

R E - R E A D I N G T H E C A N O N

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER

EDITED BY LORRAINE CODE



Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and Feminist Projects

Susan-Judith Hoffmann

Hermeneutics is above all a practice, the art of understanding and of making something understood to someone else. It is the heart of all education that wants to teach how to philosophize. In it what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts.

—Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reflections on My Philosophical Journey*

In the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, hermeneutics overthrows the false universalism of the natural sciences as the privileged model of human understanding with the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon. Much of contemporary feminist scholarship is presently undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis, and I suggest that the hermeneutic orientation of Gadamer's thought provides a fruitful resource for the articulation of feminist projects. Despite the fact that much feminist theorizing centers around the deconstruction of the traditional canon's faulty and oppressive universalizations, some feminist scholars have come to realize that their own philosophical efforts have repeated the sins of their forefathers, and that they too are guilty of questionable universalizations and reductive metanarratives.¹ According to Gadamer, it is the dominance of science and its methodological concerns that has obscured the hermeneutic dimension in understanding, and has led us to denigrate forms of knowledge and experience that cannot be subsumed under the epistemological model of the natural sciences as "inferior" forms of

knowledge. In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer provides a model of understanding that acknowledges our historical situatedness and connectedness to traditional canons of thought, yet that does not entail an uncritical acceptance of the reductive and oppressive elements of the tradition that feminist theorizing takes issue with. In this way, philosophical hermeneutics fulfills two important conditions for feminist theorizing: namely, a sensitivity to the historical and cultural situatedness of knowledge seekers, and the critical power to challenge reductive universalizing tendencies in traditional canons of thought.

Against the notion that any claim to truth must be substantiated by the methodology of the natural sciences, Gadamer argues that hermeneutic inquiry is not merely a methodological problem for the human sciences. Rather, it is an essential feature of human facticity that discloses the situatedness and essentially interpretive nature of all knowledge-seeking. The quest of the natural sciences for universally valid truth and methods constitutes a false cognitive ideal, which can never, even in principle, be realized since it actually obscures what happens in human understanding. Every act of understanding is embedded in a historical context that conditions, determines, and guides the inquiry: it is conditioned by the effects of “tradition,” that is, a normative, historically and linguistically mediated framework that is never fully transparent to the interpreter. Every act of understanding is dependent upon “prejudgments” or, as Gadamer unhappily calls them, “prejudices,” which are *initially* neither consciously present nor thematically accessible to the inquiring subject, but that may be challenged in the confrontation with another’s meaning that characterizes an act of understanding.² Thus philosophical hermeneutics both acknowledges its embeddedness in a tradition but describes the process of understanding as critical and engaged, and is able to challenge and transform the tradition it draws on. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer undertakes a rehabilitation of tradition and historical prejudices, recasting their role in understanding as positive and constructive stages of any act of interpretation—indeed they are described as the very ontological conditions for the possibility of any and all attempts to understand, and thus all attempts to seek knowledge and truth. After *Truth and Method*, hermeneutics is no longer merely an elaboration of rules and techniques for correct understanding, but is more properly understood as a deconstruction of traditional foundationalist epistemology and metaphysics, and as a set of methodical solutions to problems of understanding, in that it rejects any attempt to ground knowledge with certainty as

a misunderstanding of the very nature of understanding.³ This marks a significant departure from the older, Romantic model of hermeneutics as the elaboration of *methodologies of interpretation*, which describe a set of principles that might systematically be applied in order to secure correct understanding.

Since the publication of *Truth and Method* in German in 1963, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has sparked much criticism—notably from Emilio Betti in the 1960s, from Jürgen Habermas in the 1970s, and from Jacques Derrida in the 1980s.⁴

Betti opposed Gadamer's work on the grounds that Gadamer's rejection of hermeneutics as an absolute position and his emphasis on subjective prejudices as conditions of understanding betrayed a kind of subjectivism or relativism. If every act of interpretation is conditioned by subjective prejudices rooted in historicity, then every interpretation is relativized, and it is not possible in principle to speak of a correct interpretation in a definitive sense—a consequence that Betti took to be intolerable. Against Gadamer, Betti sought to revive the older objectivist conception of hermeneutics, and proposed the autonomy of the author's intended meaning (*mens auctoris*) and the consistency and coherence of the text as a whole (*inter alia*) as criteria that might guarantee correct interpretation.⁵ Next, Habermas voiced concerns about Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and authority. He argued that philosophical hermeneutics' renovation of the Enlightenment had eliminated too much, by giving priority to tradition and authority over reason. The context of tradition as the locus of truth and consensus ignored the dangers that such consensus of meaning might be systematically distorted: for example, that it might be the result of force and coercion. Throughout the various phases of the Habermas-Gadamer debate, Habermas's main accusation was that philosophical hermeneutics ignored the fundamental Enlightenment insight that tradition is a locus for *untruth*, oppression, and distortion.⁶ Against what he took to be Gadamer's naive conservatism, Habermas proposed instead an account of communicative rationality that was cognizant of the context of tradition but nevertheless emancipated from ideological distortions of tradition.⁷ Finally, Derrida ferreted out in philosophical hermeneutics' account of understanding as presupposing good will, and as the appropriation of the other's point of view, a metaphysical will to dominate: an instrumental will to power that assimilates, denigrates, and annihilates otherness and difference.⁸

More recently, a new debate is emerging, namely, the relevance of Gadamerian hermeneutics to feminist projects and scholarship. The impetus for this debate lies in the fact that much feminist theorizing is undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis. Many scholars, Nancy Fraser, Linda Nicholson, Jane Flax, Nancy Hartsock, and Judith Butler among others, have recognized that, despite the central commitment of feminist scholarship to deconstruct traditional canons' false universalization of a limited and oppressive perspective, much of feminist theory from the 1960s to the 1980s was guilty of the same kinds of false universalization. In the scholarship that attempts to find a framework within which one might constructively treat difference, reference to Gadamer's hermeneutics is oddly absent: not many feminist theorists have, in fact, turned to Gadamer's hermeneutics as a possible resource for overcoming problems in feminist theorizing.⁹ A few theorists such as Robin Schott, Diane Elam, and Georgia Warnke have engaged in a dialogue with Gadamerian hermeneutics; but have, with the exception of Warnke, found Gadamer's work to be conservative and patriarchal in that it celebrates custom and tradition, reifies the past, and assigns a privileged position to male-biased language.¹⁰ Elam writes that "hermeneutics contains within it a litter of phallogocentric tradition that refuses point blank to acknowledge the significance of gender differentiation," and that Gadamerian hermeneutics "fails to confront issues of gender difference" (Elam 1991, 350). The skepticism expressed by feminist scholars, either implicitly or explicitly, about the usefulness of philosophical hermeneutics for feminist projects recalls—albeit in a different context—the criticisms of Habermas and Derrida. Elam, for example, claims that Gadamer's account of tradition is "politicized" with "conservative politics," which are inimical to feminism (353). Schott argues that Gadamer "brackets questions concerning embodiment and power" (Schott 1991, 202), and that his ontological account of understanding "articulates an attitude which typifies masculine rather than feminine psychology," thereby excluding the voices of women in ontological discourse (204). Moreover, the primacy Gadamer assigns to language fails to recognize that language is a tool used to denigrate and assimilate the feminine, and fails to acknowledge that "feeling, desire, and sensuality" are also primary experiences.

