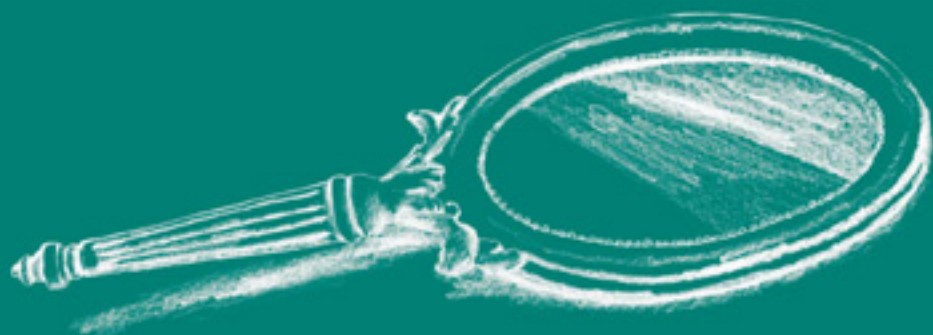


THE GADAMER DICTIONARY

Chris Lawn and Niall Keane



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Some of the entries in the *Dictionary* have been taken from Chris Lawn's *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York and London: Continuum, 2006).

Introduction

The work of Hans-Georg Gadamer – unlike a good deal of modern philosophy – is significantly lacking in abstruse and highly technical terminology. Because his work emphasises our dependence upon everyday, that is non-philosophical, language, he is at pains to develop ideas that avoid the all too easy descent into complex and bewildering terminology. This said, Gadamer has spawned a variety of terms and idioms. For example, he speaks of a ‘fusion of horizons’ and ‘effective historical consciousness’. This dictionary is designed to explain in detail these and other such terms at the heart of Gadamer’s philosophical project. Gadamer also uses familiar terms, such as ‘hermeneutics’, ‘tradition’ and ‘dialogue’, but they take on specific meanings within his writings and they require a detailed gloss and clarification.

As well as an explanation of specific terms, the dictionary relates these to broader themes. Gadamer works within the distinctly European philosophical traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology and these have given rise to, and draw upon, their own collection of concepts and ideas not immediately familiar to general readers or those working in the general terrain of analytic or English-language philosophy. This dictionary provides a detailed guide to the key ideas from which Gadamer’s own philosophical hermeneutics is drawn. Such a guide will be particularly useful to those unfamiliar with the contours of recent continental philosophy.

Gadamer lived to the venerable old age of 102. He was born in 1900 and died in 2002; if he had been born a year earlier (and died a year earlier) he would have had the rare distinction of having lived through three centuries! Gadamer’s longevity is worthy of note not simply for its rarity value but because it says something about the character of his thought. In some ways he is quite an old-fashioned thinker, being educated within the distant cultural milieus of First World War and Weimar Germany. On the other

hand, there is something distinctly modern about someone who participates in near-contemporary debates about post-modernity, alterity, relativism and anti-foundationalism. Curiously, Gadamer's international career took off when most people would be thinking of retirement. His magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, was published when he was 60. The book very quickly established itself as a modern classic and Gadamer henceforth embarked upon a new vocation as internationally recognized philosopher. For the next 40 years or so he developed and published his ideas and continued to attend conferences all over the world. *Truth and Method*, the six hundred-page defence of hermeneutics and the human sciences, with its detailed readings of the key texts in the history of philosophy, is at the heart of Gadamer's work. It represents a wealth of scholarship and springs from an engagement with some of the most celebrated thinkers in nineteenth and twentieth century German philosophy.

At the heart of Gadamer's work is a justification of philosophy itself in an intellectual world all too often dominated by the practices and procedures of natural science. For Gadamer, the time-honoured practice of hermeneutics, all but forgotten about in the modern age until revived in the nineteenth century, demonstrates that human understanding cannot be encapsulated in a body of rules or methodology; it operates in all aspects of our attempts to make sense of the world. For this reason, art and the artistry of language tell us as much about the world and ourselves as does the more revered natural science. Gadamer's greatest achievement is to use hermeneutics to re-instate the human sciences.

The Dictionary will enable the reader to explore and understand the key terms in Gadamer's lexicon. It will also enable the reader to grasp the many ideas Gadamer advances on the nature of language, art, history and human understanding. The authors operated according to a fairly strict division of labour. One of us focused on the key terms and concepts in Gadamer's work. The other dealt mainly with broader themes and the entries upon specific historical figures who either influenced Gadamer directly, such as his teachers Husserl and Heidegger, or whose influence was less direct but important, figures such as Hegel or Augustine.

The Dictionary will act as an important point of reference and assist those coming to grips with Gadamer and the whole domain of philosophical hermeneutics. It will also be a valuable aid to those who need information about the many sources on which Gadamer's work draws.

