

Introduction

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“Hermeneutics” and “deconstruction”: two terms that name two bodies of thought, two sets of texts, which today bear the signatures “Gadamer” and “Derrida.” Two terms, moreover, that name what are often taken to be clashing, even mutually exclusive standpoints—two radically different interpretations of interpretation, of writing, even of language itself.

In seeking to find a source for the divergence of these two powerful currents of contemporary European thought, one immediately runs up against the body of thought and texts bearing the signature of Heidegger. Following Heidegger’s lead, both Gadamer and Derrida deny the possibility of a transcendental, language-free standpoint for human understanding. And both, like Heidegger, regard our relationship to language as a primary philosophical issue, seeing language as the scene of our finitude, the place where we encounter the limits of our subjectivity. But their developments of Heidegger’s insights into language are not at all alike. For Gadamer, language is living language—the medium of dialogue. When in *Truth and Method* Gadamer holds up the Platonic dialogue as the model for philosophical conversation, he makes it clear that the success of dialogue depends on the continuing willingness of its participants—right from the point where one of them asks a question that can no longer be repressed—to “give in” to language, to be carried along by the conversation for the purpose of letting meaning emerge in an “event” of mutual understanding. While Derrida would agree that the meanings generated by language always exceed our intentions, he proceeds from a view of language where language is presumed to be always already writing, where the spoken word is seen as an already disrupted sign, infiltrated by absence. So he remains continually on the alert as to how otherness lurks within meaning, and how, for a particular concept at issue, there may be no possibility of deciding, from among its competing meanings, one that is true or authentic.¹

Heidegger’s recognition of the priority of language, then, gets developed in two quite different directions in the texts of Gadamer and Derrida. In Gadamer, this development leads toward a stress on the unity of and in meaning, toward

(so it seems) a strengthening of tradition and an emphasizing of the authority and truth of texts. In Derrida, on the other hand, it leads toward underscoring the irreducible equivocation and undecidability of meaning, even apparently toward questioning the concept of meaning itself.

On this basis, hermeneutics and deconstruction seem to offer us extremely different views of language. This is a major reason why they have been thought to be in opposition to each other. But despite their differences, they also have a common ground that needs to be kept in mind. Both Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Derridean deconstruction present a significant challenge to the metaphysics of modernity, whose assumptions continue to dominate not only a good deal of thinking within philosophy but also within other interpretive disciplines, including literary criticism, theology, and the social sciences. And, however far apart their views of language may appear to be, both find a common ground in this challenge itself, in questioning the metaphysical assumption that language is at our disposal. We are not the ones "in charge" of language, Gadamer and Derrida both claim. It is, they insist, the other way around.²

Just how really incompatible, then, are hermeneutics and deconstruction? Their undeniable common ground seems to point not to a total absence of any communication between them but instead to the presence of lines of communication that are elusive, puzzling, and difficult to grasp. What do these lines of communication look like? Or, to put it another way: Just how "hermeneutical" is deconstruction? And, likewise, just how "deconstructive" is hermeneutics?

In light of these questions, the meeting between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida in April 1981 at the Goethe Institute in Paris takes on special significance. This meeting, on the occasion of a symposium on "Text and Interpretation" organized by Sorbonne professor Philippe Forget, was their first in a public, academic setting.³ But the deeper significance of this "improbable debate," as Forget later called it,⁴ lay in the opportunity it offered for each thinker to engage the other in dialogue and to debate face-to-face. In short, this symposium provided a genuine chance to have what Germans call an *Auseinandersetzung*: a confrontation of positions, out of which one could gain not only a greater understanding of each individual standpoint but also of the relationship between them.⁵

But did such a confrontation really take place? The outward signs of the meeting, at least, would seem to suggest that it did. Formal papers were presented by both Gadamer and Derrida; and, at the round table discussion the morning after Gadamer's talk, Derrida addressed three questions to Gadamer in response to his talk and Gadamer offered a reply in turn. Subsequently, in 1984, Derrida's response and Gadamer's reply were published in French in the *Revue internationale de philosophie*, along with a shorter version of Gadamer's paper⁶; and in the same year the complete texts of the entire exchange also came out in German in *Text und Interpretation*, edited by Philippe Forget. One part of our

purpose in putting together this volume is to make the complete texts of this exchange available in English. These texts have been assembled as Part I of this book, beginning with Gadamer's paper, "Text and Interpretation."

I

Gadamer's presentation starts out with a brief backwards glance at the development of hermeneutics, but then quickly turns to address what he identifies as the "genuine challenge" of contemporary French thinking—above all, the challenge represented by Derrida. Gadamer specifically singles out Derrida's claim that it is Nietzsche, not Heidegger, who has gone further in freeing philosophy from the grasp of metaphysical concepts of being and truth, and also from a logocentric concept of interpretation as the process of making present a meaning contained within the text. Without hesitating here Gadamer takes up Derrida's challenge. He places himself squarely in opposition to Derrida's reading of Heidegger, supporting Heidegger's own interpretation of Nietzsche as a metaphysical thinker, even while criticizing the later Heidegger for turning to poetical language as a means of getting beyond the limits of metaphysics. Despite Gadamer's unwillingness to follow this movement of Heidegger's thought and language into what he will later call an "impassable" region, he will still here make the claim that Heidegger can be defended as a more "radical" thinker than Nietzsche.

