

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 1997

Volume 25 Number 2

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libraries and all other institutions \$48
students (four-year limit) \$18
Single copies available.
Postage outside U.S.: Canada \$4.50 extra;
elsewhere \$5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks
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Payments: in U.S. dollars AND payable by
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Composition by Eastern Composition, Inc.,
Binghamton, N.Y. 13904 U.S.A.
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co.,
Lancaster, PA 17603 U.S.A.

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Review Essay

On Catherine Zuckert's *Postmodern Platos* and the Strauss-Gadamer Debate

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Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 351 pages, \$19.95 paper.

Postmodern Platos offers a comparative philosophical-political analysis of Gadamer, Strauss, and Derrida in terms of their Platonic studies and those of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Thus the thesis of this book is that the study of Plato provides a touchstone whereby we may come to grips with contemporary thought in its hermeneutical, Straussian, and deconstructive tendencies respectively. This thesis is attractive because, as Professor Zuckert sets out to show, Plato may plausibly be viewed as a primary interlocutor for each of these thinkers, directly or indirectly, in their own ways. The study entails two claims. One is that turning, or returning, to Plato was important if not fundamental to each of these thinkers. The other is that their studies of Plato provide a common ground from which these several thinkers may be compared and contrasted among each other. How do their differing emphases on Plato, and various Platonic studies, affect and/or reflect their thinking and the differences among them.

As an organizing principle, a study of the study—the *Rezeptionsgeschichte*—of Plato is not only attractive but also daunting, and leads in many directions. This is a book of wide-ranging erudition whose arguments are backed up with numerous references to contemporary scholarly literature. It is a book that explains positions, takes sides, and comes to conclusions.

The positions it explains, endorses, and rejects are intellectually complex. In the end, however, for me *Postmodern Platos* was an unsatisfying book. I am not persuaded that Zuckert's premise has worked. It seems to me that the first difficulty with her comparative approach to philosophical analysis is that the attempt to find common ground in various Plato studies can only work to the extent that those studies prove to be commensurable, both in regard to Plato and to the effect of Plato on the different thinkers' thinking. To find such commensurability may be possible, but at the least it is a major challenge. Zuckert argues

in terms of comparison and contrast, and I am not always persuaded that her comparisons are meaningful and her contrasts telling.

In part my hesitation about the thesis of *Postmodern Platos* has to do with the fact that what lend themselves to comparison are *positions*. Zuckert depicts Gadamer, Derrida, and Strauss as all taking such-and-such positions that agree or contrast with each other with regard to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Plato. Moreover, Zuckert champions a position of her own that is clearly "Straussian" in terms of both perspective and partisanship: She judges hermeneutics and deconstruction in terms of their compatibility with Strauss in regard to such issues as the relationship of philosophy and politics, the ancients and the moderns, and the heterogeneity of the whole. To have an identifiable approach to thinking is not in itself objectionable, but in *Postmodern Platos* I think that Zuckert's allegiance to a particular perspective or "school" leads her to dogmatic treatment despite the book's fluid style of argumentation. It seems to me that Zuckert has not taken sufficiently seriously the insight, which she herself stresses as early as page three, that philosophy is not reducible to a series of propositions. In her account that insight becomes another point of doctrine, another proposition that constitutes a position with which the various thinkers agree or disagree. I will discuss this doctrinaire tendency in more detail in the context of Zuckert's treatment of Gadamer.

I have another reservation about this book. In my opinion, the most prominent of her concluding positions is wrong. This position may be simply stated: Because Derrida and Strauss have a common belief in the heterogeneity of the whole, they share a realistic view of human, and consequently political, limitation that sets them apart from Gadamer, who bridges the gap between philosophy and politics in a facile way. In short, Derridean deconstruction, in Zuckert's analysis, is philosophically more profound, and closer to Straussian thought, than Gadamerian hermeneutics. This is by no means the only conclusion, and certainly does not reflect the only focus, of this remarkably ambitious and comprehensive project. It is a conclusion that Zuckert emphasizes, however, and it is likely to be the most influential conclusion of her study because it directs the interest of Straussians away from hermeneutics and towards deconstruction. Indeed, Zuckert goes out of her way to single out Gadamer for disapproval. In her book he is the weakest of the lot:

Because they argue that there is an irreducible conflict at the heart of things, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Strauss, and Derrida all provide more adequate accounts [than Gadamer] of the reasons human beings will never possess knowledge of the whole and why we will therefore continue to disagree and fight. (P. 270)

Because I believe this position is not only wrong but also intellectually and politically deleterious, the bulk of this review will be directed toward refuting it. With apologies for a certain one-sidedness of focus and critique, I will begin

with a comment about Zuckert's discussion of Heidegger and then move to her treatment of Gadamer. I will pass over her analysis of Nietzsche's Plato, which stresses, correctly I think, the fact that Nietzsche's concern is not to study the Platonic dialogues but to engage in a contest with Plato (p. 22). All of the other thinkers in *Postmodern Platos* address the dialogues hermeneutically. Consequently, it seems to me that Zuckert is on solid ground when she points to the influence not so much of Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato as of Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche (p. 31). About Derrida, of whom I know little, I will say little; and about Strauss, I will only claim what I can document in context of his disagreement with Gadamer.

Before turning to specific issues, I must mention a final problem. All too often I found Zuckert's endnotes unhelpful. Many of us, certainly including myself, tend to use scholarly notes as much for protection as elucidation, and it would be churlish of me to criticize Zuckert on such grounds. Nor do I wish to be overly pedantic about the use of notes. Yet at times her notes struck me as almost obfuscatory.

HOW DID PLATO INSPIRE HEIDEGGER?

One prominent place where I experienced this problem was the beginning of Zuckert's discussion of Heidegger. The first paragraph of her second chapter sets up the issue as follows:

Nietzsche was correct, Heidegger thought, when he declared not only that Western philosophy was fundamentally Platonism but also that this "metaphysical" tradition had come to an end. However, in responding to the nihilistic consequences of the end of philosophy by trying to reverse and, then, to overcome Platonism entirely, Nietzsche had maintained the same basic intellectual structure. In order truly to begin again, it was necessary to think the origin through more "originally." Each new stage of Heidegger's own thought thus began with a rereading of Plato. (P. 33)

This is a highly original and provocative interpretation, tying the essential development of Heidegger's own thought to his returns to Plato. How many such returns were there? Three, Zuckert explains in note 4, placed at the end of this paragraph. That note reads in full:

Following Otto Pöggeler, *Philosophie und Politik bei Heidegger* (Freiburg: Alber, 1972) and *The Path of Martin Heidegger's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities International Press, 1987), I divide Heidegger's thought into three periods. The way in which Heidegger began each new stage of his thought with a rereading of Plato has become clear only with the publication of his lectures. The lectures he gave on Plato's *Sophist* just before he wrote *Being and Time* were published in his *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 19 (1992); those he gave on the *Republic*

and the *Theatetus* in a course *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* in 1931 in GA, Band 34 (1988); the course he gave on *Parmenides* in 1942–43 (which included a lengthy discussion of the myth of Er) in GA, Band 54 (1982), trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rocewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). For a useful summary of Heidegger's statements on Plato, see Alain Boutot, *Heidegger et Platon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1987). (P. 284)

The importance of this note is that it establishes Zuckert's justification for her argument that returning to Plato was fundamental to Heidegger's thought. This is a bold thesis. Even the tripartite division is unconventional, Heidegger being usually divided into "earlier" and "later," separated by the "Turn" or *Kehre*. Her reference to two major books without any further specification is not entirely helpful. I have checked one of those references, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, and found that Pöggeler does speak of new beginnings, although he ties them to the Presocratics and Hölderlin.¹ That he provides a tripartite division of Heidegger's thought is not obvious, and more specific reference is necessary. I could find nothing about returning to Plato.

