On 11 February 1995 Gadamer reached the age of ninety-five. The tributes that were paid to him were justifiably numerous; in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung he was celebrated as 'the most successful philosopher of the Federal Republic', placed even before Jürgen Habermas, to whom the title of philosopher was awarded only with certain reservations. The worldwide influence of Gadamer's thinking is closely connected with the reception of his principal work, *Truth and Method* (1960). In 1979 Habermas characterized Gadamer's achievement as the 'urbanization of the Heideggerian province'. The bridges which Gadamer has built consist above all in an elaboration of Heidegger's paradigm of understanding in its application to hermeneutics; these bridges connect philosophy with all those realms in which interpretative procedures are necessary, such as literary studies, jurisprudence, theology and even medicine.

**Conciliatory thinking**

What is striking in the present reception of Gadamer's work is the concentration on what Henning Ritter has described as 'conciliatory thinking which knows how to conceal its hardness'. The notion of conciliation is generally explicated through reference to the third section of *Truth and Method*. In what he terms the 'ontological turn of hermeneutics oriented by the guiding thread of language', Gadamer develops a conception of language which comes close to the dictum of the later Heidegger: that, properly understood, it is not the individual subject but language itself which speaks – with the difference, however, that Gadamer introduces the model of dialogue as a sort of counterbalance. In short, Gadamer's basic assumption is that truth is disclosed in dialogical speech. Decisive here is Gadamer's reinterpretation of Socratic maieutics in terms of an aleatory happening. This abstract paradigm of a dialogical situation which encompasses both the art of persuasion and an openness to the opinion of the other possesses an enormous resonance today.

In contrast, the conditions of hermeneutic understanding which first enable a successful accomplishment of understanding, as developed by Gadamer in the second section of *Truth and Method*, have retreated into the background. In this section Gadamer pursues a trenchant rehabilitation of a thinking which is grounded in prejudices [Vorurteilen], and affirms both the power of tradition (above all through the example of the classical) and the unlimited validity of authority and authorities. He defends this as a genuinely conservative undertaking which does not need to be argumentatively justified. The subjective dispositions through which this project is to be sustained are 'affirmation, appropriation and care' (265f.). Because Gadamer regards 'the self-reflection of the subject' as 'only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life' (265), 'the prejudices of the individual, far more than his or her own judgements, constitute the historical reality of being' (261). Under these conditions, understanding 'is less to be thought of as a subjective act' than, in a way which carries associations with military practices, 'as conscription into an event of tradition' (274f.; italics removed). On Gadamer's view, there is no 'method' for acquiring this competence in understanding.

Finally, it is characteristic of the current reception of Gadamer's work that the emphasis has shifted...
away from a thinking grounded in prejudices towards a more comprehensive notion of pre-understanding which is prior to every act of understanding. Through selective and sometimes critical readings, Gadamer has been drawn into dialogue with the school of Anglo-American philosophy of language, theorists of intersubjectivity such as Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, Richard Rorty in the USA, Jean Grondin in Canada, as well as left-oriented hermeneutic thinkers such as Gianni Vattimo in Italy and Emilio Lledó in Spain.

A look into the past

In what follows I seek to illuminate Gadamer’s philosophical writings during the period of National Socialism by focusing on two important essays. In light of the reception which has been awarded to Gadamer’s thought there may seem something provocative about the goals of this enquiry. Gadamer himself has addressed the issue of his career under National Socialism, both in autobiographical writings and in recent interviews. The picture seems to be clear and the relevant facts already known. In contrast to his teacher and to various other colleagues, Gadamer is happy to present himself in this context as someone who was ready to accommodate himself to circumstances. In several places he reveals that although there was no question of his joining one of the organizations of the National Socialist Party because of the importance of remaining loyal to his Jewish friends, he was nonetheless obliged to make political concessions in order to advance in his career. Ultimately, he was able tactfully to organize the situation to his advantage, and in 1939 he was called to a chair in Leipzig. This took place, as he correctly observes, ‘as a consequence of high politics’.

