

Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: Ein philosophisches Porträt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

Di Cesare's portrait of Gadamer succeeds because it exemplifies, amplifies, and exceeds our previous understanding of Gadamer. The emerging portrait is at once challenging and provocative. Di Cesare begins by arguing that scholars have mistakenly conflated Gadamer's philosophical contributions with *Truth and Method* (TM), missing the distinctiveness of his work that preceded and followed the publication of his signature book. In a short chapter, Di Cesare offers an account of how Gadamer "constructed" hermeneutics by strongly (and sometimes inaccurately) reading the modern tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger against a backdrop that extends from the ancient Greeks through Vico. If he was too one-sided in casting Schleiermacher as an exemplar of the romantic/psychological branch of hermeneutics, Gadamer also was too respectful of his debt to Heidegger. Against Habermas's claim that Gadamer urbanized the Heideggerian province, Di Cesare shows how Gadamer broke with Heidegger in many important respects, but also how he hewed to the early Heidegger of the *Hermeneutics of Facticity* against Heidegger's later increasingly "solipsistic disquiet" (80). Situating Gadamer in the tradition of hermeneutical thinking and reassessing his effective history in the light of historical distance proves to be one of the most helpful features of the book.

The key to Gadamer's philosophy is his questioning of truth. The event of truth is revealed by distinguishing "understanding" as a way of being from "interpretation" as an activity that one might take up in response to a problem. The hermeneutical tradition, as reconstructed by Gadamer, sought to find the key to valid interpretation. As methodologism spread from the sciences to the humanities, scholars subjected the traditional exegetical rules of biblical and legal hermeneutics to more exacting expectations. In the end, the truths that might be derived by methodological interpretive strategies were elusive. The signature insight of philosophical hermeneutics is that the humanities need not bend to the rigor of method or remain content with the subjectivism of aesthetics. Gadamer confronts the Kantian dilemma by recovering the event of truth in understanding. Di Cesare emphasizes this starting point: "Understanding means not conceiving, dominating, or controlling. *Understanding is like breathing*. And one does not decide not to breathe anymore. Understanding is not a matter of knowing, but of being" (p. 38). In chapter five, "The Constellation of Understanding," the portrait begins to lose definition and to resemble a collage. Building on Heidegger's recovery of the hermeneutical circle as a positive account of understanding, Part II of TM seeks to uncover the event of truth that the humanities foster. Gadamer's wide-ranging discussions of "prejudice," "tradition," "history of effects," "application," "the classical," "fusion of horizons," and "experience" are rich and learned. However, in this small volume, it would have been best to orient these themes and provide more focus to the arc of Gadamer's philosophy. Di Cesare concludes the chapter by correctly noting that the concept of understanding "reaches its greatest extension with the concept of experience after that of application" (106). The concluding part of TM concerns the linguisticity of human understanding, anticipating the later "linguistic turn" that captivated philosophy in succeeding decades. Di Cesare concedes that Gadamer's discussion is unsatisfactory and perhaps largely ignored because he was at the forefront of the turn

to language. In one of the longest chapters of the book, Di Cesare reconstructs Gadamer's linguistic philosophy in light of his later work and subsequent developments in the field. Of particular importance is her discussion of Gadamer's famously misunderstood statement: "Being that can be understood is language." Gadamer does not equate Being with language and emphasizes the limits of language and the excess of Being in the experience of the ineffable. The experience of the boundaries of language is thus the experience of the boundaries of our existence and our finitude. The search for the right word appears to be an endless task. On the other hand, it is the word that always carries us *above* and *beyond* ourselves (157).

The chapter emphasizes that language is dialogue, a dialogue that is always already underway and never completed. The voice of the other is a persistent challenge to the pretense of the subject who uses language as a tool because, in dialogue, both conversation partners are continually transformed. The philosophy of finitude is rooted in language, in which each participant is drawn outside herself. There never is a first or last word in dialogue.

It is in the everydayness of the now that both the finitude of every spoken and every understood word, as well as the finitude of the speaker who must rely on the word, are experienced. In this way, there arises the unquenched and unquenchable desire for another word, which would give a voice each time to what is unsaid and not understood. But this is possible only because the word in its finite presence evokes the absent infinitude of what still remains to be said and what lets itself be said. The limit of every word is thus always the beginning of something infinitely new. For every word demands another word—in an infinite dialogue (185). Gadamer does not deconstruct the metaphysical tradition but instead philosophizes an ontology of language from within the hermeneutic tradition.

Hermeneutics has never campaigned for consensus and reconciliation. The 'agreement' from which all speakers proceed is the harmony of a common language. For speaking is always a *coming-to-agreement*. The other is already recognized here: even before every agreement with oneself, each speaker comes to an agreement with the other. Hence, to speak means to articulate the linguistic commonality further and otherwise. That does not prevent language, however, in its always open movement between familiarity and foreignness, understanding and nonunderstanding, from offering not only the starting point but also the paradigm of an ethics, a politics, or justice, which can be thought on the basis of its hospitable, common, and nevertheless differentiating in-between. This in-between is the space for the other and with the other, the undetermined of hermeneutic truth, and the finite meeting point of common words, which opens participation in the infinitude of the dialogue (212-13).