As he takes up Derrida's challenge in "Text and Interpretation," Gadamer likewise accepts the typical structure of academic debate. Siding with Heidegger while at the same time defending his own project of philosophical hermeneutics against Derrida's interpretation, Gadamer risks opening himself up to the force of Derrida's questions, to the possibility that Derrida might vehemently dispute with him in order to defend his own views. Gadamer's remarks in the paper lead us to anticipate the confrontation of positions that seemed to be promised by the very event of this meeting. And, given how on other occasions—in *Spurs*, for instance—Derrida has taken the opportunity to bring out the alignment, the deep connection, existing between the hermeneutical search for meaning and the project of metaphysics, it would not have been surprising had this meeting unfolded into a debate, a genuine encounter between these two thinkers.

But this was not how it went. Derrida responded to Gadamer's presentation with several questions that, at least on the surface, appear to have been misdirected. Paying no attention to Gadamer's claim that it is a mistake to place hermeneutics under the category of metaphysics just because it refers to a meaning presented by the text, Derrida focuses his questions on something Gadamer covers almost in passing, what he takes to be the obvious and necessary precondition for any understanding to be achieved in dialogue, namely, the willingness of each partner in a conversation to be open to what the other has to say. This

Derrida identifies with the Kantian idea of the good will. Gadamer can only react to Derrida's questions by voicing his doubts as to whether he has really been understood, claiming that his concept of good will as a prerequisite for dialogue does not go back to Kant but rather to Plato's *eumeneis elenchoi*. Nothing at all about philosophical hermeneutics, he maintains, depends on Kantian good will.

Likewise, Derrida's own presentation at the colloquium—"Interpreting Signatures (Nietzsche/Heidegger): Two Questions"—does not seem directed toward developing a dialogue between himself and Gadamer. Derrida argues that Heidegger's attempt to understand who Nietzsche is from the perspective of his thought rather than his life—an effort motivated by the good will to save Nietzsche from a psycho-biographical misreading⁷—is itself organized around a misreading of Nietzsche that attributes to him the unity of a proper name, and takes his thought of the eternal recurrence to be about the totality of being. In putting forward this argument, Derrida would seem to be simply assembling more evidence in support of his own view of the relation between Heidegger and Nietzsche. One of the questions that Derrida asks quite rhetorically toward the end of his paper—"Is it perhaps hasty to make Nietzsche out to be a metaphysician, albeit the last one?"—certainly points us in this direction. While Gadamer takes account of the challenge of Derrida, at no point in his formal paper does Derrida even bring up Gadamer's name.

All of this raises the question of just how accurate it is to speak of a "Gadamer-Derrida encounter," as we have done in the subtitle of this volume. Philippe Forget would come to wonder afterwards if, in this "improbable debate," as he called it, an encounter had indeed taken place. And even Derrida prefaces his three questions to Gadamer by registering his doubts as to whether "anything was taking place here other than improbable debates, counter-questions, and inquiries into unfindable objects of thought."⁸

Just what are we to conclude, then, on the basis of all this? Should we conclude that because a "genuine debate" did not unfold, the whole encounter was of no value and the meeting between Gadamer and Derrida was unsuccessful? Does this imply that between hermeneutics and deconstruction there is an unbridgeable gap?

With these questions, we have touched on a second aspect to our purpose in putting together this book: to present Gadamer's own reactions to his meeting with Derrida, reactions that in some sense represent a continuation of this exchange—albeit with an element of absence and deferral. Included in Part II of this volume are three essays written by Gadamer since the encounter dealing with the issues that divide and hold together hermeneutics and deconstruction. In the first of these, "Letter to Dallmayr," Gadamer candidly discusses his reactions to the Paris meeting, while continuing to defend the idea that philosophical hermeneutics is independent of any "philosophy of presence." This

defense takes place as a direct reply to Fred Dallmayr's extensive review and critique of the encounter as presented in *Text und Interpretation*, which we have also included here in a shortened version. It is developed further in two other essays: "Destruktion and Deconstruction" and "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism." These, along with the "Letter to Dallmayr," are appearing here for the first time in English.

II

Dallmayr titles his review essay "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue," yet he does not believe a dialogue took place in the Paris encounter. What occurred there, he writes, was "disjointed"—in fact, a "non-dialogue." So Dallmayr undertakes a "reconstruction" in his essay, in order to "approximate" more closely a genuine confrontation. In drawing on Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and Derrida's Nietzsche-interpretation to bring this reconstruction about, Dallmayr uncovers several layers of oppositions and points of conflict between deconstruction and hermeneutics: differences over concepts of interpretation, over the relation of aesthetic play and meaning, and finally over "practical-political" issues. Commenting on these differences, Dallmayr criticizes Gadamer for failing to fully disconnect hermeneutics from subjectivism but commends him for making a connection between hermeneutics and dialogue, taken as "existential encounter involving mutual testing and risk-taking." In Derrida, Dallmayr welcomes a more thoroughgoing critique of subjectivism. He is bothered, though, by the consequences of Derrida's emphasis on difference and undecidability: his inclination to avoid the risks of dialogue, to "circumvent and elude" interaction with other points of view, and also his indifference to ethics, his "neglect" of the dimension of human activity in which judgment and decision-making are essential.