There are other discussions that, while they make no direct reference to Gadamer, are dismissive of any recourse to tradition and the shared understanding that Gadamer argues are constitutive of any inquiry. For

example, Susan Okin writes, "Concepts of rationality, justice and the human good that are supposedly based on our traditions are . . . male-centric." Narratives that rely on shared social understandings "reveal their tendencies to reinforce patriarchy by neglecting to examine the effects of past and present domination on these understandings" (Okin 1989, 110). The shared traditions, language, and social understandings that Gadamer argues are constitutive of any inquiry would oppressively universalize the experiences and political concerns of white men—thus it would appear that any Gadamerian description of genuine dialogue that is productive of truth remains bogged down with patriarchal baggage. The standpoint of tradition offers a distorted and oppressive perspective (Habermas), and dialogue with this tradition, if it is characterized by good will and the appropriation of the tradition, appears to annihilate differences in experience, knowledge, and social and political interests (Derrida). Even the very notion of a gendered identity that is excluded and oppressed by tradition may be simply uncritically adapted from such a tradition. Postmodern feminists such as Jane Flax, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, and Linda Nicholson maintain that our conception of ourselves as excluded and oppressed is itself a distorted effect of those traditions. However, a probe into hidden agendas of power and domination, the idea that a distorted perspective is inevitably the ground for any investigation, and the dissemination of meaning and the deconstruction of the subject that ensues from such an investigation all seem to lead to a kind of theoretical dead end. If we grant that there is no unified subject, no category of "woman" or "oppressed group" that can adequately address the multiple aspects that might constitute an identity, such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and age, then we are hard pressed to take an emancipatory or critical stance toward tradition. As Judith Butler writes, "Without a unified concept of woman, or, minimally, a family resemblance among gender-related terms, it appears that feminist politics has lost the categorical basis of its own normative claims. What constitutes the 'who,' the subject for whom feminism seeks emancipation? If there is no subject, who is left to emancipate?" (Butler 1990, 327). What is needed, and what I propose to argue Gadamer's hermeneutics can deliver, is an account of knowledge-seeking that allows us to conceive of power and domination as influencing and formative factors in the constitution of concepts and ideas, but that does not reduce the phenomenon of meaning per se to power. As Fraser and Nicholson write, "How can we combine a postmodernist incredulity toward metanarrative

with the social critical power of feminism”? (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 34). A response to that question is, I suggest, along with Warnke, already encompassed by philosophical hermeneutics. I shall suggest that an account of Gadamer’s own work provides a paradigmatic example of what feminists claim needs to be done. I shall further propose that concepts central to Gadamerian hermeneutics, namely those of “prejudice,” “tradition,” “authority,” and the primacy of language, do not conceal any oppressive elements that would preclude their candidacy for feminist theorizing. In this way, I hope that Gadamer’s hermeneutics will have gone some way to answering Fraser and Nicholson’s question.

It certainly is true that one cannot find in Gadamer any specific references to let alone any theoretical reflection on “gender issues,” however, there is nothing in philosophical hermeneutics’ account of understanding that is inimical to the feminist goals of ending oppressive methodologies and practices. Quite the contrary is true. Gadamer’s emphasis on the importance of recognizing the embeddedness of one’s assumptions within a specific historical context seems to me to be entirely in keeping with the feminist goals of guarding against a false universalism that would perpetuate and legitimize the very oppressive methodologies and practices they propose to expose.

The Hermeneutic Impulse in Gadamer’s Scholarship

First I would like to draw attention to the fact that Gadamer’s work is itself an example of a philosophical position that both acknowledges its connectedness with tradition and constitutes a radical break from that tradition. Thus Gadamer’s work is a perfect example of what some feminists claim needs to be done, namely, both to recognize our finite nature and our dependence on tradition and the “work” of history upon us, and to break with the tradition that conditions all our inquiries.¹¹

Gadamer launched his intellectual career by developing a radically antisystematic interpretation of Plato. According to his philological and poetical approach to Plato’s dialogues, there is no hidden systematic doctrine of ideas that underlies the truth of dialectical language. Against the standard interpretation of Plato’s doctrine as a paradigm of objective and systematic philosophy, Gadamer proposed that “truth” for Plato was not truth as such or truth in itself, but truth for us, a truth that is constantly

being tested in a lively discourse of question and answer.¹² We misread Plato when we understand his dialogues as comprising a closed system of propositions or an absolute claim to objectivity, and dismiss Socrates's proclamations of ignorance as irony or false modesty that we must analytically dissect in order to get at the hidden formulation of an absolute doctrine.¹³ It is the interplay between the one and the many, between unity and diversity, that, for Plato, is the dwelling place of truth. Truth, for both Plato and Gadamer, can be characterized as an essentially open and endless dialogue that refuses to bow to a relativism claiming that any one truth is just as good as another, but does not seek to insulate itself from the problems of relativism by falsely worshipping an artificially reified language and truth. A genuinely hermeneutical philosophy can never claim to have definitive answers—its task is rather the subjection of privileged doctrines to the dialectical process that renders possible the critical examination of human values. Gadamer's later work, *Truth and Method*, can be read as a hermeneutical inquiry into, and critical dialogue with, the entire history of Western philosophy. Thus Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics constitutes an important and original "re-reading of the canon," both a connection and appropriation of the Western philosophical tradition, as well as a radical departure from interpretations of that tradition that drew upon the authority of many centuries to sustain their momentum.

