

Not ROT: Gadamer, Heidegger, and Beckett

Gadamer (1900-2002)

“Wanting to avoid one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but blatant absurdity (*offenbarer Widersinn*). To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own precepts into play so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us”.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d English ed. (Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall transl., Continuum 2004 [1960]), p. 398 [hereinafter *TM*].

Weinsheimer and Marshall refer to the purported avoidance as “manifestly absurd”. For my part, I find that the German noun “*Widersinn*” intimates the English noun “absurdity” rather than “absurd”, which can qualify either as a noun or an adjective. Likewise, the German adjective “*offenbarer*” solicits an English adjective instead of an adverb. Beyond the matter of grammatical corollarization, I choose to apply the translator’s prerogative in favour of “blatant” in preference to “manifest”. Either way, the overarching idea is that of evidence or obviousness.

“If we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice”. *TM*, p. 278

“*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*”. *TM*, p. 291 [emphasis original]

“[W]e are always already affected by history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation [...]. [...] In our understanding, which we imagine is so innocent because its results seem so self-evident, the other presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other”. *TM*, p. 300

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Heidegger (1889-1976)

“Certainly, in order to wring from what the words say, what it is they want to say, every interpretation must necessarily use violence”.

Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed. (Richard Taft transl., Indiana 1997), §35, p. 141.

[“Um freilich dem, was die Worte sagen, dasjenige abzuringen, was sie sagen wollen, muß jede Interpretation notwendig Gewalt brauchen”].

Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik (Klostermann, 2010 [1929]), p. 202.

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Beckett (1906-89)

“What can one do but speculate, speculate, until one hits on the happy speculation?”

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (Sean Connor ed., Faber & Faber 2010 [1958]), p. 85.

“There is so little one can say, one says it all. All one can. And no truth in it anywhere”.

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (James Knowlson ed., Faber & Faber 2010 [1961]), p. 30.

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”.

Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, in *Company/III Seen III Said/Worstward Ho/Stirrings Still* (Dirk Van Hulle ed, Faber & Faber 2009 [1983]), p. 81.