

**Is it Necessary to Understand the Past?
Nietzsche and Gadamer on the Importance of the Greek
Antiquity for the Way Modernity Sees Itself.**

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If we ask, whether we really want to understand the past as it was, the Philosophy of history gives us a clear answer: we don't want to understand the whole past. We select what we find interesting, important and valuable. According to Georg Simmel, this selection constitutes the "mystery of the positing of norms"². Since the Philosophy of history has no fundamental principles for this process, its results are arbitrary.

The mystery of positing norms is characteristic for the philosophical-historical research of late Neo-Kantianism. Paul Natorp, for example, argues that it is not a sensible question to ask how the past really was. But what else can we do? Natorp's answer is simple: we must try to understand it as far as it is useful for us *today*³. In his view, the progressive development of philosophy determines what is useful and meaningful for us. What Simmel regards as a mystery, is the result of scientific progress in philosophy for Natorp. According to him, we cannot occupy ourselves with metaphysical problems that have been proved to be unscientific. Seriously regarding these speculative theories as scientific, which are labeled "metaphysical" by the history of philosophy, is incompatible with the concept of philosophy as one of systematic knowledge. Therefore not everything handed down by the history of philosophy can be considered as an subject that is appropriate and of importance to systematic philosophy

Natorp's opinion is not exceptional in the Neo-Kantian school. Heinrich Rickert suggests that a neutral and complete appreciation of the past is neither the responsibility of the history of philosophy nor of the philosophy of history. Rickert claims that we understand the past only according to our purposes⁴. Our interests determine what is useful and what is not useful for us. More recent authors, particularly those adhering to

¹ Lecture at the Congreso de Filosofía de la Historia *La comprensión del pasado*, Buenos Aires 2000. Special thanks to Howard Williams and Gabriele Mordt.

² Georg Simmel, *Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (1892), Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 2, Frankfurt/M. 1989, p. 396.

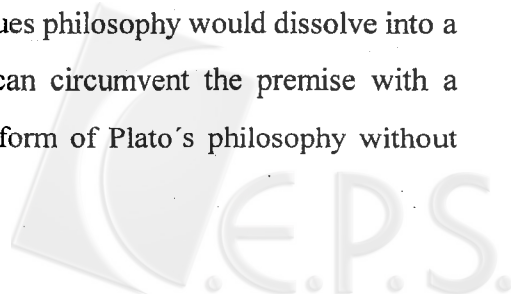
³ Paul Natorp, *Bruno Bauchs "Immanuel Kant" und die Fortbildung des Systems des kritischen Idealismus*, in: *Kant-Studien*, 17. Bd. (1918), p. 426.

⁴ Heinrich Rickert, *Kant als Philosoph der modernen Kultur*, Tübingen 1924, p. 12.

analytical philosophy, are also aware of this view. Thus, David Lewis emphasises that the actual task of philosophy does not consist in undermining or rejecting our stock of pre-philosophical opinions, but in respecting them and in extending them to an ordered system. But one can also find the opposite point of view, held for example by Richard Rorty. He criticises analytical philosophers for holding on to their self-image, while he himself considers existential transformation to be the most desirable aim of any philosophical or historical work. Nevertheless, this position is as problematic as the one mentioned before. Namely, if we accept both positions, we are not seriously trying to really understand historical texts.

Does this mean we actually are not interested in understanding historical texts? Why would this be so? What is it that does interest us in the past? Is there anything interesting in history? Or are we just motivated by curiosity?

