

ON THE *HERMENEUTICUS I* AS A PRESUPPOSITION OF ETHICAL HERMENEUTICS

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to ground the concept of *hermeneuticus I* based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy. Just as we can speak of a *Cartesian I* or *Humean I*, I intend to justify the existence of a *hermeneuticus I* by highlighting one's posture (*Tugend*) towards the others. Although neither Gadamer nor his interpreters have coined or discussed this concept from the point of view of ethics, I think it is possible to do so according to the assumption that *our peculiar way of being is understanding*. In this way, I intend to begin paving the way for the construction of a *Hermeneutical Ethics*. I propose to do this based on the well-known I-Thou triadic relationship developed by Gadamer in *Truth and Method I*. Initially, I describe the posture of the two Is and show that their way of relating with the Thou is not hermeneutic. Then, according to Gadamer, I present the third type of I-Thou relationship by systematizing seven ethical postures proper to the *hermeneuticus I*, which are founded upon the I's exercise of putting himself or herself in the place of the other, without the intention of instrumentalizing the latter. Finally, I develop conclusions and ethical and sociopolitical implications resulting from the action (praxis) of the *hermeneuticus I*.

Keywords: *Hermeneuticus I*; Ethical hermeneutics; Gadamer; Other; Action.

Understanding means that I am able to weigh and consider fairly what the other person thinks! One recognizes that the other person could be right in what he or she says or actually wants to say. Understanding, therefore, is not simply mastering something that stands opposite you [*das Gegenüber*], whether it is the other person or the whole objective [*gegenständliche*] world in general. (GADAMER, 2000, 23).

When I take a text into my hands, when I enter a conversation or engage the idioms of life and others in whatever way I do, the stakes are high, and in the end, what is most at stake is who I am and will become, how I will be with others. (SCHMIDT, 2012, 46).

The reflection I propose here is situated in the context of my project to develop the connections between hermeneutics and ethics on the basis of Hans-Georg Gadamer's work with the purpose of providing a foundation for the concept of *ethical hermeneutics*. This article has the specific goal of spelling out, reflecting on and systematizing features and implications of the interpreter-philosopher's posture vis-à-vis the world. For this purpose, I coined the phrase *hermeneuticus I* to gather and describe ethical features proper to the hermeneut-philosopher. As far as I know, neither Gadamer nor his interpreters talked about the existence of a *hermeneuticus I*, nor spoke of condensing in it the features and ethical task of the hermeneut-philosopher². But I think it is not difficult to perceive the ethical features—of Socratic-Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian origin—of the undertaking of understanding the world, which is inherent in the structure of philosophical hermeneutics. I do know the phrase *homo hermeneuticus* that Richard Palmer uses *en passant* in his book *Hermeneutics*, but without claiming to take it as the ethical subject in hermeneutics. What Palmer did was, following Heidegger, to use the phrase *homo hermeneuticus* to point to the way of being proper to human beings, whose *peculiar way of being is understanding*. Furthermore, since we are used to talking about a Cartesian, Humean, Freudian I, or the *homo sapiens, homo faber, homo lates, homo ludens, homo saucer*, why can't we think about the phrase *hermeneuticus I* or *homo hermeneuticus* as a way of gathering and condensing in it the indications or features—in this case, ethical ones—of the way of being proper to human beings, which is of understanding, and in this way orienting and guiding their actions in the world?

Having described the context of the proposed reflection, I would like to answer the question about the reasons for the creation of the expression *hermeneuticus I*. First of all, its coinage and development will enable me to design the path of the conceptual construction of ethical hermeneutics.

Secondly, I intend to reflect on and deconstruct the theoretical-philosophical problem of conceptual dogmatism. I have the impression that dogmatism is based on the view and posture of an I that considers itself absolute, the owner of truth, and that, being sure about its certainties, ignores, despises or even destroys the other. Entangled in one's egocentricity, this I is neither able nor willing to listen to anyone except itself.