Of course, Zuckert doesn't claim that Pöggeler traces Heidegger's "new beginnings" to Plato. She only grounds the general idea of a tripartite division on Pöggeler. She seems to base Heidegger's returns to Plato on the three recently published lectures. However, merely to point to three Platonic studies is not to make the case that each marks a fresh return to Plato at crucial turning points in Heidegger's thought (a case that Zuckert also does not attempt to make in the course of her chapter). Pöggeler notes in the book just cited that Heidegger began work on Plato in the 1930–31 period that was only published in 1942, which indicates that Heidegger's studies of Plato are characterized more by continuity than "new beginnings" (p. 79). Moreover, the first part of the *Sophist* lecture was on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Heidegger famously looked at Plato through Aristotle's eyes), and his lectures entitled *Parmenides*, while indeed including, as Zuckert avers, a discussion of the myth of Er, concerned the Presocratic Parmenides, not the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides*; I am unaware of any substantive reason to single out the Platonic references as she does.² Even in these lectures, not to speak of his corpus as a whole, Heidegger arguably scanted Plato. This renders Zuckert's division of Heidegger's thought into Platonically inspired "new beginnings" dubious at best. Is she actually claiming these lectures as its basis? So far the note has not provided the argument or evidence we need, and all that is left is a reference, again totally general, to a book by Alain Boutot on Heidegger and Plato. Zuckert only claims that this book provides a "useful summary," not that it buttresses her thesis. In fact Boutot not only makes no claims in his book about Heideggerian "returns" to Plato, but spends the first chapter commenting on Heidegger's remarkable lack of interest in Plato compared with other major philosophical figures.³ I agree

that it seems to be a worthy book, but have no idea how it constitutes, or where it contains, the “useful summary” to which Zuckert refers.

But I am being captious: of course the latter reference is merely informational. My point is that the note fails to add up to a coherent whole that does the job one might reasonably expect it to do, even though its disparate parts may have validity on their own. In my view, this makes Zuckert’s thesis about Heidegger’s returns to Plato and their import for his thought less attractive. In a conference paper that constituted an earlier version of this chapter, Zuckert spoke in this endnote of dividing Heidegger’s thought into “three *basic* periods” (emphasis added); while taking out the adjective for the book softens her claim, it does not begin to solve my difficulties with the note.⁴

This returns us to the issue of Zuckert’s use of Platonic studies as a common denominator. This organizing principle creates a need to focus on aspects of Plato these thinkers are concerned with in common, and it is possible that some of those aspects are not as intrinsically important to one thinker as to another. This, I think, is also true of Zuckert’s general claim about Plato and Heidegger: She wants Plato to be central to Heidegger. Actually, however, he is not, except in his well-known role as the villain in Heidegger’s history of the forgetfulness of Being, which is a separate issue.⁵ Therefore Zuckert creates a theoretical Procrustean bed of Platonic inspiration, into which Heidegger is ushered with not exactly a false, but certainly a misleading scholarly note.

ZUCKERT’S CRITIQUE OF GADAMER

I turn now to the part of *Postmodern Platos* that most disturbs me, Zuckert’s attack on Gadamer. The main line of Zuckert’s argument may be summarized as follows. Her understanding is that Gadamer insists on the fundamental continuity or homogeneity of the whole, through the mediation of the Christian “word” or Greek *logos*. Gadamer’s dialectic permits a synthesis, denied by Strauss, “between human being and nature or human being and god” (p. 261). This means that in principle philosophy provides a stable basis for a “truly human community” (p. 257), and all conflict is resolvable in the progress of history. At the end of her chapter on “Gadamer’s Path,” Zuckert concludes that quite simply, “Gadamer is fundamentally a liberal” (p. 103). The particular liberal weakness with which Zuckert charges Gadamer is that he entirely fails to explain human conflict and war:

The problem with Gadamerian hermeneutics, both Strauss and Derrida point out in different ways, is that it does not take account of the enduring conflict and irrationality we encounter in the world. According to Gadamer, everything can in principle be articulated, that is, there is nothing in itself or necessarily *alogos*. According to Gadamer, all “horizons” or understandings can in principle be fused;

there are no unbridgeable rifts or differences. If Gadamer were correct, wars would not be necessary. They would merely be products of historical misunderstandings that can, in principle, be overcome. (P. 270)

This critique of Gadamer turns on his concept of “fusion of horizons.” Thus Zuckert is sympathetic to Derrida’s objections to “rationalizing the world,” which is what she sees Gadamer as doing, and agrees with Derrida’s well-known attack on Gadamer:

Does not the ‘good will’ presupposed by the attempt to come to a mutual understanding, agreement, or ‘fusion of horizons’ reveal a form of will, indeed will to power, [Derrida] asks Gadamer. (P. 264)⁶

In Zuckert’s interpretation the “fusion of horizons” is, in short, both central to Gadamer’s hermeneutical thought and profoundly mistaken. It “covers over the fundamental differences” (p. 267). As is appropriate to the organizing principle of her study, Zuckert traces this critical error directly to Gadamer’s reading of Plato:

Plato did not explicitly articulate an historical account of human understanding. But, Gadamer thought, read in light of the “indirect tradition,” Plato’s dialogues provided an ontological and epistemological foundation for his own doctrine of the fusion of horizons by showing the arithmological relation of all the differentiated parts to an indeterminate, ever expanding whole. (P. 100)

In focusing on the concept of the “fusion of horizons” as Gadamer’s central philosophical misstep, Zuckert is developing a criticism that was mentioned by Strauss.⁷ I think that she is misreading this concept, as Gadamer thought Strauss was doing (*CSG*, p. 9). The heart of the matter, if I am right, is that Zuckert confuses or conflates phenomenological description and metaphysical doctrine. Here, I submit, her previously mentioned doctrinal tendency leads her insensibly to error. “Fusion of horizons” is not meant to support a theory in the sense of a doctrine of continuity or universal communication. It is meant as a phenomenological description of the kind of connection that experientially takes place when we understand something. In Heideggerian terms, it describes the “event of truth” in its occurrence or “happening.” Thus it emphatically does not entail that to Gadamer wars are mere “misunderstandings” that could be eliminated with a healthy dose of sweet reason.

In fact Gadamer addresses the question of war directly:

In the kind of being whose needs and goals have become complex and even contradictory, there is a need for enlightened choice, just deliberation, and right subordination under common ends. . . . [T]he stabilization of norms of conduct . . . arises out of the background of a fundamental instability of human nature unique in

the realm of nature. Its most mysterious expression is the phenomenon of war, which has stirred the particular interest of contemporary ethnology and prehistory. It seems to be the strangest discovery of this twisted nature called man, and it appears to be a contradiction within nature itself to have produced a type of being that can turn against itself in such a way that in a planned and organized fashion, it attacks, destroys, or maims fellow members of its own species.⁸

Thus any “stable basis” that philosophy, or rational thinking, can provide for human community is on a foundation of what could be termed the “natural instability” of human beings—a foundation, that is, of the limits of *logos* up against human “nature.” I find here as elsewhere in Gadamer the keenest sense of human limitation, of a finitude no less intrinsic to his thinking than to that of Heidegger or, for that matter, Strauss or Derrida.

Zuckert’s claim that Gadamer homogenizes the whole to the point of mediation or synthesis between man and god by way of language, reasoning, or *logos*—and hence, conceptual thought (see p. 16)—strikes me as wrong. To mention only one place where Gadamer contradicts this view, in a rather short interview about Strauss published in *Interpretation* he points no less than three times to the limitations of conceptual thought: first, that the divine cannot be conceived; second, that art presents a claim to truth that is beyond conceptual thinking; and third, that it is impossible to conceptualize the idea of the good.⁹ How then can one criticize Gadamer for effecting a “synthesis” between “man and god” that is untrue to the insight into human finitude?