In this paper I'm studying Friedrich Nietzsche's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's answers to these questions. I assume that Nietzsche and Gadamer have found a solution to the mystery of the positioning of norms. I will analyse their solutions by considering the conditions Nietzsche and Gadamer presuppose in order to bring Greek antiquity and modernity into an rewarding relationship with one another. These conditions, I shall argue, give significance to the study of the past which, according to Nietzsche and Gadamer, must be justified. First I want to clarify this meaning by looking at Nietzsche's interpretation of the relationship of Greek antiquity to modernity as a contest and competition (*agon*). Second I want to consider Gadamer's thesis, that the encounter with tradition generates a critical consciousness of one's own limits. Finally I will ask how far Nietzsche and Gadamer, in their attempt to place past and modernity in a rewarding relationship, apart of the premise of the philosophy of history: the presupposition of values. It is my thesis that Nietzsche solves the mystery of the positioning of norms, which he encounters as a young philologist. But he holds on to the premise of the philosophy of history, for fear that without such values philosophy would dissolve into a purely historical discipline. Gadamer, however, can circumvent the premise with a concept of hermeneutics based on the dialogical form of Plato's philosophy without calling it into question.



I. The contest and competition (*agon*) between modernity and Greek antiquity: Friedrich Nietzsche

In March of 1875 Nietzsche worked together with Carl von Gersdorf on a front page for a critical reflection according to the model of the *Untimely Meditations* (*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*). The title reads: 'We philologists'. It is prompted by the 100th anniversary of modern German philology based on the concept of Friedrich August Wolf. In this concept, the notion of education and classical antiquity are of normative importance.

In his reflection Nietzsche avoids the topics which are customary on such occasions: He neither appreciates the progress of the science which awaits its centenary, nor does he develop prognoses about future tasks or discuss different methods and concepts. Instead he shows that philology does not really understand ancient times and that it produces not educators, but scholars. How does Nietzsche come to this opinion, and what are its implications?

Nietzsche reproaches the diagnosis that classical philology has been transformed into an encyclopaedic science. According to Nietzsche this is a tragic transformation, because it has drained the theoretical lifeblood of the discipline. Philology has lost its original ability to critically apply its results to the contemporary cultural self-consciousness.

Already in his inaugural lecture in Basle in 1869, Nietzsche sees philology as being in danger of losing its theoretical lifeblood by giving up on its former aim to respond to our present time by holding up the mirror of the classic in an exemplary manner⁵. Classical philology is no longer a critique of the norms of modernity, because it has become a meticulous study of sources only. The effect of the abandoning of the normative- educating mission is that ancient Greece is an object of scientific research, but not a resource for understanding our self, for judging our time to overcome this time and ourselves⁶. For Nietzsche, this surrender documents a change with serious consequences:

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Homer und die klassische Philologie*. Antrittsrede an der Universität Basel, gehalten am 28. Mai 1869, in: ders., *Nachgelassene Werke*. Zweite Abteilg., Bd. IX, Leipzig 1903, p. 2.

⁶ Ders., *Notizen zu Wir Philologen* (1874/75), Kritische Studienausgabe (= KSA), ed. by G. Colli und M. Montinari, München

concludes, but today the present has to be understood out of antiquity¹⁸. To be able to understand modernity in this way, we must break with the transfigured picture of Greek antiquity, which was established with the adoption of the Weimar Classic in the 19th century. Thus Nietzsche warns against the untenable fantasy picture of Greek art in his Basel lectures. Nietzsche's thesis is, that in Greek appreciation, art was founded on the absurdity, dreadfulness, and brutality of human life. It aimed at veiling these conditions to make living with them possible. Nietzsche opposes to the modern view of the so called pre-socratics as the founders of science, which Eduard Zeller represents in his *History of Greek Philosophy*, and which is shared by German Neo-Kantianism. He argues that these philosophers knew how to cultivate their urge for knowledge, in contrast to modern scientists, who succumb to this urge. Nietzsche's interpretation of the pre-socratic goes beyond traditional interpretations. He paints a picture of these ancient thinkers which is radically different - in other words: untimely - from the kind of philosophy, which Nietzsche has come to know in the philosophical currents and schools of his time. Certainly Nietzsche doesn't relate this newly discovered possibility of philosophy to the question what it could entail for the understanding of present philosophy because he sees the caesura of the socratic-platonic break as an irreversible turning-point. Nietzsche searches for an untimely approach to the pre-socratic thinkers, who are hidden behind covering interpretations, so that we can no longer perceive these philosophers as the remote founding fathers of our culture of science, but as its strange counter-picture. I'm not sure, whether Nietzsche's theory of the pre-socratic philosophers' sublimation of the urge of knowledge does not study their works in a manner which does not go beyond a daring thesis.