Thirdly, with the notion of *hermeneuticus I*, I would like to contribute to the debate and point out alternatives for problems of a social-political-religious-existential nature. As we open our eyes and sharpen our ears to the social situation, we realize the growing dictatorial, totalitarian, racist, xenophobic, male chauvinist expressions and postures, deplorably, on a

world scale. The political victories of the liberal right wing are based on an absolutization of a shut-off unit, of the same, equal, identical, of the absolute I, and, as a consequence, on the exclusion of the other and their possibility of having their rights and reasons acknowledged.

The fourth argument builds on the specificity of human beings in the light of Aristotle—we are linguistic animals, interpreters of the world by nature. Our idiosyncrasy vis-à-vis the other animals consists of creating language and abstracting from reality. Through and in language we create and destroy the world, we solve problems, and those who refuse to do that return to the stage of plants, which is the case of the I who is unwilling to understand the other.

The fifth argument, of an ontological nature, is that the way of being most proper to us consists in actualizing what Aristotle claimed at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, viz. “all human beings, by nature, want to know.” The desire and the need to actualize our thirst for understanding the world are part of our nature.

In connection with the previous argument, I think that the actualization of the features proper to the *hermeneuticus I* makes us happier, more fulfilled, more autonomous and freer. The practice of the ethical features of the *hermeneuticus I* makes it possible to have a healthier, more pleasant, responsible and partnership-based coexistence. Besides contributing to our personal orientation in the world, a corollary of the actualization of the features of the *hermeneuticus I* involves preventing or minimizing disastrous consequences of the human action guided by the modern I’s posture on nature.

In sum, to philosophize, this is, to know how to deal with the other’s rights and reasons, it can be very valuable to spell out and develop features of the posture of the person who understands contained in the expression *hermeneuticus I*.

I propose to do that starting from the well-known triadic I-Thou relationship developed by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. So, initially, I will show that the two first Is in question are not hermeneutical, whereas the third one exemplarily embodies what I understand under the notion of *hermeneuticus I*.

1. On the Postures of the Is Opposite to the *hermeneuticus I*

1.1 Postures of the I of the first type of I-Thou relationship

Regarding the first type of I-Thou relationship, Gadamer argues that the I guides one's behavior by modern scientific knowledge, this is, one orients themselves by the "naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it" (GADAMER, 1999, 364). In one's posture of neutrality, objectivity and distance towards the real, they eventually objectify it. This I tries to know, control, dissect, master the real and then draw conclusions based on their position. Having no interest in getting into the games of language, they are determined to control them and to impose their own way of playing. This I wants and thinks that they can say and do whatever is convenient for them, without taking into consideration what does not concern them. Having no interest in the other's existence or making a constant effort to ignore it, they see the other as a key on a piano keyboard.

This is a posture that instrumentalizes the other by using them as a means for the attainment of the I's own ends. They do not pay attention to the other, nor to the relationship between them; by reducing the other to an object only amenable to being known and dominated, they do not establish a relationship of care³ with the other. They make no effort and have no interest in putting or imagining themselves in the other's place, but only in knowing and applying knowledge. They do not want to know about the other's position or thinking. i.e. they are not willing to play or get into (the other's) language game. They do not know or want to hear about, and have no willingness or interest in welcoming and understanding what the other thinks or has to tell them. This I, represented by the figure of the dictator, has a horror of what is different from themselves and, on the other hand, typically only approaches those who are willing to ratify their own interests. They are not willing to give the other rights, and even less admit that the other may be right. Creon represents this in an exemplary way; by shutting himself off, he refused to consider the warning of his son Haemon: "So don't let your mind dwell on just one thought, that what you say is right and nothing else," (SÓFOCLES, 1990, 225) the result of which were several tragedies, as we know.

Gadamer levels harsh criticism at the posture of the I in question, warning that the Thou, just like tradition,

is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is language—i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us ... tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou (GADAMER, 1990, 364).

