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Gadamer on Humanism, Solidarity, Phronesis, and Phenomenology

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Abstract: In this essay I describe some of the circumstances that guided me in writing the book *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic* and I respond to critiques offered by four reviewers. The critics raise issues about Gadamer's humanism, his treatment of solidarity, the centrality of *phronesis* for his work, and his relation to the phenomenological movement.

Keywords: Gadamer, Hans-Georg; phenomenology; hermeneutics; humanism; essentialism; solidarity; conversation; ontology.

My Book

The book *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic* has a very long history.¹ It comes from a long engagement with Hans-Georg Gadamer's work and its critics. The book's origin lies in my fateful encounter with Gadamer in 1969 as an undergraduate philosophy major at Catholic University. It was Gadamer's first lengthy stay in the United States. He spent most of the spring semester of 1968-69 at Catholic University giving a series of lectures that were an elaboration of his essay "Die Phänomenologische Bewegung."² Not only did I attend the lectures, but I also had the opportunity to see him outside the lecture room. Gadamer was given a small suite of rooms in my dormitory at the

Theological College. He sometimes had meals in the common dining room, and I sometimes ate with him. His English was not very good at this time. I was surprised at the time when he told me he was trying to improve his English by reading American and English poetry. I was then uncertain regarding my future. I was very interested in philosophy, but at that time I found few likable role models, though I had a deep respect for many of my professors (*GH* viii). Gadamer showed me what philosophical life could be like. He, as everyone who knew him will attest, was a great conversationalist. He was an excellent listener. He had a sense of humor. He was very interested in literature and frequented the art museums of our nation's capital. He clearly was enjoying himself in his first real experience of the United States, the university, and its students. He referred later to this time as his "second youth."³ My experience with him and of him helped me decide on a career in

¹ Robert J. Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022. [Henceforth cited as *GH*]

² An earlier version of Gadamer's essay was first published in 1963 in *Philosophische Rundschau* 11/1-2 (1963), 1-45 that has been revised in 1967 in his *Kleine Schriften III*, Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 1967.

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre: Eine Rückschau*, Frankfurt am Main, DE: Vittorio Klostermann 1995, p. 198.

philosophy. Over the years I was fortunate to be able to renew my personal contact with Gadamer both in the United States and in Germany.

I wrote my M.A. thesis at Catholic University on Martin Heidegger and intended to write my dissertation on Heidegger when I arrived in the Ph.D. program at Pennsylvania State University. For a set of complicated reasons, I ended up writing a dissertation on Immanuel Kant under the direction of Thomas Seebohm, a phenomenological philosopher (a Husserlian to be precise) who was very interested in hermeneutics. Seebohm had some disagreements with Gadamer and Gadamerian hermeneutics. He did not find it adequate as a basis for philology. Their differences were an important background for most of my philosophical life. I address them in this book. As I write in its Preface, the book is, among other things, an attempt to mediate between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the philological hermeneutics, for example, of Kristin Gjesdal and Michael Forster, by way of reference to Seebohm's phenomenology of philology.

With this book, I hope to correct some serious misreadings of Gadamer and defend his civic humanism, which I find to be at the heart of his philosophical enterprise. Gadamer has been considered to be anti-Enlightenment, yet he clearly states that "we are all children of the Enlightenment" (*GH* 10). Kant is the archetypal Enlightenment thinker, and I explore Gadamer's ambivalence toward Kant. I argue that at the core of Gadamer's relationship to modern philosophy is his critique of its subjectivism. This shows itself epistemologically in representationalism and ethically in utilitarianism and emotivism.

In the book, I also explore Gadamer's complicated relationship with the work of Heidegger. Gadamer presents his own work as opening the way to Heidegger. Yet Gadamer is a defender of humanism, in contrast to Heidegger's anti-humanism, and Gadamer calls himself a Platonist, while Heidegger casts Plato as the progenitor of metaphysics, a way of thinking that philosophers must get beyond. My comparison of the inaugural lectures of both Heidegger (1933) and Gadamer (1946) as each one became Rector of his respective university shows both a proximity of the two thinkers and the distance between them.

