THE ROLE OF ARISTOTLE IN GADAMER'S WORK

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ABSTRACT: This chapter reassesses the role of Aristotle in Gadamer's work. Gadamer is sometimes read as preferential to Plato over Aristotle. Such a reading, however, displaces the centrality of Aristotle to Gadamer's thought. Gadamer saw Aristotle, and not Plato, as the first phenomenologist. Gadamer consequently expressed a great debt to Aristotle, not only for modeling a phenomenological approach to philosophy, but also for the illuminating phenomenological descriptions that Aristotle gave. Both his philosophical approach and the insights it yielded serve as compelling evidence for Aristotle's continued relevance for us today.

> "[W]hen do we encounter a truth that is not already to be found in Aristotle?" (Gadamer 1986g, 91)

Gadamer took his studies in ancient philosophy to be the "most distinct" (*eigenständigste*) part of his prodigious and far-ranging philosophical output (1991a, 13). The studies in ancient philosophy focused primarily on Plato and Aristotle, whom Gadamer took to offer insights still worthy of our consideration. Given the contemporary relevance of these philosophers, and given that Aristotle's criticisms of his teacher suggest substantive philosophical differences between them, the question naturally arises: was Gadamer a Platonist or an Aristotelian? We might be inclined to think that Gadamer was, in the final analysis, a Platonist. In *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, Donatella Di Cesare goes so far as to say that "we could even describe him as an 'Anti-Aristotelian'" (2007, 137). According to Di Cesare, Gadamer found problematic not only Aristotle's demand for apodictic certainty, but also the way in which that demand puts an end to the dialogue constitutive of philosophy. These criticisms supposedly become clear when we turn to writings other than *Truth*

and Method.[1] In light of Gadamer's critical remarks, Di Cesare concludes that "Gadamer's proximity to Aristotle is ultimately limited to the chapter in which philosophical hermeneutics encounters the practical knowledge of Aristotle, where Aristotle himself returns to Platonic and even Socratic motifs" (2007, 137). Di Cesare and others who believe Gadamer to be a Platonist seem to find confirmation from Gadamer himself, who once in an interview declared: "I am a Platonist" (Fortin and Gadamer 1984, 10). That would seem to settle the matter.

In this chapter, however, I want to reassess the role of Aristotle in Gadamer's thought. While it cannot be denied that Gadamer considered himself a Platonist, Aristotle's influence on Gadamer was by no means limited to their shared interest in practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). There are at least two reasons for suspecting this. First, Gadamer contended that "the first Platonist would be none other than Aristotle himself" (1987a, 186). Gadamer said this in part because Aristotle shares Plato's interest in investigating the nature of forms. Although Aristotle is critical of Plato's theory of forms, the criticism belies how much the two agreed. Gadamer may have been a Platonist, but so, too, was Aristotle. Second, Gadamer was not only a Platonist but a phenomenologist, and he considered Aristotle, and not Plato, to have been the first phenomenologist long before Edmund Husserl founded the tradition (see, for example, Gadamer 1995b, 351; 1995a, 18; 2000b, 22).[2] As we will see, according to Gadamer, Aristotle was a phenomenologist in at least three important respects: (i) he saw the fundamental task of philosophy to be describing phenomena rather than giving causal explanations for their effects; (ii) those descriptions are "eidetic," or intended to present the essences of phenomena; and (iii) those descriptions draw upon human experience as it finds expression in ordinary language.

To appreciate fully the central place of Aristotle in Gadamer's thought, we need to see how Gadamer learned to read Aristotle as a Platonist and phenomenologist. When we do so, it becomes clear that Gadamer, although critical of Aristotle in certain respects, nevertheless admired the Stagirite not only for his phenomenological approach, but also the descriptions of phenomena that resulted therefrom. We should consequently avoid asking whether Gadamer was a Platonist or an Aristotelian. Answering that question is likely to overlook the extent to which he is indebted to *both* Plato and Aristotle. And if Gadamer was right that both thinkers have much to teach us, such an oversight would be more than just a biographical error.