In his letter responding to Dallmayr, Gadamer readily accepts Dallmayr's characterization of the Paris meeting as a "non-dialogue." His hopes for a conversation between "two totally independent developers" of Heidegger's philosophical thinking, he indicates here, were largely disappointed. But what sort of conversation did Gadamer anticipate? The idea of conversation held by Gadamer in the texts included in this section reflects the model of dialogue as he had set it out earlier in *Truth and Method*; it is according to this model that he gauges the success of his conversation with Derrida. In that work, he took the phenomenon of conversation to be not simply an exchange of remarks but a process of two people understanding each other" (*WM* 363/347) that turns out simultaneously to be a process of the "coming-into-language of the thing itself" (360/341). Language itself is the key for Gadamer to this process of understanding. In back of his remark to Dallmayr that "the word is what one person speaks and another understands" stands the idea that language is "the universal me-

dium in which understanding itself is realized" (366/350). He attributes to language the power to bridge the distance between those who are attempting to speak to each other and the ability to help them reach an agreement about the central issue or "object" [*Sache*] of the conversation.

More precisely, Gadamer's claim that the "emergence of the question" offers up to us "the being of what is asked about" (*WM* 345/326) indicates that the linguistic process of conversation would not be able to advance its course without questioning, and without determining a direction for this questioning. On the basis of this picture of what a dialogue is, Gadamer is indeed hard pressed to identify what took place between Derrida and himself as being a genuine conversation, one where the logic of question and answer leads to a new, more truthful awareness of the issue at stake. Although many questions were put forward during the discussion, it is very difficult to single out an issue that is held in common, oriented toward bringing out a more essential determination of the being of a *Sache*. The questions that Gadamer raised about the nature of linguisticity and interpretation are not followed up by Derrida. But this is not the only noticeable lack in their exchange. The absence of a critical preliminary condition for dialogue to occur—a common language—also stands out. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer asserts that without this common language, partners in a conversation would talk at cross purposes and fail to make any headway toward mutual understanding (*WM* 360/341). His remark in "*Destruktion and Deconstruction*"—that when a dialogue starts out in two different languages, there comes a time when those speaking have to switch to one language for the conversation to advance—echoes this point. But Gadamer and Derrida, in their exchange, would both stick to their own language. One would also find it difficult to point to a philosophical language that the two share. Certainly Gadamer is right in stating, in his response to Dallmayr, that a common ground between them cannot be found in Nietzsche's language. Nor can it be found in the language of the later Heidegger, about whose poetic character, as mentioned earlier, Gadamer expresses strong reservations.

But even though Gadamer runs into difficulties in trying to fit his encounter with Derrida to the model of dialogue as he has already conceived it to be, he continues to put his trust in this model as the form to which any philosophical discussion must adapt. Behind Gadamer's statement that "Whoever wants me to take deconstruction to heart . . . stands at the beginning of a conversation, not its end" is the thought that for any conversation between hermeneutics and deconstruction to take place, those who are involved will have to view themselves as conversational *partners*, engaged in a joint search for meaning and truth.

With this in mind, it becomes possible to read Gadamer's subsequent responses to his meeting with Derrida as an effort to work out a common ground, some points of affinity on the basis of which such a conversation might yet take

place. He will discover this common ground not in Heidegger's language but in the fact that he and Derrida are, as he puts it at the beginning of his "Letter to Dallmayr," two persons seeking to develop and carry forward aspects of Heidegger's thought. Gadamer attempts to make this common ground more explicit in "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction," where he places the Heideggerian method of *Destruktion*—the "de-structuring" of the language of metaphysics—in the context of an effort to step back from Hegelian dialectic. In making this move Gadamer is able to locate a dimension common to his hermeneutical project and the projects of both Heidegger and Derrida. Much as Heidegger's philological *Destruktion*—which retrieved the origins of metaphysical concepts in living language—can be seen as countering the dialectical development of concepts, so Derrida's deconstruction can be understood as a "step back" from the emphasis on the unity of meaning central to Hegelian dialectic. Now Gadamer mentions in both the "Letter to Dallmayr" and "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism" that he can readily accept the description of his project as being a "dialectical hermeneutics." But such a dialectical hermeneutics, he argues, shares with Derridean deconstruction and Heideggerian *Destruktion* a desire to resist Hegelian dialectic and to "open up a dimension of communicative understanding which goes beyond linguistically fixed assertions."

Thus, Gadamer finds hermeneutics and deconstruction, in their desire to overcome the metaphysical ideal of the exact determinability and repeatability of meaning, do share interests and have a common concern. This desire, one could say, is a type of being faithful, where the object of faith is the mysterious character of the word. In singling out this faithfulness, Gadamer discovers what he takes to be the common ground between himself and Derrida. In fact, this is a point about which he is quite convinced. In "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction" he writes: "Obviously the principle of deconstruction involves something quite similar to what I am doing." And it is not only with regard to Hegel where Gadamer claims that he and Derrida see eye to eye. One of the most striking aspects about these texts is the frequency with which Gadamer aligns himself with Derrida, emphasizing their similar positions. In the "Letter to Dallmayr," Gadamer claims that he recognizes the internal connection between speaking and writing, the independence of textual meaning from authorial intention, and the penetration of self-understanding by otherness—or rather, that he *too* accepts these views, just as Derrida does. Likewise, in "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism," he insists on the existence of difference, deferral, and distance within thought—on the existence, in other words, of *différance*. *Selbstverständnis*, Gadamer writes, reflects *différance*; the continuity of self-understanding includes discontinuity, a "constant being-other."