This external accommodation in turn gave Gadamer the opportunity to pursue philosophical work in a spirit of pure ‘scholarship’ even under National Socialism. Unlike Karl Löwith, Gadamer argues for a strict division between the scientific and political domains. And this implies that there were both accommodationists and Nazis who were otherwise thoroughly responsible scholars, such as Martin Heidegger, Kurt Hildebrand, Erich Rothacker, Wolfgang Schadewelt, Felix Krüger, Helmut Berve, Richard Harder and Gerhard Fricke. The claim to ‘scientific excellence’ provided the means by which the academic community could constitute itself internally and at the same time insulate itself from the influence of National Socialism externally. What this view fails to take into account is that this appeal to ‘scientific excellence’ may well have been the very form in which the knowledge and skills of the human sciences could be employed in the service of National Socialism. Today, Gadamer also emphasizes his contacts with the ‘national conservative’ resistance to Hitler. Together with other members of the Goerdeler circle, to which he belonged in the last phase of fascism during the war period, he shared an open opposition to the Weimar Republic as well as admiration for Hitler’s foreign policies, which still seemed highly promising during the so-called ‘Blitzkrieg’. Gadamer was not a Nazi and for this reason he was elected Rector of the University of Leipzig by the occupying Soviet powers in 1947. Later he transferred to the University of Frankfurt and finally, as successor to Karl Jaspers, to the University of Heidelberg, where he still lives today.

Such clarity concerning the facts would seem to render the questions I am pursuing here superfluous. Nonetheless, the crucial problem from which I started out was to arrive at a more substantial and exact definition of the concept of ‘national conservatism’ by focusing on those philosophers who belonged to the so-called ‘black faction’. Despite the fact that these philosophers entered into a clear and solid alliance with the Nazis which endured almost until the end of the Nazi period, it has long remained unclear exactly what contribution this faction made to the consolidation and perpetuation of National Socialism. The key to interpreting this contribution is not to be found in the attempted assassination of Hitler on 20 July 1944. According to the self-understanding of the national conservative opposition, as articulated for example by Gadamer’s friend Eduard Spranger in 1947, ‘it was not National Socialism which led us into catastrophe but rather Hitlerism itself’. The studies written for the project Philosophie im Deutschen Fascismus (AS 165) are concerned with national conservatives of an earlier generation – for example, Nicolai Hartmann, Eduard Spranger, and Theodor Litt – and they can help us to recognize different modalities of fascism within the black faction.

It was in this context that I began to investigate Gadamer’s texts from the period 1933 to 1945. Amongst other things I came across interpretations of Plato in which Nazism was never explicitly referred to. Gadamer’s articles were entirely in keeping with then current research and did not appear to represent anything unusual. His goals did not extend to such ambitious projects as the question of the meaning of being or revolutionizing the discipline of philosophy. As a young university lecturer he worked un-
assuming on texts of ancient philosophy, above all on a reading of Plato’s Republic. During the course of my research, however, I discovered that this reading was multi-layered, and this in turn opened up a new way of looking at Gadamer’s writings of the period.

My first concern was to reconstruct the connection between what was said and the context in which it was written, to document what for us has now fallen silent. Or, to put it in Gadamer’s own language, I sought to establish the historical basis on which other hermeneutic approaches could be developed and to discover the fusions of horizon between past and present which were possible at that time. In the course of my investigations I was able to give more precision to the often overgeneralized and inexact use of the notion of ‘context’ through employing the concept of ‘relations of response’ to Plato. We can use this concept to describe how in the process of fascization various ideas were articulated through readings of Plato: National Socialism was identified as a task which had already been laid out in antiquity. These ideas resonated not only within the domain of academic discourse but also within other fields of practice such as the National Socialist Party’s policies on health, justice, education and art.13

Around 1933, despite differences in interpretation, there emerged a common point of convergence: the destruction of the self-understanding of universalist humanism. This expression signified the humanism of European modernity and of Weimar classicism; above all, that humanism which was articulated through the ideals of the French Revolution. Disqualified as ‘apolitical’ under the cipher of aesthetic humanism and identified with the ‘age of liberalism’, it became the hegemonic critical target for the new reception of antiquity. At the basis of the denunciation of the Enlightenment as developed within the humanist camp itself in opposition to the Weimar Republic lay a new conception of law which aimed at strictly controlling society, and attacked as ‘sophistic’ the old human dream of a society based on self-determination and autonomy. The process of fascization supported an unparalleled project of bourgeois modernization, to which not only radical technocratic modes of thinking but also the humanist notion of ‘care of the soul’ made a contribution. It was on this front that the interpretation of Plato was engaged. Alongside the lecture which Gadamer gave in occupied Paris in 1941 in the service of foreign propaganda, and the interpretation of Max Weber (1943), in which he addressed the issue of modernizing National Socialist policy on science and education in the face of possible military defeat, it is the two interpretations of Plato which particularly stand out amongst Gadamer’s philosophical writings between 1934 and 1942. In what follows I shall restrict myself to a consideration of these two essays.