II. *The strange and unknown past: Hans-Georg Gadamer*

Without Nietzsche, I think, the rebirth of the normative-educational demand, which had been given up by philology, would have been impossible. This rebirth occurs after World War I and commences from a renaissance of the concept of the classical initiated by Werner Jaeger. According to Jaeger, this concept is based on the insatiable thirst for a

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Notizen zu *Wir Philologen** (1874/75), KSA 8, p. 31, 3 (62).

critical comparison of modernity and Greek antiquity. Jaeger's account of the classical is in many respects not very different from approaches dominant in Nietzsche's philological conception. Like Nietzsche, Jaeger considers the past as endorsing the role of critique in our present, and the necessity of critical thinking for understanding ourselves. In contrast to Nietzsche, Jaeger thinks that the aim of this critical comparison is a radical renewal of modernity. The classical contributes to this renewal because it is a corrective to modern culture¹⁹. According to this understanding of the term "classical", Jaeger goes beyond the responsibility described by Nietzsche: understanding one's own time better with the help of antiquity. Jaeger points out that the classical functions as a critique of the present by developing into an inalienable norm. If I mention a motive to which Nietzsche's philological history of reception cannot be reduced, it is because by this Nietzsche has an effect on Hans-Georg Gadamer. The young Gadamer attentively follows the discussions about the rehabilitation of the classical set off by Jaeger, and through Paul Friedländer, his philological teacher, Nietzsche's highly individual representation of the earliest Greek philosophers, and his interpretation of Plato, come to Gadamer's attention.

Gadamer objects explicitly to the normative importance Jaeger confers upon the classical. He understands the classical as a process which, by selection, rejuvenation, transformation, rejection, and appropriation generates a canon which gives the classical different interpretations in different epochs. This is by no means arbitrary, because the process seems to depend on interests or values. But this is only one aspect of Gadamer's explanation of the classical. Another important aspect is the question, which effects the classical can have under special conditions. As Gadamer points out, we come to a critical self-understanding and understanding of our knowledge, and we are ready to learn from history, if these special conditions are extant. Early he recognizes that this is only possible under a single special condition: that we neither attach a significance to terms, nor ascribe meanings to a text, which the terms and the text don't in fact imply. The impact of this condition can be approved of, if we consider the context Gadamer first speaks about it.

In 1924, one of Gadamer's first philosophical papers was published as part of the commemorative publication for Paul Natorp, his Neo-Kantian supervisor. In this paper,

¹⁹ Werner Jaeger, *Der Wandel des Platonbildes im 19. Jahrhundert* (1928), in: ders., *Humanistische Reden und Vorträge*, Berlin

Gadamer criticizes the Neo-Kantian conception of problem-oriented history (Problemgeschichte), which had a spiritual father in Wilhelm Windelband, and which established the foundations of its transcendental conditions on Nicolai Hartmann, Gadamer's second Neo-Kantian teacher after Natorp. Relating to the conception of a problem-oriented history, German Neo-Kantianism attempts an answer to the question of the philosophical meaning of historical research. This meaning had been doubted, when philosophical historians like Kuno Fischer and Johann Eduard Erdmann demanded that we must acknowledge historical facts.

Hartmann accused the generation of historians of philosophy represented by Zeller and Erdmann of losing sight of philosophy's genuine task owing to the enormous work of examining and ordering the historical material. Gadamer considers this reproach to be justified, even if it is not entirely sound. It is not sound because one cannot accuse Zeller or Erdmann for something their whole generation struggle with: namely the question, what philosophy after Hegel could resemble. Wilhelm Windelband's account demonstrates the dramatic situation of philosophy after Hegel's death. He has to notice that philosophy is in danger of either dissolving into the relativism of the history of philosophy or disappearing into empirical psychology and a philosophy of weltanschauung (Weltanschauungsdenken).