This is not to say that in these texts Gadamer glosses over the differences between hermeneutics and deconstruction. Just as he finds fault with Heidegger's path away from dialectic for having led into "impassable regions" by

taking an overly poeticized approach to language, he objects to Derrida for having gone to the other extreme right from the start of his path away from dialectic, for approaching language by way of Husserl and thus, in his understanding of language, privileging the concept of the sign rather than the living word of conversation. Derrida's move of taking the concept of the sign as his starting point, which led to his reading Heidegger through Husserl, had "fateful consequences," Gadamer claims, for his understanding of hermeneutics. To really find *différance* in language, Gadamer seems to be saying here, one needs to go back to the spoken word. In this sense, Gadamer sees philosophical hermeneutics as out-deconstructing deconstruction.

But ultimately, one could say, it is not just these differences which get in the way of a confrontation between Gadamer and Derrida. Rather, Gadamer seems to be suggesting that since they both have a starting point in Heidegger and even have mutual goals because of that starting point (see LD 93 and HL 125), they should be partners in a conversation rather than fierce opponents. With this assumption the otherness, the strangeness, the rough edges of the "challenge" of Derrida are made smooth and a confrontation or debate made more difficult. It is almost as though the "French challenge" represented by Derrida had already been inscribed within the history of German philosophy.

III

It would seem, then, that the mutual ties to Heidegger and mutual goals of deconstruction and hermeneutics offer to Gadamer a common ground for conversation, not for confrontational debate but a conversation in which a mutual testing of complementary ideas—the testing that Dallmayr mentions in his essay—could occur. In theory, Gadamer appears to be saying in the texts presented here, there is nothing to prevent such a conversation from taking place. The failure of a conversation to materialize in Paris would consequently be attributable to Derrida's having seized upon the concept of the sign as the gateway to an understanding of language. Were it not for this move, Gadamer presumes, Derrida would most likely not have come to see dialogue as necessarily tied to logocentrism, dependent on a "Platonic-static sense of one ideal meaning," and thus, mediation and agreement would be just around the corner.

But is this the only source of Derrida's apparent reluctance to engage in dialogue, to participate in the process of question and answer? Certainly Derrida does not discount the importance of questioning in philosophy. He characterizes those who currently participate in philosophical discourse by their relationship to questioning; they are, he writes, members of "a community of the question about the possibility of the question" (*ED* 118/80)—the question of the possibility of surpassing the metaphysics of presence. As Derrida points out, being concerned with this question is a matter of being read into a conversation so that

one is “overtaken by the dialogue of the question about itself and by itself” (*ED* 119/80); philosophy does not raise this question because it has decided to, or (as he has said in another place) as a result of the “internal maturation” of its history (*M* 162/134). Just at the point where Gadamer finds it impossible to follow Heidegger’s way, Derrida gives Heidegger credit, credit for undertaking an *Abbau* or dismantling on such a grand scale so as to encompass all of Western metaphysics, and for understanding the unique difficulty of this dismantling, of thinking the “beyond” of the metaphysical tradition, of thinking that which is neither present nor absent and so open to assimilation under the category of presence.⁹ The question at stake is precisely, as Derrida indicates in “Ousia and Grammé,” “a question of something entirely other” (*M* 42/38). The *Sache* of philosophical thinking for Derrida is not something that language can put into words. So Gadamer’s model of conversation, where questions are directed toward bringing *something* to language (*HL* 122), could not be Derrida’s.

When looked at from this perspective, the questions that propel Derrida’s step back from dialectic and those that motivate Gadamer’s appear to have two quite different aims. The latter seeks to break up the fixed, determinable meaning of metaphysical concepts by returning these concepts to speech. The former would aim at a more thoroughgoing dissemination, at disrupting the determinateness of meaning as part of the project of uncovering what is entirely other than meaning and truth. Thus, Derrida would agree with Gadamer that hermeneutics and deconstruction do not represent opposing positions, not because they have so much in common but because their paths unfold on different planes. One cannot really discuss deconstruction and hermeneutics in the same breath or speak of their common “ground.” There cannot really be a “ground” for deconstruction if it is not a set of ideas forming a philosophical position to begin with.¹⁰

So for Derrida hermeneutics and deconstruction do not haunt each other so much as seemingly stand in a relationship of alterity, of non-oppositional difference. And yet perhaps their relationship from Derrida’s viewpoint is even more complicated. If they stood in a relationship of radical difference, one could not choose between them as though choosing between alternatives. But what is more, as Derrida has indicated in a number of places, one cannot choose between them at all.¹¹ For that which evades metaphysics must somehow be inscribed within metaphysics, implicit within it in some way—and this calls for a type of hermeneutic retrieval, which would remain within the tradition in its attempt to undo it. In this sense, hermeneutics would in fact be unavoidable, but not, Derrida would say, unavoidable from the inside, from within his own deconstructive project. This despite the fact that Derrida once called this hermeneutics a form of deconstruction.¹² Such deconstruction, which he linked to Heidegger but which he could just as easily have associated with Gadamer, is not the same as the attempt to dislocate oneself completely from the metaphysi-

cal tradition. And if one is not to choose between them, then one must practice both, speaking more than one language at once.