Positions are answers, and Zuckert’s overriding concern with positions has led her, I believe, to ignore the central role of questions, rather than answers, in Gadamer’s hermeneutics. I say this in full awareness of her statement that “Gadamer remains true to Heidegger in emphasizing the priority of the question (as opposed to the answer or doctrine)” (p. 83). But a “synthesis”—which is a kind of position—constitutes an answer. Zuckert convicts Gadamer of dogmatism, it seems to me, by virtue of dogmatizing him first. To recognize that somebody says something about their thinking is not the same as recognizing that something in their thought. *Postmodern Platos* actually contains a fairly lengthy discussion of dogmatic philosophy (pp. 116 ff.), but that is in context of explaining how Strauss transcended the problem and certainly does not provide any prophylactic for Zuckert’s own argument.

Perhaps I am wrong. It is possible to persuade me of the error of my views on such matters with textual analysis. Zuckert takes her bearings from Gadamer’s well-known view that “*Being that can be understood is language*” (quoted at p. 94, her emphasis). She explains:

Language is not merely the ‘house’ of Being, as Heidegger had maintained; it is not merely the structure in which intelligible existence becomes manifest and is preserved by means of a ‘sheltering’ limitation [note 63]. Language itself is the

medium as well as the locus of intelligible existence [note 64]. There is no mysterious source or ground that is in itself unintelligible [note 65].

To say that language is the locus of all intelligibility is to see that all intelligibility is essentially historical. That is to say not only that what is intelligible, the worlds in which human beings live, continually and gradually change over time, but also that this intelligibility is always limited or finite.

In disagreeing with Heidegger about language, Gadamer thus necessarily disagrees with his mentor about the character and meaning of history. . . . (Pp. 94–95)

Let us stop here and ask what we have learned about this putative disagreement between Gadamer and Heidegger over language. I for one am not sure. Does Heidegger deny that “all intelligibility is essentially historical”? His concept of the discontinuous “epochs of Being,” to which Zuckert refers elsewhere, would seem to argue the opposite. What about this word “essentially”? Does this mean that Gadamer’s “historicism” precludes the possibility of transhistorical understanding? Zuckert herself denies that. Indeed, her critique of Gadamer for finding continuity where Heidegger saw the more fundamental role of discontinuity implies, if anything, the opposite. Nor is it clear, at least to this reader, what Zuckert means by maintaining that whereas language for Heidegger is a “structure” and “limitation,” for Gadamer it is a “medium” and “locus.” I turn to the notes for elucidation. Note 63 cites a scholar of Gadamer who noted the similarity between Gadamer and Heidegger on language and criticizes that scholar for failing to note the difference as well.¹⁰ Note 64 offers a speculation by Zuckert that Heidegger would have wanted to criticize Gadamer for subjectivizing language, then refutes that speculative criticism by pointing to the similarity in their views of language as conversation. In Heidegger’s case, she mentions, this view was developed by way of Hölderlin. She doesn’t mention that this exact point about conversation, including the reference to Heidegger’s use of Hölderlin, is clearly made on the cited page of the work that she has criticized in the previous note.

Note 65, however, promises some light. This is the reference for her statement that to Gadamer “there is no mysterious source or ground that is itself unintelligible.” Note 65 consists of a quotation from Gadamer to the effect that his thinking, like Heidegger’s, was based upon finitude and followed the later Heidegger’s “turn,” albeit in a direction inspired by the Platonic dialogues rather than Hölderlin’s poetic *mythos*. In citing this as evidence of a crucial theoretical or doctrinal difference between Gadamer and Heidegger, Zuckert disregards Gadamer’s statement later in the same paragraph that his different “direction” nonetheless “corresponded with the intention of Heidegger’s thought to the degree that he knew himself to be *unterwegs zur Sprache*” (the title of a major and well-known work of the later Heidegger).¹¹ If we decline to disregard that clarification, it seems to me much more plausible to interpret Gadamer’s

statement as referring not to the supposed intelligibility of the whole, but to the “translation” of Heidegger into a “more academic medium” that was, as Gadamer agrees with Strauss, his purpose (*CSG*, p. 8).

Thus, while on first reading the note might seem to support (if not to elucidate) her argument, looked at more carefully, it does not. Not that her overall argument, whatever it is, is thereby refuted; this is a long book, and I have no doubt that Zuckert could point to other passages in support. This particular passage, however, has not helped, and the slippery argument and even more slippery use of notes further illustrates my difficulties with the scholarly apparatus of *Postmodern Platos*.

The issue of continuity in Gadamer is complex, however, and Zuckert has backing in the literature for taking Gadamer to task for papering over the fundamental differences. Robert Bernasconi, in a well-known article that she cites, makes that case from a point of view sympathetic to Derridean deconstruction. Bernasconi’s argument is beyond the scope of this review and I have addressed it elsewhere.¹² What I find noteworthy in the present context is the fact that Strauss is animated by an identical concern. Where Zuckert would put Strauss with Derrida and Heidegger, one might more plausibly put Strauss with Gadamer against Derrida and Heidegger: Strauss no less than Gadamer took the issue of historical and philosophical continuity to be central. But Strauss did not call the problem by that name. He called it “radical historicism.” As Zuckert points out:

On 26 June 1950, [Strauss] wrote to Kojève: “I have once again been dealing with historicism, that is to say, with Heidegger, the only radical historicist, and I believe I see some light.” (P. 308, note 7)

This light necessarily permits the continuity of meaning through time and across cultures. Zuckert makes much of Strauss’s agreement with Heidegger, against Gadamer, that the crisis of our times is unprecedented and requires radically new thinking (p. 104). But in fact for Strauss that crisis leads precisely to the return to Plato celebrated in *Postmodern Platos*, and his affirmation of the ability to make transhistorical judgments of right and wrong is emphatically shared by Gadamer.¹³ Thus Strauss’s recognition of crisis, although indeed shared with Heidegger, leads him not to “radical historicism,” but towards the affirmation of continuity in meaning. Regardless of any theoretical disagreements about hermeneutics, this common project decisively unites Strauss and Gadamer against the loss of meaning in deconstructionist postmodernity. Zuckert does bring up this fundamental criticism of Derridean thought (p. 263). Yet she fails, it seems to me, to take proper account of it in her choice of Derrida over Gadamer vis-à-vis Strauss.

Moreover, I have a problem with Zuckert’s view of Gadamer on Plato. In order to find the common ground in Plato, Zuckert has focused on certain

Platonic dialogues, specifically the *Republic*, to the exclusion of others, because that was the focus of Strauss. But this leads her astray in regard to Gadamer, whose work on the *Republic* is contained only in two early essays.¹⁴ Although she also relies on another essay, “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic” (*ibid.*, pp. 124–55), she does little more than mention (p. 72), and certainly does not feature in her analysis, Gadamer’s much more prominent Platonic studies, specifically of the *Philebus*, that provide the real basis for his thinking.

Moreover, even within her selective focus I had difficulties. I offer the following as a final example of my problems with the scholarly apparatus of *Postmodern Platos*. Zuckert explains what she perceives to be a fundamental contrast between Strauss and Gadamer as follows:

Under the influence of his teacher Heidegger, Gadamer began insisting in the 1920s that Socratic philosophy depicted in the Platonic dialogues constitutes a way of life, not merely the last step in the acquisition of knowledge or science. In direct opposition to Heidegger, however, Gadamer argued, like Nietzsche, that this way of life was essentially moral. In contrast to Nietzsche, however, Gadamer regarded the “noble lie” as merely one of the indications that the description of the “city in speech” was not intended to constitute a blueprint or program to be literally instituted. [note 65] Gadamer did not, in other words, make the relation between truth-seeking and morality or politics a central concern the way his acquaintance Strauss did. (P. 31)

I am not sure how the last sentence puts the previous argument into “other words.” Here we have a concrete point of reference, however, where I can see for myself what Gadamer says about the Platonic noble lie, compare the text with what Zuckert says about what Gadamer says about the Platonic noble lie, and decide whether I agree that it provides evidence for her conclusion about the difference between Gadamer and Strauss.