Nevertheless, from a factual point of view, Hartmann's reproach is justified. Already Kant recognized that a purely historical depiction of philosophy merely reveals how and in which sequence philosophical thinking has been performed. Therefore Hartmann is right in asserting that the historiography of Johann Eduard Erdmann, August Brandis, Heinrich Ritter, Karl Prantl, Eduard Zeller and Kuno Fischer was mainly governed by the quest for an doctrine and system. They inquired as to the "historical fact", former teachers' lessons, thoughts and aspirations. They did not ask, what those thinkers saw, recognized, understood, and what they achieved. Philosophy seemed to succumb to the same contradiction from which already philology, according to Nietzsche, had withdrawn: to "create nothing, because one wants only to know about what has already been created". But just as Boeckh anxiously inquired as to whether the philologist should write new books in the same way as pharmacists new mixtures, "by pouring from

one vial into another”, late New-Kantianism inquires not without reason as to the philosophical meaning of the history of philosophy's research. As soon as 1864 Otto Liebermann emphasized that philosophy not only was in danger of dissolving into the specialized sciences, but also endangered to become the object of “historiographical description”. His concern was justified. In 1882 Paul Natorp felt compelled to indicate philosophy's imminent decline, since its lucky or rather unlucky star carried it into the broad stream of historical research.

But what is the result of those studies? Hartmann's laconic answer is: The history of the young Hegel can teach us many things about the thinker's intellectual personality and about contemporary history. It cannot teach us much about what Hegel himself realized, or what his contemporaries and posterity could learn from him. In contrast, the concept of a history of philosophical problems is meant to enable the historian of philosophy to extract the genuine insights from the translated philosophies. This emphasizes the historical continuity, which characterizes the history of philosophy as science. Moreover, it takes into account that each new generation of philosophers alters its ideas, according to new and increasingly finer distinctions between knowledge and refutation of “historical thought”.

Even Hartmann, though, remains rooted to the historical facts, which now figure as factual problems that occupy the place of doctrines and systems. He is able to show that these problems appear in a historical sequence and, moreover, are themselves subject to historical progress. Thus Hartmann refutes quite impressively the evaluation of history of philosophy as a disjointed and arbitrary conglomeration of opinions and critiques, which pervades the studies of historians of philosophy in the generation of Zeller and Fischer. Like the generation of historians of philosophy criticized by Hartmann, he doesn't limit himself to the depiction of facts, but wants to show a consistency in the past: namely, one which, in spite of the diversity of history, has always existed and is therefore comparable. In Hartmann's point of view, the outline of the history of philosophy proves and consolidates itself through these problems, while the singular and the exceptional can be hardly explained - or not at all. The price that has to be paid for the foundation of a unitary structure in philosophy's accumulation of historical knowledge, consists in a strong

simplification and schematization.

Gadamer realizes that Hartmann's idea of an exploration of philosophical problems is attached to the generation of historians of philosophy of the Hegelian School, which Hartmann himself criticizes perspicaciously. Gadamer also reproaches the advocates of the conception of problem-oriented history, because of reducing the relationship of philosophy and their own history to a seeking for certainty of problem-oriented historical precursors. For Gadamer, the profound meaning of the earliest philosophies for contemporary philosophy is situated in a critical self-understanding, not in the genesis of certain problems.

Nietzsche demands the same, as I have mentioned. For him, the philologist's approach to Greek antiquity must not be to "detect in antiquity, what our time admires exceedingly". The philologist must use the opposite method. But while Nietzsche is mainly concerned with the question, how we should relate to the heritage of antiquity - critical, preserving or negating - , Gadamer's main concern lies altogether with another question: the problem of the different quality (*Andersheit*), of the untimely-ness (as Nietzsche calls it) of tradition, which limits the freedom of understanding. For Gadamer, the alien quality of a piece of work of tradition results from the knowledge entrusted to it, which contains the work of past generations. Two aspects are important. First, this knowledge is foreign to us, because it is only present in written memory, not of a more immediate access; second, it has been transformed by interpretation, which emphasizes some aspects, while neglecting other motives.