Learning to Read Aristotle

Gadamer began reading Aristotle with philosophical interest during his doctoral studies at the University of Marburg (1919-1922). At the time, however, the neo-Kantian faculty at Marburg found little of value in Aristotle's thought:

> In Marburg Aristotle is not held in high regard. Herman Cohen had an especially drastic expression for his appraisal of Aristotle: "Aristotle was an apothecary." By that he meant that Aristotle had been merely a classifying thinker, like an apothecary who continually labels drawers, cans and jars. (Gadamer 1985, 242)

The exception to this general disregard was Nicolai Hartmann, who had been inspired by Max Scheler to break rank with the Neo-Kantians. Hartmann saw Aristotle as a "phenomenological help-mate" in his efforts to develop a theory of value, and he brought Gadamer's attention to

Aristotle for that very reason (Gadamer 1991a, 13). As he studied with Hartmann, Gadamer became familiar with English and French scholarship on Aristotle, including that of "Robin, Taylor, Ross, Hardie, and, above all, the incomparable Hicks" (1986e, 3). But Gadamer later confessed that his studies were immature: "I had still not learned what real work was and no one really demanded such a thing of me" (1987b, 18–19).

Gadamer's interest in Aristotle was piqued, but he did not begin reading Aristotle seriously until he met Martin Heidegger. In 1922, shortly after defending a brief and underwhelming dissertation on "The Essence of Desire in Plato's Dialogues," Gadamer contracted polio. While convalescing, Gadamer was given a forty-page manuscript written by Heidegger. The manuscript is no longer extant, but Gadamer described it as "a basic introduction to an Aristotle interpretation that Heidegger had prepared, and above all it dealt with the young Luther, with Gabriel Biel, and with Augustine" (1994c, 31; see also 1994b, 140). Although the manuscript was merely a rough draft, Gadamer said that reading it "was like being hit by a charge of electricity" (1994a, 113). Gadamer was so excited that he went to Freiburg to attend all of Heidegger's seminars during the summer semester of 1923. Of particular significance for Gadamer was a seminar on Book VI of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The following semester Heidegger was given an associate professor position at the University of Marburg, and Gadamer followed him. There Gadamer participated in Heidegger's famed seminars on Aristotle. Gadamer and his fellow students would attend the lectures, which began at 7:00am sharp, and then wax philosophical over a breakfast which often lasted until noon.

Heidegger's lectures showed Gadamer not only how to read Aristotle, but also how to do philosophy:

> Heidegger followed the principle put forward in Plato's *Sophist*, that one should make the dialogical partner the stronger. Heidegger did this so well that he almost appeared like an *Aristoteles redivivus* [Aristotle brought back to life], an Aristotle who, through the power of intuition and the boldness of his highly original conceptuality, cast a spell over everyone. (Gadamer 2007, 13)

In his lectures, Heidegger presented Aristotle's thought in such a convincing way that it was often difficult to tell whether Heidegger was expressing his own views or those of Aristotle (see Gadamer 1994a, 115; 1995a, 19). Gadamer and his fellow students were captivated by Heidegger's interpretations. He showed them how Aristotle's conceptual analyses offered answers to important questions about human existence. As Gadamer put it, Heidegger's "analysis always pressed on to the most original experience of Dasein" (1994c, 31; see also 1986b, 400). This was a breath of fresh air in comparison to the seemingly obsolete and pedantic concerns typical of the academy.

During those seminars Heidegger taught Gadamer two things about Aristotle that, by Gadamer's own lights, proved momentous for his own subsequent thought (see Gadamer 2007, 12–13). First, Heidegger helped Gadamer come to appreciate the significance of Aristotle's account of practical wisdom. In Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle showed how practical wisdom is a mode of thinking distinct from both science (*epistēmē*) and craft (*technē*). This distinction was important for Heidegger insofar as it shaped his analyses of Dasein and its understanding of being (see, for

example, Gadamer 2003, 20). For Gadamer the distinction was important for his philosophical hermeneutics. He later drew upon this distinction in order to show how practical wisdom serves as a model for the sort of understanding belonging to the human sciences. Second, Heidegger encouraged Gadamer to resist the traditional reading of Aristotle as a realist reacting to Plato's idealism. Neo-Kantians like Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp read Plato as a transcendental idealist whose theory of forms attempted to identify categories that make thinking possible. On their reading, Plato did not, in fact, hold that forms were actually existent, intelligible objects; Aristotle was the first in a long line of thinkers who misunderstood this. Gadamer followed Heidegger in resisting this traditional reading of Aristotle's relationship to Plato because it overlooked the question which both ancient philosophers had in common, and which guided their philosophical thinking. Their question was, in Gadamer's words, "how the *logos ousias* (the statement of being, of what a thing is) is possible" (1986e, 16). For the rest of his philosophical career, Gadamer remained preoccupied with these two insights—*phronēsis* as a model for hermeneutics and the proximity of Plato and Aristotle. They formed the backbone of his *Truth and Method* (1960) and *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (1978), two books hailed as classics of twentieth-century philosophy (MacIntyre 2002, 157).