Moreover, Gadamer deconstructs the Enlightenment distinction between ethics and politics. Inspired by Plato's *Seventh Letter*, Gadamer argues that philosophy is the preferred way of doing politics, and that politics is an extension of ethics in a collective context. The notion of political science based on a model of the natural sciences is devoid of any ethical dimension and thus reduced to a study of power relationships where the orientation of politics as a locus of truth and justice is lost, and replaced with an emphasis on method and an ossification of privileged doctrines.¹⁴ Against the race for constructing all-encompassing objective standpoints to describe the workings of society, "metanarratives" that can only lead to the kind of false universalism that feminists have made it their mission to expose, Gadamer suggests a rehabilitation of philosophy as a practical, ethical task that takes the form of an inclusive dialogue. The attempt by thinkers such as Marx, Hegel, and Weber to construct such metanarratives, and the attempt to make scientific method the touchstone of all knowledge and reality as exemplified by thinkers from Descartes and Bacon to the positivists and neo-Kantians

of Gadamer's day, represents the loss of true knowledge as defined by Plato. Gadamer's work constitutes a radical break with the philosophical cultural heritage that conditioned his inquiry. As Gadamer himself writes: "Nowhere so strongly as in Germany had the so-called human sciences united in themselves scientific and orienting functions. Or better: Nowhere else had they so consistently concealed the orienting, ideological determination of their interests behind the method-consciousness of their scientific procedure" (Gadamer 1985, 179). For Gadamer, the domain of study in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the human sciences, is not the world of objects but human beings' knowledge about themselves, and the constituted world in which this knowledge is found. But the positivist faith in the unity of science, and its subsumption and denigration of the truth claim of the human sciences, represents a dangerous orienting rationalization of society. The rhetoric of objectivity and neutrality masks an agenda of power and domination that Gadamer, who lived through the Nazi era of Germany, is acutely aware of. The calm distance from which a middle-class educational consciousness takes satisfaction in its own achievements omits a recognition of how much it is immersed in its own game, and how much it is at stake in the game. Thus Gadamer is well aware of the dangers of privileging ideals of abstraction, and of how the notion of disembodied subjects works to marginalize and oppress participation in the discourse of tradition. He locates the solution to this problem in a more accurate account of what happens when we engage in the process of understanding. Central to philosophical hermeneutics is the claim that all of our experiences and knowledge-seeking are structured as *questions*, and one of the tasks of hermeneutics is to draw attention to the often unthematized framework that informs and guides the knowledge-seeking process. Whoever is asking the question must clarify their own presuppositions, their "stake" and interest in the game. And whoever is asking the question must recognize that power is constitutive of the process, in that we bring to the process projects, goals, and interests that guide the kinds of questions that we raise. More important, a genuine hermeneutical inquiry will recognize the fundamental necessity of acknowledging *difference* if one is to do justice to the truth that philosophical hermeneutics can reveal. One must always be open to the possibility that the other could be right.

The structure of knowledge-seeking, which comes in the form of a question, logically requires an openness. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer writes: "The essence of the question is the opening up, and keeping open

of possibilities" (Gadamer 1985, 266). A real question—one productive of knowledge—will have both sense and direction, i.e., be guided by an initially unthematized framework that, however, while it is the very ground of the inquiry, will be called into question when it is put into contact with different perspectives. "It is of the essence of a question to have sense. Now sense involves direction. Hence the sense of a question is the direction in which alone the answer can be given if it is to be meaningful. A question that places that which is questioned within a particular perspective. The emergence of the question opens up, as it were, the being of the object. Hence the logos that sets out this opened-up being is already an answer. Its sense lies in the sense of a question" (326). The openness of a question is not boundless, it is limited by the horizon of the question; however, this framework or horizon is not static—it shifts, and is also put at risk in the asking/answering of the question. The asking of a question requires both the direction of our forejudgments and the openness that involves the suspension of our forejudgments and a questioning of their validity. It is impossible to make ourselves aware of our forejudgments as long they operate unconsciously and unnoticed, however, any knowledge-seeking encounter that is to yield genuine knowledge requires that we open up possibilities and thus put our prejudices at risk. Gadamer stresses throughout his writings that agreement is not a matter of eliminating differences but is rather a matter of putting them into contact. To superimpose one's own "research interests" upon the "text" of the other is to engage in "subtle forms of colonization" (311). The demand to be open to the other is more than a plea to engage in knowledge-seeking in an ethical manner, it is logically required by the very nature of the knowledge-seeking process.

Gadamer appeals to history and tradition as the ground for our reflections, but he also concedes that this ground is one of struggle, partisan conflicts, and controversy; and that these conflicts can and should be challenged in our dialogue with tradition. However, for Gadamer, conflict in history is much less a worry than a "standardized world civilization"—a world without the recognition of difference and the obstacles involved in communication. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is anything but exclusionary—it is the contact of different perspectives that makes possible a disclosure of truth. While Gadamer never really specifically addresses issues of gender, he is certainly the forerunner of the hermeneutical impulse in recent feminist scholarship, and his own work provides us with a paradigmatic example of how an account of

knowledge and truth that grants the primacy of tradition over subjective reflection has the critical power to break the bonds of authority, conservatism, and the status quo.

While feminist scholars might agree with my characterization of Gadamer's philosophical project *en gros*, and concur that feminist scholarship is undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis, many might nevertheless find an account of Gadamer as an ally of feminist theorizing rather dubious. So, in the remainder of this chapter, I propose to anticipate some of the aspects of philosophical hermeneutics that feminists might find objectionable, namely, Gadamer's account of prejudice, tradition, authority, and language, his notion of understanding as the appropriation of the other, and his silence on feminist issues, with the goal of representing Gadamer's hermeneutics as already being what Habermas calls "a critically enlightened hermeneutics" (Habermas 1990, 267).