1933: responses to Plato’s Republic

Since we possess neither any systematic nor any definitive investigations of the influence of fascism on the interpretation of Plato in the German-speaking context,14 a large part of my work consisted in studying the Plato scholarship of the period through the original sources.15 Decisive for understanding Gadamer’s work is the transformation of the humanist image of Plato which had already taken place during the Weimar Republic. The key features of this transformation can be summed up as follows:

1. Classical philology stepped into line with National Socialist thinking, thereby bringing to an end the conflict which had raged in the Weimar Republic concerning the correct interpretation of Plato. Official justification was provided by the work of Werner Jaeger.16 Whereas classical humanism had paradigmatically interpreted Plato as a poet and a metaphysician, and as the founder of the doctrine of ideas, an association of philologist and philosophers now sought to propagate an alternative ‘political reading’ of Plato. In the course of this conflict of interpretation new interpretative principles were developed.

2. The relative importance of the various texts in the Platonic canon were subjected to a revaluation. Those dialogues, dialogue passages and elements which are concerned with metaphysics and the theory of ideas – that is, those texts on which the traditional humanistic interpretation of Plato developed by Schleiermacher and Neo-Kantianism was based – no longer stood at the centre of philological research. Instead, attention was focused on the Republic, the Laws and the Seventh Letter. The epistemological concerns which had informed earlier readings of Plato receded into the background. This shift of emphasis was justified philologically inasmuch as the Seventh Letter, Plato’s so-called political biography whose authenticity is still disputed today, was declared to be an authentic textual source.17

3. Advocates of this ‘politicalized’ reading of Plato made appeal to the so-called unwritten doctrine which, according to the Seventh Letter (341, a–e) and other sources, represents the essence of Plato’s phi-
osophy. Out of this secret doctrine they then sought to derive new rules for philological inquiry which went beyond what could be defended on the basis of the textual material itself, and one to which they believed they enjoyed access.\textsuperscript{18}

In this new interpretation emphasis was no longer placed on the construction of a systematic conceptual system. The hermeneutic key to Plato's writings was provided by his involvement in Attic politics. Plato's supposed biography was interpreted with categories taken from \textit{Lebensphilosophie}, with great emphasis being laid upon Plato's 'decision' to refund the state.

The most noted Plato scholars (in the tradition of Ulrich v. Wilammowitz-Moellendorff) were Werner Jaeger, Julius Stenzel, Paul Friedländer, Heinrich Gompertz, and, from the George circle, Kurt Hildebrandt, Wilhelm Andrae, Kurt Singer and Edgar Salin. It suited their purposes to depict Plato as a 'philosopher of crisis'. Kurt Hildebrandt maintained that 'for us Germans' Plato should be 'a model of a saviour in an age of dissolution and decay'. Plato's \textit{Republic}, which was itself a response to the crisis of the Attic polis, offered material on the basis of which the crisis of the Weimar Republic could be projected back into antiquity. Plato's dream of restoring Attic aristocracy by reforming it in the form of an authoritarian educational state was elevated to the status of a 'spiritual task'.

As can be seen from the example of Jaeger and Hildebrandt, the ground for the subsequent fascination of the interpretation of Plato had already been fully prepared during the period of the Weimar Republic. As the philological associations fell into line with National Socialist ideas this interpretation then became orthodox teaching: 'Whereas our predecessors saw Plato as a Neo-Kantian system builder and the initiator of a highly revered philosophical tradition, for our generation he has become the founder of the state and the giver of laws.'\textsuperscript{19}

The expulsion of the poets: a lecture and its context

On 24 January 1934 Gadamer gave a lecture entitled 'Plato and the Poets' before the Society of Friends of the Humanistic Gymnasium in Marburg. In this lecture he set himself the task of 'understanding the meaning and justification\textsuperscript{20} of Plato's critique of the poets in the \textit{Republic}. For the members of the cultural elite who had gathered to hear him speak, this 'represented the most difficult task confronting the German spirit in its efforts to assimilate the spirit of the ancient world' (5). The difficulty of this task resided in the fact that Plato's critique of the poets was carried out through an attack on the 'art and poetry of the ancients' and so challenged just that ideal domain which embodied the self-understanding of German humanism.