Gadamer criticizes the reifying treatment given by the I, recalling and warning that the Thou has a voice, history, speaks for itself and has an ethos and a life world of its own. By objectifying the Thou, the I does not allow them to speak nor allows their horizon to be taken into consideration. Gadamer not only criticizes the limits of the technical-scientific relationship that guides the posture of this I, but claims that it is not an ethical posture, and does so by referring to the Kantian imperative:

From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man. As we know, in interpreting the categorical imperative Kant said, *inter alia*, that the other should never be used as a means but always as an end in himself (GADAMER, 1990, 364).

In brief, the “pure self-regarding” that guides the way of knowing and acting of this first type of I disregards the other’s situation so as to annul them and, as a consequence, implodes the “moral definition of man.” Having no interest or intention of putting themselves in the place of the other, the I described above treats the other as a means only, rather than as *an end in himself or herself*, and this contradicts the exercise of the ethical, philosophical understanding of the other.

1.2 Postures of the I of the second type of I-Thou relationship

In the first type of relationship the I pays no attention at all to the other, whereas in the second there are signs of care as the I tries to understand and even put itself in the place of the other; however, they do so in order to manipulate, control and dominate the other. I call this relationship a dialectical-scientific one. In Gadamer’s words:

A second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgment the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness ... One claims to know the other’s claim from [one’s] point of view and even to understand the other better than the other understands himself ... [The Thou] is understood, but this means [he] is co-opted and pre-empted reflectively from the standpoint of the other person (GADAMER, 1990, 365).

In this case, the I recognizes the other at the starting point of the process of knowledge, but their final understanding is ultimately reached on the basis of the sole "self-relatedness," which refers exclusively to the I and excludes the Thou.

This I understands the other only on the basis of their own claims and interests. This institutes a dialectical relationship that is not completed because the I only takes the Thou seriously at the initial moment, but at the second moment, when performing the synthesis or weighing what the Thou said or meant, the I does not take into consideration and is not affected by the Thou's rights, and has no interest in incorporating the latter's argumentation in the synthesis. When the I puts and imagines itself in the place of the other, it does so only with a view to its own horizon and with the purpose of manipulating the other.

In this type of relationship, which is more refined and radical than the scientific instrumental one, the I claims not only to know, but to know the other better than the latter knows themselves. This radicalization is expressed in the I's claim to understand the other in advance based on their words, exercising a subtle control over the other based on the latter's world. By instituting an image of the other based on themselves, the I is:

reflecting himself out of his relation to the other and so becoming unreachable by him. By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy ... The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance (GADAMER, 1990, 366).

Although the approach to the other adopted by the second I is more subtle than the objectifying treatment of the other by the first I, it is still instrumental and reifying (GADAMER, 1990, 366). By criticizing this way of approaching the Thou, Gadamer recommends that they should be treated as an end in themselves, and this leads us to the field of ethical hermeneutics.

Claiming to know and recognize the other while neglecting and prescinding of their context leads to a partial understanding and an inappropriate treatment of the other. This perspective of the I breaks the moral bond, the reciprocal relationship with others, the ethos. The selective action of this I is anti-ethical, for, according to Gadamer:

A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its [morally binding character]. *A person who reflects himself out of a*

living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way. In seeking to understand tradition historical consciousness must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources, as if this preserved it from mixing in its own judgments and prejudices. It must, in fact, think [about] its own historicity. To be situated within [traditions] ... does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible (GADAMER, 1990, 366).

The treatment that does not take into consideration the Thou's dwelling place—their contingencies, freedom, desires and historicity—where the I puts themselves in the place of the other in order to better control them is considered anti-ethical and anti-hermeneutical. This I, although acknowledging the other's right to be right, never entertains the possibility that the other is right.