Prejudice

The Western philosophical notion of an autonomous subject, a self thought of as universal and free from any contingencies of difference, constitutes, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's view, an unjustified "prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer 1985, 240). The Enlightenment project of a global "overcoming of all prejudices"—wherein a prejudice is that which is unjustifiably biased because it has not passed the Cartesian test of method and the notion persists that a disciplined application of reason could separate what is objectively true from what is mere opinion—is, according to Gadamer, a fundamentally misguided one. It is neither possible nor desirable to ground knowledge in an autonomous self who seeks to bracket the flow of contemporary discourse and the bosom of tradition in which such discourse is held and nourished. As Gadamer points out, it is not until the Enlightenment that the concept of prejudice received the *solely* negative connotations that it carries today—connotations of dogmatism, falsehood, racism, and, we may add, sexism. From an Enlightenment standpoint, prejudices arise from an uncritical acceptance of traditional views and from an over-hasty, unmethodical use of reason. Thus reason, method, and accurate understanding are set in opposition to prejudice, authority, and tradition. Prejudices are taken to be a hindrance to the acquisition of reliable knowledge, as are authority and

tradition. Autonomous reason is the order of the day.¹⁵ However, against this view, Gadamer argues that prejudices are, in fact, constitutive or productive of accurate understanding and reliable knowledge. Prior to the Enlightenment's "discrediting of prejudice" (Gadamer 1985, 241), prejudice simply meant a provisional judgment that is made before all the components that determine a situation are fully examined, and carried with it both a positive and a negative sense. The negative sense is the meaning of a disadvantage or adverse effect, but, as Gadamer points out, this negative sense is a secondary, derivative meaning that depends on a more fundamental and positive meaning of prejudice as a positive capacity to understand at all, albeit in a provisional manner.

Drawing on Husserl and Heidegger, Gadamer undertakes the rehabilitation of this positive sense by arguing that prejudices are conditions of, and central to, every event of understanding. A prejudice, for Gadamer, is simply an anticipation of meaning, a foreunderstanding that constitutes the basis for any understanding whatsoever, and that is then reconsidered and confirmed, or altered, in the very process of understanding. Recalling Husserl's insights about the constitution of meaning, Gadamer points out that "perception is never a mere mirroring of what is there" since perception always remains "an understanding of something *as something* . . . perception includes meaning" (Gadamer 1985, 81, my italics).¹⁶ We never merely perceive an object, and then throw a signification over it; rather, we perceive a chair *as* a chair, a house *as* a house, an unfamiliar object—a *spaetzle* maker, for example—as a funny kind of colander or grating device.¹⁷ Gadamer makes the same point by drawing on the work of Heidegger: the structure of human being, or *Dasein*, is that of "thrown projection," that is, a mode of being that is interpretive and is not consciously thematized. Understanding becomes concretized and thematized *as* historical understanding: "[T]he commitments of custom and tradition and the corresponding potentialities of one's own future become effective in understanding itself" (Gadamer 1985, 234). In order to find our way in the world, we direct ourselves toward certain "projects" of understanding, which carry within them our possibilities and ability. Before we even begin to consciously attempt to understand the meaning of an object or event, we have already placed it within a context (*Vorhabe*), a perspective (*Vorsicht*), and grasped it or conceived it (*vorgreifen*) in a certain way. Thus understanding of an event or object can never be objective in the Cartesian sense, since there is no neutral vantage point from which we might conduct an inquiry.

It is the foreunderstanding derivative of the prepredicative existential situation of *Dasein* that determines the thematic framework and playing range of every interpretation. The working out of this foreunderstanding, forejudgment, or prejudice, and the confirmation and revision of what was provisionally projected is the task of understanding. The objectivity or correctness of understanding is nothing other than the confirmation of the foreunderstanding or foremeaning in the working out. So prejudices are positive for Gadamer in the sense that they are fundamental conditions of any kind of understanding whatsoever, which direct and determine the sense of a question. Moreover, prejudices are positive in the sense that the horizon that is the playing range of every interpretation is never closed, and thus is never predetermined. On the contrary, to have a horizon means “not to be limited to what is nearest, but to be able to see beyond it” (Gadamer 1985, 269). Horizons change for the person who is moving, and the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never bound to a particular standpoint. Horizons are being continually formed in that we continually have to test or put at risk all our prejudices in the asking of a question. The recognition that understanding and the prejudices operative in understanding are provisional compels us to be open to the other, and precludes an automatic disvaluing of certain types of experiences that might not fit into a dominant paradigm.

Tradition and Authority

“Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves” (Gadamer 1985, 261). For Gadamer, tradition plays a fruitful role in the project of understanding, and he is particularly concerned to rehabilitate the authority of tradition against the Enlightenment’s attempt to unseat it and replace it with autonomous reason. This rehabilitation of authority sparked the first phase of the debate between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Habermas’s ideology critique. Habermas pointed to the discrediting of reason, and to an over-reliance on authority that Gadamer’s rehabilitation of tradition seemed to imply. Feminist theorists have reiterated Habermas’s concerns, albeit in a different con-

text—for thinkers such as Elam and Schott, the appeal to the authority of tradition seems to be an affront to the intellectual and social emancipation of women. However, as in the case of the Gadamer-Habermas debate, the conflict between Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and the feminist call for emancipatory ideology critique is minor compared to the substantial common ground hermeneutics and feminist projects share, and the objections raised against hermeneutics can be satisfactorily addressed.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes that the Enlightenment makes tradition "as much an object of criticism as do the natural sciences the evidence of the senses" (Gadamer 1985, 241–42) by taking it to be rife with superstition, irrational and unreflective prejudices of the past, and a reliance on the authority of traditional texts such as the Bible. The concept of authority becomes "diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience" (248). Clearly, an appeal to the reputation of authority is a poor substitute for a one's own judgment, and Gadamer explicitly states that an over-reliance on the authority of any tradition can spawn illegitimate prejudices that are not productive of knowledge and truth. Gadamer describes the Romantics' revolt against the Enlightenment's discrediting of authority and tradition as an important improvement on its distortion of authority and tradition, and credits the Romantics for recognizing "that tradition has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason and in a large measure determines our institutions and our attitudes" (249). However, he adds that, in significant ways, the Romantics' faith in a tradition that is diametrically opposed to reason and requires no rational justification in its preservation only polarized the gulf between reason and tradition by reversing the Enlightenment criterion with an equally dogmatic embracing of tradition, the mysterious, and the unconscious. This is no less a distortion of tradition than that of the rationalist account, since it does not offer an account of reason as conditioned by custom and tradition. Rather, it simply rejects the ideal of perfect reason and replaces it with another reductive metanarrative—the return to a mysterious mythical consciousness. Both the Enlightenment's criticism of tradition and the Romantic opposition remain mired in an epistemological framework that cannot accurately describe the historical nature of tradition and the work it effects in the process of understanding. The skeptical stance Gadamer takes toward the over-reliance on the authority of reason and tradition and toward the flip side of that epistemological opposition, namely an

equally reductive embracing of the subjective, anticipates the very kind of move feminists such as Fraser and Nicholson call for.