Aristotle's Relationship to Plato

According to Gadamer, Aristotle's critique of Plato is "the root" of Aristotle's whole philosophy (2013a, 541). Examining that critique will therefore give us a clearer understanding of how Gadamer interpreted Aristotle and why Gadamer considered Aristotle and not Plato to be the first phenomenologist.[3]

Gadamer contended that there is little textual or historical evidence that Plato underwent any major developments in his philosophy. His philosophy remained guided by one question in particular: how is it possible to give an account of what a thing truly is? Plato's dialogues suggest that in order to give such an account, it is necessary to posit the existence of universals. Plato called such universals "ideas" (*ideai*) or "forms" (*eidē*). Positing their existence is necessary because knowing what some particular thing is requires knowing the universal of which it is a particular. Forms exist and are the cause of particulars. "Participation" (*methexis*) describes these causal and explanatory relations. Sensible objects like giraffes and intelligible objects like triangles all participate (*metechein*) in the universal forms of which they are particulars. Their participation is the cause of their being the sorts of things they are. A particular giraffe is what it is because it participates in the Form Giraffe. A particular triangle is what it is because it participates in the Form Triangle. The same holds true of forms themselves: forms are what they are because of the other forms in which they participate. Knowing a form consequently requires knowing which forms it participates in, and which it does not. The form Triangle presumably participates in the form Three and Plane, but not Circle or Giraffe. Knowledge of a form is accordingly expressed in a definition whose terms refer to the other forms in which the defined form participates. Plato makes clear in the *Republic* that all these participation relations are made possible by the Good. It is the cause of the being of the forms, as well as our knowledge of it (*Resp.* 509b). In this respect the Good transcends the other forms; it is not another form among the rest and, on Gadamer's reading, this is why Plato is careful only to refer to it as an idea (*idea*) (1986e, 27). This is Plato's theory of the forms in rough outline. The theory purports to explain the true being of something by articulating the forms in which that thing participates and which cause it to be what it is. Such an explanation marked an

advance beyond Thales and the other Pre-Platonic philosophers who sought to give explanations of natural phenomena by appealing either to the matter of which they are composed or the physical source of their motion.

Aristotle shared Plato's question and agreed that knowing what something truly is requires grasping its form. However, Aristotle raised two major criticisms against Plato's theory. The first criticism concerns the "separation" (*chōrismos*) of the forms. Plato allegedly held that forms exist separately from the sensible particulars that participate in them. In this sense, to be separate from something else is to be able exist independently of it. Forms exist in the intelligible realm, independent of the particulars which exist in the sensible realm but nevertheless participate in them. Aristotle gave many arguments as to why this so-called two worlds doctrine is untenable (see, for example, *Met.* I.9). Those arguments need not be rehearsed here, and Gadamer himself barely discussed them. But, according to Gadamer, Aristotle was consequently convinced "that the eidos is not to be separated from its phenomenal appearance and, thus, that it is an *enhylon eidos* (materialized form)" (1986e, 132). This materialized form is what Aristotle called "secondary substance," and grasping it allows us to know and give an account of what any "primary substance" is. The form as secondary substance therefore does not exist independently of, but rather is immanent in, the sensible particular. The form Human, for example, is the materialized form or secondary substance immanent in Socrates and other humans, all of whom are primary substances.

Aristotle's second criticism concerns the idea of the Good, and Gadamer devoted more attention to Aristotle's arguments on this matter (1986e, 126–58). Gadamer, however, was less interested in evaluating the strength of these arguments and more so in determining what they reveal about the

philosophical proximity of Plato and Aristotle. Two of Aristotle's arguments, which appear in all three ethical works, deserve our attention. The "category argument" attempts to show that there is no one idea of the Good which makes possible one and the same goodness in all particulars (1986e, 131). This is because the goodness of particulars is not one and the same, but differs from one category to the next. Moreover, if there were such an idea of the Good, it would be the object of a science. But there is no such science of the good, nor even of the good in one category (for example, in the category of quality or time). For Aristotle the most "decisive" argument, however, is that even if there were an idea of the Good, it would be practically useless (Gadamer 1986e, 128). Since we neither aim for the Good itself, nor could we ever achieve it, coming to know such a thing would have no practical benefit. Despite these arguments, Aristotle did not entirely give up on the good. He agreed that with Plato's Socrates that we must "understand the world starting with the experience of the good" (Gadamer 1986e, 128). We do so insofar as we recognize distinct goods that shape our practical and theoretical lives. There is the human good (*anthrōpinon agathon*), which is that for the sake of which we do all things. This good serves as the first principle of practical philosophy. There is also the natural good (*to hou heneka*), which is that for the sake of which things in nature change or remain the same. This good consequently plays an essential explanatory role in physics.