Hence, another way of looking at Derrida's apparent refusal to confront Gadamer would be to see in it an exploration of a way of speaking that would neither be an attempt to strengthen the position of the other or to dogmatically assert one's own position and thus forego dialogue in favor of talking to oneself. A way of speaking with the other that would affirm both the *Destruction* of metaphysical concepts, and the thinking that seeks to break completely from these concepts. Derrida's non-engagement with Gadamer would thus be a refusal to affirm not dialogue itself but rather what Gadamer perceives as the necessary condition of dialogue: speaking only a single language. To speak more than one language would involve a type of negotiation. Derrida has admitted to having a preference for "negotiation" rather than "dialogue," but at the same time has stated "there is no negotiation without dialogue."¹³

IV

The texts in the final part will provide commentaries on the problematical phenomenon we have called "the Gadamer-Derrida encounter." All were either written or translated especially for this volume. Some will focus on the Paris encounter, some on Gadamer's subsequent essays.¹⁴ Some will defend Gadamer's hermeneutics against the challenge of deconstruction, others will defend deconstruction against the challenge of hermeneutics. Clearly, too, this encounter had a political dimension; it did not take place, for example, on neutral territory. Some of the commentaries will address the political issues raised by the encounter, blaming now deconstruction, now hermeneutics, for lack of political awareness, while others will examine more closely the styles and formal aspects of hermeneutics and deconstruction. Finally, the closing essay will examine the two styles in the light of some recent works of Derrida.

In "Argument(s)," the initial essay in this section, Philippe Forget focuses on the lines of reasoning involved in the debate he had arranged. He takes a particular interest in Gadamer's attempt to put this debate on the ground of a nonethical, hermeneutical good will, and thus to establish a consensus between himself and Derrida. This move prompts Forget to wonder whether it is possible for hermeneutics to take a critical approach to its own prejudices.

To answer this question, Forget sets up another encounter, one that takes place between texts: one passage from *Truth and Method* and another from Derrida's essay, "Préjugés." Forget finds Gadamer's argument in *Truth and Method* in support of a "rehabilitation" of prejudice to be itself riddled with prejudices: that authority is receptive to truth, that dialogue is universal, that the Enlightenment was thoroughly opposed to recognizing prejudice as a positive feature of understanding, and that there is even such a singular event as the

“Enlightenment.” In the final section of his essay, Forget turns to look at Gadamer as an interpreter of Celan. Against the logic of Gadamer’s reading, which finds closure in Celan’s poetic language, Forget proposes another reading that would not cover up the “abyss” of meaning found in language. Cautioning the reader against assimilating Gadamer’s concept of polysemy to Derridean dissemination, Forget indirectly questions Gadamer’s argument that hermeneutics and deconstruction step back from Hegel in comparable ways.

Manfred Frank’s “Limits of the Human Control of Language: Dialogue as the Place of Difference between Hermeneutics and Neostructuralism” was one of the other papers presented at the original colloquium in Paris in 1981. Three themes figure in Frank’s essay: language, dialogue, and individuality. Both hermeneutics and French “neostructuralism” emphasize the priority of language structures over specific uses. But, Frank insists, linguistics (from which deconstruction draws conceptual models) treats language quite differently from dialogical hermeneutics, and he finds Derrida’s debts to Saussure and Husserl also limit his view of language. It is this view that Gadamer follows in reproaching Derrida at the close of “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism” for “an ontologically unclarified dependence on the semantic starting point” in his concept of language and also in “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction” where he again reproaches Derrida for taking too narrow a view of language. For Frank, dialogue becomes “the place of difference” between Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Derrida’s deconstructive approach. But Frank has another concern: individuality. He faults both hermeneutics and “neostructuralism”¹⁵ (which includes both Foucault and Derrida) for bypassing the importance of individuality in interpretation. Taking his lead from Schleiermacher,¹⁶ Frank argues that in their perhaps necessary denial of subjectivity (in the name of language, or structures, or convention, or tradition), neither hermeneutics nor deconstruction come to grips with the claims of individuality.¹⁷ Precisely because hermeneutics and deconstruction have in common the denial of subjectivity and an affirmation of the priority of language, they also have in common the neglect of individuality.

Joseph Simon’s “Good Will to Understand and the Will to Power: Remarks on an ‘Improbable Debate’ ” takes up Gadamer’s question from “Text and Interpretation” as to whether language is a bridge or a barrier, but not for the purpose of resolving it one way or the other. Simon detects in the very way this question is put a major assumption behind Gadamer’s emphasis on dialogue: that what the other seeks is to be understood. From this perspective “good will” turns out to be the will to overcome one’s own narrowness in order to understand the other. For instance, in his response to Derrida, Gadamer asserts that even Derrida (and even Nietzsche) wanted to be “understood.”¹⁸ Otherwise, Gadamer asks, why write at all? Why wish not to be understood? Simon’s analysis makes it quite clear why Derrida draws back from Gadamer’s eagerness for conversation. It would appear that the considerations of good will in dia-

logue, especially when Gadamer makes them thematic, do not provide a common ground. Continuing to seek a common ground, Gadamer in his essays in this volume turns to the issue of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche and takes issue with what he takes to be the "position" of Derrida.¹⁹ Yet Simon shows why even this move will fail, because Derrida's strategy is to be always and only a counterposition and never a position.

In a second section of his essay Simon groups Habermas and Gadamer together, for both rely on the "communicative situation" and the rational good will of the other. Both have responded to the French "challenge." Both find their positions radically in question, according to Simon, and their thesis of "good will" finds itself, according to Simon, "either trapped in an antinomy or interpreted as just another, individual, will."