Once the Enlightenment demand of an overcoming of all prejudices is shown to be itself an unjustified prejudice, which silences and distorts ways of knowing and fundamental features of the process of knowledge-seeking, we will, according to Gadamer, have cleared a path for an appropriate understanding of our finitude, the nature of our historical consciousness, and our connection to the tradition that sustains us. Gadamer's emphasis on prejudices as constitutive of understanding must not be taken as a kind of epistemological subjectivism, historicism, or relativism. To embrace a subjectivism instead would be to make the same mistake the Romantics made, namely to presuppose the epistemological framework of the Enlightenment, and to simply reverse its values of objectivity for subjective ones. Against this epistemological framework, which constitutes the kind of reductive metanarrative feminist theorizing hopes to overcome, Gadamer proposes a historically situated account of reason that moves and lives in the universality of language. However, while it may appear that the problem of authority in tradition has been overcome, there may be a residue of false authority in the form of oppressive elements at work in language. It is here that feminists such as Schott again raise concerns that echo the charges Habermas made against hermeneutics in part two of the Habermas-Gadamer saga—namely, that the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon in the universality of language constitutes the statement of an absolute standpoint, a reduction of all human experiences to language, and a reification of language that preclude the possibility of ideology critique.

The Universality of Language

According to Gadamer, the authority of tradition is both mediated and realized by language. However, if every act of understanding is conditioned by the “force” of tradition, that is, a normative, historically, and linguistically mediated preunderstanding that is never fully transparent to the interpreter, and the language that mediates understanding can be the locus of both truth and distortion, then perhaps Gadamer's account of the universality of language is an endorsement and ossification of certain privileged, male-biased modes of discourse. This is certainly the posi-

tion that Robin Schott takes in her article “Whose Home is it Anyway?” However, in what follows, I shall suggest a reading of Gadamer’s account of language that differs from Schott’s account of philosophical hermeneutics.

Schott argues that Gadamer treats language as an objective phenomenon, rather than as a product of interaction among people. She writes: “Gadamer’s search for a relation to language that is prior to specific relations in the human community precludes seeing that one’s access to language and the content of one’s own discourse are shaped by existing relations of power” (Schott 1991, 204). For example, one might want to point out that when women understand various traditional doctrines about their needs and interests, and when women try to incorporate the truth of historical tradition into their own lives, what they “appropriate” is a picture of themselves that undermines their emancipatory power. An account of understanding that only focuses on the truth claims tradition makes upon us is not capable of recognizing the connection between the traditional views of women and relations of power. Schott cites Gadamer’s ontological account of play as an example that illustrates his insensitivity to the role of gender in ontology. She maintains that he ignores the fact that the content of ontological discourse as exemplified by play is justified by particular ideological interests, namely, men’s interests.

According to Gadamer, the subject matter that is being interpreted, be it a text, a tradition, or a work of art, holds an ontological priority over the subjectivity of the interpreter. He illustrates this ontological priority with a phenomenological account of game playing and shows how game playing is a model for the linguistic event of understanding. The requirements of a game, Gadamer writes, dictate the actions of the player, thus one must set aside one’s own goals and aspirations and surrender oneself fully to the priority of the game if the player is to play properly and in the right spirit. In a much quoted passage in *Truth and Method* he states:

[A]ll playing is a being played. The attraction of the game, the fascination that it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game tends to master the players. Even when it is a case of games in which one seeks to accomplish tasks that one has set for oneself, there is the risk whether or not it will ‘work,’ ‘succeed,’ and ‘succeed again,’ which is the attraction of the game. Whoever ‘tries’ is the one who is tried. The real subject of the game . . . is

the game itself. The game is what holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there. (Gadamer 1985, 95–96)

Schott argues that such an account of play typifies masculine psychology and cites psychological evidence that girls are more likely to break off a game when a quarrel erupts, and that boys' games tend to be longer and in larger groups.¹⁸ If the essence of the game is to surrender to the game itself, then, according to Schott, it would appear that the success of the masculine over the feminine is ensured from the outset. Thus Gadamer fails to recognize how the tradition of ontological discourse ideologically reinforces men's interests and excludes the feminine. She states that "perhaps Gadamer's sensitivity to the inadequacy of a subjective starting point would be more effectively addressed by seeking to understand how differences between subjects may contribute to potentially different forms of self-reflection" (Schott 1991, 204–5).

It seems to me that Schott's account of differences in the play of boys and girls misses the mark, since a quarrel would not break out if indeed the players have set aside their own goals and their urge to dominate, and have indeed surrendered their will to power to the priority of the game. Once a quarrel over the game breaks out, the primacy of the game is already interrupted. What happens afterward and what differences exist between boys and girls is not relevant for the persuasiveness of Gadamer's account of the ontological priority of the game, nor for Schott's claim that this ontology is somehow male-biased. The fact that girls are much more likely to abandon a game if a quarrel breaks out points to the fact that girls do not like to quarrel, but certainly not to their inability to surrender to the primacy of play. Indeed, it seems that the opposite might be true, namely that the ontology of play might typify female psychology instead of male psychology! If indeed it is the case that girls are less likely to quarrel and prefer to compromise and cooperate rather than risk their relationships with others, then perhaps girls are more able to surrender themselves to the priority of play.

Secondly, as I explained above, Gadamer is well aware of the importance of difference in understanding. It is only in dialogical understanding that the difference of individuals, and the articulation of the possibilities these differences offer, are brought to light. A recognition of these differences with the object or partner of interpretation is fundamental to the process of understanding. The first task in interpreta-

tion is to work out one's own foreprojections so that understanding is not led astray by false presuppositions. "Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by the things themselves, is the constant task of understanding" (Gadamer 1985, 267). The work of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure for understanding, but is rather to work out the conditions in which understanding takes place, conditions in which a recognition of difference, not a *repression* of difference, constitutes an essential factor for productive understanding.