According to Gadamer, Aristotle misrepresented Plato in these criticisms. The biggest misrepresentation concerned the separability of forms. Plato did not intend the forms to be separable in the sense of existing in the intelligible realm, independently of the sensible particulars. Like Aristotle, Plato uses the term "separate" (*chōristos*) in two senses: "On the one hand, it refers to a thing's being separate and, on the other, to its consisting in itself (*In-sich-stehen*)" (1986e,

132).[4] Gadamer does not elaborate on this distinction. But to be separate in the former sense presumably means to be able to exist independently of something else. For something to "consist in itself," however, means for something to be what it is in virtue of itself, not in virtue of something else. Primary substances, according to Aristotle, consist in themselves insofar they are what they are in virtue of themselves, not in virtue of something else. Accidents, by contrast, are what they are in virtue of their belonging to substances. Primary substances, however, cannot exist independently of their accidents; a substance without accidents is no substance at all. In this way, primary substances consist in themselves but are not separate from their accidents. According to Gadamer, Plato understood forms to be separate in a similar way: forms consist in themselves but are not able to exist independently of sensible particulars. That is, forms are immanent in sensible particulars, but forms are what they are in virtue of themselves, not the particulars in which they inhere. As it turns out, this is close to if not exactly what Aristotle meant with his notion of materialized form.[5]

Such misrepresentations, however, were not the result of Aristotle misunderstanding his teacher. Gadamer found that exceedingly unlikely (1986e, 2; 1991b, 7). Gadamer instead observed that Aristotle had "a way of taking statements not as they were intended, but literally, and then demonstrating their one-sidedness" (1986e, 60). This happened most frequently with predecessors like Plato and Heraclitus, who expressed themselves more metaphorically (1986e, 145). Aristotle tended to misrepresent them because he had an agenda to push, and that agenda involved integrating their work into conceptual analyses for which clarity and univocity were virtues (1986e, 145; 1991b, 7–8). Di Cesare suggests that Aristotle's misrepresentations of Plato are due to this "attempt to secure a scientific foundation in the concept, which is the universal and

necessary definition of the essence of the object" (2007, 137). Forming concepts in this way supposedly leads to a "double loss" which Gadamer found problematic:

> With conceptual formation, in fact, the "inexhaustible ambiguity" of everyday language is lost, whereas philosophical language gets reduced to rigid terminology. […] The greatest loss that the Aristotelian apodictic brings, however, since its task consists of separating what is unified, is the hypostatization of the sensible and the intelligible world. The doctrine of two worlds is a consequence of the Aristotelian critique of Plato. For Gadamer it was, paradoxically, precisely Aristotle who, by his renunciation of the Socratic dialogue, initiated Platonism. (2007, 137–38)

According to Di Cesare, this is why Gadamer preferred Plato's dialectics to Aristotle's apodictic conceptual analyses. While there is some truth to this story, it is not entirely correct. Gadamer did think that it was Aristotle, not Plato, who invented the two worlds doctrine. Gadamer did also find problematic certain aspects of Aristotle's conceptual analyses, as we will see. However, Gadamer never held that conceptual analysis inevitably leads to rigid technical jargon. Nor did he consequently renounce conceptual analysis. Quite the contrary. As a phenomenologist, he thought that "conceptuality" [*Begrifflichkeit*] "makes up the essence of philosophy" (1986c, 77).

Aristotle as Phenomenologist

Gadamer saw Aristotle, and not Plato, as the first phenomenologist in part because Aristotle's philosophizing was dedicated above all to developing such conceptual analyses:

> But just this makes [Aristotle] the first theoretician: that his philosophizing is no longer the carrying out of a shared philosophical process, and his literary works are no longer the protreptic presentation of the kind of philosophizing mode of existence for which, as in Plato's works, something like a "doctrinal content" was only an indirect result of the process that the works pursued and portrayed. When philosophical teaching, in a purely conceptual understanding of its subject matter, *expresses only that subject matter's problematic and not its own*, words for the first time acquire the real task of the concept: to analyze the structure of the subject matter of thought and to make it available in the logos. The concept becomes the true language of philosophizing, and each area of its subject matter articulates a system of concepts that are specifically appropriate to that subject matter. (Gadamer 1991b, 5–6)

According to Gadamer, Plato's primary aim was protreptic; his theories were always of secondary importance to the depiction and glorification of Socratic philosophy as a way of life. Aristotle's aim, by contrast, was to give conceptual analyses of phenomena fundamental to human experience.