James Risser in his "The Two Faces of Socrates: Gadamer/Derrida" finds common ground between the two thinkers in the fact that the work of both is focused on text and interpretation, and in the fact that both are in quest of liberation through forms of Socratic vigilance: one form is the radical probing of Derrida, the other the unending "conversation that we are" in Gadamer. Both are radically antifoundationalist thinkers. Gadamer's hermeneutics does not seek origins, for "in genuine conversation there is no last word just as there is no first word"; his is a hermeneutics of creative repetition. Thus, both thinkers practice, in different forms, a "vigilance against the pretension of knowing": Gadamer in his "hermeneutics of finitude" and Derrida in his emphasis on irony. They exemplify, according to Risser, two sides of Socrates.

Risser also remarks on the political implications of the Gadamerian form of dialogue in this form of vigilance, which, according to Risser, represents "preparation for a form of community." In the "conversation that we are," the other can be right. This is the condition for democracy, in which difference does not give way to difference but seeks unity in understanding. Thus Risser finds in Gadamer's emphasis on conversation something in harmony with the "ideal of democracy," a participation in something that "posits the goal of human solidarity."²⁰

Yet precisely such Gadamerian assumptions are put in question by deconstruction. Thus, can a dialogue between Gadamer and Derrida be imagined? This is the question Charles Shepherdson puts to himself in "Imagine Understanding. . . ." Could these two "arguments" bearing the signatures of Gadamer and Derrida address each other or focus on a common problem? What are the barriers, the problems of translation, to be surmounted in order for Gadamer to deal with what he himself calls the "challenge" of contemporary French thought? Shepherdson finds in the two thinkers two quite different conceptions of dialogue, one oriented to the mode of exegesis and comparison of viewpoints, and the other to the tension between hermeneutic understanding and that which "asserts itself against all reasoning." Gadamer's encounter with the French chal-

lenge teaches him the limits of his own interpretation of Heidegger and his own roots in the romantic tradition, and thus is a deeply meaningful experience. Yet for Shepherdson, the idea of a hermeneutical critique of deconstruction or a deconstructive reading of hermeneutics remains questionable and would only “betray the very thinking that one would have imagined oneself to have been following.” Thus, Shepherdson remains satisfied to explore in a sensitive way what it might mean for each to understand and speak to the other.

If Shepherdson is concerned with Gadamer’s problems in understanding Derrida, G. B. Madison in his “Gadamer/Derrida: The Hermeneutics of Irony and Power,” raises the question of Derrida’s understanding of Gadamer. Madison finds “thoroughly bizarre” Derrida’s apparent view (on the basis of the term “good will”) that Gadamer is trapped in the metaphysics of subjectivity and philosophies of will. In fact, says Madison, “it is difficult to make any sense of Derrida’s question,” so he concludes that Derrida is resorting to a strategy of irony and will to overpower Gadamer through deliberate misunderstanding: “In the final analysis, what Derrida is attempting to do by means of his irony, parodying, performative utterances is perhaps to teach Gadamer a lesson. . . .” As for genuine conversation on the “power” and “power plays” in language, Derrida cannot allow himself to risk “alienating that specialized audience . . . of his particular brand of ultra-ironic discourse.” Derrida’s vested interests make a genuine dialogue improbable at best.

Derrida’s disruptive response is also the focus of Herman Rapaport’s “All Ears: Derrida’s Response to Gadamer.” It seems clear to Rapaport that Derrida is purposely subverting Gadamerian innocence. But while Madison’s analysis faults Derrida’s irony for undermining dialogue, Rapaport blames Gadamer for not being sensitive to Derrida’s “ear-splitting” discourse and instead urging that “everyone hears with the same ears.” Gadamer’s emphasis on “the experience we all recognize” looks to Rapaport very much like “an interpretive gesture wherein differences are made to adapt to norms of social consensus.” Thus, Derrida’s strategy is an interruption of rapport, according to Rapaport. Rapaport also finds political implications in Gadamer’s thought quite the opposite of Risser’s references to the ideal of democracy. Rather he notes that Gadamer in his *Philosophical Apprenticeships* repudiates Nazi “nonsense” in the thirties, thus turning a deaf ear to fascism. He asks: “What are the consequences of this ethical refusal to listen?” What happens, he asks, in situations where “good will” cannot function as a ground for listening?

Donald G. Marshall in “Dialogue and *Écriture*” places the debate over writing in the context of the tension between “literacy and orality.” In this context, Marshall finds Gadamer’s emphasis on dialogue to be in harmony with Hebrew tradition and such Jewish thinkers as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. While it may be true that “Reb Derissa” practices a kind of hermeneutics that reflects a Talmudic heritage,²¹ Gadamer’s turn to dialogue and engagement does

find reverberations in Jewish and Christian theology in the twentieth century. Thus, while Rapaport goes so far as to imply Gadamer's unknowing complicity in the holocaust, Marshall argues that Gadamer has a greater affinity than Derrida with Buber and Levinas. In light of Derrida's special relationship with Levinas and with Levinas' concept of the Other, and objections that Gadamer fails to do justice to the other, interesting questions arise that go beyond the intention of Marshall's essay.²²