However, Gadamer also writes that "language completely surrounds us like the voice of home which prior to every thought of it breathes a familiarity from time out of mind" (Gadamer 1976, 97). Schott objects to this formulation of language as our home. The "us" that Gadamer refers to seems to exclude women, since language is not a secure safe dwelling place for all of "us": in fact, language dislocates and oppresses women and is often used as a tool to justify and maintain patriarchal interests. According to Schott, the primary significance Gadamer assigns to language as our primordial "home" reduces all forms of knowledge to linguistic forms, and claims a kind of universal validity for an objectified language that dislocates the feminine: "by giving primary significance to our dwelling in language, Gadamer implies that feeling, desire, and sensuality are not primary experiences" (Schott 1991, 205). But Gadamer does not deny that there are concrete experiences that are primary, including desire—desire for the other and feelings that language cannot articulate. He writes:

Of course, the fundamental linguisticity of understanding cannot possibly mean that all experiencing of the world takes place only as language and in language. All too well known are those prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawns, dumbnesses, and silences in which the immediate meeting with the world expresses itself. And who would deny that there are real conditions to human life? There are such things as hunger and love, work and domination, which themselves are not speech and language but that circumscribe the space within which speaking-with-each-other and listening-to-each-other can take place. There is no dispute that it is precisely such preformations of human opinion and speech that make hermeneutic reflection necessary. (Gadamer 1985, 179–80)

Hermeneutics is concerned with all human experience of the world including the concrete factors of power relationships or politics, work or economics, oppressive silences, desires, and sensuality. We cannot, as Gadamer writes, have experiences without asking questions; thus hermeneutical inquiry, which is the art of asking questions, encompasses all human experiences. The universality of philosophical hermeneutics is such that it not only encompasses experiences such as desire, but constitutes desire as a fundamental condition of linguistic communication. I shall return to this point below, after addressing the problem of the universality of language. Does Gadamer reify language by claiming that the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon lies in the linguisticity of being? Is the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon as a universality of language not the statement of an absolute standpoint, an ideology that is incapable of emancipatory critique? Schott is right in pointing out that Gadamer's ontology of language goes beyond a merely intersubjective account. However, Schott is one of many critics who have misunderstood Gadamer's claim "Being that can be understood is language" as a reductive universalization of all being to a reified account of language.¹⁹ In what follows I shall suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics must not be understood as an absolute position, and further that his transsubjective and intersubjective account of language does not constitute a reification of language that could serve to thwart feminist goals.

First, for Gadamer, any philosophy's claim to be absolute is a distortion of the finite nature of knowledge-seeking and truth. When he writes about the universality of language or the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon he is simply claiming that the search for understanding and language is more than a methodological problem, it is a feature of human facticity. To restrict hermeneutics to the domain of the human sciences is to distort its universal nature; however, to acknowledge its universality is not to endow it with autocratic status. Hermeneutic inquiry is universal in the sense that, as Grondin writes, it "constitutes our whole universe." Language and understanding are the "totality" in which we live—this is what Gadamer means when he says that language is the home that breathes a familiarity of time out of mind—that is, it is the element within which the dialogue that we are is played out. As Grondin writes: "[I]t is important to follow the suggestions in various of Gadamer's texts that the real basis for the talk about universality in *Truth and Method* should be sought in the semantic field of the word 'universe.' Accordingly, we can take the claim that language and understanding are

universal to mean that they constitute our universe—that is, the element or the totality in which we live as finite beings” (Grondin 1994, 122). There is nothing for mortal beings that is not part of our endless task of attempting to understand ourselves and others. The fact that language is universal must not, of course, be taken to mean that everything that can be uttered is already somehow contained or present in a reified language. As Grondin writes, the words we find are nothing but “the visible terminus signaling the interminable desire for further understanding and language” (123). Understanding is a fundamentally open-ended process, and the truth it seeks can never be fully captured by language. The claim to universality does not constitute a false, reductive universalization since the only position that is excluded from it is an absolute standpoint. For Gadamer, there is only finitude that is universal in the search for goodness and truth that is the goal of philosophy.

Language can never fully capture the conversation that we are, thus language can never, if it is to reveal truth, be reduced to definitively grounded propositions. Language, Gadamer argues, is an event (*Geschehen*) that transcends every individual consciousness. There are two features of language that Gadamer develops to ground this account: (1) what he calls the self-forgetfulness of language (*Selbstvergessenheit*) of language during speech, and (2) the dialogic structure of language that grounds the intersubjectivity of language.

The Self-Forgetfulness of Language

The self-forgetfulness of language is the notion that language “recedes” as it brings the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*) into language. Language best reveals the nature of a subject when language is not consciously experienced as such. When we focus on language itself the horizon of the unsaid is bracketed, and the statement is falsely taken to be an autonomous entity of meaning. Here the speculative nature of language as the locus for truth is lost in an artificial abstraction; and what Gadamer calls the world disclosing function of language, the function of language as a revelation of the world, escapes our consciousness. Following Heidegger, Gadamer emphasizes that Being that shows itself, shows itself in language. And language exists most fully as language when it is bound up with the subject matter. If we step back and try to treat language as an objectified product by analyzing language as

language, that is, as a system of rules, we are one step removed from an interpretation or understanding of the subject matter. The “subject matter at hand has disappeared so to speak,” and we end up analyzing an empty form, although we mistakenly assume that we are engaged in a substantive investigation of the very subject matter itself. Gadamer’s account relativizes the primacy of the apophantic, of the propositional and predicative dimension of language. It is precisely when we focus on the propositional as primary, instead of recognizing its secondary or derivative character, that we may fall prey to false universalization and oppressive abstraction since we ignore the hermeneutical dimension of language—the preenunciative or prepredicative motivational dimension of language. Here we find the concrete experiences of love, hunger, work, domination, and desire, which are prior to language as utterance, which motivate language as utterance, and which can never be fully captured by language. To illustrate this claim, we can refer to the claim “This baby is heavy.” As a statement, it tells us the property of heaviness is applied to the subject, the baby. But the meaning of the statement is not merely that the baby has the property of heaviness, and the meaning of the statement can only be grasped if we attend to the motivational dimension, that is, the hermeneutic dimension of the utterance. The subject matter of “this baby is heavy” is, if the utterance comes from an impoverished and fatigued mother, the declaration that *Dasein* suffers in its work with the baby. The mother could be protesting, resigned, furious, hoping for some help—all of these possible subject matters disappear if one focuses only on the propositional dimension of the statement. To understand the statement, we have to know *who* is uttering it, and what his or her motivation is. As Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method*, anyone who has been involved in a legal case knows how propositional language can impede an understanding of the truth of the matter, and how the reduction of truth to that which can be stated can obscure the ethical dimension of the situation that the legal process is, in fact, supposed to disclose.