Gadamer starts out by recalling the harmonious character of this humanist ideal, in which Plato too occupies a place. Plato is recognized as one of 'the greatest representatives of the poetic genius of the Greeks', 'admired and loved like Homer and the tragedians, Pindar and Aristophanes' (5). By identifying Plato's eminent status within the humanistic ideal as envisaged by his audience, Gadamer finds a starting point from which he can begin to rebuild this ideal from within. Plato himself is represented as a 'hostile critic of the art of classical antiquity' (5). The poetry he wrote in his youth, 'he burnt ... after he became a pupil of Socrates' (6) and he 'condemned Homer and the great Attic dramatists ... to be completely expelled from the state' (5). The tension generated by this conflict enables Gadamer to set the hermeneutic circle of his lecture in motion.

Following Socrates, Plato turns against the 'much beloved Homer' (6). He censors Homer in accordance with the norms of a poetry which should work for the state and recomposes the opening of the \textit{Iliad} so as to 'purify it of all direct speech' (10). Plato thereby chooses 'a deliberately provocative example' (10), since Socrates, through whom Plato speaks, must struggle against his own deep-rooted sentiments and attitudes. But Gadamer, too, thereby chooses a 'deliberately provocative example', for the 'verses known to all' from the opening of the \textit{Iliad} – learnt by heart by entire generations of gymnasium students – were a symbol of classical education.

Gadamer may well have disturbed his hearers by demanding that they should bring this 'monstrous attack' upon poetry and on Homer vividly to mind rather than 'pushing it away from us ... into the distant past of a unique historical period'. Gadamer is concerned with the fact 'that this decision also has something to say to us' (10). Were his audience not suddenly confronted with the National Socialist present, with its burning of books, and the censorship, exile and persecution of poets and writers?

At no point does Gadamer directly mention the fascist present. His lecture remains entirely on the terrain of an interpretation of Plato. Plato's measures against the poets are to be understood through an interpretation of the \textit{Republic}.\textsuperscript{21} In the first part of the lecture Gadamer discusses the status of Plato's
critique. Its full significance is derived from the project of refounding the state. This new state is to be an educational state. At its centre Gadamer places the Platonic paideia, the education of the youths to become its guardians. These are the youths who risked corruption by the poets because they lacked 'the binding civil ethos which could secure that poetry would have its proper effect' (15). In the second part of the lecture poetry, is rehabilitated in the service of patriotic ends. Here Gadamer discusses Plato's critique of imitation. Plato develops a conception of art whose purpose is not to give aesthetic pleasure but to strengthen the civil ethos, as in the case of hymns. Finally, Gadamer presents Socrates, the critic of myths, as the restorer of myth against the Enlightenment.

Despite the textual immanence of Gadamer's reading of Plato, his audience must have been all too aware of the fascist present with its censorship, persecution, exile and expatriation. When this lecture was held in January 1934, the burning of books, the symbolic high point of the 'action against the non-German spirit', had taken place only six months before.

Taken as a whole, the lecture and its context are rich with interdiscursive implications and allusions. Together they provide a hermeneutic horizon which is congruent with the ideal self-understanding of National Socialism as a political decision to 'renew' the state after the 'decay' of the Weimar Republic. Drawing explicitly on the politicized reading of Plato which valued his thought as a 'resolute expression of decision ... directed against the entire political and spiritual culture of his age' (12), rather than emphasizing his status as a 'metaphysician of the theory of ideas' (12), Gadamer chose to discuss the theme of the expulsion of the poets — a theme which seemed to be given in advance by the times.

When Gadamer demanded of his educated and cultured audience that they respect the expulsion of the poets as a decision made within the framework of the founding of the state, he indirectly attacked the reservation and scepticism about the burning of books which was widespread amongst the humanist elite. The burning of books was not only an action against the so-called enemies of the state, but also affected authors who belonged to the cultural bourgeoisie itself. Alongside books by Marxists, pacifists and left-wing intellectuals such as Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Tucholsky, Carl von Ossietzky, Erich Maria Remarque and Franz Kafka, flames also consumed the works of writers like Thomas Mann, Friedrich Gundolf, Arnold and Stefan Zweig, and the Catholic pacifist Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster. Parallel with the attack against thinkers on the Left there was also a second front of 'action against the non-German spirit'. In Goebbels' language, the so-called aesthetic humanism of the enlightened liberal bourgeoisie revealed an attitude of 'non-involvement' and 'standing to one side'. In this respect, the burning of books could be understood as a warning against 'inner emigration'.

In Alfred Baeumler's inaugural lecture, which was originally planned as a speech to accompany the burning of books, the critique of the ideal of a harmonious personality and of the 'aesthetic attitude' entertained by the highly educated took on a key role. Baeumler's critique of the personality ideal of the cultured reappears — in almost exactly the same words in Gadamer's lecture. His interpretation of Plato's notion of paideia is directed against the 'humanist ideal of the "harmonious personality"' (18).