Turning away from the advocacy of one side or the other, Richard Shusterman takes a mediating approach in his "The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: A Pragmatist Perspective." The two thinkers actually have a great deal in common, he asserts, and what is needed is the mediation of American pragmatism. Shusterman argues that "Gadamer's non-foundational, linguisticized, but tradition-respectful hermeneutics nicely dovetails with Quine's conservative 'maxim of minimal mutilation' to our inherited web of belief, and with Nelson Goodman's emphasis on tradition's antecedent practice and entrenchment for the projectability and inductive fruitfulness of categorial predicates." On the other hand, "Derrida's non-foundational hermeneutic scepticism and critique of meaning is remarkably paralleled by Quine's and Donald Davidson's arguments against synonymy and for the indeterminacy of translation and interpretation." Furthermore, both Gadamer and Derrida "have been explicitly appropriated and deployed by more radical pragmatists like Richard Rorty and Joseph Margolis" whose work signals an impending rapprochement between the continental and Anglo-American traditions. Instead of faulting Derrida for misunderstanding Gadamer, Shusterman argues that pragmatism can provide "a mode of mediation" for all three of the questions Derrida raises with Gadamer in his response, namely, "the context of interpretation, consensual continuity versus rupture as the basis or precondition of interpretation, and the nature or possibility of perfect dialogical understanding." Thus, pragmatism, according to Shusterman, has something to offer both sides. But the reverse is also the case. Says Shusterman: "The importance of the Gadamer-Derrida encounter transcends the arena of continental philosophy; its issues and disseminations are pregnant with significance for Anglo-American philosophy as well." So it is in the context of a possibility for cross-fertilization and dialogue that Shusterman addresses himself to the three questions raised by Derrida in his response to Gadamer. In relation to each question, he finds that pragmatism can mediate creatively between hermeneutics and deconstruction.

When one takes Gadamer's three later papers responding to Derrida as essentially continuations of the encounter, one can speak of two major foci. The first is centered around Derrida's response to Gadamer's paper and takes up such issues as good will, psychoanalysis, and the possibility of dialogue. The second focus shifts away from issues surrounding good will to the question of Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger, and especially his reading of Heidegger's

Nietzsche-interpretation. With this change of focus, interesting new issues arise to which our next papers address themselves. For instance, to quote David Farrell Krell's "'Ashes, ashes, we all fall . . .': Encountering Nietzsche," the first of these commentaries, "Why, when Gadamer encounters Derrida, and Derrida Gadamer, are both encountering Heidegger—encountering Heidegger encountering Nietzsche?"

Of course, Derrida in encountering Heidegger questions Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche while Gadamer, encountering Heidegger, becomes, as he admits, the "willing victim" of that thinker's powerful interpretation of Nietzsche. Krell, however, wonders about both of their readings of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*. Krell (editor and major translator of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* into English) suggests that both Derrida and Gadamer do not do justice to the deep ambivalence of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Krell asks: "Would it not be better for all concerned to be less convinced both by and about Heidegger's *Nietzsche*?" In fact, says Krell, Heidegger himself was not so very convinced. He hedges his interpretations in *Nietzsche* with the following bit of hermeneutical caution: "We must guard against the presumption that we now belong among those who really understand. . ." (*N* 2 181). Krell ends his essay with a bit of irony: "The supreme *hermeneutician* of the twentieth century"—is Derrida. "The most romantic and adventurous of readers and most flexible of conceptual thinkers, the most open to conversation and debate, the one who shifts the instant his position becomes too rigid—in short, the most *French* of contemporary thinkers"—is Gadamer. Thus, while Marshall had found Gadamer more loyal to Jewish tradition than Derrida, now Krell finds him more French! Is Gadamer at once more Jewish and more French than Derrida? Obviously not; but both Marshall's surprising assertion and Krell's playful reversal of roles give one a clear sense of the play of interpretation.

Robert Bernasconi in "Seeing Double: *Destruction* and Deconstruction," also offers us a careful examination of Gadamer's reading of Derrida's reading of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Bernasconi takes up the question of whether Derrida's term "deconstruction" is properly understood to be the same as Heidegger's *Destruction*. Gadamer, in "*Destruction* and Deconstruction," ventures to suggest that Derrida has misinterpreted this Heideggerian term to have a negative tone it does not possess in Heidegger. Has Derrida misread Heidegger, or has Gadamer misread Derrida? It would seem, and does seem to Bernasconi, that Gadamer was misinterpreting Derrida's use of the term. But Bernasconi also asks: Was even Gadamer correct in his interpretation of Heidegger's use of the term? How does Gadamer "see" Derrida, and how does Derrida "see" Gadamer? Bernasconi suggests that perhaps Gadamer is urging a "single reading" hermeneutics and Derrida a "double reading" hermeneutics. In doing so, he turns to a careful examination of the specific hermeneutical strategies that mark the two thinkers. At the end of his essay, Bernasconi suggests that what

starts out as a relationship of opposition actually becomes a relationship of alterity, of two “different strands of contemporary thinking.”

In “Interruptions,” John Sallis interrupts all this more conventional argumentation with a Derridean approach—a “writerly presentation” that would be very difficult to read orally. One would need two voices, perhaps, interrupting and interpreting each other. Going back to Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*, Sallis proposes a Derridean critique of dialogue. Dialogue, for Derrida, involves a prior stage of difference within the moment of utterance. Thus, Sallis questions whether Gadamer’s model of dialogue is really a sufficient model. For Derrida, the “archaic operation of difference within the dialogue of the soul within itself” is found *before* all dialogue with the other and “otherness is always already operative in what one would otherwise have called monologue.” By taking his cue from Derrida’s Husserl-interpretation, Sallis addresses himself to the Platonic basis of Gadamer’s claims about dialogue. Sallis argues that something more than “good will” is in play when Socrates interacts with his various interlocutors.