Nietzsche presupposes this distinct quality, in order to depict antiquity as an counter-picture gradually revealing itself, and with which modernity is grappling. But Nietzsche also is aware of the danger that we often do not recognize the alien parts of a tradition, nor use them as an opportunity for critical reflection.

Gadamer locates one cause of this danger in the attempt of Neo-Kantian philosophy to transfer the idea of progress upon the relationship of philosophy and its history.

Hardly any other work demonstrates the interest in such a transfer as clearly as Paul Natorp's widely discussed Plato-monography of 1903. Nowhere else can one find a

similarly distinct formulation of the aim to show Plato as a predecessor of the critical treatment of the problem of knowledge. Natorp recognizes the roots of that critical idealism of the Neo-Kantianism in Plato's theory of ideas. Gadamer conceives Natorp's book mainly as a projection of the modern concept of science into Platonic philosophy, carried out in the spirit of the Marburger Neo-Kantianism. But this doesn't account for the fact that Natorp's book isn't undisputed even among Neo-Kantians. Although they agree widely that Plato is to be considered as the first philosopher who undertook the foundation of science, his interpretation of Plato is widely discussed among Neo-Kantians. That can be traced to the fact that his interpretation exceeds all reflections upon Plato up to then by far. For him, Plato is not only the founder of European science conceived by Socrates, and not only the discoverer of epistemology, but also the first philosopher who asserted and founded philosophical idealism with the help of a transcendental methodology.

Paul Natorp justifies his view by arguing that Plato's idealism is still primeval. Compared with the Kantian system, Plato's autochthonous idealism appears as a far less complex system. Therefore, Natorp's depiction of Plato's developing theory of ideas considers itself to be an introduction to (transcendental) idealism (as the book's subtitle reads). But that is not the only argument he uses to justify the way he proceeds. In his view, also the basic concept of idealism is to be found in Plato in a by far purer property as in Kant, because Plato's theory of ideas is free of all those elements which appear in Kant's work along with the theory of the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*).

As in his study to Descartes' epistemology (1882), whose theory had been reconstructed in the spirit of Kantian criticism, the interest in systematic convergence predominates in Natorp's study, which relegates the differences, here those between Plato and Kant, to the background. Neglecting of the difference and alien-ness between former and present philosophies is justified in order to preserve Platonic philosophy as a living entity, according Natorp,. This neglect, however, is one reason why Natorp, in Gadamer's view, cannot deal with former philosophies in a rewarding way. The Neo-Kantians' scientific ideal, schooled by the natural sciences, functions as a filter which only retains what the familiar understanding of philosophy recognizes from tradition. This is reflected in many Neo-Kantian studies in the history of philosophy, for example, if they deal with

the prehistory - in the widest sense - of Kantian philosophy, or if they hitherto operate on a synopsis of the critical treatment of the problem of cognition in the history of philosophy. In their works, this history is basically reduced to a prehistory of the philosophy of the present.

So all endeavours for a consistent treatment of the history of philosophy are caught in a *circulus viciosus*. On the one hand, there is the claim that philosophy needs its history to gain enlightenment and knowledge its historical position in the process of development. And, on the other hand, it is clear that the selection of topics relevant for a history of philosophy presupposes a distinct concept of philosophy. We can now note that the Neo-Kantian turn to history is not only shaped by the elevation of tradition to the object of scientific study. It is also marked by a critical standard, which is a precondition for history of philosophy's research. It allows for a selection of those aspects of former philosophies, which can be recognized as philosophy, and understood as science. Viewed from the perspective of Neo-Kantianism, the transfer of the idea of progress coined in the natural sciences is not only legitimate, but, on historical and systematic interests, even justified.