Note 65 (p. 283) consists of a reference to the 1941 Gadamer essay “Plato’s Educational State”—the whole essay. Turning to this essay, I find to the contrary of Zuckert’s claim, that the connection between philosophy and morality or politics is central to Gadamer’s analysis:

. . . we know that [Plato’s] entire life’s work is rooted in the conclusion to which he came, that there is an indissoluble tie between political and philosophical activity. Thus like any other of Plato’s writings, the *Republic* belongs not only to his philosophical but also to his political life, and its special character must be defined starting with that fact. (“Plato’s Educational State,” p. 73)

And again:

Only justice can bring about a solid and enduring state and only he who is a friend to himself is able to win the solid friendship of others. These two statements contain the whole of Plato’s political philosophy. They establish the essential

connection between state and soul, on the one hand, and politics and philosophy, on the other.

Now, I am willing to admit that these two particular quotations leave open the possibility that Gadamer makes, or finds in Plato, too simple or too smooth a connection between “truth-seeking and morality or politics,” which, as we have seen, Zuckert elsewhere contends. But I do believe that they constitute evidence of a genuine concern with the relation in question, for this is not a place where Gadamer takes issue with Plato.

But what about the “noble lie”? It is perfectly plausible that Gadamer would discuss the noble lie in terms of the impracticality of Plato’s educational state, as Zuckert asserts. I doubt that such a discussion would constitute evidence for her conclusion that Gadamer is not as concerned with the relation of philosophy and the city as was Strauss, but remain open to the possibility. But where is the discussion? I read, and reread, “Plato’s Educational State” while looking for any mention of anything even remotely resembling the noble lie—and found nothing. The word “lie” (*Lüge*) does not even appear in this essay. Very well, I said to myself, let me not be pedantic. It only stands to reason that Gadamer would write about the noble lie *somewhere*—Zuckert has merely shown herself mortal, and confused citations. I decided to hunt this reference down. I turned to the ace up my sleeve, an electronic copy of Gadamer’s *Gesammelte Werke*, and looked up every occurrence of *Lüge* and compound words containing *Lüge*.¹⁵ In the *Gesammelte Werke*, lies are discussed in eleven essays, in contexts including art, Odysseus, Nietzsche, and semantics—but, amazingly enough, there is no treatment of the Platonic noble lie at all. Yet Zuckert repeats the point later on, with greater emphasis:

Unlike Gadamer, who takes the explicitly unrealizable character of the educational prescriptions, *especially* the “noble lie” in which they culminate, simply as evidence that Socrates is not putting forth a practical program, Strauss thinks the content of the prescribed education is instructive. (P. 150, emphasis added)

So again Gadamer is unmasked as superficial. But where is the evidence? I do not wish to make too hasty a judgment here. Perhaps there is alternate terminology that led my word search to fail. Perhaps I overlooked the relevant passage or passages in “Plato’s Educational State.” At the least, however, this experience points to a genuine need for more accurate references.

Let me turn now to the text of the Strauss-Gadamer debate, not for the purpose of attacking *Postmodern Platos* any further, but to provide an alternative analysis. Zuckert quotes Strauss’s observation in his correspondence with Gadamer that from a common starting point he and Gadamer have gone in opposite different directions (p. 105). For Zuckert this is clearly the end of the matter: If Strauss says he has gone in the opposite way from Gadamer, he has gone the opposite way from Gadamer. She does not even mention the fact that

Gadamer strongly disagrees with Strauss's conclusion. This in itself shows the extent to which Zuckert's perspective is dogmatically "Straussian." She takes no account of the fact that Gadamer spells out his view of their areas of agreement and disagreement in considerable detail, both in the correspondence to which she refers and in a supplement to *Truth and Method* that was published some four years later with direct reference to the issues of that correspondence. (*TM*, pp. 532–41). It is strange that, while Strauss's part of this correspondence is prominently featured in *Postmodern Platos*, Gadamer's is so completely ignored. Yet Gadamer answered Strauss point by point, and has described his extended response as a "challenge" for Strauss to engage in further dialogue with him. ("Gadamer on Strauss," p. 8). Strauss chose not to do so, for which he may have had good reasons—he did describe his first letter to Gadamer, after all, as "not more than a first reaction" (*CSG*, p. 5). In context of the comparative study in *Postmodern Platos*, however, Zuckert's failure to consider Gadamer's side of this debate with Strauss constitutes, in effect, a choice of doctrinal disputation over dialogue

STRAUSS'S CRITIQUE OF GADAMER

To analyze the Strauss-Gadamer debate, I will focus first on Strauss's critique of Gadamer in their correspondence, then turn to Gadamer's reply, and conclude with my own interpretation of their intellectual relationship, which is that in the end they are very close indeed, perhaps even closer than Gadamer indicates. Certainly they are much closer—one is tempted to say radically closer—than one would gather from *Postmodern Platos*.

As Zuckert points out (p. 91), Gadamer subscribes to the Heideggerian hermeneutical principle that to understand an author is necessarily to understand him differently from the way he understands himself. Strauss, famously, repudiates this principle. A cornerstone of the Straussian approach to philosophical scholarship is that the goal of textual interpretation is to understand an author as he understood himself. How, Strauss asks, can one judge an author without first understanding what he intended to say? The point seems self-evidently logical: How can one affirm that one understands an author in any way differently from how the author understood himself, except on the basis of having first understood him the same way?

Strauss argues against Gadamer that the best interpretation is the most purely "ministerial" one, reproducing what an author intended to say as opposed to reflecting opinions of the interpreter, which means that the interpreter should be essentially subservient to the text rather than aspiring to any sort of creativity (*CSG*, p. 6). To the extent that an interpreter reflects a different understanding than the author's own, then, he falls short of the goal. The goal of all interpreters, regardless of the variety of their historical circumstances and starting

points, is to reach one and the same “plateau” of understanding. Strauss grants that in studying the great works of the past he has never reached that plateau, so that there always has “remained in the text something of the utmost importance which I did not understand,” but he argues that this does not rule out the logical possibility of achieving an “adequate or complete” understanding (*ibid.*). For Gadamer to argue as he does that in some way the fact of human finitude precludes this possibility is, Strauss believes, mistaken. The mistake is not only Gadamer’s; it is inherent in “historicism,” which cannot allow for an adequate understanding because of its denial of the possibility of understanding an author as he understood himself.¹⁶ Strauss sees only two choices: to understand an author as he understood himself, or to understand him historically, which implies that one understands an author “better” than he understood himself even if the only claim is to understand him “differently.” Strauss is clear about this point:

historicism is the belief that the historicist approach is superior to the non-historical approach, but practically the whole thought of the past was radically “unhistorical.” Historicism is therefore compelled, by its principle, to attempt to understand the philosophy of the past better than it understood itself. (P. 68)

As Zuckert stresses (pp. 104, 256), according to Strauss all forms of “historicism” including Gadamer’s require the assumption of an absolute moment of time in history.¹⁷ This “absolute moment” occurs when the meaning of history becomes transparent. The difference arises that, whereas for the Hegelian historicist such meaning is philosophical fulfillment in absolute knowledge, for a “radical historicist” (which here includes Gadamer) it is “the moment in which the insoluble character of the fundamental riddle has become fully manifest” (*Natural Right and History*, p. 29), which is a “negatively absolute situation” (*CSG*, p. 7). With specific reference to *Truth and Method*, Strauss accuses Gadamer of taking for granted the relativity of all values (at *TM*, p. 58) and all world-views (at *TM*, p. 447), an historicist insight that is taken to be final and therefore exposed to what Strauss considers the telling objection of self-refutation: It cannot be an absolute truth that there are no absolute truths because that would mean that there is at least one absolute truth. Strauss believes that Gadamer admits to holding this position, if not to the attendant difficulties, by speaking of “the completed experience” (at *TM*, p. 320; translated in the Second Revised Edition as “perfectly experienced”). This means to Strauss that “in the decisive respect experience has come to its end” with the historicist insight (*CSG*, p. 7).

