The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer interests a wide audience that spans the traditional distinction between European (Continental) and Anglo-American (analytic) philosophy. Yet one of the most important and complex aspects of his work – his engagement with German Idealism – has received comparatively little attention. In this book, Kristin Gjesdal shows that Gadamer’s engagement with Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher is integral to his conception of hermeneutics. She argues that a failure to take this aspect of Gadamer’s philosophy into account leads to a misunderstanding of the most pressing problem of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics: the tension between the commitment to the self-criticism of reason, on the one hand, and the turn towards the meaning-constituting authority of tradition, on the other. Her study offers an illuminating assessment of both the merits and the limitations of Gadamer’s thought.

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Wayne M. Martin: *Theories of Judgement*
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“Using Heidegger’s analysis, my starting point was a critique of German Idealism and its Romantic traditions.”

HANS-GEORG GADAMER,
“Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” 27.
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Over the past decade, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1960) has enjoyed a renaissance. With its concern for the question of validity in interpretation, the so-called Gadamer–Habermas debate has faded into the background. So has the discussion between Gadamer and Derrida over the relationship between hermeneutics and deconstruction. When philosophers such as Richard Rorty, John McDowell, and Robert Brandom turn to Gadamer, it is in order to find support for the notions of *Bildung*, historicity, and the linguistic nature of reason.

While it offers new perspectives on Gadamer’s work, the recent Anglophone reception overlooks how philosophical hermeneutics develops in critical interaction with German Idealism and its legacy in modern aesthetics and philosophy of art. Through a critical investigation of *Truth and Method*, the present study argues that Gadamer’s engagement with Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schleiermacher is integral to his understanding of hermeneutic reason and that a failure to engage with this aspect of Gadamer’s philosophy leads to a misunderstanding of the most pressing problem of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics: the tension between the commitment to the self-criticism of reason, on the one hand, and the turn towards the meaning-constituting authority of tradition, on the other. Arguing that Gadamer fundamentally misconstrues the legacy of German Idealism, this book proposes that this tension can only be overcome by a return to early nineteenth-century hermeneutics as it develops in the wake of the Enlightenment and Kant’s critical philosophy.
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I would like to thank Michael Forster for his ongoing encouragement, countless discussions on hermeneutics and German Idealism, and for carefully commenting on substantial parts of the manuscript. Over the past three years, I have benefitted from conversations on German philosophy and aesthetics with Paul Guyer. At the University of Oslo, Bjørn Ramberg has been – and still is – a generous yet critical sounding-board. Rudolf Makkreel, Joseph Margolis, Andrew Bowie, John Gibson, and Shelley Wilcox all read through and offered helpful comments on various parts of the manuscript. I thank Richard Eldridge and Stephen Houlgate for valuable criticism and suggestions. Most of all, however, my love and gratitude go to my husband, Espen Hammer, whose combination of patience, generosity, and critical readership has made an enormous difference.

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Acknowledgements

ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Hans-Georg Gadamer:


WM *Wahrheit und Methode.* 2 vols. GW, vols. I and II. (Unless otherwise noted, WM refers to vol. I of this work.)
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works on Hans-Georg Gadamer:


Works by G. W. F. Hegel:


Works by Martin Heidegger:


GA Gesamtausgabe. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–.


Ni Nietzsche. Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst. GA, vol. XLIII.


Works by Immanuel Kant:

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS


Works by Friedrich Schleiermacher:


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