In the approach of Neo-Kantianism, such a transfer is not just legitimate, but justified in the name of historical and systematic interest. Above all, as the true achievement of earliest philosophy can best be seen from the perspective of the latest, most advanced and developed philosophy. From this point of view, our judgement is no longer concealed by metaphysical speculations, but follows explicit, scientific criteria. On the other hand, the occupation with the history of philosophy has to enlighten the critical analysis of the problem of cognition - i.e. the genesis of modern philosophy - in the attitude of Neo-Kantian philosophers.

Gadamer contrasts this approach intending to elaborate the convergence of old and new, ancient and modern philosophy, with the purpose of reflecting upon tradition, to the latest developmental stage of philosophy. Thus ancient texts may well be understood in a novel, different way, but only without taking their inherent claims into account. Furthermore, any possibility of correcting or extending the expectations, which concern the interpretation of the text, as well as any self-conscious enhancement or critical revision of one's own appreciation of philosophy, are initially eliminated. If one supposes

that the latest thinker will also be the objectively most advanced thinker, it is in principle possible, but not very likely, that present philosophy can learn from its predecessors. This is a result of the demands of transference and the severe simplifications and reductions analysed in Gadamer's critique of the philosophical historians of the Neo-Kantian schools. It also has calmed the other, strange voice of philosophical tradition, which is reduced to pure pre-history, being neither strange nor alien because it inevitably leads to the philosophy of the present. Neo-Kantianism's systematic effort to create a history for itself reaching back far beyond Kant, does not only result in a very simplistic view of tradition. It is also based on an illusion of unlimited freedom of understanding.

III. On the necessity of understanding the past: The mystery of the positioning of norms

Perceived in this context, the mystery of the positioning of norms, as Simmel calls it, loses its secret. It diminishes to a methodically barely provable selection of common reflections, the logical argumentation of which has to be examined by modern philosophy. Gadamer argues, that this results in an assimilation of different former philosophies, along with their different perspectives and approaches, to one's own particular philosophical situation. By applying interpretative to the text, only those aspects of earlier philosophies become perceptible that suit the reduced perspective of one's own understanding of philosophy, but not those, that demarcate and denote the differences between the respective philosophies and perspectives. For Gadamer such an approach rather reveals the self-understanding of the current philosophy than an understanding of the philosophy of the past, because it only reconstructs its own history and does not recognize the difference in quality to antiquity. Thus, concentrating on history has no effect upon current philosophical endeavours. And, according to Gadamer, critical self-reflection, the true characteristic of actual experience, is eliminated.

My reflections do not seem to exclude the possibility that Nietzsche and Gadamer agree with all those critics of philosophy of history, who warn against too pragmatic reference to the past. These critics relate to the effect of such pragmatism. The effect results in a

network of constructions and interpretations, which withholds not only how the past really was, but which is also suspected of being not seriously interested in the historical past. But do Nietzsche and Gadamer really agree with this criticism?

Nietzsche and Gadamer share the supporters' opinion of the positioning of norms in the philosophy of history, namely that it cannot be a meaningful question to ask how the past really was, i.e. without all modernising supplements. Further, Nietzsche and Gadamer seem to be convinced that, according to the assumption that *the* past does not exist, an understanding of *the* past is either not possible at all or possible only in a thoroughly limited sense. Thus Gadamer speaks of a "multitude of voices", which are echoing the past²⁰. And Nietzsche claims, that what we actually describe the past as a "multiplication of several pasts"²¹.

