

**Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer***, trans. Kathryn Plant (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

*The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* is an impressive introduction to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics written by an internationally renowned Gadamerian scholar. The volume aptly situates Gadamer's thought not only within the tradition of hermeneutical thinking but also in a broader context of contemporary philosophical debate.

Grondin's unparalleled and challenging guide engages a variety of themes pertaining to Gadamer's philosophy: the problem of method beginning with Descartes' philosophical inquiry, the universality of hermeneutics, the linguality of understanding, aesthetic experience as the model of hermeneutic investigation, but also the notions of pre-judgment, hermeneutic horizon, and the fusion of horizons (*la fusion des horizons*), to name but a few.

In the clearly defined chapters, Grondin not only addresses the most fundamental facets of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics but also demonstrates his doing of hermeneutics (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Admirably and convincingly, the author explores the ways in which Gadamer continues but also substantially modifies the problematization of the *method*, which becomes his undeniable *tour de force*, and how he appropriates Heidegger's philosophy of language, both paying his debt and distancing himself from his mentor.

The insights provided in this significant contribution to the Gadamerian scholarship embrace diverse themes and have become exemplary in the explication of Gadamer's *understanding* of understanding, language, and the reading process. For Gadamer, language cannot be delimited to playing the role of a communicative tool. Gadamer emphasizes the dialogic nature of language – language is never completed, but rather it is endlessly open to transformations that arise from the interaction between the speaking partners. In conversation, the voice of the other challenges, undermines, deconstructs, and reconstructs, providing novel understandings and the ever-new possibilities of our re-orientation in the reality we are immersed in. Grondin's exceptional attunement to Gadamer's understanding of the linguality of human experience shines forth in his exhilarating interrogation of the “disturbing proximity” of speaking and thinking, which stands at the center of Gadamer's gloss on language. Language always remains “uncannily near” (*so unheimlich nahe*) to thought, and, paradoxically, the *unheimlich* is our “home.”

Gadamer's explication of the relationship between speaking and thinking is supplanted with his interrogation of the reading process. For Gadamer, as Grondin meticulously explains, reading is always situated within the historical and cultural horizon. It is thereby affected by the ongoing “conversation” between the reader and her tradition done in the reciprocal manner – the historically-effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*).

Undoubtedly, Grondin's succinct, elegant, and comprehensive book demonstrates that if we follow Gadamer's oft-quoted dictum: "We always understand differently, if we understand at all," in the manner of its author, Gadamer's brilliant student, we will remain sensitive to the inexhaustibility of the hermeneutic enterprise and the versatility of the realms which open themselves in front of us each time we attempt to understand.

Grondin's supreme keeping vigil for the meaning which unfolds from attentive listening to Gadamer's teaching deserves the highest praise.