from the philosophic, a possible alternative would be to restrict the endnotes to linguistic remarks and place the more philosophical comments in the Epilogue. The reader could then choose whether or not to refer to the highly specialized linguistic explanations. Another point is that a few translations seem too detailed, for example, “auf” (with respect to, on the basis of, and with view to...), “Woraufhin” (the with-respect-to-which and on-the-basis-of-which), “aus” (wherefrom, out-of-which, and on-the-basis-of-which) and “Einsatz” (initial engagement and bringing into play). An endnote explanation may have been sufficient to suggest the different meanings the reader should have in mind when he reads the word, allowing the translator to choose an expression more in tune with the sobriety of the German term. Finally, van Buren speaks of looking for a balance “between the poetic dimension of Heidegger’s text and its factical earthiness.” (99) While we agree with his view that the seminar anticipates later texts generally regarded as poetic, he has perhaps over-emphasized the poetic dimension of this text. (91, 92, 97, 108, 111) His main examples of poetic language are the words “Aufenthalt,” sojourn, and “Verweilen,” whiling. An explanation of what van Buren means by “poetic” would have been useful.

Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity is a highly enigmatic work due to the nature of its subject matter and its form as lecture notes. Although it stands on its own and can be read without reference to Heidegger’s later work, this text challenges the alleged lack of an ethical perspective in Being and Time. Van Buren rouses the reader’s interest in this subject with a simple question: “Was the course ‘Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity’ the original form of Heidegger’s ‘original ethics?’” Heidegger would have responded in the affirmative, prompting the reader to ask: Is it then meaningful to ground ethics in ontology and to found ontology on existence? To ask this question is to encounter Heidegger’s thought and to be moved by the hermeneutical impulse toward self-interpretation. Perhaps that was precisely what Heidegger ultimately wanted to accomplish.

JOHN BEACH AND ALEXANDRA LEDUC, Université de Montréal

Die Resokratisierung Platons, Die Platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamers
FRANÇOIS RENAUD

When I retired from my teaching position at Heidelberg towards the end of the sixties, I originally had planned to develop all of the already submitted, and also all of the commenced studies on Greek philosophy into one larger book on Plato. I never got to
do so. Other tasks always interfered (...). ¹

So writes Gadamer, who celebrated his 100th birthday in February of 2000, in the preface to the seventh volume of his collected works, published just nine years ago. Now François Renaud has undertaken the arduous task of synthesizing Gadamer’s thought on Plato to present it in one book. ² Whether Gadamer will regard this as his work having been done for him, is a question he alone can answer. We shall have more to say about this later.

There is no doubt, however, that many Plato scholars and those curious about, or already interested in, Gadamer’s work will find Die Resokratisierung Platos an invaluable source, both for insights into Gadamer’s thought and as a rich source of references. A further attraction: it is beautifully written, impeccably researched, and well documented. What is more, the contextualisation, the careful and sensitive exposition of Gadamer’s thought, and the measured and considered critical comments show interpretive practice at its best. The only thing that many English-speaking scholars will wish for is that Renaud may publish an English version soon.

“The goal of this book is to critically examine the Plato interpretation of H-G. Gadamer,” says FR in the first line of his introduction. (1) The route he chooses has three distinct stages: the first (chapters I and II) locates Gadamer’s Plato studies within the larger context of the German philosophical tradition and classical philology. (5) He traces in broader strokes Gadamer’s interpretive practice and hermeneutical theory from its roots in tradition to its offshoots in scholarly reception. Chapter I brings to the forefront the tension between practice and theory in Gadamer’s work. As FR states, this tension informs the critical thesis of his book:

The distinguishability in principle of understanding and application, interpretation and critique, sense and meaning, that Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory ultimately is not willing to recognize, which his hermeneutical practice, however, quietly presupposes, constitutes the critical foundational thesis of the present (i.e. FR’s) study. (15)

Chapter II revolves around Anamnèsis (recollection) as participation (Teilhabe). The Anamnèsis teaching as the central motif of Platonism underlies the task of destruction (Destruktion) aimed at breaking up the sedimentation that covers up the conceptual (begriffliche) roots of tradition. Pivotal for Gadamer’s thought is the model character (das Vorbildhafte) of the classical (des Klassischen) that he defends against classicism and historicism.