Gadamer seeks to make this critique of aesthetic humanism plausible to his humanist audience by constructing it out of their most coveted cultural sources. He makes Plato's paideia into 'the opposite of that which the Greeks themselves and we as their humanist successors conceive under the terms "education" and "culture"' (18).
As can be shown in greater detail, Gadamer constructed an interpretative framework for the contemporary situation in Germany which, at the same time, allowed Plato’s critique of the poets to be understood in a manner which simultaneously articulated the self-understanding of the present. As a result, the passages in which Gadamer, together with Plato, argues for the unconditioned validity of authority over and against the sophistic conception of the laws of the state can be seen as a grave and unambiguous response to National Socialism in the period of its consolidation. Central here is the demand for a new *paideia* which was called upon to shape the youths into the guardians of the new state and to help them to resist the seductions of the sophistic spirit to which they may be exposed. In this way, a new form of subjectivity was to be developed which – without the recognition of basic human rights – was to bring the interior of the state into agreement with its external form. This achievement can only be made visible, however, when the meaning and scope of the topos of the sophists (or the sophistical), as well as the critique of the Enlightenment, is understood not only in terms of the history of ideas but as a concrete and stigmatized way of representing the enemies of the state under National Socialism.

By drawing upon all the available material, in which Gadamer’s voice is but one amongst many, we can establish the following points:

1. The genesis of this multiform interpretation of Plato was not determined by extra-academic impulses or by some sort of *Weltanschaung*, but arose at the centre of academic discourse itself and was unconditionally asserted as part of the scientific canon. Popular interpretations of Plato drew upon these approaches and sought to make them productive in their own way.

2. At the same time, however, certain interpretations of Plato’s *Seventh Letter* and of Plato’s unwritten secret doctrine secured exclusive access to the truth for the academic elite under National Socialism. By identifying hidden ‘reserves of meaning’ in the Platonic material, they were able to distinguish their own reading from the ‘simple message’ contained in the popular image of Plato.²⁴

3. The topos of interpreting the *Republic* as an ideal task which is yet to be fulfilled allowed the possibility of conceiving new ways of actualizing this task under National Socialism as it developed through its various stages. This is something which can be shown in an exemplary way in the case of Gadamer. The traditional reading of the *Seventh Letter* as an expression of Plato’s disappointment at the impossibility of realizing his project of a proper ordering of the state could be functionalized in a new way with the occurrence of ‘processes of disappointment’ over certain unwelcome developments under National Socialism.

**The cure for the unhealthy condition of the state: Gadamer in the SS state**

Gadamer’s essay ‘Plato’s Educational State’ was published in 1942 as part of a collection of texts whose purpose was to document the contribution made by classical philology to the ‘human sciences as part of the war effort’. In the intervening period Gadamer had become firmly established as a professor in Leipzig. In 1977 he himself described this text as ‘a sort of alibi’²⁵ without providing any further explanation. In fact, Gadamer adopts an unexpected tone in this essay. He appears to resist becoming caught up in the general enthusiasm generated by the triumphal march of the German military forces. The posture of ‘German strength’ which had informed the lecture on Herder, given in 1941 to imprisoned French officers, is no longer in evidence. Instead, Gadamer takes up a pensive attitude and appears to want to direct a word of warning to the ‘present’ through a reading of Plato. The theme which is treated under the title of ‘Plato’s Educational State’ is the unsuspicious, familiar postulate of the ‘philosopher king’: that is, the idea that ‘the philosophers lead the rulers and the rulers are taught by the philosophers how to rule’.²⁶ This theme, however, harbours a certain explosive force.

Gadamer presents Plato here as someone who is disillusioned with the dictatorship which has taken over from Athenian democracy. He quotes whole passages from the *Seventh Letter* in which Plato raises impassioned complaints at the general moral decay under the rule of ‘tyranny’. In order to put an end to this decay Plato advocates ‘a reform of unheard of proportions’ (317). For Gadamer, it is the Plato who criticizes and admonishes the tyrants of Athens and, through Socrates, seeks to show them the way to reform who provides the guiding thread by which the *Republic* is to be interpreted.²⁷ The shift of emphasis involved in this image of Plato is remarkable. Gadamer’s Plato of 1934 was someone who had made the expulsion of the poets and the education of the guardians into a condition of the founding of the state. The hermeneutic horizon within which Plato is now presented is ‘the decay of the state under tyranny’.

