

Stefano Marino

Gadamer and the Limits of the Modern Techno-Scientific Civilization.

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Coming across a book of this title, the reader may be excused for expecting an elaboration exactly on that topic: a detailed treatise on the critique of our modern (and that largely means techno-scientific) world by Hans-Georg Gadamer, surely one of the most eminent and continuously most impactful thinkers of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, that is not what this book is. Rather, Stefano Marino's work, apparently largely the product of a postdoc at the University of Freiburg, is a more general, systematized collection of the author's thoughts on Gadamer's philosophy in general. To be sure, the question the book purports to address is dealt with, and even sometimes in some detail, but there is no ongoing, permeating concern with the matter, or none that is sufficiently deep and wide. This is particularly sad because, in the age of the Web 2.0, Gadamer's critique of modern techno-scientific civilization is as relevant and indeed trenchant as it ever was, perhaps even more so, going as he does to the core of the issues of technology and science, rather than only to phenomena, effects, and consequences. A book really dealing with this topic would have therefore been especially welcome, and it still is.

Truth in labeling aside, is this a good book on Gadamer in general? Yes and no. What we have here is a book that largely represents a valid personal reading of Gadamer by Marino, and that is not a bad thing. As an academic qualification essay, this would no doubt show that the author knows his subject: Marino is well-versed in Gadamer's work, in the secondary literature on Gadamer (although he pays more attention to Jean Grondin's work, especially the biography, than Gadamer himself would have appreciated), and in most of the philosophical context, including Heidegger. Wherever his interpretations seem a bit odd, they are almost always defensible, except for some minor points regarding Gadamer's life rather than work (such as the influence of his father, the pharmaceutical chemist Johannes Gadamer). It is also very noticeable that Marino never met and talked to Gadamer, nor did he access any unpublished correspondence, but especially the former would be asking too much by now in any case.

The two most serious substantive problems of the book are, first, that Marino has not really thought sufficiently about the connection between Gadamer's central philosophical work, both as regards *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) and the work specifically on Greek philosophy, on the one hand, and the minor(-seeming) political philosophy and social theory essays in various small collections, which he mostly uses for his deliberations, on the other (see e.g. pp. 15–17, 51). Yes, the latter are very important indeed, but do they really stand apart from the former? Second, Marino gives too short shrift overall to Gadamer's concern with Greek philosophy, especially with Plato and Aristotle, which for Gadamer himself was at the very heart of his thought.

Even these two issues notwithstanding, the question is whether what we have here is enough. I would say that it isn't, because for an introduction to Gadamer, this is nowhere near, say, Chris Lawn's brief but superb outline, which I previously reviewed in this journal

(*Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum 2006, reviewed in *PiR* 27:2, 124–126). Gadamerians, on the other hand, will find very little that is new, as the added value, the author's own interpretation, is too light. (Even if we followed the occasional Anglo-American caricature of Gadamerian hermeneutics as reducing any philosophy to "what it means to me," there would not even be enough of that.) And almost every time there is a conflict between Gadamer and an interlocutor, between two secondary authors, or between a commentator and Marino, this is stated and left standing ("Anyway, it is not my aim to dwell over such controversies and criticisms", 105). Almost every thought that would be interesting to pursue, Marino designates "interesting" and leaves it at that. Part of the reason for this deficit may be that Peter Lang books do not profit from recommendations by editors; they are printed as they come. Hence also, I venture to guess, the ubiquity of remarks that many things are well-known or obvious, or of self-reflective colloquial phrases that structure the text by narrating it as if it were a (jumpy) thought process, such as the non-sequitural opening word of many new segments, "Anyway."

What speaks most for this book is that, again, there is very little in it that is outright wrong or even heavily questionable. The language, while not exactly inspirational, is certainly readable as well. And Gadamer's thought is so immediate ("*aktuell*") that one can do much worse than read a book about his thought. The question is only whether one would not profit much more from reading, or re-reading, anything by Gadamer during the finite time one has. But then again, that is not rare about tertiary, non-introductory books about the work of great philosophers.

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