The range of hermeneutic understanding is not limited to expressed truth, to claims that subjects make or values that they uphold. Hermeneutics explicitly extends to the assumptions and expectations that such truth claims include and presuppose. Philosophical concepts need to be understood in terms of *Dasein* or one’s own existence. When we understand hermeneutically, we must ask “Whose philosophical concept? Whose rationality? What is motivating an instrumental account of rea-

son? Whose tradition?" In an entirely Gadamerian spirit, many feminists have raised precisely these questions, and have exposed the narrow interests that often guided knowledge-seeking, and thus distorted the true nature of the hermeneutical endeavor. Gadamer writes that "there is no possible assertion that cannot be understood as an answer to a question and only be so understood." To philosophize is to develop an "ear" for the question for which the statement is an answer, for the "prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts" (Gadamer 1997, 17). Thus whoever wishes to understand a proposition must first endeavor to understand the question that it is attempting to answer. Gadamer writes:

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that meaning necessarily exceed what is said in it. (Gadamer 1985, 333)

There is no objective understanding of a proposition that derives some special significance when it is subsequently applied to our existential questions, rather, it is itself an answer to a question posed by whoever wrote or stated the proposition. Schott's concern about the critical power needed for an account of "how differences between subjects may contribute potentially different forms of self-reflection" (Schott 1991, 205) is addressed by hermeneutics' account of understanding as *application*. Critical theorists, particularly Habermas, with whom Schott specifically aligns herself, have been dubious of hermeneutics' critical power and have claimed that only if the applicative dimension of understanding can be subordinated to some procedure for distinguishing between distortion and correct interpretation can hermeneutics claim emancipatory power. Gadamer quite rightly points out that the contrary is closer to the truth: only the subordination of methodological procedures to a model of understanding as a practical, existential, and engaged task (*phronesis*) can encompass the critical power needed to challenge outmoded traditions and conventions in a productive manner.

The Dialogic Structure of Language

According to Gadamer, whoever speaks a language that no one understands does not speak, for to speak is to communicate, and to communicate is to communicate with an other. Dialogue is understood as the communicative form of linguistic understanding between two subjects. So language is both understood as “absolutely prior” and as an intersubjective process, a product of the interaction of subjects. However, this must not be understood to mean that language has both an objective and a subjective dimension, both a descriptive and a creative function. In a genuine conversation, the central aim is not to understand the other’s point of view as a unique expression of her individuality, nor to describe some objective totality, but is rather to relate the possible truth of what she is saying to the subject matter itself and to one’s own views and perspectives. When Gadamer speaks of relating the possible truth of the other to one’s own situation, he means not only understanding how what is said might be right, but also realizing that, to establish contact, “I must myself accept some things that are against me” (Gadamer 1985, 361). A condition of dialogue is being open to being addressed by the other. As James Risser writes in an article that traces the role of the voice of the other in philosophical hermeneutics, “for Gadamer, it is precisely the voice of the other that breaks open what is one’s own, and remains there—a desired voice that cannot be suspended—as the partner in every conversation.” The desire for the other is nothing other than what Gadamer refers to as the condition of linguistic communication, namely good will. Risser continues: “[W]here does a dialogue begin if not in the space of desire, in the space of the interrogative that allows one to cross over into the word of the other?” (Risser 1997, 397). First, there must be a desire for the question, a desire for the other and the possibilities the other brings to the encounter. The good will to understand the other does not, as Derrida and Schott maintain, entail an appropriation of the other, in the sense of an obscuring or annihilation of difference. We cannot simply subsume the other into our own limited horizon, for the event of understanding that puts us into contact with difference calls that very horizon into question, and in an encounter that is productive of truth, transforms that horizon. For Gadamer, truth is an event that “happens” to us as it were: it is not something that we can control or predict. The will to understanding and the desire toward the other is far from being in collusion with the drive for domination. Finally, the notion of desire or good will as a precondition

tion of linguistic communication speaks against understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics as a reduction of all being to language, and of his failure to acknowledge that feelings and desire are just as primary as language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to anticipate one final objection from feminist theorists. One might want to object that, even though particular aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics—such as his account of prejudice, tradition, authority, and language—have been, I hope, shown to be entirely compatible with feminist theorizing, his deliberate silence on feminist issues is itself a very telling statement that makes any account of him as an ally of feminists a dubious proposition indeed. After all, as Gadamer himself says, “oppressive silences” are undeniably part of our hermeneutic universe. It would certainly be a distortion of Gadamer's position and his intention to claim that he offers any sort of *method* that might be a useful resource for feminist issues. Moreover, it would not be accurate to represent Gadamer as a politically engaged philosopher who addresses “gender issues” in his hermeneutics. This certainly is not his intention, and it would be a serious misrepresentation of the spirit and letter of his philosophical work to make him a “silent feminist.” He explicitly denies that the task of the philosopher is to propose solutions to social and political problems, rather, he sees the task of the philosopher vis-à-vis society as developing people's sense of judgment and ability to think for themselves by “engaging in the primacy of dialogue in the theory and practice of teaching” (Gadamer 1997, 258). However, I hope to have shown that Gadamer's account of the importance of difference, his notion of understanding as an inclusive dialogue, his account of prejudices as positive conditions of an understanding that must always remain provisional, his account of tradition as not only the foundation that carries us but as that which is transformed by our reflection, and his account of language as an ongoing project all point toward a hermeneutics that is in solidarity with feminist theorizing. But not all silences are oppressive, and Gadamer's silence on political matters stems from his notion that philosophy is “politically incompetent,” and not from any hostility toward political issues, including gender issues. Some silences are simply a proclamation of modesty.