Strauss judges the basis of these difficulties to be Gadamer’s overall approach to a text. He argues that Gadamer starts not from what presents itself first to the reader—i.e., the text itself—but rather from the abstract point of view of a hermeneutical theory that moves “from certain false theories and their

criticism, to what is first in itself" (CSG, p. 6). Strauss would oppose to this sort of universal theory what he regards as "the irretrievably 'occasional' character of every worthwhile interpretation" (CSG, pp. 5–6). He finds himself at a "great disadvantage" in that he has been unable to formulate such a "comprehensive doctrine" as Gadamer's—a doctrine that is "to a considerable extent a translation of Heidegger's questions, analyses and hints into a more academic medium." As Zuckert mentions (p. 105), Strauss notes in this regard that Gadamer provides a chapter in *Truth and Method* on Dilthey but none on Nietzsche (CSG, p. 5).

GADAMER'S RESPONSE TO STRAUSS

Gadamer has characterized Strauss's observation as "the heart of the matter" concerning differences with Heidegger that have appeared in the course of his efforts at "translation."¹⁸ Gadamer's "critical stance," toward the tradition of historicism led him in a very different direction from Heidegger:

It seems to me that my own contribution . . . is the discovery that no conceptual language, not even what Heidegger called the "language of metaphysics," represents an unbreakable constraint upon thought if the thinker only allows himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking. (Ibid., p. 380)

According to Gadamer, however, this departure from Heidegger does not, contra Strauss (see CSG, p. 11) and, following Strauss, Zuckert (p. 105), entail a fundamental disagreement with Strauss. Gadamer is at one with Strauss in regard to the implication that a text may contain truth. "What else is interpretation in philosophy," he says, "but coming to terms with the truth of the text and risking oneself by exposure to it?"¹⁹ He also agrees entirely with Strauss that to understand a text "historically" is to preclude understanding it as expressing something true (*TM*, p. 303).

Thus Gadamer denies that his own hermeneutical approach falls prey to the fallacies common to traditional historicist understanding. He believes that his hermeneutical theory brings to light realities of textual interpretation that are concealed by any dogmatically universal theory of historical understanding. These realities include what Strauss calls their "occasional" character:

In any case, your emphasis on the "occasional" character of every interpretation is in my estimation no reproach against a theory which asserts just this, rather an anticipation of this theory itself (for you yourself mean that explicitly in general and not "occasionally"). (CSG, p. 9)

Gadamer is particularly in agreement with Strauss's denial of the historicist claim to understand texts from the past better than they could have been under-

stood at the time. “Whoever thinks like this excludes from the outset the possibility that the thoughts that are handed down to us could simply be true,” he says (*TM*, p. 534). To a large extent Gadamer considers Strauss’s attack on historicism to have the force of a well-considered corrective that is merely misdirected as applied to himself.

Gadamer would agree with the judgment that “the term ‘historicism’, as used by Strauss, appears . . . too massive and inflexible an instrument to grasp the nuances of hermeneutics. . . .”²⁰ Gadamer argues that Strauss is too quick to deny the middle ground between understanding an author as he understood himself and understanding him better. Gadamer believes that it is possible—in fact, necessary—to understand a text “differently” without claiming to understand it “better.” While this is also Heidegger’s claim, Strauss has pointed out emphatically that there is nevertheless an implied superiority to Heidegger’s position.²¹ The question is whether Gadamer has successfully solved the problem.

Zuckert is right to stress the importance of language and linguistic expression to Gadamer (pp. 94–95). I do not think that she understands the issue correctly, however. To open oneself to the possibility that a text contains the truth is in Gadamer’s view to ask questions of it and challenge one’s preconceptions with the answers that are found. It is to engage in a dialogue with the text.²² It is this engagement that opens the possibility of the “fusion of horizons.” The truth contained in the text is indeed unhistorical; but its expression, being in language, has an ineluctably historical dimension. Gadamer is an “historicist” who does not consider the discovery of history a wholly new “dimension of reality” that “escaped classical thought” and consequently confers superiority on the moderns (Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 33). Gadamer does not think the moderns are “superior.” Instead, to Gadamer the idea of an historical dimension only sharpens focus on the problems of people understanding other people regardless of the time gap between them. Gadamer asks: What is contemporary? Where are we to draw the historical line? (*TM*, p. 395). “In the form of writing, all tradition is contemporaneous with each present time,” Gadamer points out (p. 390). He stresses that

In any case, we must not be led into the error of thinking that the problem of hermeneutics is posed only from the viewpoint of modern historicism. It is true that the classic authors did not discuss the opinions of their predecessors as historically different, but as contemporary. But the task of hermeneutics—i.e., the task of interpreting transmitted texts—would still present itself. . . . “[H]istorical” hermeneutics is separated far too much from “prehistorical” hermeneutics. (P. 537)

It is this task, which has indeed an historical dimension but is not to be confused with any assumed historical superiority, that for Gadamer dictates our understanding of a text as different from its author’s self-understanding, and that requires from the interpreter a “productive” as opposed to simply “repro-

ductive” or “ministerial” effort. The element of production is necessary because the reader comes to a text not as a blank slate ready to receive its truth, but as an historical being carrying the prejudice, understanding, and misunderstanding of a tradition already connected to the text in multifarious ways; and it is part of the “occasional” nature of every worthwhile interpretation to involve application to the interpreter’s particular time and context. Dialogue, including dialogue with a text, is not simply a receptive effort. Gadamer claims that we necessarily understand an author differently from the way he understood himself not as a logical matter requiring us to have understood him first in the same way, but as a phenomenological matter of what is unavoidably involved in the process of reading and understanding that constitutes hermeneutics. Gadamer considers Strauss’s argument about understanding an author as he understood himself overly simplistic, an underestimation of the difficulties of understanding (*TM*, p. 535).

To Gadamer the concept of an author’s “intention” is an abstraction. We do not have intentions in front of us. We have books. The “meaning” of the book arises (as an event) in our reading of it, which is our confrontation with the possibility that it contains the truth. Whether or not this meaning turned out to be the same as the author’s intention would be, to Gadamer, irrelevant even if it could be determined. It is the meaning that matters. In any case he doubts that the author can be expected to have intended exactly what he wrote or to know what he meant. The artist, Gadamer points out, is seldom the best critic of his own work, and the same goes for the philosopher: “The curious chapter of philosophical self-interpretation—I think, for example, of Kant, Fichte, and Heidegger—seems to speak for itself” (*TM*, p. 540). Gadamer argues that

[w]hat is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding. (*TM*, p. 395)

One may ask in what sense Gadamer can properly be labeled a “relativist.” Of the two passages referred to by Strauss in his accusation, the first mentions “the relativity of all values” in context of a discussion of “taste,” a subjectifying phenomenon that makes the reference ambiguous in this regard (as mentioned above, at *TM*, pp. 58 and 447. The accusation is in *CSG*, p. 7). The second is a phenomenological critique of the expression “world in itself.” My interpretation of this passage, however, is that it constitutes evidence not for, but against Gadamer’s putative “relativism,” if one accepts that the relativity of all worldviews is not tantamount to relativism. As Gadamer puts it:

In every worldview the existence of the world-in-itself is intended. It is the whole to which linguistically schematized experience refers. The multiplicity of these

worldviews does not involve any relativization of the "world." Rather, what the world is is not different from the views in which it presents itself. (*TM*, p. 447)

Strauss has argued that "the undeniable possibility of historical objectivity is explicitly or implicitly denied by historicism in all its forms" (*Natural Right and History*, p. 32). Gadamer, however, does not hesitate to speak of "a text's meaning"; but in order to express that meaning "we must translate it into our own language" (*TM*, p. 396). That is where the historical element necessarily intrudes. Gadamer calls linguistic expression "the concretion of the meaning," and stresses that being historically "bound by a situation . . . does not in the least relativize the claim to truth of every interpretation" (*TM*, pp. 397–98). Gadamer, it seems, is in a category hitherto unknown in Straussian circles: a "non-relativist historicist."