However, giving conceptual analyses is not sufficient for making Aristotle's philosophical approach properly phenomenological. In order to be phenomenological, conceptual analyses must be descriptive, eidetic, and linguistic. Analyses must be "descriptive" in the sense that they articulate phenomena rather than provide physical causal explanations of them. According to Gadamer, Husserl made such phenomenological description "a duty to us all" (2013b, xxiv). Analyses must also be eidetic insofar as they articulate the essence of the phenomenon analyzed.

Although Gadamer criticized Husserl for seeking the essence of human Dasein in a way that failed to appreciate fully its finite and historical nature (see, for example, Gadamer 1976, 135), Gadamer never gave up the quest for essences. In *Truth and Method*, for example, Gadamer describes the essences of all sorts of phenomena, including taste, labor, play, festival, tragedy, picture (*Bild*), power, and authority. Finally, conceptual analyses must be linguistic insofar as they draw upon human experience as it finds expression in ordinary language. Language is a repository of human experience, and reflecting on language use can consequently reveal truths learned from those experiences. According to Gadamer, Aristotle himself always assigned "the greatest importance to the way in which the order of things becomes apparent in speaking about them" (2013b, 448).

In Aristotle's conceptual analyses we find all three features. Aristotle draws upon "the things said" (*ta legomena*) about some phenomenon in order to grasp its essence by means of definition. Aristotle did so in a way that Gadamer and Heidegger and others found particularly attractive:

> [I]t was particularly clear how the Aristotelian construction of concepts arises almost seamlessly from out of the reflective experience of life itself and how the expressive power of the words that are really in use is kept alive in the language of concepts. To this extent, Heidegger's efforts to bring to concepts the experiences of factical life with phenomenological faithfulness can be easily recognized in this Aristotelian model. As a matter of fact, Heidegger saw it as his phenomenological mission to remain true to the motto "to the things themselves" and study phenomena as they are articulated in human self-interpretation. (Gadamer 2016, 254)

Gadamer and Heidegger saw Aristotle as a model for remaining true to the phenomenological motto "to the things themselves." Aristotle was not some obsolete apothecary, but rather a thinker who used ordinary language in order to describe and thereby make evident the essences of phenomena in human experience. He avoided needless technical jargon and the "scholastic" construction of philosophical systems that are not borne out by experience.

Di Cesare is correct that, despite all this high praise, Gadamer's view of Aristotle was not uncritical. She is also correct that for Gadamer the problem with Aristotle's conceptual analyses was their striving for what she calls "apodicticity"—that is, for their attempting to express the essences of phenomena in universal and necessary definitions. The problem with this demand for universal and necessary definitions is that such definitions require univocal terms. True univocity, however, is not possible because of the "occasionality" of language. According to Gadamer, all language is occasional in the sense that the meanings of words always depend in part on the occasion in which they are understood. Every occasion is different, and so the meanings of words will differ depending on the occasion. This makes univocity impossible and, as a result, we cannot hope to render truly universal definitions.[6]

Aristotle's Phenomenological Descriptions

That criticism notwithstanding, Gadamer insisted that "Aristotle's ability to describe phenomena from every aspect constitutes his real genius" (2013b, 327). Gadamer often appealed to Aristotle's insightful phenomenological descriptions in order to guide his own thinking. Those appeals, moreover, were not limited to Gadamer's discussions of practical wisdom and how it serves as a

model for hermeneutic understanding. Aristotle had a much broader influence on Gadamer. Indeed, Aristotle helped Gadamer describe underlying structures of experience (*Erfahrung*) and presentation (*Darstellung*) that make possible not just practical wisdom, but all other forms of understanding. This is not to suggest that Aristotle shared Gadamer's hermeneutical questions; Gadamer was quick to point out that Aristotle himself was "not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension" (Gadamer 2013b, 322). But Aristotle could nevertheless be helpful because he, like Gadamer, was interested in how we experience universals in particulars.

The Conception of Universals: Experience

On Gadamer's reading, Aristotle held that humans acquire concepts of universals through experience, and that human experience (*empeiria*) is linguistic in nature. That human experience is linguistic becomes clear if we consider Aristotle's well-known claim that "among animals only a human has *logos*" (for example, *Pol.* I.2, 1253a9-10). Following Heidegger, Gadamer understood this claim to mean that humans are the only animals with language. Because humans have the capacity for language, they are able to indicate what is advantageous and harmful, as well as what is good and bad. Animals, by contrast, have voice (*phōnē*), which only allows them to indicate pleasures and pains. But the human capacity for language has more than just these ethical implications. To be able to indicate good and bad involves being able to step back from our appetitive desires and reflect on the way the world is (*die Sachverhalte*) and how we ought to act in it (Gadamer 2013b, 461). Language is not just that which enables humans to think. It is also that which founds human community. We are born into a community rather than choose it, and the

language we learn articulates an understanding, shared by members of our community, about the way the world is. When Aristotle said that a word is a voiced sound that signifies something "by convention" (*kata sunthēkēn*, *Int.* I.2, 16a19), he did not mean that the words of a language were created by convention. A community does not at some point decide on the meanings of its words. Rather, the community is made possible by the conventions of language its members already share. The conventional meanings of words make possible their debating and gaining new understandings of the world (Gadamer 2013b, 448–49, 463).[7]