Thus, we can say that the postures of the Is in question are not hermeneutical or ethical, insofar as they are neither able nor willing to dialogue, since their relationship is guided by the "monological structure of modern science and theorization" (GADAMER, 1993, 212). These Is are not capable of welcoming, listening to, understanding, grasping and perceiving the other's position, of letting themselves be touched or affected by the other and even less of changing their opinion or posture. Now, according to Gadamer's warning:

A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a *vis a tergo*. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light (GADAMER, 1990, 366).

These Is are not hermeneutical because they have no interest and no intention of dealing with or accounting for the difference that exists vis-à-vis the other. In metaphysical terms, this I reminds one of positivity, of the full unity, complete in itself, of the Parmenidean sphere or the *cogito ergo sum*. In political terms, the first I's posture is embodied in the tyrannical dictator—who, like Creon, ignores the chorus leader's recommendation: "My lord, if what he's said is relevant, it seems appropriate to learn from him" (SÓFOCLES, 1990, 226)—and the second I becomes concrete in the figure of the demagogue or populist. In terms of knowledge, the first I manipulates the other like a scientist who examines a virus, and the second is mirrored in the figure of the sophist—in the pejorative sense of this word—in which

the I enters the other's world, but does so only to exercise domination over the other, since the I continues to be the reference.

We can conclude that in Gadamer's hermeneutics we find clear and irrefutable ethical principles, namely not treating the other as a means but as an end in themselves. The posture of these two Is shows the negative version of Kant's imperative, this is, how one should not understand the other as an object, an instrument. However, in Gadamer's philosophy one can also track the expression of the moral golden rule in the postures of the I that characterize what I call the *hermeneuticus I*.

2. On the *hermeneuticus I*

Just like one speaks, without fear, of a Cartesian, Fichtean, Transcendental, Humean I, I propose a reflection on the *hermeneuticus I*. Through this phrase, I intend to show the positive version of the golden rule—the previous Is represent the negative version of a non-hermeneutical I because they express the way in which the I should not treat the other. Differently from them, the *hermeneuticus I* is the I who “treats the others as ends in themselves, rather than as means,” i.e. who “treats the other as it would like to be treated,” because it is guided by “weigh[ing] and consider[ing] fairly what the other person thinks” (GADAMER, 2000, 23).

Let us look at seven ethical postures, proper to the *hermeneuticus I*, founded upon the I's effort and exercise of putting, imagining and perceiving themselves in the place of the other—without the intention of instrumentalizing, dominating or reifying the other—in order to foster and contribute to the process of rendering them more autonomous, freer, happier.

The first ethical posture is *opening oneself to the other*. What does opening oneself to the other mean? In his discussion of the third type of I-Thou relationship, Gadamer justifies the appropriate, philosophical relationship between the I and tradition, which “has a real analogue in the I's experience of the Thou,” claiming that “knowing and recognizing this constitutes the third, and highest, type of hermeneutical experience: the openness to tradition ...” (Gadamer, 1990, 367). From this Gadamerian hint, one can extract the first thesis on the posture of the *hermeneuticus I* involved in each and every hermeneutical process, namely that understanding does not imply only knowing and recognizing, but also opening oneself to the other. According to Hans-Herbert Kögler, “the important Gadamerian ‘value’ of openness, which is declared to be the only or at least the major orientation that is required in interpretation (after the

deconstruction of pseudo-objectivistic methods), could open doors to accepting *any* mode of understanding or practice" (KÖGLER, 2014, 10).

Opening oneself to the other does not mean blindly adhering to, accepting or admitting the other's truths, but unblocking channels or allowing their speech to echo and produce effects on the I. It means exercising oneself in grasping what the other has to say from their horizon, without hastening to refuse, ratify, or rectify what they say. It means being able to weigh and re-weigh what they try to express. Opening oneself to the other means making an effort to treat the other as an end, rather than as a means for personal use.