The second stage (Chapters III—VI) might be termed the expository stage. Here FR collects Gadamer’s dispersed Platonic studies and unites them under four
main themes: Socratic dialogue (III), ideas (IV), dialectic (V), and ethos (VI). The figure of Socrates and the Socratic dialogue explored in chapter III are central to Gadamer’s project of the “re-socratization of Plato” (hence the title of FR’s book). Here the role of logos—its limits, its harmony with ergos (deed), and as question—gains prominence. This leads into the notion of eidos (idea) discussed in Chapter IV with particular focus on “taking flight into logoi” (die Flucht in die Logoi), the hypothesis of eidos, and the demand for justification (Rechenschaft). The discussion of Platonic ideas carries over into Chapter V, where the crucial theme of “the one and the many” is elucidated. Chapter VI focuses on ethos as practical philosophy in the sense of phronesis and of dialectic as practical knowledge from an Aristotelian and a Platonic perspective. Contrary to the tradition that sees Plato as a dogmatic two-world proponent and idealist, while emphasizing Aristotle’s realism, Gadamer aims to minimize the opposition between those two philosophers by denying the dogmatism and the two-world view, and instead stressing the immanence of ideas.

The third stage (Chapter VII, and the conclusion) consists of critical comments derived from other scholarly approaches to Plato, and critiques of Gadamer’s approach to hermeneutics and to Plato interpretation. Although the specified goal of the book is a critical examination, readers expecting an in-depth critique of Gadamer’s Plato interpretation might feel disappointed. As the German heading of Chapter VII (Kritische Anmerkungen) suggests, and as indicated also by the subheadings, this part of the book offers critical comments on all the main themes the earlier chapters explicate. The lack of in-depth critique, however, does not necessarily detract from the value of the book. On the contrary, this survey of some of the contentious aspects in Gadamer’s work is immensely helpful for scholars seeking to orient themselves in the debate. It might have been interesting, though, to see a concluding chapter bringing out more clearly FR’s own view on Gadamer’s practice and theory. But here as throughout the book FR practices admirably Gadamer’s demand for Zurückhaltung (restraint).

In addition, the book contains an appendix critically discussing Leo Strauss’s Platonic hermeneutics (152—9). Invaluable bibliographical material includes, apart from an extensive general bibliography, a chronological list of Gadamer’s Plato studies (150—1) and a separate list of Gadamer’s works (160—2). The book lacks a subject index, although a name index is included.

If we were to take up a Gadamerian perspective, what could we say about FR’s synthesizing efforts as a hermeneutical endeavour? Consider some of Gadamer’s hermeneutical tenets: A hermeneutical rule is that one must understand the whole through the particular (aus dem Einzelnen) and the particular through the whole, hence, the hermeneutical circle (GW I, 270ff, 296ff). Understanding a text means understanding the question to which the text is the answer (GW I, 368ff, 375), and this presupposes recovering the Fragehorizont (horizon of questioning), which is achieved by the fusion of the horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) of the
past and of the present (GW I, 311 f, 380). Socratic dialectic is paradigmatic for hermeneutics (GW I, 368 ff; V, 38 ff). Schriftlichkeit (being in writing) is hermeneutically enabling (GW I, 393 ff), rather than impeding as Plato thought (Phdr. 274c ff). Moreover, although Gadamer acknowledges the role of mens auctoris in “living conversation” (lebendiges Gespräch), the author’s intent is problematic and of diminished interest when it comes to written text (GW II, 19). Nevertheless, Gadamer states:

> When we attempt to understand a text, we do not try to transfer (versetzen) ourselves into the psychological state of the author. Rather, if one wants to speak of self-transference (Sichversetzen), we put (versetzen) ourselves into the perspective under which the other has gained his opinion (GW I, 297).

Understanding is always already interpretation (GW II, 19). And most importantly understanding, and thus, interpreting, is to understand each other “in” the subject matter (sich in der Sache verstehen) (GW I, 29 ff).

Let us turn to FR’s book. Its structure follows the principle of, first, giving an overview of the whole by assembling the particular key points of Gadamer’s hermeneutical practice and theory. FR does so by fusing the horizon of past scholarship from which Gadamer’s thought arose with that of present scholarship (i.e. the reception of Gadamer’s thought). Interestingly, Gadamer himself stands in both horizons, so to speak. In the second stage FR collects the particular tenets of Gadamer’s Plato interpretation and unifies them under key concepts. In the third stage Gadamer’s interpretation of these Platonic concepts is critically examined.5