Given that human community is founded in language, and given that we as infants join a community in part by learning language, Gadamer suspected that for Aristotle language acquisition and concept acquisition go hand in hand. Aristotle did not make this connection explicit, but it seemed to follow from other things he said, particularly in *Posterior Analytics* II.19 (100a3ff). That passage describes how we acquire universals from experience, and how from those universals *nous* grasps the first principles of a science.[8] We acquire universals after having perceived the same thing many times and retained those perceptions in memory. At some point we come to grasp the universal which is common to our perceptual memories, and that grasping of a universal is an "experience" (*empeiria*). By reflecting on these experiences, we in turn can acquire craft or scientific knowledge. Gadamer was careful to note that Aristotle did not ever state explicitly that experiences of the universal were linguistic (2013b, 360; 2000a, 12). Yet Gadamer also noted that the connection was clear enough at least to the paraphrast Themistius, who explained the development of *nous* and its ability to grasp the highest universals in terms of a child's learning language:

> *Nous*, then, is the thing which grasps the first principles [*archai*], and *nous* is the thing furnished first and by nature in the linguistic animal. But while it is in potentiality, this [i.e. *nous*] is quite simple and like some irrational and undiscerning sight of the soul, according to which the human is, from the beginning, by nature a linguistic animal. This *nous* is always growing and increasing in us as we also develop, first with regard to simples, which we call terms [*horous*]… For children begin first both to speak and think [*noein*] human or white whenever they are furnished with language [*logos*]. When the ability to put these simples together also advances, it [i.e. *nous*] gains power and it is now possible to think through [*dianoeisthai*] what a human is. And whenever it takes more strength, it also becomes more capable with respect to putting together and thinking the universal, as long as we make solid our possession of language…In this way, in fact, *nous* is first able only to name and to think things by their names, but next both to put together [names] and think through them; then, finally, after establishing some universal judgments, it secures them away in itself. (1900, 65.12-66.3)

Not only did Aristotle seem to hold that all thinking is linguistic, he also suggested that there is nothing that cannot find expression in language. In his *De sensu* (I.1, 437a11-15), Aristotle argued that hearing "contributes more to understanding, since language, by being audible, is the cause of learning." By this, Gadamer understood him to mean that hearing enjoys a kind of primacy because it can express all that can be thought and subsequently taught to others.[9]

The Presentation of Universals: Tragedy

Gadamer praised Aristotle's analysis of tragedy for aptly describing how tragedies make evident to audiences the tragic nature of the human condition (see 2013b, 130–35). But for Gadamer that analysis has a wider import, since it may also "serve to exemplify the structure of aesthetic being as a whole" (Gadamer 2013b, 130).[10] Aristotle's analysis articulates the structure by which any artwork discloses its truth to an attending audience. In fact, the import of Aristotle's analysis of tragedy is even wider still when we consider that, according to Gadamer, the mode of being of artworks is a model by which to understand the being of texts and other cultural objects handed down by tradition (see 2013b, 159–68). This is because the being of artworks and other cultural objects essentially depends on the objects presenting themselves to us as we try to understand their meaning. Gadamer found in Aristotle a description—although not intended by Aristotle as such—of this event in which a particular cultural object presents its universal meaning to an audience attempting to understand it.

According to Aristotle, poetry is "more philosophical" than history because it is more apt to convey the universal, history more so the particular (*Poet*. 9, 1451b1-6). History tells us what some particular person did, whereas poetry tells us what sorts of things a certain sort of person will either likely or necessarily say or do. Gadamer never missed the opportunity to cite Aristotle on this very point (see, for example, 2013b, 119; 1986f, 13; 1986d, 120). But how are poetic works like tragedies able to convey such universal truths? To answer this, we must first appreciate that poetic works are works (*erga*), and all good works possess a unified structure by which they can convey meaning. As Aristotle said, "people often say about well-made works that it is possible neither to take away nor to add" (*Eth. Nic.* II.6, 1106b9-11). In the particular case of tragedies, the plot is a

presentation or *mimēsis* of an action, and that action constitutes a whole such that no part can be added or subtracted (*Poet.* 8, 1451a30-34).

