

BOOK REVIEWS

Philosophical Apprenticeships, by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Translated by Robert Sullivan. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985. Pp. xviii + 198. Reviewed by Ted Vaggalis, University of Kansas.

Gadamer's thought--as well as continental philosophy in general--suffers the fate in this country of being well known without being known well. Gadamer is usually regarded as a disciple of Heidegger whose task is to preserve and pass on the legacy of the master. But such a view misses the significance of his work, as well as the differences between him and Heidegger. One reason for such misconceptions has been the lack of biographical details which would allow one to see how his hermeneutic philosophy emerged and the questions which occasioned such a response. This translation of Philosophical Apprenticeships goes a long way towards bridging the gulf that makes continental thought seem so foreign to those schooled in the Anglo-American tradition. In what follows I would like to focus on three features of this book that I believe make it a valuable contribution to the understanding of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Philosophical Apprenticeships is the way in which it is written. It is not an autobiography in the usual sense, for Gadamer does not talk about the self. This is because he rejects the Cartesian method which has guided western philosophy with its demand for "unprejudiced self knowledge" (p. vii). Because this self knowledge appeared to be autonomous of opinion, it allowed the scientific method to become the paradigm of all understanding. But, Heidegger's questioning of Being revealed the inadequacy of such a paradigm to cover all the forms of one's experience of understanding. This revelation allowed Gadamer to go outside of philosophy (to art and the Geistwissenschaften) in order to better grasp this experience. The result was a series of apprenticeships under such diverse thinkers as Nicolai Hartmann, Paul Natorp, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Friedlander and of course, Martin Heidegger (p. 178). In so doing, Gadamer initiated a revival of that tradition of learning that Descartes had implicitly rejected. This tradition of learning included rhetoric, which brought with it an older tradition of aesthetic concepts. This, in turn,

led to Aristotle's notion of practical reasoning (p. xv). Here, Gadamer found a foothold. For Gadamer, Aristotle had demonstrated that ethics was not a matter of definitive answers, but the raising of certain questions to which our responses are merely "the initial conditions" of agreement (pp. 183-84). Aristotelian ethics sought its realization, not in the intellect, but in lived experience. It is this lived experience which is the foundation of understanding (p. 183). Here one finds revealed the particularity of science as a mode of knowing and the universality of the hermeneutical problem. The problem opens up an understanding of man's fundamental linguisticity. It is the element in which "recognition of the world and orientation in the world" is rooted (p. 179). This does not mean that all of experience can be reduced to language, but that it is completed only in language.

The result of Gadamer's apprenticeships in various disciplines can best be viewed as that which provided him with the means of properly characterizing this notion of "lived experience." He does not attempt to construct a philosophical system from an objective foundation. Rather, the idea of "lived experience" points to that natural inclination of human beings to philosophize (p. 186). For Gadamer, philosophical thinking is not the illumination of some a priori fact of self-consciousness, it is the retrieval of a lost question (p. 187). The activity of questioning is important because it will not allow thought to end. Instead, it compels thinking to go beyond these lost questions to new ones, which arise out of one's practical experience. This is the historical-conditionedness of thought which Gadamer initially developed while studying with Paul Friedlander (pp. 43-44).

The Cartesian method was rejected because it sought to begin all philosophy at a zero point. But, this is impossible because thinking always begins in media res. Even philosophy must speak the language it has inherited. Rather than develop a highly specialized language, Gadamer's hermeneutics seeks to reunite us with our native or common sense mode of speech. It is a task which modern science cannot do, because it is blind to it (p. 183).

This brings us to the next feature of Gadamer's book. Earlier I mentioned that there were differences between Gadamer and Heidegger. In Philosophical Apprenticeships, Gadamer takes the opportunity to underscore this fact. These differences are best summed up in Gadamer's acceptance of a philosophical tradition that Heidegger sought to transcend (pp. 51-52). As an example, both thinkers were led to vastly different views about Plato. For Heidegger, Plato is the Adam of our philosophical tradition. It is his mistakes that constantly recur and keep one from thinking. The aim was to get back beyond Plato to the Presocratics, where

philosophy was in its paradisaical state. Gadamer, on the other hand, had taken the work of philologists seriously. He came to view the Platonic dialogue as an "authentic" model of hermeneutic understanding. The Ideas of Forms did not signify a doctrine, but a direction for questioning (p. 186). Thus, a move beyond tradition is impossible because it always constitutes a part of us, albeit an unconscious one.

In addition to differences about Plato, there are scattered suggestions that Gadamer did not follow Heidegger into his later thinking, although he did regard it as genuinely philosophical and not simply poetic (See, for example, p. 143). This becomes all the more apparent when Gadamer grounds his hermeneutics in the analytic of Dasein in Being and Time. The analytic of Dasein could only be expressed within the context of an "effective history." Heidegger's later work de-emphasized this role of history.

Last of all, I must mention the portraits that Gadamer drew of those thinkers he had come to know. They are "portraits" because they are artfully pieced together and their sentences are powerful, expressing the depth of character of each thinker. They are short and worded such that one can take them in at a glance. Lowith's image is that of the dutiful Stoic. One who had endured great pain and disappointment only through philosophical detachment, whose life ended at its appointed time. Jaspers' portrait takes on the look of sobriety and discipline in order to accentuate his persona of teacher and moralist. Add to this the figures of Heidegger and Max Scheler that Gadamer drew as he recounted the lamentations of Husserl concerning his fallen disciples.

Philosophical Apprenticeships is invaluable to a proper understanding of Gadamer's thought. It will help to complete our own picture of his philosophical life and project.