and, unlike some pragmatists who regard agreement as a criterion of truth, he holds that "the thing under discussion renders the agreement true or false" (p. 123). What is revealed in the conversation is the truth of the thing. Here Dostal mentions Gadamer's central claim about language: "Being that can be understood is language". Understanding is a matter

of language, as we understand things in words, and it is language that leads us to an authentic understanding of things. Language opens up the world for us.

In chapter six, Dostal first defends Gadamer against the charge of anti-science. He claims that Gadamer objects to scientism rather than to science. Taking his cue from Husserl's account of the lifeworld and Heidegger's notion of the "fore" structure of understanding, Gadamer criticises scientism for viewing science as the only source of truth. The human sciences actually deal with more fundamental experiences than the natural sciences do. Another significant question Dostal considers in this chapter is Gadamer's defence of the scientific status of philosophy. Gadamer argues that philosophy's theoretical construction, conceptuality, and, most crucially, its claim to truth make it a branch of science. Dostal also introduces Gadamer's arguments for the distinction between his hermeneutics and philology in his debates with Emilio Betti and E. D. Hirsch. These opponents cast doubt on the scientificity of Gadamer's hermeneutics, because they claim that it lacks a judging standard for the validity and objectivity of interpretation. In Gadamer's defence, the model of hermeneutics these critics conceive is wholly different from his philosophical hermeneutics and much more akin to the philological-methodological hermeneutics of the 19th century. Gadamer acknowledges philology's claim to objectivity, but the primary concern of hermeneutics should be the truth of understanding.

The final chapter is devoted to the central theme of the whole book, namely, that Gadamer regards his philosophical hermeneutics as somehow between phenomenology and dialectic. Gadamer says so as he considers his hermeneutics a reconciliation between phenomenology and dialectic. The reconciliation is marked by the identification Gadamer makes of intuition with language – or, to use classical terminology, of *nous* with *logos*. Most of the time, Gadamer avoids the use of the word intuition, but he does discuss the idea of the direct contact with things in his appropriation of Plato's and Aristotle's term *nous*: "A central and basic proposition that Gadamer shares with Plato and Aristotle is fragment #3 from Parmenides, which states that 'thinking and being are the same'

(*to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*)" (p. 181). The notion of *noein* denotes the immediate knowing of the presence of something. Gadamer makes the effort to demonstrate that, for Plato, *noein* is dialectical, since knowing requires a knowledge of the whole and thus entails knowledge of differentiation. He then ties dialectical knowing to conversation, as knowing entails engaging in conversation. Gadamer also claims that, for Aristotle, "[t]he 'eye of the soul' is present only in the *logos* and can 'see' only with the *logos*" (*TM*, p. 322). Therefore, for Aristotle, "speech and thought remain completely unified" (*TM*, p. 431). If speech (*logos*) is dialectical and speech and thought are unified, it follows that, for Aristotle, all thought is dialectical and, accordingly, *nous* is dialectical. In this way, Gadamer appropriates Plato's and Aristotle's thesis, as he identifies *nous* with *logos* and makes a case for the reconciliation between phenomenology and dialectic.

Yet, Dostal contests the identification that Gadamer makes of *nous* with *logos*. He contends that Gadamer is neglecting the distinction between *nous* and *logos*, an important distinction recognised by both Plato and Aristotle: "*Nous* and *logos* reciprocally reinforce one another but are not the same" (p. 185). According to Dostal, *noein* as a kind of wordless "seeing" is immediate, while *logos* as "saying" is not: "It suggests that we first see something and understand it in 'sight' and then articulate it in words" (p. 182). To some degree, Dostal is aligned with Husserl and the early Heidegger, who point out the pre-conceptual or pre-predicative aspect of human experience. Gadamer never embraces the idea of the pre-predicative experience and thus simply reduces *nous* to *logos*. Dostal makes it clear that he is not opposing the reconciliation of phenomenology and dialectic or the togetherness of *nous* and *logos*, but rather the reconciliation via identification. Gadamer's way of identifying *nous* with *logos* is essentially a deduction of one from the other.

As the reconstruction above demonstrates, Dostal extensively illustrates Gadamer's reliance on phenomenology and classical philosophy by reference to a wide range of topics that covers a significant portion of Gadamer's works, before the final assessment of Gadamer's reconciliation of phenomenology and dialectic. Dos-

tal also portrays Gadamer in conversation with other philosophers in the chapters devoted to the Enlightenment, humanism, and science, which is useful for appreciating Gadamer's relevance in a larger philosophical framework. It also enables Dostal to defend Gadamer against the charges of anti-Enlightenment, anti-science, and linguistic idealism. In light of this, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* is an indispensable reference book for hermeneutic and Gadamerian studies.

Bibliography

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Useful links

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