The unity of a tragedy enables the mimesis of its plot to convey a universal truth. Mimesis is often thought to be a representation of an original. In Plato's *Republic*, for example, the mimesis of the painting is said to be a representation of the object depicted (595a-608b). But according to Gadamer, Aristotle understood mimesis not as imitative representation (*Vorstellung*), but as presentation (*Darstelling*): "Mimesis is a presentation in which we 'know and have in view the essential content of what is presented" (1986d, 119). Aristotle's description of children playing pretend exemplifies this. When children play pretend, they are trying to make present the person they are pretending to be (Gadamer 2013b, 117–18, with reference to *Poet*. 4, 1448b5-6). The parents, for whom the children are pretending, are supposed to recognize not the children in disguise, but rather the people they are presenting. The pretending children surely cannot present exact replicas of people; nevertheless, the children can make present the truth of those people such that those people can be recognized by the parents. In tragedy, mimesis works in the same way. The plots present tragic figures in their truth. The audience recognizes that this person on stage is that figure (*Poet*. 4, 1448b16). Yet the audience recognizes more, because in that tragic figure they recognize a universal truth about humans. Or, as Gadamer put it, the audience recognizes themselves: "As the Aristotelian doctrine seems to suggest, all art of whatever kind is a form of recognition that serves to deepen our knowledge of ourselves and thus our familiarity with the world as well" (1986a, 100). In this way the performance of a tragedy is an event in which the truth of the tragic play becomes present to an audience. During its performance, the tragedy as a

work (*ergon*) is in the state of being at work (*energeia*). The latter is a coinage from Aristotle which he himself never applied to the performance of tragedies, but Gadamer found quite fitting.

Although Aristotle also never intended this, what can be said of tragedy can be said of any artwork, as well as any other cultural object. The being of these works is such that in their performance, even if their performance only involves being read, the works present their truths to an audience.

The Application of Universals: Practical Wisdom

The influence of Aristotle's analysis of practical wisdom on Gadamer's hermeneutics is unmistakable and well-known.[11] That analysis (in *Eth. Nic.* Bk. VI) describes the nature of good practical reasoning and how its application of ethical universals to particular situations made it a mode of thinking different from craft and science. This analysis was especially insightful for Gadamer. He held that "the chief task" of modern philosophy was "to defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science" (1975, 316).

Aristotle showed how such a defense was possible. Practical wisdom differs from science insofar as it correctly deliberates and makes decisions about objects that undergo change. Science (*epistēmē*), by contrast, correctly understands and demonstrates objects that are eternal. The difference between practical wisdom and craft is less obvious, since both concern particular objects that undergo change, and both involve applying universals to those particulars in order to do something. Practical wisdom applies ethical universals like bravery and temperance to particular situations in order to act nobly. A craft such as medicine applies universals concerning bodily

health to particular patients in order to treat them. Despite these analogies, Aristotle identified essential differences. First, practical wisdom and craft reason differently about their ends. The practical agent is "always already involved in a moral and political context and acquires his image of [bravery or temperance] from that standpoint" (Gadamer 2013b, 330). That is why practical wisdom cannot be forgotten (*Eth. Nic.* VI.5, 1140b29–30). That is also why upbringing is so important; it is the process by which we acquire ethical universals like bravery (*Eth. Nic.* I.4, 1095b4–8). When we deliberate about how to act bravely in a particular situation, we do not already have a fully determinate conception of bravery. We instead only have a schematic conception of bravery which we must consider anew and concretize in the present situation. This is not so when practicing a craft. The product of a craft can be determined fully before the craftsperson goes to work; it need not be considered anew and concretized as the craftsperson produces it. The doctor, for example, can know what health is before she finds herself in the situation in which she needs to apply her understanding of health to a particular patient. From this it follows that practical wisdom and craft also reason differently about the means for achieving their respective ends. We cannot know in advance the means by which to act bravely, since an act of bravery needs to be carried out in the proper way, and determining the proper way requires being able to see the ethically salient features of the situation. The doctor, however, can know the means by which to achieve health in advance of treating a particular patient. The doctor may have to modify those means in light of the extenuating circumstances of a case, but that does not thereby change the doctor's understanding of health or the means of achieving it. The doctor is just being forced to make do. In this way, practical wisdom, as opposed to craft, involves deliberating well about both means and ends. For that reason Gadamer thought that "Aristotle's definitions of

phronēsis have a marked uncertainty about them, in that this knowledge is sometimes related more to the end, and sometimes more to the means to the end" (2013b, 331).[12]