Against many a reading of Gadamer's hermeneutics, I show how we should consider Gadamer's work to be transcendental in nature,

even though he explicitly rejects this. I explain how Gadamer allows for the science of philology, even though he is quite critical of its leading figures of the nineteenth century—Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey.

Yet, perhaps most importantly, I explore the difficulties that Gadamer has made for himself in the attempt to reconcile phenomenology and dialectic. In an autobiographical essay Gadamer characterizes his work as being between phenomenology and dialectic. I explore the difficulties of his attempt at such a reconciliation and argue that he is not entirely successful. Like Claude Romano in his 2015 book *At the Heart of Reason*, I would like to bring phenomenology and hermeneutics together.

My Responses to My Critics

I thank the Jaspers Society for organizing and sponsoring the session on my book and for finding this set of four thoughtful critics who have read my book carefully and have called for more thinking and conversation about a variety of issues related to my book.

Theodore George, "Understanding in Tension: Language, Intuition, and the Meaning of Humanism"

In his generous response, Theodore George captures much of what I think is important about the book.⁴ As its subtitle indicates, my book situates Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics between phenomenology and dialectic. I am gratified to see George write that

The result of Dostal's approach is a hermeneutics that remains true to Gadamer's self-proclaimed concerns for objectivity and orientation toward reality. [*UT* 9]

As an astute reader and commentator on Gadamer, George parenthetically lets the reader know that "objectivity" here is *Sachlichkeit* and not *Objektivität*—an important distinction.

Yet as I have just pointed out, George qualifies his praise for my book with two criticisms. I would suggest that his two criticisms are largely rhetorical. By this, I mean that he states that he is substantively in agreement with my presentation of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, but—of course, there must be a "but"—

⁴ Theodore D. George, "Understanding in Tension: Language, Intuition, and the Meaning of Humanism," *Existenz* 18/2 (Fall 2023), 8-11. [Henceforth cited as *UT*]

that I should have done more concerning two closely related topics.

Regarding Gadamer's humanism, George says politely that I "might have done more to focus" (UT 10) on an aspect of it—its anti-essentialism. The second topic he addresses is the concept of the *Sache selbst*. He says that this concept "deserves more emphasis" (UT 11). Both points are closely related and both rest on a judgment of the readership—what does the reader need to know and how might this be best presented. George may be right regarding both. I do not think we are in substantive disagreement about these two matters, though there may be some disagreement about the former—Gadamer's purported anti-essentialism. George claims that

Gadamer's humanism is not only a counterpoint to subjectivism...it is also a counterpoint to any essentialism regarding the human subject. [UT 10]

Let me comment first on something George has said here regarding humanism. My comment is meant merely to underline what he has said. He writes:

For Dostal, Gadamer's humanism is a civic humanism...By this I take him to mean that Gadamer conceives his form of humanism as a socially achieved elevation of oneself into a universal perspective through conversation. [UT 9]

With respect to this remark, I wish simply to remind the reader that Gadamer embraces the Hegelian concept of *Bildung* (education, formation, cultivation) as "rising to the universal." As George correctly points out, this is done primarily through conversation—and within a conversation principally by listening. Yet at the same time Gadamer embraces what G. W. F. Hegel would consider as the bad infinite. This rising to the universal is to be understood as an ongoing indefinitely open process without end. The ascent to the universal is not easy and it does not eliminate difference either. As George points out, it is important to see that this rising to the universal is socially achieved.

What I would like to take exception to, however, is George's suggestion that Gadamer's humanism is a rejection of essentialism. His remark points to essentialism about the human, although he makes the simple claim that Gadamer rejects essentialism. I am always somewhat at a loss as to what to say about essentialism. In the book, I address this matter directly, and I shall repeat a bit of it here. I rely in part on Brice Wachterhauser's excellent treatment of this matter

in his book *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutic Ontology*. I am not sure if, in the end, George and I disagree about this matter. On the one hand, essentialism can be taken to mean "a-historical." Gadamer, of course, insists on the historical character of human experience. In this sense, he is not an essentialist. Essentialism can also mean "sameness." George is most concerned about an essentialism regarding the human subject. If essentialism means "same," it would mean that humans are all the same. This too Gadamer would reject. In coming to terms with the other, one is confronting difference. So, in this respect too, Gadamer is not an essentialist.