What, then, of the "absolute moment" that Strauss and following Strauss, Zuckert, consider necessary for every sort of historicism? Gadamer does possess that notion, in a way. In the life of the individual it is the "completed experience" to which Strauss refers, but Gadamer's understanding is far different from what Strauss makes of it. For Gadamer it refers to an emancipation that is gained from the disappointment that we all must experience in our expectations of final or definitive answers. The realization of our finitude, which means our inability to provide answers once and for all, far from constituting a dogmatic historicist assumption, results in a true openness to new experience unfettered by any capitulation to dogma or closed-mindedness.²³ That there are dogmatists of historicism to whom Strauss's critique properly applies, Gadamer entirely agrees (see "Gadamer on Strauss," p. 13); but he sees also the danger of a "new dogmatism" in the "philosophical opposition to history" (*TM*, p. 541). That is a danger, if not of Strauss's thought properly understood, of Straussian thought as a school.

To Gadamer the consciousness of history does not constitute the discovery of a new dimension of reality. "I do not believe in a return of pre-historicist hermeneutics," he says, "but rather in its *factual* continuation, which is only hidden by 'history'" (*CSG*, p. 9, emphasis in the original). The prehistoricist ancients knew about the "same phenomena of historical life," but those phenomena were understood differently, "unhistorically," whether in relation to a mystical past or to an eternal order. (*TM*, p. 531). To think historically means, for Gadamer, to establish a connection between one's own concepts and the thinking of the past (p. 397). Thus the proper approach to the study of Plato begins with "our own relation to the actual problems that concern Plato" (p. 538). All correct interpretation, says Gadamer, must "direct its gaze on 'the things themselves,'" the meaningful objects with which meaningful texts are themselves concerned (p. 267).

It would seem that only the way one goes about this task differentiates the "historicist" from the "prehistoricist" approach to understanding. This explains

Gadamer's answer to Strauss's criticism that he proceeds from abstract theory to what is "first for us," from the criticism of Romantic hermeneutics and Dilthey's historicism to the positive analysis of textual interpretation: Because of the accretions of historical tradition, we cannot get at the latter without a detour through the former. The "first for us" consequently is not the "first by nature" (*CSG*, pp. 9–10). It may have been different for the ancients. If the course of history represents not simply a steady gain of knowledge, but rather a gain of knowledge as power or technique at an offsetting cost of knowledge as direct insight, then Gadamer's historicist hermeneutics may not be an improvement over ancient ways of understanding but rather a necessary propaedeutic to recovery of the truth expressed in the old. In this case it is not better, but different because of changed circumstances, which implies that if circumstances change again, historicism could become unnecessary or irrelevant and consequently disappear.

This suggests Gadamer's answer to Strauss's charge that historicism refutes itself, which is, in part, to agree. "'Historical' understanding, whether today's or tomorrow's, has no special privilege. It is itself embraced by the changing horizons and moved with them" (*TM*, p. 535). Gadamer points out, however, that the self-referential statement is on a different logical level from other sorts of statements in that "[t]he consciousness of being conditioned does not supersede our conditionedness," just as "the sun has not ceased to set for us, even though the Copernican explanation of the universe has become part of our knowledge."²⁴ Thus he judges the "formalism of such reflective argument" to be of "specious philosophical legitimacy":

That the thesis of scepticism or relativism refutes itself to the extent that it claims to be true is an irrefutable argument. But what does it achieve? The reflective argument that proves successful here rebounds against the arguer, for it renders the truth value of reflection suspect. It is not the reality of scepticism or of truth-dissolving relativism but the truth claim of all formal argument that is affected. (*TM*, p. 344)

THE *QUERELLE DES ANCIENS ET DES MODERNES*

In the final analysis, Strauss concludes, the fundamental difference between himself and Gadamer, of which their disagreements over hermeneutics are only a consequence, is that they take opposite sides in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* (*CSG*, p. 11). Gadamer addresses this issue at some length. This debate of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was originally settled, in Gadamer's account, "in a sense of historical awareness" and constituted "as it were, the last form of an unhistorical debate between tradition and the modern age" (*TM*, pp. 532–33). Strauss, impelled by the crisis of modernity²⁵ or the "catastrophe of modern times" (*TM*, p. 533), rekindled the quarrel because "[s]o

elementary a human concern as the distinction between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ assumes that man is able to raise himself above his historical conditionedness” (ibid.).

Although Gadamer supports Strauss’s efforts to address this concern, he does not think that it is possible to “take sides” in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* as though one had a genuine choice. Gadamer does not believe that modernity is something one can choose to set aside; and he finds the strength of Strauss’s interpretive practice, which he respects and admires, in what he views as Strauss’s tacit recognition despite himself that he cannot do so either (*TM*, p. 536).

To clarify this issue between Strauss and Gadamer of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, it is necessary to consider what they mean by “modernity” and their views of the essential differences between modern and ancient thought.

There seems to be a remarkable degree of consensus between Gadamer and Strauss concerning the fundamental differences between ancient and modern thought and, consequently, the nature of “modernity.” First of all, a striking (albeit hitherto unnoticed) coincidence appears in the way that each of them has chosen to explicate ancient versus modern thought: Each has relied upon a quotation from the same passage in the Preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²⁶

In this passage Hegel characterizes the difference between ancient and modern thought in terms of “natural consciousness.” Ancient philosophy, says Hegel, viewed itself as the perfection of natural consciousness and as such developed its abstract notions from the immediacy of every aspect of life as it presented itself. Modern thought, on the other hand, finds its abstract concepts already prepared. Thus while for the ancients thought was from the beginning fluid and had to be conceptually fixed in place, for the moderns it is already fixed, and the task of philosophy is the opposite, to recover its “natural” fluidity. Gadamer refers to this as “the fluidity of speculative truth” (“Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers,” p. 9), while Strauss calls it “pre-philosophical consciousness” (“Political Philosophy and History,” p. 75), but whatever their differences of terminology, they are as one in recognition of the phenomenon.

There is further common ground. For a more detailed analysis, Strauss refers the reader to two publications by Jacob Klein, his well-known study of Greek mathematical thinking and its transformation into modern thought and an essay on the relation of phenomenology to the history of science.²⁷ Gadamer, for his part, has also credited Klein’s work as seminal to his own understanding of Platonic thought (“Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic,” p. 129). Although Zuckert takes note of this common source, she argues that Gadamer and Strauss were influenced by different aspects of Klein’s thinking, the former by his study of ancient number and the latter by his phenomenological approach to history (p. 314, note 61). This may be correct as far as it goes, but while such a separation

is plausible as a matter of focus, it seems to me that in the fundamental matter of ancient versus modern thinking, Klein's influence proves to be a unifying factor. Ancient mathematics is for Klein precisely the key for understanding the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*.

Among the Greeks, according to Klein, scientific concepts were formulated by a process of "abstraction" from "natural" or prescientific experience. He characterizes this "abstraction" as "the pressing ontological problem of antiquity" (*Greek Mathematical Thought*, p. 120), although its problematic character is lost in modern thought, which takes the abstractions, as Hegel said, ready-made and consequently for granted. This attitude, Klein says, forms the basis not only for modern science, but also and directly derivatively, for the way we think in our daily lives. Thus we come insensibly to believe in a sort of second, more real, mathematically shaped world behind that of our sense experiences ("Phenomenology and Science," p. 162). This sort of analysis, the Heideggerian overtones of which are palpable, is behind Gadamer's view of modernity of "quite unequivocally" defined by the emergence of a new idea of science and method and Strauss's equivalent belief that the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* ultimately concerned modern science and philosophy.²⁸

The science of the ancients, Klein stresses, "never" betrayed its foundation in "natural" immediacy (*Greek Mathematical Thought*, p. 63, emphasis in the original), which is one way of explaining Gadamer's contention that the concept of "life" is fundamental to all Greek thought about reality ("Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers," p. 29). Thus the Greeks in counting always had in mind that in some sense they were counting "things" so that strictly speaking, Klein argues, they were not operating with a concept of "number" at all (*Greek Mathematical Thought*, pp. 67, 63).