Chronology: Gadamer's Life and Works*

- 1900 Hans-Georg Gadamer was born in Marburg, Germany, to Johannes Gadamer and Emma Caroline Johanna Gewiese.
- 1902 The family moves to Breslau in Lower Silesia; in 1945 the once-German city became part of Poland, adopting the Polish name Wrocław.
- 1904 His mother dies of diabetes.
- 1905 Gadamer's father remarries.
- 1918 He attends the University of Breslau and matriculates in German Studies.
- 1919 The family moves back to Marburg as Johannes Gadamer is made professor at the University.
- 1919 Gadamer commences studies in philosophy at the University of Marburg.
- 1922 He contracts polio and spends months in isolation. During this time he reads Husserl and some unpublished work of Heidegger. He starts to fall under the influence of Heidegger and resolves to study with him in Freiburg.
- 1923 Gadamer marries Frida Kratz, daughter of a factory owner and a friend from Breslau, who nursed him through his illness with polio.
- 1923 He attends Heidegger's classes in Freiburg.
- 1925 Gadamer starts intensive study of classical philology after Heidegger rebukes him and causes him to doubt his abilities in philosophy.

- 1926 Jutta, Gadamer's first daughter, is born.
- 1927 He passes the examination in classical philology and is awarded the *Habilitation*.
- 1928 Johannes Gadamer dies of cancer.
- 1931 Gadamer's *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* is published in Leipzig.
- 1934 He is appointed to the chair of philosophy at the University of Kiel. The circumstances of the appointment are not clear, but Gadamer replaces the incumbent suspended because of his Jewish origins.
- 1936 He attends Heidegger's lectures in Frankfurt on the nature of art, later published as *The Origin of the Work of Art*. These lectures have a lasting influence on Gadamer's understanding of art.
- 1939 He moves to Leipzig and teaches philosophy at the University of Leipzig.
- 1945 Leipzig is occupied by Russian troops.
- 1946 After the Second World War Gadamer is elected Rector of the University of Leipzig.
- 1947 He takes up an appointment at the University of Frankfurt in West Germany. He is instrumental in assisting the philosopher Theodor Adorno secure an academic post in Frankfurt. Adorno had fled from the Nazis in the early 1930s, first to Britain and then the United States, where he spent the war years.
- 1949 Gadamer takes up an appointment of professor at the University of Heidelberg where he stays for the rest of his life.
- 1950 He marries his second wife, Käthe Lekebusch.
- 1956 His second daughter Andrea is born.
- 1957 Gadamer is invited to give the Cardinal Mercier lectures at the University of Louvain. The lectures, entitled 'The Problem of Historical Consciousness', contain the central ideas of what was to become *Truth and Method*.
- 1960 The publication of *Truth and Method*.

- 1967 The publication of the first volume of the collected shorter works (*Kleine Schriften*) of Gadamer.
- 1971 *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies* is published.
- 1975 The first publication of an English language translation of *Truth and Method*.
- 1976 The collections of essays *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies* and *Philosophical Hermeneutics* are published in English.
- 1977 The publication of the autobiographical work, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*.
- 1980 The publication of *Dialogue and Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*.
- 1981 He debates with Jacques Derrida at the Goethe Institute in Paris. He publishes *Reason in the Age of Science*.
- 1983 *Heidegger's Ways* is published.
- 1986 *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* is published.

The first volume of the 10 volume *Gesammelte Werke* (Collected Works) is published. The other nine volumes are issued over the next nine years.
- 1992 *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics* is published.
- 1994 *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essays in German Literary Theory* is published.
- 1996 *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age* is published.
- 1997 *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, a volume in the prestigious 'Library of Living Philosophers' series, is published.
- 2001 The terrorist attack upon the World Trade Center in New York takes place. Asked to comment on this event Gadamer responded with 'the world has become quite strange to me' (as translated in Grondin's biography of Gadamer). This suggests that it is an event

he can make no sense of, suggesting that for all the optimistic possibilities in his hermeneutics, this is possibly a point at which no dialogue is possible.

2002 Gadamer dies in the hospital in Heidelberg at the venerable age of 102.

* Much of the information in this section comes from *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* by Jean Grondin (see Bibliography).

A-Z Dictionary

(NB: **TM** in the text refers to *Truth and Method*, trans. Weinsheimer, Joel and D. G. Marshall, Second revised edition, London: Continuum, 1989.)