According to Gadamer, openness, when applied to tradition, means that "I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say" (GADAMER, 1990, 367). Opening oneself to the other means "that one does not overlook the claim of the other" (RISSER, 1997, 15). In this practice, the I deals with the difference without eliminating it in advance or at the end of the process. The *hermeneuticus I*—or "the hermeneutical consciousness," in Gadamer's words—"culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma" (GADAMER, 1990, 367). Thus, there is an intimate relation between openness and philosophical experience or wisdom, the antipode of which is dogmatism.

This posture of openness has many philosophical implications. By opening themselves to the other, the I has the possibility of clarifying their arguments and worldview and, by broadening their self-consciousness in this way, the opportunity to act in a more autonomous, free and appropriate manner in each case. The openness that characterizes the *hermeneuticus I* enables them to be exposed to "the possible opposed view," and thus go beyond the narrowness of their "own biases" (GADAMER; KOSELLECK, 2000, 40). By opening themselves, the I has the possibility to better understand their situation and history, and make the right decisions that are possible in the circumstances in which they are. (SCHÖNHERR-MANN, 2004, 191).

The second ethical posture is *treating the Thou as a Thou*. What does treating the Thou as a Thou mean? The second ethical feature is part of the posture of openness insofar as, for Gadamer, "In human relations the important thing is ... to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim ..." (GADAMER, 1990, 367). The *hermeneuticus I* does not ignore the presence and claims of the other, but treats them as a Thou, taking their positions seriously. The *hermeneuticus I* goes out of

themselves, in the manner of Abraham, and makes the effort of the *epoché* to be able *to experience the Thou as a Thou* in the latter's historicity. Treating the Thou as a Thou means treating them as an end in themselves, with their projects, world and freedom (GADAMER, 1990, 364). Philosophical understanding is woven by the imperative of opening oneself, of taking seriously, welcoming, treating the other as an end in themselves. This involves respect for otherness and a *fusion of horizons* in which there is an open dialectics, without the dilution of one or another, but with a maintenance of the difference in an open unity, in the form of a network, thus potentiating both of them.

The third ethical posture is *letting the Thou say something to you*. Besides being careful *to treat the Thou as a Thou*, the *hermeneuticus I* develops the skill and practice of *letting the Thou say something to them*. In other words, the philosophical understanding becomes more complete when the I is able to open themselves, to treat the Thou as a Thou and also "let him really say something to us" (GADAMER, 1990, 367). The I not only allows but also enables the Thou to say something to them with as little filtering as possible, making the effort of the *epoché* (ROHDEN, 2017), so that the Thou can express their own perspective on truth.

The fourth ethical posture is *listening to the other*. What does listening to the other mean? The exercise of letting the other say something to oneself allows another ethical feature that is proper to the *hermeneuticus I* to show, which is *listening to the other*. In Gadamer's words:

Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person "understands" the other [i.e. sees through the other]. Similarly, "to hear and obey someone" (*auf jemanden hören*) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires (GADAMER, 1990, 367).

Listening means—much more than letting the other speak—welcoming the other's word, taking into account the filter of the judgments involved in the process of understanding. The exercise of listening on the one hand presupposes and on the other fosters the mutual bond, (ROHDEN, 2004, 191-192) the ethos between I and Thou. Listening to the Thou involves caring for and cultivating the bonds between them. Following Plato, for Gadamer, the fulness of this ethical feature occurs in the practice of dialogue: "the constant aptitude to return to conversation, this is, to listen to the other, seems to me to be the true elevation of human beings to humanity" (GADAMER, 1993, 214). Or, in the words of Kögler:

The dialogical process is here emphatically defined by the *open-endedness* of all understanding, which ensures the visibility of views that are presented and/or reached, and thus further grounds the idea of a *hermeneutic recognition* in dialogical interaction. By defining our beliefs as ongoing projects to understand, as fallible projects to make sense, the internal correctibility of one's convictions based on the other's input is made an integral part of understanding. (KÖGLER, 2014, 12).