But let us dwell for a moment on what such collection of thought from a variety of texts written over the span of about sixty years implies. First, it raises the question whether one can take an author’s thought as homogenous enough to yield a coherent interpretive picture over time. This, of course, is one of Gadamer’s own assumptions in his Plato interpretation. As FR points out, Gadamer aims for a unitary depiction of Platonic thought, pivoting around the figure of Socrates (121 ff). In other words, he does not subscribe to the tradition that sees a clear development in Plato’s thought from the early, over the middle, to the late dialogues. By contrast, FR sees such an “undeniable development” in Gadamer’s own thought from the early to the later Plato studies, a development that FR takes into account in his explication (16—18). Moreover, consider the fact that Gadamer himself collected texts spanning nearly eight decades6 and published a selection of them in ten volumes. For the most part the included texts remain unreviewed with some comments added in brackets. But FR draws not only on the Collected Works but also on other texts, not only on Gadamerian but also on texts by other authors who have either influenced Gadamer or reacted to what he has said (mostly in his
What made Gadamer include or leave out these texts and not others when compiling his GW? In the case of major texts—say *Truth and Method*, or Plato’s *Dialectical Ethics*—the answer seems obvious. These texts are landmarks of Gadamer’s work. But for a variety of shorter texts this is not necessarily so. Hence, one may ask whether Gadamer’s decision against inclusion is any indication of his attitude towards them. In short, could one read it as a rejection? My own feeling is that there are no sufficient grounds for such a reading. Does that mean that one can safely assume that Gadamer stands behind everything he has ever written (barring what he explicitly amends in his annotations)? It seems to me that this would go too far in the opposite direction. One obvious criterion for assuming that an author continues to hold certain beliefs or tenets he or she has expressed earlier in life is their coherence with what is said later. But can we infer from that that anything that does not cohere should be discarded as no longer the author’s considered opinion? In addition, would that entitle us to speak of a development in the author’s thought? Gadamer would seem to answer both questions in the negative. “Not only sometimes, but always, does the sense (*der Sinn*) of a text surpass its author.” (GW I 301) Once written, a text becomes part of tradition, and so, takes on a life of its own. The original author (*ursprüngliche Autor*) does not have privileged access to its thought in the sense that he or she knows best how to interpret it and can serve as the standard for its “correct” interpretation.

This seems at the same time both counter-intuitive and strangely plausible. On the one hand, we take it for granted that an author can explain best what she means in her text. After all, conference discussions of an author’s paper, for instance, are based on this assumption. Few people would tell an author that she does not know what she means but that they do. They might very well point out a discrepancy between what she believes her written words convey and what the hearer or reader may in fact take them to mean. But would anyone at this point say: “you cannot change your text; what you said there will be considered as your opinion for all times?” We take it for granted that an author might discover in discussion that what her text conveys to others is not in fact what she intended to convey. We also allow for the possibility that dialogue about the text may lead the author to change her opinion, say, if flaws in the argumentation are pointed out to her (or if further research yields different conclusions, etc.).

The problems arise when the text has become part of the public domain—that is, if a written text is published. There is no chance of “recalling” a written text as a dealer might recall a faulty car model. Of course, one can try to retract in subsequent publications, but there is no guarantee that readers will read both. What is more, the author may remain unaware that readers understand the text differently than the author intends it to be understood. And if the author is no longer living, access to her original intent or intended meaning is denied. To some degree this is the tension between the original meaning (*ursprüngliche Bedeutung*)...
of a text and the significance of the meaning for us (Bedeutsamkeit für uns) that FR points to in Gadamer's theory and practice (42). This is a multilevel question, because we may draw a further distinction between the author's original intended meaning and the meaning the text had for its original audience. Moreover, it is misleading to speak of the latter as though there were any clear-cut interpretive consensus views. There are interpretive traditions, but as in written history, what is transmitted are often the views of the victorious. This also holds for tradition itself. The meaning for “us” depends on who “we” are at any given point in the tradition. The “we” may simply refer to the view of mainstream scholarly tradition, or depending on the perspective from which it is spoken, it can represent dissenting interpretive views. Gadamer's own wish to rehabilitate Socratic Platonism serves as an example of the latter. 7