One can, however, find Gadamer utilizing the concept of essence in a positive way. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer asserts that the mimetic picture provides "knowledge of the essence."⁵ Elsewhere he writes about the "permanent essence" as revealed in poetry.⁶ Sometimes Gadamer seems to be self-conscious of the problematic status of the concept of "essence" and uses the straightforward German term *Was-Gehalt*—the "what content." Concerning oneself with the *Was-Gehalt* is to concern oneself with what something is. I would suggest that this is another way to talk about what Gadamer occasionally refers to as essence.

In this regard, I think a little discussion by Gadamer in a short paper concerning aesthetics that I have cited in the book is importantly revealing. In the essay "Philosophy and Poetry" Gadamer writes:

I should like to point out that Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, developed for philosophy a method of self-understanding...He called this the "eidetic reduction," by which all experience of contingent reality is bracketed as a point of method. This is something that occurs de facto in all true philosophizing. For it is only the a priori essential structures of all reality that have always and without exception formed the realm of the concept, or the realm of Ideas, as Plato called it.⁷

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, transl. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London, UK: Continuum 2004, p. 114. [Henceforth cited as *TM*]

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Poetry and Mimesis," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, transl. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1986, pp. 116-22, here p. 120.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Philosophy and Poetry," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, transl. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, New York,

Gadamer here is not endorsing the method. He is saying that coming to terms with the "essential structures of all reality" (*PP* 133) is what philosophy is about, yet philosophers do not necessarily need to use Husserl's method.

In an endnote in my book, I comment that Joseph Margolis called Gadamer a "closet essentialist" and that Jack Caputo endorsed this (*GH* 263n74). I do not think that Gadamer was in the closet about this. What I have just cited shows Gadamer comfortably talking about philosophy as coming to terms with the essences of things. One might want to argue that this is uncharacteristic of Gadamer—a kind of slip, that he knew better. Against this, I am suggesting that this is indicative of his position.

What I would call Gadamer's essentialism is closely tied to what George is keen on endorsing—a kind of realism. So, the other point, that George suggests needs more discussion than my book provides, is the central role of the *Sache*—the matter at hand, whatever is the topic of the conversation is. This notion is basic to my book, but, perhaps, as George suggests, I insufficiently highlighted it. In my discussion of dialogue and conversation, I state that what makes agreement possible in a conversation is one's concern for truth. A concern for truth means being concerned regarding the truth about something, the *Sache*. The conversation is about something that is in the world. Ultimately, humans inhabit a shared world. And, yes, this common world has many aspects and is mediated in multiple ways and layers of multiple ways. But, in the end, we inhabit the same world, our world in common.

This placing of the *Sache* as what ties one together with others in a shared world is the indicator of what one might call Gadamer's realism. My book, as George recognizes, presents Gadamer as a kind of realist. My question to George at this juncture is how he connects what he takes to be Gadamer's anti-essentialism with Gadamer's realism. I am suggesting that Gadamer's realism is tied to his essentialism. As Gadamer sometimes says, thereby echoing Heidegger, the things show themselves to one, to be what they are. Of course, Gadamer suggests that this showing is a way of speaking. The things, in a manner of speaking, tell us what they are. I endorse the phenomenological notion that things show themselves to humans, yet I

resist the notion that they all talk to us. In accord with Gadamer and Socrates, I endorse the notion that one best comes to terms with the things of the world in conversation with others about what those things are.

Georgia Warnke, "Dialogic Solidarity"

I am gratified that Georgia Warnke found my book "deep and rewarding."⁸ I must return the compliment by acknowledging that I have learned much from her work, especially her discussion concerning solidarity in Gadamer which I have cited in my book.

In her remarks on my treatment of Gadamer on solidarity, Warnke points out that I show how Gadamer's concept of solidarity is not subjective, not identitarian, but based on dialogue and conversation. We are largely in agreement about Gadamer's concept of solidarity and about its significance for political thought and action. Yet her response is more nuanced than my account in the book. She points out that solidarity may be in tension with friendship and that Gadamer recognizes this, while I simply point to civic friendship as the locus of solidarity. She also points out that I write according to Gadamer one discovers solidarity with others in conversation and dialogue. She replies that the process of engaging in conversation and dialogue simply is solidarity. This is not merely a slight correction of my position but also of the one upheld by Gadamer. Warnke is concerned that the concept of "discovering" in this context seems to rely too much on finding a common identity, which is doubtlessly a reading that Gadamer rejects.