²²
The contemporary horizon for this reading of Plato was given by the restructuring of the National Socialist ruling apparatus which took place at the start of the war. The apparatus of repression was built up and the SS state began to take shape. With the deterioration of the war situation this reorganization allowed the ideological forces of cohesion on the 'inner front' to slacken and the ideological incorporation of the individual to break down.

The general change of mood was not restricted to the conservative and academic elites. Within the philosophical domain there was a proliferation of proposals for an inner reform of fascism based on readings of Plato, Hobbes, Machiavelli and Frederick the Great. The cases of Eduard Spranger, Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt belong here. Almost all the projects which became philosophically effective in 1933 sought to establish a normative foundation for developing various conceptions of an ideal fascism. Against the background of the destabilizing effects of the war, these projects consequently served to procure stability and order. This can be elucidated by looking at the model of society which Gadamer sought to distil from the Republic.

Under the heading of 'dikaiosyne' (a term which is translated as 'Gerechtigkeit', or 'justice') Gadamer opposes, as he had in 1934, the idea of the Platonic state, the state as 'an order of classes' (326), to the concept of tyranny and the sophistic conception of the state. Dikaiosyne is used to describe government in the form of the general interest. Ideally, the rulers should use their competence in planning and leadership unselfishly - that is, for the good of all, rather than in the service of their own interests. The military uses its weapons in defence of the whole. For the rulers and those that are ruled, however, the 'state as a whole' (327) presents itself in a different way. Because their special competence resides in leadership, the rulers have a position in the 'division of labour' which binds them immediately to the 'universal': 'Every form of work is indeed there for the use of all who need it. Nonetheless, the work of a political leader or a warrior is not merely a technical skill like any other but is immediately related to the interest of the state as a whole' (327). If in this way, in a formulation which Gadamer takes up from Hegel, 'the universal prevails' (329), then the rulers can rely upon the 'sophrosyne' or virtue of those who are ruled to guarantee that their decisions will meet with agreement. In opposition to real, 'tyrannical' fascism, Gadamer describes an ideal fascism, a stratified community of the people brought about through the 'reconciliation of the three classes to form a single unity' (328).

The system of government which Gadamer derives from Plato's ideas is only conceivable as an authoritarian state with a highly centralized concentration of power. He clearly rejects the conception of 'democratically' formed decision-making procedures: 'The disruption of this order of the classes is the real political misfortune, that is, the destruction of the structure of government as this became visible in the decay of the Attic democracy' (327). The concentration of power in the hands of the 'governing classes' has its price: there is no guarantee, no internal power, which can prevent the 'governing classes' from establishing a tyrannical government. There is a permanent danger that the governing class will succumb to the 'temptations of power' and that the 'order of the state will be destroyed' (329). In regard to this problem, Plato's doctrine of the soul can be seen as a doctrine of how the state can become diseased through the actions of its rulers. The form of 'legality' (324) transforms the power of leadership into the 'legal force of the state', and its government into the 'administration of the power of the state' (326). Such government is legitimate government which is able to survive situations of crisis without transmuting into tyranny. Since it occupies a position in the soul of those it rules over, it can count on their 'inner attunement', even 'in proximity to possible discord' (329).

My thesis is that this ideal of an authoritative government represents a reaction to the 'tyrannical' transformations which fascism underwent during the war. Gadamer's call for 'a cure for the unhealthy state' is closely related to the various proposals for providing the National Socialist system and its military policies with a 'new' basis, as these were developed within the upper ranks of the government, military and business. Proposals for an inner reorganization of the state were not limited to the Potsdam faction of National Socialism, whose plans for transforming the 'Führer' state into an 'enlightened' monarchy resulted in the military putsch of 20 July 1944. An impetus for reform was also generated from within the National Socialist Party itself. Paradigmatic here is the critique which was openly articulated by Hans Frank, one of the foremost lawyers of the National Socialist Party. From the example of Frank's attempt to curb the development towards tyranny we can see the range and variety of social forces which informed Gadamer's interpretation of Plato. In stark contrast is the option pursued by Carl Schmitt, who in 1938 sought to legitimize the establishment of a total police state.
through recourse to the work of Hobbes. Whilst both the national conservative opposition and certain factions within the National Socialist Party sought to discover a way of securing the relationship between 'the leadership and the people' by respecting the 'emotional and psychological constitution of the individual', Schmitt outdid these suggestions – amongst which Gadamer's is to be included – with his model of tyranny.