Tension arises from any claim that an interpretation is a rendition of the original author's intended meaning. Claims about the author abound, for instance, in Gadamer's Plato studies. That is, every time he speaks of “Plato's philosophy,” Gadamer is already going beyond the texts because Plato, as is well known, is conspicuously absent from all but two dialogues. 8 So clearly Gadamer's dialogue is not only with the text(s) but with the author. In particular in the case of dramatic writings, like Plato's, going outside of an individual, self-contained text, in an effort to collect thoughts and ideas emerging from a number of texts by the same author, and to synthesize them into a unitary outlook, presupposes making some strong claims about the author's intention. After all, the author himself gives no evidence of any intention to openly flag his own views. It is arbitrary to decide which of the characters is intended to voice the author's views. Any interpretation that takes Socrates as the mouthpiece of Plato's opinion, for example, goes well beyond the evidence of the text. And, as far as we know, Plato made no effort to collect the thoughts and tenets dispersed in his work into unified ideas (called Platonic doctrines) to represent a unitary whole (called Platonism). Whether he intended his readers to do so, we do not know. His Phaedrus points out the dangers involved once a written text enters the public domain. The text needs its parent-author to come to its aid, because it is unable to protect and to defend itself. 9

But what if the author is no longer there to come to the aid of the text? In the case of transmitted texts, whose authors are just names of the past known to us through texts, it is the sensitive interpreter who will try to come to its aid. He or she cannot be a surrogate parent, so to speak, but an understanding friend of the text—not of the parent-author. If we become friends through conversation, and if interpretation means having a conversation or dialogue with the text, then friendship plays an important role in “good” interpretation. 10 That Gadamer feels a deep friendship for Plato's dialogues becomes evident when reading his Plato studies. Similarly FR's sensitive interpretation of Gadamer's Plato studies evinces an attitude of friendship towards Gadamerian texts (and Platonic texts too, for that matter). In the former instance, the friendship for the texts is conflated with the
friendship for the text’s parent, so to speak. Getting to know the text is taken to be synonymous with getting to know its author. This seems legitimate in the case of a text where the parent-author explicitly speaks in his own voice, as is true of Gadamer’s own writings, for instance. In that case the text becomes an extension of the author’s oral communications. To stay with Plato’s metaphor, the offspring (text) is directed to express the views of the parent (author). If the offspring muddles the communication, or is misunderstood for other reasons, the parent can step in, if so inclined, and clear up the misunderstanding. Conversely, when dealing with writings that do not purport to state the author’s view, one should be careful not to conflate the opinions expressed by the text with those of the author. When making new friends, we do not usually suspect their parents’ opinions behind their views (unless, of course, our new friends are young children). And unless our new friends tell us about their home life and parents, our assumptions about the latter are conjecture. Even if we know the opinions of all the siblings, this does not necessarily mean that we know those of the parents. Similarly, even if we know all the opinions expressed in a multiplicity of texts by the same author, this does not mean that we have come to know the author’s own opinions. That is to say, not unless the author explicitly writes in his or her own voice, or has disclosed that a particular character is intended as a mouthpiece, are we entitled to establish a direct link between the views expressed in the text and those held by the author. And so, while it is perfectly legitimate to collect the thought of the latter kind of author from a variety of texts into a unity of ideas that represent a coherent whole, it is not legitimate to do so in the case of authors who chose a dramatic style that hides its author’s voice. FR’s Gadamer interpretation is of the former kind. Gadamer’s Plato interpretation is of the latter. Whether FR has understood Gadamer as he intended to be understood, is for Gadamer alone to say. But, then again, Gadamer’s own view on mens auctoris and the independence of the text may prevent him from doing so.

Notes


2. Renaud (later FR) referring to Gadamer’s earlier intention, explicitly states that, among other things, his book is an attempt to provide the comprehensive presentation (Gesamtdarstellung) of the Gadamerian Plato interpretation that has been missing until now (5).

3. See also Chapter I on this.
4. Explicated in detail in Chapter I.

5. My allusion here to Plato’s method of collection and division, called dialectic in the *Phaedrus* (265d ff), is intentional.

6. The earliest seems to be his unpublished dissertation in 1922.

7. Another distinction, as mentioned (FR 15), is between the “sense” and the “meaning” of the text, a topic too intricate to broach here.

8. Even there he is mentioned only in passing (*Apol.* 34a2, 38b7; *Phd.* 59b10).


10. Gadamer himself points out that conversation is in peculiar proximity with friendship. ("So ist das Gespräch in eigentümlicher Nachbarschaft mit Freundschaft."). That is, “(o)nly in conversation (and in laughing together, which is a wordless boundary transcending agreement [Einverständnis]) can friends find each other and build the kind of commonality in which each remains the same, because both find the other and in the other themselves.” (GW II, 211)

EVA M. BUCCIONI, University of Guelph