Notes

1. In the introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism* Nicholson writes: In large part the problem was a consequence of the methodological legacies which feminist scholars inadvertently took over from their teachers . . . not only did feminist scholars replicate the problematic universalizing tendencies of academic scholarship in general, but, even more strikingly, they tended to repeat the specific types of questionable universalizing moves found in the particular schools of thought to which their work was more closely allied. Thus, Marxist-feminist scholarship suffered the same kinds of faulty universalizations found in non-feminist-Marxist scholarship, while feminist developmental psychologists replicated the specific types of universalizing mistakes present in developmental psychology. (Nicholson 1990, 1)
2. It is important to point out that Gadamer stipulates a positive meaning to the term "prejudice." For Gadamer, a prejudice is not necessarily a negative, false, and unjustifiable judgment; rather, it is a provisional judgment that may be positive or negative and that is challenged in the process of understanding.
3. While hermeneutics and deconstruction are in many ways opposed to one another, they both reject the notion that the task of philosophy is to provide an objective foundation for knowledge and experience, and question an account of the meaning of language as a controllable phenomenon that can capture its object exactly and completely.
4. The three debates are well known and have been extensively discussed in contemporary scholarship in hermeneutics. See, for example, Jean Grondin's "L'hérméneutique comme science rigoureuse selon Emilio Betti (1890–1968)" (1990, 177–98); Josef Bleicher's *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (1993); J. Mendelson's "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate" (1979, 44–73); Dieter Misgeld's "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and Hermeneutics in the Light of the Debate between Habermas and Gadamer" (1977, 321–44); and Demetrius Teigas's *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Study of the Habermas-Gadamer Debate* (1995). See also Grondin's "Hermeneutics in Dialogue," a succinct overview of the Betti, Habermas, and Derrida debates in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1994).
5. See *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito*, ed. Gaspare Mura (1990). While there is no English translation of Betti's work on a general theory of interpretation for the human sciences, there is a German version by Betti entitled *Die hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (1962).
6. See Grondin's discussion of the evolution of Habermas's relation to hermeneutics in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1994, 129–35).
7. For Habermas's emancipatory critique of ideology based on the "objective" model of psychoanalysis, see his earlier work, for example, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1988). His theory of communicative action and discourse ethics can be found in his more recent work. See, for example, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984); *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990a); and *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (1998).
8. On the English translation of the Gadamer-Derrida encounter that took place in Paris in 1981, see Mihelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (1989).
9. In recent works such as *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (1995) and *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Nicholson (1990), Gadamer's hermeneutics is never even mentioned, let alone recognized as a fruitful resource for feminist scholarship. It strikes one as particularly odd that scholars who work in the continental tradition, and who discuss the intersection of Habermas and Derrida with feminist projects, would ignore one of the most prominent interlocutors in the debate on interpretation. See also Kathy Ferguson's *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (1993), in which she discusses

what she calls "praxis feminism," which she takes to be indebted to hermeneutics, although she makes no mention of Gadamer.

10. See Robin Schott, "Whose Home is it Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature: Plato, Heidegger, Barthes, Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida*, ed. Hugh Silverman (1991, 202–9); Diane Elam, "Is Feminism the Saving Grace of Hermeneutics?," in *Social Epistemology* (1991, 349–60); Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser (1994, 206–26); and "Feminism and Hermeneutics," in *Hypatia* (1993, 81–97).

11. In *Feminism/Postmodernism* Fraser and Nicholson write:

[W]hile the specific manifestations of . . . universalizing tendencies in feminist theory might have been diverse, the underlying problem was the same. It was the failure, common to many forms of academic scholarship, to recognize the embeddedness of its own assumptions within a specific historical context. Like many other modern Western scholars, feminists were not used to acknowledging that the premises from which they were working possessed a specific location. (1990, 3)

12. See *Dialogue and Dialectic in Plato: Eight Hermeneutical Studies* (1980), and *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus* (1991).

13. Gadamer probably has some key proponents of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Plato scholarship such as Burnett, Crombie, and Ryle in mind here. He is also referring, more specifically, to his German colleagues in philology, particularly the great classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, whose project of constructing philology as a science included assuming that language was merely a shroud that obscured a doctrine of ideas in Plato's system.

14. It seems likely that Gadamer has the early Habermas in mind here, with his argument that exposing unjust relations of power in society requires going beyond hermeneutic understanding alone and appealing to an objective reference system of relations of power and conditions of social labor in society. See "A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (1977).

15. Gadamer quotes Kant who, at the beginning of his essay "Was ist Aufklärung" (1784), commands that one must have the courage to use one's understanding.

16. See, for example, Husserl's early work, *Logical Investigations* (1970), especially sections entitled "Expression and Meaning" and "On the Theory of Wholes and Parts."

17. Device for making spaetzle, a Swabian specialty consisting of very small dumplings made out of egg noodle dough.

18. Schott writes:

[P]sychologists studying the play of boys and girls have noted that boys' games tend to be in larger groups than girls' games, more competitive, and longer, since boys seem to enjoy legal disputes about rules. Girls' games, on the other hand, tend to be in more intimate groups than boys' games, more involved in turn taking, and girls are more likely to break off a game when a quarrel breaks out than to jeopardize a relationship with other players. (1991, 204)

19. In "Language as Dialogue" in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Grondin writes: Gadamer's hermeneutics of language is the most misunderstood aspect of his philosophy. The aphorism "Being that can be understood is language" has seemed to justify accusing his philosophy of—or, according to another school of thought, celebrating it for—reducing all being to language. Readers have also objected to the occasional moments of vague diction in the final section of *Truth and Method*, which is sometimes lacking in precise conceptual distinctions. Thus we detect a certain resignation when distinguished students such as Walter Schulz believe they have discovered that for Gadamer everything collapses into an all-embracing synonymy: "History, language, dialogue, and game—all of these, and this is the decisive thing, are interchangeable quantities." (1994, 118)

References

- Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, eds. 1995. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.
- Betti, Emilio. 1962. *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.
- Bleicher, Josef. 1993. *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Elam, Diane. 1991. "Is Feminism the Saving Grace of Hermeneutics?" *Social Epistemology* 5, no. 4: 349–60.
- Ferguson, Kathy. 1993. *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Fraser, Nancy, and Linda Nicholson. 1990. "Social Criticism Within Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism." In Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*.
- Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1980. *Dialogue and Dialectic in Plato: Eight Hermeneutical Studies*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1985. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.
- . 1991. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. Trans. Robert Wallace. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1997. "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.
- Grondin, Jean. 1990. "L'hérmenéutique comme science rigoureuse selon Emilio Betti (1890–1968)." *Archives de Philosophie* 53: 177–98.
- . 1994. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . 1977. "A Review of Truth and Method." In *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press.
- . 1988. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- . 1990. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality." In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 1990a. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- . 1998. *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *Logical Investigations*. Trans. J. N. Findlay. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books.
- Mendelson, J. 1979. "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate." *New German Critique* 18: 44–73.
- Michelfelder, Diane, and Richard Palmer, eds. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Misgeld, Dieter. 1977. "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and Hermeneutics in Light of the Debate between Habermas and Gadamer." *Cultural Hermeneutics* 4: 321–44.
- Mura, Gaspare. 1990. *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito*. Roma: Cita Nuova.
- Nicholson, Linda. 1990. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.
- Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Risser, James. 1997. "The Voice of the Other in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.
- Schott, Robin. 1991. "Whose Home is it Anyway?" In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature: Plato, Heidegger, Barthes, Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida*, ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge.
- Sullivan, Robert. 1985. "On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics." In *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Teigas, Demetrius. 1995. *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Study of the Habermas-Gadamer Debate*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press.
- Warnke, Georgia. 1993. "Feminism and Hermeneutics." *Hyppatia* 8: 81–98.
- . 1994. "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women." In *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.