In summary, the results of this investigation reveal the way in which Gadamer was able to identify with the national conservative faction of National Socialism without, however, publicly declaring his opposition to its more popular forms. The contemporary relevance of his interpretations of Plato enabled him to construct bridges which allowed various connections to be drawn without ever needing to state them explicitly. The hermeneutic art of allusion which Gadamer invokes in his critique of Carl Schmitt's interpretation of *Hamlet* is also relevant to Gadamer's own work: 'In fact, the reality of a play is constituted by leaving an indefinite space around its theme.'

In the end, we can agree with Jan Ross's evaluation that 'Gadamer's virtuoso ability' consisted 'in adapting the subject of thought to altered circumstances and, above all, to the circumstance of permanent change.' After 1945 a new interpretation of Aristotle was being called for by means of which civil society could be reconstituted out of the ancient *polis*, and here, too, Gadamer discreetly took part.

If, as Ross claims, it is 'Gadamer's secret' and at the same time 'his dangerous inheritance to have smuggled the great philosophical tradition from Plato to Heidegger into the home of the prosaic Bundesrepublik', then this secret demands a new reading of *Truth and Method*, one which finally begins to examine more closely the origin of such smuggled goods. For with this work the hermeneutic experience garnered by Gadamer under National Socialism finally attained the prominent status of a theory of interpretation with a claim to universality.

Translated by Jason Gaiger

**Notes**

Translator's note: The two principal texts discussed by Orozco (‘Plato and the Poets’ and ‘Plato’s Educational State’) are translated by P. Christopher Smith in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT and London, 1980. Since both these essays are quite short, it did not seem necessary to provide a cross-reference for each reference to the German original.


5. ‘The goal of all attempts at reaching understanding is agreement concerning the subject matter. Hence the task of hermeneutics has always been to establish agreement where there was none or where it had been disturbed in some way’ (Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik (1960), Tübingen, 1986, p. 276; subsequent page references appear in parenthesis in the text).

6. It was Jürgen Habermas who critically questioned this hermeneutic postulate, thereby initiating a debate which introduced the 'claim to justification' as the ineliminable foundation of a theory of interpretation.


8. *Philosophische Lehrjahre. Eine Rückschau*, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p. 57. Research into the circumstances of Gadamer’s call to Leipzig reveals that he was promoted in place of the university’s preferred choice, the NSDAP candidate Theodor Haering, an ordinarius lecturer in Tübingen, on the insistence of Professor Heinrich Harmjanz, who was the minister responsible for the social sciences section (Department W6) in the ministry of education. Gadamer’s name occupied second place on the list, even before that of the SS ‘echelon candidate’ Hans Lipps (see J.Z. Müller, *The Other God that Failed. Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton NJ, p. 319). Control of Department W6, which to all intents and purposes was ‘already something like an SS post’ (Helmut Heiber, *Walter Frank und sein Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschland*, Stuttgart, 1966, p. 649), was given to the SS lobbyist Harmjanz in 1937.


Spranger was still able to identify ‘much that was irreproachable, indeed praiseworthy, in National Socialism (ibid., p. 69), such as the ‘Reichsberufsfelddampf’’, the ‘Arbeitsdienstpflicht’ and the ‘NS Landjahr’.


11. See Thomas Laugstein: ‘Die protestantische Ethik und


23. This is not to say that Gadamer is quoting Beuamler directly. Nonetheless, this coincidence is not wholly contingent. It demarcates an identical critical front. The ideal of the harmonious personality was derived polemically from a formulation of Schiller’s and was widely used under National Socialism as a cipher to criticize the ‘apolitical intellectual’. Gadamer’s employment of this term represents a classic example of what Michel Pêcheux has termed a ‘cross-discourse’.

24. In the Introduction to Platon's Lehre von der Wahrheit ((1931/32, 1940) Frankfurt am Main, p. 201) Martin Heidegger indicated his own approach to the question of Plato’s secret doctrine: ‘The “doctrine” of a thinker is that which remains unsaid in what is said, that to which man is exposed in order that he might expend himself on it.’ Heidegger’s modern interpretation of the analogy of the cave addresses the reader by mobilizing both the hermeneutic force of the esoteric and a notion of truth as something which can only be revealed. Manfred Frank (Stil in der Philosophie, Stuttgart, 1992, p. 64) has described this phenomenon in a very clear way: ‘What can be “shown” in the utterances of philosophy but cannot be “said”, that is, what remains silent – can always remain silent profoundly.’ Devoted disciples are attracted by the realm of the unspoken in that they imagine themselves to be among to the select few who stand in the presence of a truth which can never be grasped discursively.


