

Welcome Home

The 2022 AGLSP annual conference, for the first time since October 2019, will be held in person. The immense importance of this fact, for a number of reasons, cannot be overstated. Practically speaking, for the AGLSP to continue to be an indispensable resource to students, practitioners, and lovers of graduate liberal studies, the kind of engagement that the annual conference offers is absolutely necessary. Over the last few years the Association has done a tremendous job of continuing to foster meaningful engagement with members and programs, by offering (among other things) virtual conferences, Director's Dialogue events, informative roundtable discussions, and showcases of student work, yet there really is no comparable replacement for the earnest, organic engagement that develops over the course of several days spent with others who share our passions. When we convene in San Antonio on October 10th, we will undoubtedly celebrate the long-awaited reunion with friends and colleagues; in equal measure, I hope that we will realize our responsibility to the opportunities that can only be gained through this kind of extensive, in-person occasion.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his seminal work *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960; translated in 1975 as *Truth and Method*), developed his philosophical conception of the hermeneutic experience—a particular manner of interpretation and understanding (usually of a text) which occurs by cultivating and maintaining a relationship through question and answer. This may sound strange—it's one thing to ask questions of a text or a work of art and hope that it will answer, but it's something else entirely to presume that the

text or work of art would itself pose questions of *us*, questions which we must answer if we hope to continue the hermeneutic experience toward an uncovering of understanding and meaning. But Gadamer argues that the reciprocity of this manner of dialogue between the interpreter and that which is being interpreted is essential, as both sides are equally constituted and maintained through the dialectical relation (*play*) which is formed. In play, the reciprocity, the *relation*, is primary. The ultimate goal of this dialectical movement (*play*) is the understanding of the object to be interpreted, an understanding which, as Gadamer notes, must take the form of language: “the way understanding occurs—whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person who raises an issue with us—is the coming-into-language of the thing itself.”¹

Whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person— this expansion by Gadamer of the ‘typical’ hermeneutic experience, extending beyond a metaphorical dialogue with a text or work of art to an actual conversation with another person, is what I want to emphasize. Yes, Gadamer’s primary goal in his analysis of the hermeneutic experience is to demonstrate that formal scientific inquiry does not hold an exclusive right to truth and that the human sciences stand at least on equal footing in their capacity to manifest truth; as he eventually contends, it is through the hermeneutic experience that truth can be uncovered. Beyond this goal, however, there is the more abstract but no less important point that the kind of experience Gadamer describes, *which depends on a particular manner of relating* (in conversation), can equally effectively be used by persons toward a similar uncovering of meaning. This aspect of Gadamer’s philosophy has intrigued me since I first read *Truth and Method*, and it’s been on my mind more and more as we approach our first in-person conference in three years.

In conversation, the participatory play through which two (or more) persons uncover and shape an understanding *together*, the meaning of that which is discussed may be revealed. What’s more, the subjects in conversation with one another—the individuals who momentarily (or perhaps longer) transcend their relative subjectivities to engage in dialogue *together*—are likewise revealed more fully, perhaps even themselves shaped and defined by the

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989, 2004), 370–371.

conversation. In this sense, meaning arises not just through the uncovering process that the dialogue enacts, but also through the revelation and becoming that each participant undergoes, specifically in relation to the other(s). *The relation is essential*. It is in relation to others that we are most able to ask and answer the questions that may allow for the uncovering of meaning; further, it is in relation to others that we are most fully able to be what we are as human beings. Human beings are relational creatures, and thus for us meaning (in an existential sense) can only ever be achieved in and through our relations with others. The moments when we achieve this kind of meaning-in-relation are perhaps then the moments when we are most fully human; these are also perhaps the moments when we are most at-home with others and in the world.

Here's hoping that we can all be the kind of earnest, open participants at the upcoming conference, and in so many other similar occasions in our professional and personal lives, who can uncover something of meaning, of *home*, together.

Confluence