"The art of understanding certainly is first and foremost the art of listening. The possibility that the other be right is also part of that art. The other is always in a bad situation if both sides do not feel this." (GADAMER, 1995, 274). The actualization of this ethical feature of the *hermeneuticus I* involves many philosophical implications. Listening to the other allows and enables the I to broaden their gaze and way of hearing, and consequently of acting. By listening attentively to the Thou, the I allows the other's speech to reverberate not only on their ways of thinking, but also of acting. In the gesture of listening, of welcoming what the other has to say, one can see signs of empathy⁴ which, as we know, is a fundamental ethical assumption for a successful and healthy relationship between persons and for all professional practices.

The fifth ethical posture is *letting oneself be affected, touched*. What does this mean? The *hermeneuticus I* not only allows, enables, welcomes and listens, but also lets themselves be affected and touched by the other's word. Differently from an objective, allegedly neutral and cold hearing of the other's word, they become sensitized by the other's horizon and opinion, which does not involve agreeing with or ratifying them, but understanding in the sense of *comprehension*. This ethical posture is shown exemplarily in the field of the experience of the work of art, according to Gadamer, where one feels touched by the meaning of what is said, (GADAMER, 1996, 60) for "The work of art that says something confronts us itself ... To understand what the work of art says to us is therefore a self-encounter", (GADAMER, 1996, 60) which helps to guide our action.

The sixth ethical posture is *admitting the validity of something opposed to the I*. And, finally, the most radical thesis is that the *hermeneuticus I* not only broadens their knowledge, sensitivity and perception of the world, but also increases their possibility of acting by welcoming and/or admitting the validity of something that is strange, different and even opposed to their own horizon. According to Gadamer, "Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me

to do so" (GADAMER, 1990, 367). The *hermeneuticus I* opens themselves to speeches that are different and even opposed to their own speech, allowing them to produce echo and challenges, rupturing their way of thinking and acting. By exercising the auscultation of what is completely strange, they must even "accept some things that are against the one who seeks to understand." (RISSER, 1997, 15). In James Risser's words, "what is at stake in understanding is the otherness of the text and its ability to assert its truth against one's own fore-meanings." (RISSER, 1997, 15). Recognizing and even affirming the opposite truth requires from the *hermeneuticus I* the exercise of self-dispossession and even of *indifference* that is peculiar to the philosopher who undertakes to understand the whole of reality rather than just a part of it, but that does not mean accepting everything uncritically. The *hermeneuticus I* renounces the claim to possess total control over the real, and attempts "to take into account the social situatedness of any ethical agent," (KÖGLER, 2014, 11) even when it is adverse to themselves.

The seventh ethical posture is *humbleness* (Schönherr-Mann, 2004, 191). The previous posture presupposes and implies the practice of humbleness by the *hermeneuticus I*. The posture of humbleness contrasts with the epistemological arrogance and its claim to control and dissect the real or to have a *fixed and definitive opinion on everything* and everyone. This posture of humbleness has its roots in our humanity; after all, we are made from humus—we are not gods, and therefore we are finite. Humbleness is rooted in "the insistence on the finitude of the interpreter" that "excludes any epistemic hubris, defines an attitude of responsiveness that aims to learn and be challenged and advanced by the other" (KÖGLER, 2014, 11). Although the posture of humbleness may give the impression of weakness or insecurity, the strength of humbleness lies in potentiating human freedom and weaving a conceptual network with the threads of finitude, and therefore with the measure appropriate to the human way of knowing and acting.