Warnke is right to ask the reader to think about the ramifications of Gadamer's concept of solidarity for the politics of the current situation in the United States. She rightly points out the siloed character of much of the citizens' lives and the polarization of the republic. Overall, humans engage primarily with like-minded people. Ideologically opposing communication channels cater to their audience and people show little to no interest in considering the arguments advanced on the other side. While there are groups within the nation that nonetheless embrace solidarity, Americans currently lack solidarity as a nation. Neither Gadamer nor I have any magic formula to overcome this fundamental lack of solidarity. Gadamer's basic suggestion is

NY: Cambridge University Press 1986, pp. 131-9, here p. 133. [Henceforth cited as *PP*]

⁸ Georgia Warnke, "Dialogic Solidarity," *Existenz* 18/2 (Fall 2023), 12-15, here p. 12.

simply to overcome one's subjectivism, to focus less on oneself or myself, and to listen to others genuinely. But even this will fail, unless both sides are equally willing to engage. Of course, conversations often do not get very far. They often fail. The backdrop to our current situation in the United States with its lack of solidarity is the Anglo-American tradition of strong individualism. Though it may seem to be hopeless, in his book, *The Upswing*, Robert Putnam points out that solidarity in American history rises and ebbs.⁹ So perhaps it will rise again. Gadamer points to rituals, festivals, and theater performances as examples of places where humans can experience solidarity.

The American situation has parallels elsewhere in the world. One might consider the situation in Germany or in France that are experiencing a kind of de-solidarization. Gadamer suggests that Europe is a kind of test case for solidarity. He saw the coming together of Europe in the European Union as an example of living in solidarity with others who significantly differ from oneself. He thereby points to the different languages, histories, and cultural differences among the European countries. He would have us recall the two world wars of the twentieth century that had torn Europe apart. Yet Gadamer finds hope in the European Union.¹⁰ I cannot but think of the role that France has recently played, led by President Emmanuel Macron who has made it clear that he wants a more tightly organized Europe with a stronger self-led military. This latter initiative requires even more solidarity. Yet Macron sought previously to keep much of Eastern Europe out of the Union. He does not (or, at least, did not) wish to find solidarity with them.

Finally, let me mention that some critics of Gadamer have pointed to what they perceive as being his Eurocentrism. As I just pointed out, Gadamer would have Europe serve as a "training ground" for humanity because it has found unity in diversity

⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Diversity of Europe: Inheritance and Future," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, transl. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1992, pp. 221-36, here p. 234. [Henceforth cited as *DE*]

(*DE* 234). It is the case that Gadamer comments almost exclusively about Europe, his comments about humanity apply his hermeneutical principles of conversation and dialogue to the larger world. Being asked in an interview what he considers to be most important for a revival of rhetoric, Gadamer delineates his beliefs regarding Europe and the world and gives his advice in very strong terms:

I believe that by learning more foreign languages, one will be educated in the end to a greater self-critique. That is also a possible way to achieve world peace. We will also have to learn, to say, that all religions have their partiality and therefore may justify their recognition of the others. I don't know, but I suspect that this must happen if we wish to survive.¹¹

David Vessey, "Robert Dostal, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the Challenge of Phenomenology"

David Vessey challenges my reading of Gadamer in relation to phenomenology.¹² We are not in disagreement about the relation as such but whether we support Gadamer's position: While Vessey supports his position, I object to it. This question is made difficult as evidenced by Vessey's statement, with which I agree, namely that

it is never entirely clear what he [Gadamer] sees as being the relation between his philosophical hermeneutics and classical phenomenology. [*CP* 16]

As Vessey recognizes, I would like to align Gadamer with Paul Ricoeur's view that hermeneutics presupposes phenomenology. I point out in the book several ways in which Gadamer relies on important basic phenomenological concepts and how, at one important place, Gadamer allows that his method is phenomenological and calls his reliance on this method paradoxical (*TM* xxxii). Yet I am negatively critical of Gadamer's ambivalent relation to phenomenology. As Vessey points out, my main criticism of Gadamer concerns the status of the pre-conceptual, which is an important concept for

¹¹ Ansgar Kemmann, "Heidegger as Rhetor: Hans-Georg Gadamer Interviewed by Ansgar Kemmann," transl. Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt, in *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, eds. Daniel M. Gross and Ansgar Kemmann, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2005, pp. 47-64, here p. 62.