Aristotle's account illuminated more for Gadamer than just the nature of practical wisdom. Just as Gadamer saw in tragedy a model for the way in which universals become present to us, so similarly did he see in practical wisdom a model for the human sciences. Practical wisdom can serve as a model in part because the human sciences also have as their object "man and what he knows of himself" (2013b, 325). Moreover, both practical wisdom and the human sciences involve a similar application of universals to particulars. Like ethical agents who are "always already involved in a moral context," inquirers in the human sciences are always already involved in a tradition which confers them with their objects of inquiry, as well as their schematic preconceptions of those objects. Their tasks of application are therefore analogous. The philologist, for example, is always already involved in the tradition which has handed down not only the particular tragedies she studies, but also the preconception of tragedy she applies in her coming to understand a particular play. Understanding the universal truth of tragedy, however, only occurs when the philologist applies her schematic preconception of tragedy to the particular play she is presently reading or watching.

Gadamer admired Aristotle for offering a wealth of insights, both with respect to phenomenological method and the descriptions produced by means of that method. In the epigraph of this chapter, Gadamer rhetorically asked what truth could not already be found in Aristotle. Given just how much truth Gadamer did find in Aristotle, we should probably understand that question as only half rhetorical. We should also disabuse ourselves of any suggestion that Gadamer

was a Platonist as opposed to an Aristotelian. He was certainly both, and he would certainly think we should be, too.

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[1] Otto Pöggeler expresses a similar sentiment: “When we read *Truth and Method* we can very well assume (until we reach the third part on being as language) that Gadamer is an Aristotelian, one who takes rhetoric, poetry, and the legal structuring of life as his main themes. The works of volume 7 of the *Collected Works,* however, which certainly form a second highpoint next to *Truth and Method,* prove that Gadamer was a Platonist” (1994, 497; cited by Di Cesare 2007, 123). See also Brice R. Wachterhauser: “But what Plato only anticipated mythologically and schematically, Aristotle ‘transferred to the cautious and tentative language of philosophical concepts’ (*IG*, 178). Despite this Aristotelian accomplishment and advance over Plato, Gadamer’s thought is still predominately indebted to Plato” (1999, 90). Or P. Christopher Smith: “Though Hegel’s dialectic and Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics are certainly very important, I will assume here that the ‘effect’ of Plato’s dialogues on Gadamer’s thought is more distinctive than any other” (1991, 23).

[2] For a discussion of the way in which Aristotle has been read and misread by figures in the phenomenological tradition, see Kontos 2018.

[3] For more comprehensive accounts of Gadamer’s readings of Plato and Aristotle, see, for example Barthold 2010, 1–46; Zuckert 2002. The account offered in this chapter is generally in agreement with them.

[4] It is unclear what German word Gadamer has in mind for "being separate." This sentence is part of a passage that Gadamer added to the English translation by P. Christopher Smith, and so there is no corresponding sentence in the *Gesammelte Werke*.

[5] On Gadamer's reading, Plato and Aristotle actually disagree not about the separability of forms, but rather the participatory relationship among forms. Plato understood their relations in terms of number, and Aristotle found that problematic. Thereon hangs another tale.

[6] For a fuller discussion of occasionality, see the chapter contributed by Greg Lynch in this volume.

[7] Among anglophone scholars there is scarce discussion about what Aristotle meant by words signifying "by convention." David Charles, for example, tellingly says: "Aristotle says practically nothing in *De Int.* about the conventional aspect of significance, and I shall follow his example" (2000, 81 n.125). However, in Germany Gadamer's reading seems to have taken some hold. In his commentary on *De interpretatione,* Hermann Weidemann quotes Gadamer verbatim (2002, 167).

[8] For additional discussion on how Gadamer reads this passage, see Risser 1997, 86–88.

[9] There are few anglophone commentaries on *De sensu,* but at least G.R.T. Ross seems to be in agreement with Gadamer on this point: "Hearing contributes more to intellectual life, for to the audible sounds we have by convention (*kata sunthēkēn*) attached concepts by which we think the whole of reality so far as it is known to us" (1906, 131).

[10] For an excellent, fuller account of Gadamer's reading of Aristotelian tragedy, see Tate 2008.

[11] Much ink has been spelled on this aspect of Gadamer's thought, and the present chapter will hardly do it justice. For more, see, for example Weinsheimer 1985, 184–92; Risser 1997, 83–118; Dunne 1993, 156–67; Rese 2007.

[12] There has been much recent debate among Aristotle scholars about whether practical wisdom involves deliberation of means or also of ends. For more on this debate, see Moss 2012.