But Nietzsche attacks the idealisation of antiquity; and Gadamer uses his history of concepts and connotations to search for guidelines which allow him to reveal the methodically validated past in its specific peculiarity. For both, Nietzsche and Gadamer, the modern interpretations and simplifications of the authors mentioned at the beginning of my lecture are not an indispensable evil. Although Gadamer thinks it is part of our freedom to transform or reject tradition, and although Nietzsche points out that it may be necessary to break with *one* past to gain a new one in an historical situations, respectively, they both disagree with those authors, who merely regard the past as a one-dimensional precursor to modernity. Nietzsche opposes this occupation of the past by modernity with the untimely-ness of the understanding of art and philosophy in the tragic Greek age, and Gadamer insists on the alien qualities of tradition, which we have to recognize, not equalise.

Nietzsche, using the topic of the Greek understanding of art and philosophy before the Persian wars, argues for a rediscovery of the untimely-ness of past ages in relation to modernity. But his appreciation of the first philosophers' suppression of the urge for knowledge, its liberation by Socrates and his resort to art are influenced by a positioning of norms, which Simmel regards as mysterious. From his point of view, Nietzsche's attempt to transfer the Greek concept of *agon* to the relationship of modernity to antiquity,

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), *Gesammelte Werke (-GW)*, Bd. 1, Tübingen 1990, p. 289.

positioning of norms, as such seems basically superfluous²². But it is essential. Modernity can only compete with a model that seems exemplary. If antiquity is to provide this example, it must possess something modernity is lacking. To look back to antiquity in order to find what modernity is missing, presupposes that there is something valuable and important for us.

Not so for Gadamer. For him ancient philosophy is exemplary not in the sense that it mirrors our own shortcomings and mistakes. This philosophy is exemplary for us only in so far as occidental philosophy, parallel to Plato's resort to the *logoi*, concentrates on language in a way which Gadamer considers to be announcing an epochal turn. For him, the resort to the *logoi* is equal to the departure to the "dialogue-dialectic": the prototype (Urgestalt²³) of philosophy which Gadamer considers to be the perpetually self-renewing beginning of philosophy. The platonic dialogue-dialectic offers a possibility to regard the positions of Neo-Kantianism and of the historians of philosophy criticized by the latter not as counter-positions, but as points of view which presuppose each other.

Although Gadamer takes the Aristotelian term *phronesis* as an proof of forms of knowledge which cannot be reduced to the modern understanding of science, this is not the result of a positioning of norms, but of an investigation into the history of concepts, which aims at breaking up historically developed layers of sense and meaning. Since it is to us to learn from the discourse with tradition, thereby being aware of the limitedness of our views, opinions and knowledge, we cannot completely ignore the positioning of norms. Results thereof are the prejudices Gadamer talks about: the prejudices we have in our conversations, or that employ when we begin to understand a text. The fact that these prejudices are inevitably revised, however, illustrates their inherent need of justification and revision. Gadamer's conclusion is that prejudices have to be rigorously examined with regard to their legitimacy. Accordingly, he does not seem to ask whether the premise of the philosophy of history can be maintained: namely, that values have to be fixed. On the basis of the kind of dialogue created by Plato, Gadamer does not have to raise this question. The necessity of the positioning of norms and the readiness to revise them are an

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Notizen zu Wir Philologen*, p. 34, NF 3(69).

²³ This fundamental aspect forget Hayden White in his book *Metahistory. The historical Imagination in nineteenth-Century Europe*, The John Hopkins University Press 1973, chapter 9.

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato als politischer Denker* (1935), GW 5, Tübingen 1985, p. 338.

inevitable result of the fact that philosophy continues to correct and develop itself through the discourse with its own history.

In my paper I have shown that the philosophy of history's positioning of norms is not such a mystery as Simmel assumes. Gadamer points out that Greek antiquity as a potential surpassing our possibilities, is to be understood only in the sense that under certain circumstances, historical traditions promote a critical self-reflection rather than an uncritical confirmation of self-sufficient and self-deceptive knowledge, which Nietzsche noticed in his philological colleagues, and Gadamer in his Neo-Kantian teachers. If we do not want to surrender to the illusion of knowledge seeming to be above critique, we need an authority which forces us to evaluate this knowledge, and which reveals its limited and tentative character.

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