It is clear that the fact that Greek concepts had not yet been, as Gadamer puts it, "uprooted from the soil of the concrete plurality of particular existents" explains both their intuitive immediacy and the limitations of Greek mathematics and science ("Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers," p. 9). In Klein's analysis the modern development of mathematics, which is "exemplary for the total design of human knowledge in later times" (p. 121, emphasis in the original) is rooted in ancient conceptualization from which, however, it has become "oddly ruptured" (p. 118, emphasis in the original). We are dependent upon presuppositions of which we are no longer aware.

Klein's concern is to analyze a process of simultaneous progress in the ability to manipulate abstractions and loss of intuitive immediacy that leads from ancient to modern thought. He sees this as an "interlacement" of the living production of ideas and their reification or "sedimentation" as they become familiar through use and lose their original significance. This process constitutes the history of human thought. To Klein it is arguably the "one legitimate form of history" and, he adds, "[h]istory, in this understanding, cannot be separated from philosophy" ("Phenomenology and Science," p. 156, emphasis in the original).

This suggestion is particularly provocative in light of Strauss's definition of historicism at the beginning of "Political Philosophy and History" as "the assertion that the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be maintained (p. 57). Thus the studies on which Strauss explicitly bases the crucial part of his analysis in the context of a central attack on historicism assert precisely the thesis he has attacked in the same essay. This is the sort of conundrum that renders Strauss difficult of access and fuels debate over his "real" teaching, which may or may not involve some kind of closet modernism.²⁹

Even if we do not wish to go more deeply into the Straussian hermeneutical thicket, my argument remains that the closer one looks at Gadamer and Strauss, the more similar they appear. Zuckert, however, draws the opposite conclusion from her discussion of Klein's influence on Gadamer (pp. 96 ff.). Here I think she has found an interesting path of inquiry in Gadamer's development of the "arithmological" structure of *logos*, based on the concept of the "indeterminate two." Zuckert discusses this difficult concept in terms of the unity of a whole that transcends its parts, such as the unity of Being in Plato's *Sophist* which "somehow" encompasses both rest and motion (p. 98). Although Zuckert does not go any further with her analysis, to Gadamer this "somehow" of the Platonic "sudden change" from rest to motion in the *Sophist* raises the question of transition, which is basic to his temporal problematic (see, for example, "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers," p. 14, where Gadamer speaks in this regard of the "transition in no time").

Although I think this could be a fruitful line of inquiry, the problem with Zuckert's treatment is that she makes Gadamer twist Klein's insight about the "indeterminate two" into a principle of doctrinal synthesis. In a passage cited earlier, she asserts that to Gadamer, "Plato's dialogues provided an ontological and epistemological foundation for his own doctrine of the fusion of horizons by showing the arithmological relation of all the differentiated parts to an indeterminate, ever expanding whole" (p. 100). In Klein's interpretation of Plato Zuckert sees the "indeterminate two," in effect, as a principle of heterogeneity, illustrated by the heterogeneity of motion and rest with Being as a whole (p. 98). She has managed to interpret Gadamer, however, as using the very same principle as a spurious basis for asserting homogeneity. Again, *Postmodern Platos* has dogmatized Gadamer—an effort that bears fruit in the form of a withering critique in the very next section, entitled "The Political Implications" (pp. 100 ff.).

CONCLUSION: THE *RAPPROCHEMENT* OF GADAMER AND STRAUSS

For those who have been educated in Straussian thought, which includes myself, there tends to be a certain style of sober scholarship that is both substantively and stylistically attractive. In terms of the latter, at least, Derrida and

deconstruction are far less appealing than Gadamer and hermeneutics. *Post-modern Platos* makes a case for overcoming such prejudices on the grounds of substantive agreement. I wish to argue to the contrary, that in this case “prejudice” is sound instinct and “substantive” means no more than doctrinal. The fact is that whatever their doctrinal differences, Strauss and Gadamer are remarkably close in hermeneutical practice, i.e., in their actual scholarship and interpretation of texts.

Take Plato, for example. The interconnection of dramatic context and the interlocutors’ arguments is as fundamental to the Platonic hermeneutics of Gadamer as of Strauss, and each of them has pursued this interpretive approach in practice as well as in principle (Gadamer points this out in “Gadamer on Strauss,” p. 7). As we have seen, the hermeneutical principle that an author can only be understood differently from the way he understood himself is a central point of contention between Strauss on the one hand and Heidegger and Gadamer on the other. Yet despite Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s supposed accord on this issue, the fact that Heidegger considered his understanding superior to Plato’s is as contrary to Gadamer as to Strauss. Gadamer, no less than Strauss, considers himself a “Platonist.”³⁰

To a remarkable extent, what seem to be serious disagreements between Gadamer and Strauss become no more than differences of emphasis. A prominent example is the supposed disagreement, which, as previously mentioned, Zuckert stresses (p. 104), over the “crisis of our times” or approaching world-night of the forgetfulness of Being, in Heidegger’s phrase. It is true that Gadamer does not think that philosophy thereby comes to an end, but in Gadamer’s understanding, metaphysics as the “metaphysics of presence” has indeed exhausted itself; and he fully agrees that we are in a fundamental sense in such a time of crisis, of the “cosmic night” of the “forgetfulness of Being.”³¹

Another example is Gadamer’s contention that to determine an author’s original intentions is both impossible and irrelevant to interpreting the meaning of a text. Since Strauss argues that the whole point of interpretation is precisely to return to the author’s intended meaning, as we have seen, this issue seems central to the Strauss–Gadamer debate. Nevertheless, Strauss admits that neither of them would ever claim to have actually reached a complete understanding of the text however they define this hermeneutical goal (*TM*, p. 6). And Gadamer grants Strauss that there is nothing wrong with the goal of achieving the “same plateau” of understanding even though one never reaches it in fact (*CSG*, p. 9). Moreover, when one turns to actual studies, this theoretical issue seems strangely to evaporate. On the one hand, since Strauss as a careful scholar insists no less than Gadamer on a close reading of the text, his discovery of “intent” in practice differs hardly at all from Gadamer’s discovery of “meaning.” On the other hand, Gadamer’s resolute theoretical opposition to any notion of discovering an author’s intention seems in practice to have little discernable effect. He does not hesitate in his own writings to refer directly or

indirectly to an author's intended meanings or, differently put, to an author's real meanings that are contrary to his apparent ones. Even if he usually avoids the actual word "intention," it is not apparent that such semantic scruples have any genuine importance.³²

To mention such points of agreement between Gadamer and Strauss is only to explore more fully Strauss's own acknowledgment that in practice they have much in common (CSG, p. 11). This acknowledgment is in response to Gadamer's conclusion that in order to persuade Strauss that he is right,

[w]hat I *really* would have to do, would be . . . to show you in your work what I mean—for I would be misunderstood if one does not take seriously that I would like to correct a *false thought* about a procedure, which, there where it succeeds (i.e., really discloses something in the tradition), is itself correct. (CSG, p. 10, emphasis in the original)

It seems, then, that it may not be necessary to "take sides" between Gadamer and Strauss in the most important respect, which is their ability to uncover truth. But in any case the extent of their disagreement would be easy to exaggerate, and I believe that *Postmodern Platos* does so. My conclusion is that the philosophical relationship of Gadamer and Strauss is fascinating and substantively important. Moreover, this topic remains as yet remarkably unexplored. It is to its author's credit that *Postmodern Platos* begins that exploration, however critical I may be of the attempt.

