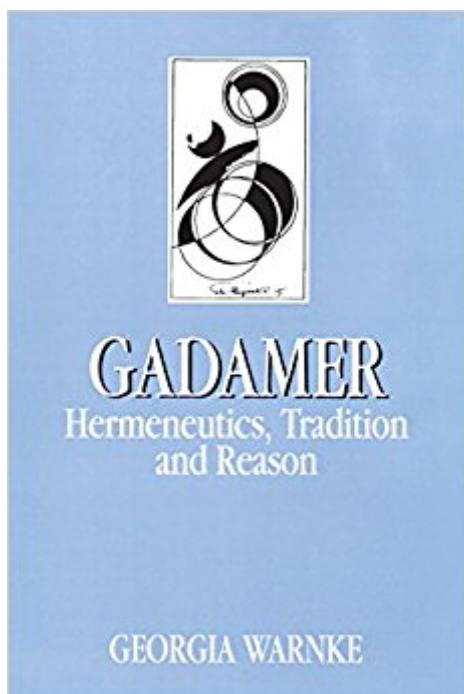


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# Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, And Reason (Key Contemporary Thinkers)



## Synopsis

Hans-Georg Gadamer is one of the leading philosophers in the world today. Since the publication in 1960 of his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, his philosophical hermeneutics has been the focus of a great deal of attention and controversy. His ideas have been applied to questions of interpretation in the study of art and literature, to issues of knowledge and objectivity in the social sciences, and even to reevaluations of philosophy itself. This book is a systematic introduction to Gadamer's work, presented with a clarity of exposition and argument that makes it rewarding to non-philosophers and philosophers alike. It is constructed around a series of debates on historicism, authorial intention, subjectivism, ideology, and the "New Pragmatism," and it pays particular attention to how Gadamer's work has been interpreted and criticized by such philosophers as Hirsch, Habermas, Apel, and Rorty. The dialogic form, which is in itself a central feature of hermeneutic theory, gives the book an immediacy that textual exegesis cannot achieve. This is the first book in the series, *Key Contemporary Thinkers*, which will make available the ideas of some of the most influential philosophers of our time. The series will cut across academic disciplines and will include books on European, British, and American thinkers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'An extremely distinguished volume, a major book on the topic, and of amazingly high quality throughout.' J. Hillis Miller, Yale University

Hans-Georg Gadamer is one of the leading philosophers in the world today. Since the publication in 1960 of his magnum opus "Truth and Method," his philosophical hermeneutics has been the focus of a great deal of attention and controversy. His ideas have been applied to questions of interpretation in the study of art and literature, to issues of knowledge and objectivity in the social sciences, to related disputes in theology and jurisprudence, and even to reevaluations of philosophy itself. This book is a systematic introduction to Gadamer's work, presented with a clarity of exposition and argument that makes it rewarding to non-philosophers and philosophers alike. It is constructed around a series of debates on historicism, authorial intention, subjectivism, ideology, and the "New Pragmatism," and it pays particular attention to how Gadamer's work has been interpreted and criticized by such philosophers as Hirsch, Habermas, Apel, and Rorty. The dialogic form, which is in itself a central feature of hermeneutic theory, gives the book an immediacy that textual exegesis cannot achieve. This is the first book in the series "Key Contemporary Thinkers," which will make available the ideas of some of the most influential philosophers of our time. The series will cut across academic disciplines and will include books on European, British and American thinkers.

Warnke presents the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, primarily as presented in *Truth and Method*. Her purpose is to give a reasoned systematic evaluation of Gadamer in the light of a series of arguments presented against him. The purpose of chapter one is to consider the critique which Gadamer leveled against Schleiermacher and romantic hermeneutics. Gadamer argued "that this tradition erred in restricting the problem of understanding to methods for ascertaining an agent's or author's intentions..." (ix). Gadamer believed that understanding is historically situated and that a variety of understandings are valid. (Some have argued that this is subjectivistic (Hirsch), and is a legitimate charge. Warnke takes up this charge in a later chapter.) In chapter two the author begins the discussion with a question concerning the text. If an author's intentions are not able to be delineated, how then ought one to understand the text? Deconstructionism, or the New Criticism, answer the question of the interpretation of text in a simple manner, however you want. Gadamer agrees in different areas with those who endorse such a view, and disagrees in others. Contra Gadamer, Hirsch believes that an author can say more than he is aware because of the laws of language. This does not mean that any interpretation is valid, for words can include more than what the author intended, but less than everything. Pre-modern thought believed the Bible to be true, and attempted to understand it by coming to an agreement with the claims made therein. The Romantics turned the table and attempted to understand the text "as the expression of its author's creativity"

(73). Gadamer has rejected the Romantic turn for two reasons, according to Warnke. First, they have rejected the "representational feature of works of art;" and second, it "overlooks the 'situatedness' of understanding" (73). Belief that an interpreter is able to understand the meaning according to the author is shortsighted, according to Gadamer, because "the meaning of a text goes beyond its author not only occasionally but always" (74). The subjective nature of interpretation is rightly questioned by Warnke who then leads the reader through three additional features of Gadamer's hermeneutics. These include "(a) his notion of an anticipation of completeness; (b) his analysis of the applicative moment of understanding; and (c) his account of its dialogic structure" (75). Chapter four is dedicated to the challenges given by Habermas and Apel. They appreciate Gadamer's provision of "an account of hermeneutic understanding that both indicates the extent to which it deviates from natural scientific explanation and justifies it as an unavoidable component of social scientific inquiry." However, Habermas disagrees with Gadamer over the role of critical reflection at the hands of the interpreter. These two men are forced to disagree because of their Marxist presuppositions. Warnke begins chapter five with another explanation of the critiques offered by Habermas and Apel. Habermas argues that language is insufficient because it has been deformed in the same way the explanation has been. Apel must resort to a "quasi-objective scientific explanation" in order to compensate for Gadamer's hermeneutics. She then moves on to argue that Gadamer's hermeneutic is "not as antithetical to Enlightenment concerns as Habermas, Apel and Rorty believe, and remains closer to a foundationalist enterprise than any of them admit" (141). Warnke repeats three of the central ideas to Gadamer's hermeneutic as she evaluates her conclusion that Gadamer rejects the methods of the Enlightenment but seeks to support its ideal. The three ideas are: "(a) the account of the dialogic character of human understanding, (b) the notion of hermeneutic experience; and (c) the use of the concept of *Bildung*" (168). Georgia Warnke has produced a helpful tool for the student of hermeneutics. Although she does not agree with all that Gadamer has espoused, she is fair in her representation of him. Her probing questions allow the reader to follow along as Gadamer is evaluated along side of other philosophers and critics. One weakness of the book seems to be the lack of reference to Scripture, something which found more recognition in the actual Truth and Method. Her critiques are valid, her writing style clear, and her skill evident. Suggested Reading EPZ Truth and Method (Continuum Impacts) by Gadamer (look for another printing that has a good binding) Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge (Landmarks in Christian Scholarship) by Vanhooser

One of the easier philosophical writings of Gadamer to read. I think it is a good starting point to enter his philosophy.

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