John Caputo’s lively essay, “Gadamer’s Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique,” presents Gadamer as a “closet essentialist” pretending to follow in the path of Heidegger’s historical, existential, finite hermeneutics. Caputo detects two contradictory longings in Gadamer’s hermeneutics: one for “deep truths” that rise above all time, the other for a mode of interpretation rooted in our existential, historical, finite existence. Caputo finds this a curious combination of Hegel, German Romanticism, Platonism, and Heideggerian existentialism that only plunges us into the metaphysics from which Heidegger was trying to free us. For Caputo, the difference between Gadamer and Derrida is basically “a conflict between right wing and left wing Heideggerianism.”

In putting the issue in terms of “left wing” and “right wing” Heideggerianism, Caputo turns to explore certain political consequences of Gadamer’s interpretation of Heidegger in contrast to Derrida’s. Even in the ostensibly anti-foundationist position of Gadamer Caputo finds a kind of traditionalism. Following Margolis, he asserts that Gadamer is “in headlong retreat from the radicalization of *Wesen* [essence] which was underway in Heidegger.” While breaking with Hegelian teleology, Gadamer still seeks a “deep truth” in texts. From a deconstructionist standpoint, Gadamer’s use of Heidegger, then, is “half-hearted, indeed reactionary,” and actually resists the momentum of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics. But Derrida has “stepped back” out of “the epochs of presence, of the meaning and truth of Being,” and thus more faithfully followed the later Heidegger in his radical scepticism about these notions. Derrida, says Caputo, simply does not think there is a “deep ontology inscribed in the *Muttersprache* . . . which usually ends up saying that father knows best.” With these associations, Caputo is able to find in Gadamer a

political tendency to lean to the right, even while seeing himself as faithfully following the most radical thinker in the century.

Neal Oxenhandler in "The Man with Shoes of Wind: The Derrida-Gadamer Encounter" offers a short meditation on why Derrida seems not to have taken time to enter into a serious dialogue with a thinker of the stature of Gadamer. Rather, Derrida "stands outside of Gadamer's position and subjects it to the cutting edge of irony." Oxenhandler suggests several areas the two thinkers have in common as well as areas of difference. For both thinkers the literary tradition is important and both are interpreters of works of art. For both, the concept of play is important. But for Gadamer "the play of the work, in manifesting a way of being, conveys 'truth,' " whereas for Derrida there is "no closure beyond the ceaseless play of dissemination." A professor of French literature, Oxenhandler finds in Derrida the voices of Mallarmé, Proust, Beckett, and others. And when Derrida visits with him at Dartmouth College, he even ventures to suggest to Derrida that he had become, like Rimbaud, a man with shoes of wind. Derrida could only agree.

The final essay, Gabe Eisenstein's "Dead Ends and the Life of Language: The Privilege of Sharing," opens up new dimensions of contrast between hermeneutics and deconstruction. So rather than bringing a sense of closure, Eisenstein's essay points us beyond the present discussion to other possibilities. Relying on such later texts as "D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie" (ATRAP) and *Altérités* (A), Eisenstein chooses to put the contrast between Gadamer and Derrida not in terms of hermeneutics versus deconstruction but in terms of two "paradigms": the dialogical paradigm of Gadamer and an "apocalyptic" paradigm of Derrida. In the apocalyptic paradigm, Eisenstein says, "we [as interpreters] inevitably assume, in our best attempts at thinking and speaking clearly, the position of a mystagogue: we speak in such a way as to take up a privileged position with regard to a certain universe of discourse—discourse governed by the *absence* of some fundamental sense-giving experience possessed or intimated by the speaker alone." It is from this privileged position that Derrida, as interpreter, can utter the prophetic command "Come!" yet in a way that is "without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee" (ATRAP 94).

Such a model of interpretation stands in radical contrast to Gadamer's paradigm of dialogical understanding as a way to overcome otherness and reach agreement in understanding. Gadamer's dialogical model of interpretation is based on good faith, honesty, and openness to the other. On the other hand, Derrida's prophetic and apocalyptic use of language is "protreptic," according to Eisenstein; it assumes authority to speak. One might also use the word "hortatory": it is the stance of assumed authority philosophers frequently adopt, especially Heideggerians. Interestingly, Eisenstein tells us that what speaks in

the apocalyptic dimension is an “absolutely authoritative voice,” a narrative voice speaking out of a “radical *alterity*” that “brings into view the limitations that would be overcome in the drama of autonomy” and also marks out the privileges to be enjoyed. Such speaking is “a blow, a transforming gesture rooted in the radical *incommensurability* of differing standpoints.” The autonomy of this voice is such that it stands outside and above the other, “irreducibly unequal” to the other. Such a voice and such a model are not unprecedented in the history of hermeneutics, specifically in Hebrew models and also the neoorthodox theology of Karl Barth. Obviously, the articulation of this paradigm as the Derridean standpoint vis-à-vis Gadamer goes beyond anything presently associated with “deconstruction” and perhaps provides the appropriately tantalizing note to be sounded in the final essay of our commentaries.

In closing, we may say that although the encounter between Gadamer and Derrida was short, it was and remains significant. Its importance lies not just in what was said and what happened there but also in what was not said and what did not happen. Both the said and unsaid in this “improbable encounter”—and the range of issues generated by it—provide us with exceptional tools for dealing with the complexities involved in thinking through hermeneutics, deconstruction, and the slippery relationship between them.