¹² David Vessey, "Robert Dostal, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the Challenge of Phenomenology," *Existenz* 18/2 (Fall 2023), 16-20. [Henceforth cited as *CP*]

Edmund Husserl, the early Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (among others).

There is a second location for my objection to Gadamer, a location that Vessey does not address (nor was it necessary to do so). Here I digress a bit. It concerns Gadamer's appropriation of Plato and Aristotle. Gadamer presents himself as a kind of Platonist. For Gadamer, the difference between Plato and Aristotle is not large, especially regarding those aspects of their thought that are relevant for Gadamer. Gadamer has his objections to their work: It is insufficiently historical. It does not provide an adequate account of freedom. For him, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is too theological. Though neither thinker provides an adequate account of language, Gadamer wholeheartedly endorses Socrates' so-called second sailing in the *Phaedo*. This is indicative for Gadamer of the Socratic way—the way of following the *logos* wherever it might take one. This is the way of language. Gadamer is committed to following the later Heidegger's turn to language.

I see a connection in a broad-scale sort of way between the important concept of *nous* in Plato and especially in Aristotle, and the concepts of intuition and the pre-conceptual in Husserlian phenomenology. I argue in the book that Gadamer either ignores *nous* and the noetic or identifies it with *logos*. His concept of the inner word abets this identification. I will not here repeat my analysis of Gadamer's usage of the concept of the inner word, however here I will point out that Aristotle says quite clearly in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that *nous* is without *logos*. One can find corresponding suggestions elsewhere in his work. I am simply claiming that Gadamer is not a good Aristotelian in this regard. Gadamer would accept this for he wishes to insist upon the linguisticity of all understanding, and, more than that, all intelligibility. For Gadamer to historically develop what he takes to be a more adequate account of the linguisticity of all intelligibility, he turns away from Plato and Aristotle and turns to Augustine and Aquinas and the concept of the "inner word." Gadamer's utilization of the concept of the "inner word" is an attempt to find in the Aristotelian tradition an account that renders linguistic the most original coming to grips with whatever one experiences, namely an inner word, which is to say that human experience is linguistic all the way down.

Vessey rightly points out that I argue that in Gadamer's late work, Gadamer acknowledges a

conceptual shortcoming when he refers to something like the pre-linguistic or something akin to the pre-conceptual. Vessey agrees that there are some "infelicitous slips" (CP 18) in Gadamer, namely, his use of the phrase "something like the pre-linguistic." Vessey insists that Gadamer had "rejected any form of pre-linguistic awareness" (CP 18). As I point out in the book, this matter is directly and paradoxically addressed by Gadamer at age ninety-six in an interview with Jean Grondin:

GRONDIN: Is there then such a thing as non-linguistic understanding?

GADAMER: Doubtless there is.

GRONDIN: And would you still call this linguisticity?

GADAMER: Why yes! Language in words is only a special concretion of linguisticity.¹³

Gadamer leaves the reader with a notion of non-linguistic linguisticity. In my view, he has identified intelligibility with linguisticity, and thus it follows that any understanding is linguistic, even if it is non-linguistic—a contradiction in terms or a tautology. I argue in the book, as Vessey points out, that it is possible to deny pure perception without claiming that all intelligibility is linguistic.

We are in agreement concerning the fit between John McDowell and Gadamer in this regard. But I do not think it appropriate for Vessey to attempt to enlist Merleau-Ponty on his behalf as the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty insisted on the primacy of perception.

In his closing remarks Vessey seems to be suggesting that in my book I would disagree with the idea that "language opens one up conceptually to the world" (CP 18) and that humans have a world only because they have language. On the contrary, I very much endorse this idea. I am arguing that the noetic is to be distinguished from language but that the noetic (*nous*) is insufficient by itself. Finite and fallible human understanding requires language and concept. This is explicit in Aristotle, and implicit in Plato. I think it is also true of Heidegger's phenomenological stance.