27. Gadamer’s various interpretations of the Seventh Letter reveal the variety of possible readings to which this letter is exposed. In the texts of 1934 and 1942 he discusses the first part of the letter, in which Plato provides a narrative account of his political and philosophical development. Gadamer’s influential article ‘Dialectic and Sophism in Plato’s Seventh Letter’, dating from 1964, contains a shift in emphasis in so far as he devotes his attention to that part of the letter in which Plato addresses the question concerning ‘the means by which knowledge comes about’ (‘Dialektik und Sophistik im siebten Platonischen Brief’). Vortrag gehalten vor der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.- Histor. Klasse, Abh. 2. Heidelberg (1964), in Griechische Philosophie I. Gesammelte Werke, Tübingen, 1985, p. 92). This essay is a meticulous philological treatise which is radically different from the pieces discussed above in its mode of presentation, style and form of argument. It is also interesting because Gadamer discusses the political reading of Plato at a markedly discreet distance. In the tradition of the Tübingen school of classical philology, he writes: ‘We are concerned to investigate the responses of Aristotle and his contemporaries [to the dialogues – T.O.]. The more we engage with Plato’s philosophy in this way, the more one-sided seems the approach to Plato’s dialogues which was pursued in Germany in the first half of this century. Either the “political Plato” was pushed to the fore, as in the work of Wilamowitz, Friedländer and – in an extreme form – Hildebrandt. Or, with reference to the Existenzphilosophie of the twenties, prominence was
given to the “existential Plato” and the doctrine of ideas was stripped of its dogmatic form” (ibid., p. 91).


29. See Müller, The Other God that Failed, pp. 267ff.


31. It remains an open question whether Gadamer sought to indicate his proximity to the Kieler school with this discreet reference. According to Bernd Rüthers (Entartetes Recht. Rechtslehren und Kronjuristen im Dritten Reich, Munich, 1994, p. 43), this school did not regard the state as ‘a mere instrument of power for the party or for a “movement”’ (ibid.). In the tradition of Hegelian modes of thought, the state was ‘bound up with the incarnation of the idea of the ethical as a superpersonal form of “law” whose central content they sought to define in a national and racist way. The very notions of general law, penal law and individual rights represented normative limits upon the holders of power because of their connection with objective and fundamental legal values (justice, ethical life). The idea of the state and of “right” could not be instrumentalized at will. Nonetheless, the recourse to Hegel and to German Idealism could, theoretically, set limits to the misuse of the law and the state in the despotic arbitrariness of the administration of the law and the employment of the police’ (ibid.). Laugstein has also drawn attention to the functionalizing of the Hegelian universal within this school: ‘the Hegelian discourse of the “universal” in which everything individual knows itself to be sublated was ideally suited to consecrating as a higher necessity the removal of the basic rights of the individual’ (Philosophieverhältnisse im deutschen Faschismus, p. 175).

32. Martin Broszat (Der Staat Hitlers, Munich, 1983, pp. 412f.) documents a statement made to the minister of justice by Frank’s representative in the National Socialist Juristenbund on 22 August 1935. There he expressed ‘serious concern about the state of legal protection in Germany’ (ibid.). He referred to the fact ‘that the refusal of legal support in cases of preventative detention’ by the Gestapo stood ‘in contradiction to the natural sense of law of the northern peoples’ and ‘encouraged calumny’. Further, ‘the activities of the Gestapo – like the Russian Tschecha – were outside of the sphere of law’ and ‘purely despotic’. Frank later took a leading role in the genocide of the Jews. He was condemned to death by the Nuremberg military tribunal.

33. ‘Exkurse II’ (1960), in Ergänzungen und Register zu Wahrheit und Methode, Tübingen, 1986, p. 380. Gadamer criticizes Schmitt’s discussion of the play’s contemporary political relevance, arguing that Schmitt sought ‘to read Hamlet like a roman-à-clef’ (ibid., p. 379). Gadamer maintains programmatically that, ‘The more that remains open, the more freely the process of understanding succeeds, that is, the process of transposing what is known in the play into one’s own world and, of course, into the world of one’s political experience as well’ (ibid., p. 380).

34. ‘Schmuggel. Gadamers Geheimnis’.

35. Gadamer provided the introduction and commentary for a translation of Aristotle’s Metaphysics which was published in 1948.

36. ‘Schmuggel. Gadamers Geheimnis’.

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