— A —

Adorno, Theodor (1903–1969) German philosopher and critical theorist who escaped to the United States during the years of the Second World War. Gadamer was largely responsible for Adorno's return to Germany in 1947, and he helped him secure an academic post at the university in Frankfurt during the former's tenure at the institute. In 1950 Gadamer and Adorno took part in a radio broadcast to commemorate fifty years after the death of **Friedrich Nietzsche**. Despite Adorno's hostility to the fundamental ontology of Gadamer's teacher **Martin Heidegger**, as articulated most explicitly in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964), many salient points of agreement between the two theorists can be discerned. Both Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) and Gadamer's **philosophical hermeneutics** attest to the mutual influence of Hegelian dialectics on their respective projects; however both theorists eschew the teleology of **Hegel's** system in favour of the historicity of understanding. The shared emphasis on the contingency of understanding evinced in both theorists a re-orientation of philosophical inquiry towards interpretation in order to avoid a relapse into idealism, which in turn elucidates the centrality of the truth-disclosing potential of art in both their theories. As one of the most

prominent members of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, Adorno's project was motivated by an analysis of the degenerating effects of reason within society and the concomitant critique of instrumental reason as manifested in the reduction of meaningful experience, a sentiment shared by Gadamer's reproach of **positivism**. The proximities between Adorno and Gadamer were intended to be explored in a dialogue between the two theorists that Gadamer wished to initiate. However Adorno's death in 1969 prevented this from occurring.

Aesthetics This is the branch of philosophy which studies the nature of art and the beautiful. The word derives from the Greek *aisthēsis*, meaning 'sensation' or even 'sense-perception' because, in one view, art invokes pleasurable or unpleasant sensual responses in the recipient. Although a philosophical interest in the nature of art goes back to **Plato** and the Greeks, the term aesthetics is actually relatively recent, being coined by the German philosopher **Alexander Baumgarten**. Gadamer's work has a good deal to say about the philosophy of art although he is critical of the aesthetic theory of **Immanuel Kant** and its legacy. Gadamer's major works on aesthetics are in Part One of *Truth and Method*, and the essays in the collection entitled *On the Relevance of the Beautiful*. Although Gadamer is mainly concerned with the literary art forms, especially poetry, he also writes extensively about the aesthetics of music and the visual arts.

Aesthetic consciousness To speak of aesthetic consciousness is to suppose that there is a purely aesthetic way of viewing the world, or alternatively, that there is a specific realm of experience we may term the aesthetic. For example, one might say that a piece of music does nothing more than stir up sentiments of well-being or sadness; such a belief reduces music to an aspect of aesthetic consciousness. Running in tandem with this idea is the assumption that there is such a thing as a purely aesthetic judgement, lacking cognitive content, and appealing to 'pure' sensation and feeling. Gadamer strongly contests these ideas because he maintains that all works of art are more than just **subjective** responses; works of art make a claim to **truth** and hence are not just sensations or opportunities to experience feelings and emotions. We do not just wallow in the pleasurable feeling an art work gives rise to; a work of art has something to say and seeks to share its **truth** in playful **dialogue**. Art is a form of **truth** and its

meaning is not located in the perceiver but in the art object itself and what it discloses.

Aesthetic differentiation Aesthetic differentiation, a term coined by Gadamer, refers to the idea that a work of art can be understood as being separate from, and irreducible to, the circumstances of its production or its original ceremonial, religious or political context. Other theorists have adopted a similar position by referring to works of art as *sui generis* (existing in a class of their own). Gadamer rejects the elevation of art objects to a separate realm of existence and meaning. Many objects that we now consider to be works of art – religious icons, for example – originally performed ceremonial and other functions and these factors are to be taken into consideration when determining the meaning of a work of art. In fact, for Gadamer, the original significance of art objects is necessarily considered when they are understood hermeneutically. To appreciate an art object in its original non-aesthetic context is what Gadamer calls **aesthetic non-differentiation**.

Aesthetic object For Gadamer, an aesthetic object is not to be treated as a detached entity to be appropriated and understood conceptually. A genuine work of art takes hold of the observer and becomes an 'event' with which we engage. It appropriates, surprises and disrupts the world of the observer by the presentation of an alternative world or an alternative aspect of the present world. An aesthetic object, such as a literary text or a painting, is not that different from other objects in the world: the differences are of degree and not of kind. An aesthetic object opens up an aspect of the world with greater intensity than our encounters with the everyday, but even mundane conversations, for example, are revealing and disclosive, and hence truthful, but to a lesser degree than great art.

Alterity (or 'otherness') Alterity is an important issue in contemporary philosophy. It refers to the possibility that there can be ideas outside a particular mode of understanding or frame of reference that cannot be assimilated by that frame of reference; the radically other refuses to be reduced to something within a familiar frame of reference. The work of the German philosopher **Hegel**, it is claimed by his critics, is an example of a philosophical system where there is an absence of true alterity. His concept