The cloudiness of Gadamer's treatment of his debt to phenomenology and the matter of pre-linguistic awareness has enabled the disagreement between Vessey and myself.

¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "A Look Back over the Collective Works and Their Effective History," transl. Richard E. Palmer, in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2007, pp. 409-27, here p. 420.

Mirela Oliva, The Good Life in Dostal's Gadamer Interpretation

Mirela Oliva's comments about my book shows her to be in agreement with my analysis of Gadamer's appropriation of Aristotle, especially concerning the relation between the theoretical and the practical.¹⁴ She provides a clear and concise account of my treatment regarding the question. She articulates the nuanced way in which Gadamer's prioritizing the practical over the theoretical is closely connected to Aristotle's view. Her remarks show well, how Gadamer's taking up of the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis* is critical of much Enlightenment and modern thought and its formulation. She captures well what I argue in the book when she writes:

Dostal's reconstruction of Gadamer shows how the *phronesis*-based character of understanding entails, on the one hand, the social and cultural constitution of the self and, on the other hand, the manifestative character of the being of things that appear to us humans. [GL 23]

Here I would like to address two aspects of Oliva's response to my book. The first one concerns my treatment of Gadamer's appropriation of the medieval concept of the "inner word" in Augustine and Aquinas. She writes:

For Dostal, this inner word prior to its vocal utterance indicates a nonlinguistic linguisticity that avoids linguistic idealism and does justice to the elusive language of things. Furthermore, it makes room for including intuition into the building blocks of language, a feature that, according to Dostal, Gadamer does not sufficiently consider. [GL 23]

This brief comment is correct as far as it goes. Yet my consideration in the book of Gadamer's utilization of the concept of the inner word is meant both to (1) show how the concept of the inner word enables Gadamer to render what is prior to language in experience nonetheless a function of language, and (2) to prepare for my argument against Gadamer that he does not provide an adequate place for the pre-conceptual. I am objecting to the "nonlinguistic linguisticity" to which Oliva makes reference.

In the conclusion of her critique of my book Oliva writes:

It seems to me that Dostal's analysis remains transcendental and does not leap into an ontological foundation. [GL 24]

It is the case that in my book I argue against many commentators on Gadamer that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics should be considered a contribution to transcendental philosophy. While I will not rehearse the whole argument here, I will point out that Gadamer both claims that he has rejected transcendental philosophy and that his philosophical hermeneutics are quasi-transcendental. My book has little to say about Gadamer's ontology, but it does expressly show that, in the final section of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's ontology adopts three of what the medieval philosophers called the transcendentals: the good, the true, and the beautiful (GH 95-6). Here he is attempting to reconcile the early Heidegger, whose project is a phenomenological ontology, with the later Heidegger's turn to language. The title of the last chapter is "Language as horizon of a hermeneutic ontology." It is relevant here to note that after the publication of his major work, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer almost never makes mention of ontology, even though he sees his later work as building on this work. I should add that, although my book has relatively little to say about Gadamer's ontology, it does make a case to read him as a kind of realist.

Oliva's criticism concerns not only ontology but also ontology as a foundation. Gadamer is critical of the late Husserl's attempt to establish a final foundation. It is worth noting here that many contemporary phenomenologists think that Husserl violated his own phenomenology when he raised the question of a final foundation. Gadamer finds Husserlian phenomenology to be both subjectivistic and foundationalist. At the same time, he sees a "clear line" from Husserl's notions of passive synthesis and anonymous intentionality to hermeneutics.¹⁵ In my view, Gadamer is building on basic aspects of Husserlian phenomenology as well as on the ontological phenomenology as developed in the early Heidegger. Gadamer attempted to establish an ontology that is not foundationalist. He would reject what Oliva calls for.

¹⁴ Mirela Oliva, "The Good Life in Dostal's Gadamer Interpretation," *Existenz* 18/2 (Fall 2023), 21-24. [Henceforth cited as GL]

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode," in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 2*, Tübingen, DE: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1993, p. 16.