NOTES

1. See Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987), pp. 158 and 174 ff.

2. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 88–99.

3. See Alain Boutot, *Heidegger et Platon: Le Problème du Nihilisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), p. 2: "Donc peu de textes de Heidegger sur Platon, mais aussi et corrélativement peu de textes de Platon commentés par Heidegger."

4. Catherine H. Zuckert, "Heidegger's New Beginning," American Political Science Association Eastern Division Meeting, September 1991, p. 25. It is noteworthy that when she wrote this paper, which is virtually identical with chapter 2 of *Postmodern Platos*, Zuckert pointed out that Heidegger's *Sophist* lecture was not yet available, so on her own account, Zuckert's position seems to predate her evidence. On closer examination, however, I notice that Zuckert isn't really claiming that there is any direct connection between these passages and her tripartite division: her claim is that they merely show, for the first time, *how* Heidegger returned to Plato at "each new stage" of his own thought—whenever those stages began. Maybe, then, there is nothing wrong here. But I am left confused and perplexed.

5. Gadamer comments in this regard: "Only the thought-event of the Platonic dialogues—the first philosophical text that we still have—remained inaccessible to this impatient questioner [Heidegger] in spite of all of the momentum behind his appropriations." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Greeks," in *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 144.

6. Zuckert's reference is to Jacques Derrida, "Three Questions to Gadamer," in Diane Michel-felder and Richard Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 52–53. Although "will to power" is a plausible paraphrase for this passage, Derrida's specific reference is to Kant, and he accuses Gadamer of holding to a Kantian metaphysics of the will. Zuckert does not mention Gadamer's reply, which I find persuasive, that his common-sensical notion of the "good will" necessary for dialogue implies no particular metaphysics and can be taken back to Plato with ease. See "Reply to Jacques Derrida," *ibid.*, p. 54. This famous debate, or failure to engage in debate, is the subject of the entire book cited above, and one of the limitations of a comprehensive project like *Postmodern Platos* is that it cannot delve into the detailed arguments and contexts that are sometimes necessary for coming to reasonable conclusions about such matters.

7. Leo Strauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978): 6. Hereafter *CSG*.

8. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 76.

9. Ernest L. Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss: An Interview," *Interpretation*, 12, no. 1 (January 1984): 9, 11, 12.

10. The reference is to Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 213.

11. Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 56.

12. Walter Lammi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Correction' of Heidegger," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52, no. 3 (July–September 1991): 501 ff.

13. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 533. Hereafter *TM*.

14. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets" and "Plato's Educational State," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 39–92.

15. This is the work of the Philology and Philosophy Project, directed by Peter A. Batke, Humanities Computing Specialist at Princeton University, aided by my wife, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and myself. The results of this project are currently being made available on the Web as a comprehensive word-index to the printed version of the *Gesammelte Werke*. The Web site is: <http://www.princeton.edu/~batke/phph>.

Lüge and compound words containing *Lüge* appear a total of 54 times. In "Plato und die Dichter," the essay that happens to precede "Plato's Educational State" in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, the word is used four times—but only in context of the tension between philosophy and art, not the noble lie. This is the closest reference I could find.

16. Leo Strauss, "Political Philosophy and History," in *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 66.

17. See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 29, and "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 32.

18. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 381.

19. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Heidegger and Marburg Theology," in David E. Linge, trans., *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 201.

20. Fred R. Dallmayr, *Polis and Praxis: Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984), p. 40.

21. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," p. 30. See also Leo Strauss, "Relativism," in Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins, eds., *Relativism and the Study of Man* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1961), pp. 155–56.

22. Contrary to Zuckert's insistence that Heideggerian *Destruktion* and Gadamer's textual dialogue are such dissimilar projects that they provide a point of simple contrast between the two (p. 90), I think, and have argued at length, that they are virtually identical. See Walter Lammi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Platonic *Destruktion* of the Later Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* (forthcoming,

1997). This article begins with a quotation from a 1923 Heidegger course (the first that Gadamer attended) that makes the point emphatically: “*Hermeneutik ist Destruktion!*” Martin Heidegger, “*Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*,” lecture course in the summer of 1923, Freiburg, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), vol. 63, p. 105.

23. *TM*, p. 367, *CSG*, p. 10. Gadamer has a more direct concept of “absolute moment” in his interpretation of *kairos* and instantaneity, but that is a separate matter.

24. *TM*, pp. 448–49. A detailed examination of this issue is in Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, pp. 53–59.

25. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), p. 3.

26. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 19–20 (para. 33). Strauss refers to the quotation in “Political Philosophy and History,” in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, p. 75. Gadamer’s reference is in “Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 8. What makes this coincidence even more remarkable is the fact that the quotations start at exactly the same point in the middle of a sentence, although Gadamer provides three more sentences than does Strauss.

27. Jacob Klein, “Die griechische Logistik und die Entstehung der modernen Algebra,” *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik*, Heft 1 (Berlin, 1936), vol. 3, pp. 122 ff. In translation this is *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), pp. 61–63 and 117–25. Strauss’s other reference is to Jacob Klein, “Phenomenology and Science,” in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), pp. 143–63.

28. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 6. Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization,” *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 31.

29. I should add, however, that Gadamer for one clearly does *not* view Strauss as a “closet modernist.” In his *Interpretation* interview on Strauss, for example, he remarks that his wife marveled at how persistently Strauss returned to the same points of disagreement during a day they spent in discussion together. Their chief disagreement, Gadamer says, was precisely over Strauss’s refusal to admit the necessity of our modernism. While willing to accept the superiority of the Ancients, Gadamer argued that one cannot simply return to their thought (“Gadamer on Strauss,” p. 3). I am inclined to accept this personal evidence. If Gadamer is right that Strauss was not being disingenuous in his call for a return to the Ancients, however, it follows from my textual analysis that Gadamer is also right about Strauss’s need, despite himself, to rely on modern conceptualization.

30. “Gadamer on Strauss,” p. 10. I suggest that Gadamer and Strauss stand alone among the thinkers of *Postmodern Platos* in the depth of their engagement with Plato and the importance of that engagement to their own thought.

31. Quoted in a famous statement about this issue in *TM*, “Foreword to the Second Edition,” p. xxxvii. See also Gadamer, “Notes on Planning for the Future,” in Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, trans., *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 179–80: “[P]hilosophical discourse . . . must heighten the awareness that God has been obscured for us and that we live in the age of the eclipse of God (Martin Buber), and that the question of being has fallen into forgetfulness, as our metaphysical tradition is absorbed into the realm of science (Martin Heidegger).”

32. See for example Gadamer’s analysis in “Plato and the Poets,” p. 58, whose conclusion that “Plato’s *paideia* is thus meant as a counterweight to . . . the sophist enlightenment” could equally well have substituted “intended” for “meant.” In the same essay (p. 45) Gadamer refers to Plato’s having used “an intentionally malevolent example.” Or, even more tellingly: “Might it have been Plato’s actual intent in the *Parmenides* to make us so acutely conscious of the ontological problem in the relationship of idea and appearance that the very inappropriateness of the solutions discussed demonstrates the dogmatism implied in the question itself?” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 10.

In a book review of Gadamer's *Dialogue and Dialectic*, Richard Velkley points out that according to Gadamer, the Platonic dialogues are "'wholes of discourse' which make their intention manifest by including their addressees. 'Intention' is not here meant psychologically or subjectively, for it is not solely Socrates' (or Plato's) possession, but it becomes the possession of anyone who truly understands; intention here is the revealed intent of one who is engaged in a conversation. By preserving respect for the intention of an author, Gadamer departs widely and Platonically from many of his contemporaries." *Interpretation*, 13, no. 2 (May 1985): 264.