3. Conclusions and Ethical Implications of the *hermeneuticus I*'s Action

3.1. *The hermeneuticus I is a project!*

The *hermeneuticus I* as an idea, a project, a presupposition of the philosophical practice we can see in Gadamer. Here, we have listed some of their peculiar features because they are not given nor defined, and

resembles more the multifaceted and undefined face of Hermes than that of Apollo. It is a concept-project that carries and contains the perspective in a peculiar way of knowing and acting. Rather than a finished definition, they are a construction, a task opposed to the way of acting of the two kinds of Is described above. Vis-à-vis the model of the dominating I, the exacerbation of subjectivity erected on the project of modern science, Gadamer proposed the constitution of the subject:

by other powers, especially those of commonality—in the family, in comradeship, in human solidarity—so that one understands and is understood. Understanding always means first of all: oh, now I understand what you want! In saying this, I have not said that you are right or that you will be judged to be correct. But only if we get to the point that we understand another human being, either in a political situation or in a text, will we be able to communicate with one another at all (GADAMER, 2000, 23-24).

3.2. The hermeneuticus I is dialogically constituted

We saw that Gadamer criticizes morally the postures of the two Is on the basis of the Kantian imperative of “not treating the other as a means or instrument, but as end in himself or herself,” and I argued here that the *hermeneuticus I* represents the active posture of the moral principle of “doing unto others as you would like them to do unto you.” The *hermeneuticus I* not only does not treat the other as a means but treats them as an end in themselves, as the I would like to be treated. Therefore, they weigh and re-weigh, consider and reconsider, what the other says or thinks, which is fulfilled in the exercise of dialogue. Along these lines, in the words of Theodore George, in the light of Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics can be taken as the process of “elevating” ourselves “to humanity” through “the aptitude (*Fähigkeit*) for conversation” (GEORGE, 2014, 103). In Gadamer’s words, “the constant aptitude to return to conversation, this is, to listen to the other, seems to me to be the true elevation of human beings to humanity” (GADAMER, 1993, 214).

The dialogical posture of the *hermeneuticus I*, who treats the others as an end in themselves, makes them freer, more fulfilled and autonomous, for, according to Dennis Schmidt, “When I take a text into my hands, when I enter a conversation or engage the idioms of life and others in whatever way I do, the stakes are high, and in the end, what is most at stake is who I am and will become, how I will be with others” (SCHMIDT, 2012, 46). The *hermeneuticus I*, driven by the natural desire to know, aware of their

finitude, is, as a consequence and in an attitude of humbleness, fulfilled by dialogue where they exercise that art of giving the other rights and the right to be right, which for Gadamer constitutes "the soul of hermeneutics" (GADAMER, 1991, 160).

The *hermeneuticus I* is willing to play with others and not only against them, exercises listening to the voice of the other, his able to leave their Ithaca aware that they will return as a different person, and learns to know, recognize and grant the other not only rights but the right to be right; in brief, they practice respect for the other to the point of becoming solidary with the other. In metaphysical terms, the *hermeneuticus I* breaks with the binary logics of knowing as a mere adjustment between thing and intellect, and institutes the appropriation and conceptualization of the real woven by finitude according to the logic of the included third. The philosophical process as praxis interweaves understanding and ethics as ratified by Dennis Schmidt, for whom "hermeneutics needs to be understood as a *practice* and that it is a practice that, properly understood, changes us. This change, this transformation, comes to shape our character. It affects and forges what was understood by the ancient Greek word *ethos*" (SCHMIDT, 2014, 169). This also implies that:

Gadamer's commitment to the *linguistic mediation* of all understanding in productive dialogue avoids any historicist reduction to context, as dialogue is defined as the opening toward the subject matter in its different views and horizons. The voice of the other is thus neither individualized nor objectified, but taken as a response, as a claim that addresses oneself in one's essential humanity (KÖGLER, 2014, 11-12).

3.3. Personal and sociopolitical implications resulting from the task of becoming a hermeneuticus I

3.3.1. Personal-ethical implications

By actualizing the peculiar hermeneutical way of being, we actualize our way of being language through openness, welcoming, listening and weighing the other's word. This praxis, as proposed by Aristotle, is that which makes us more ourselves, happier and more fulfilled. By understanding the world, the *hermeneuticus I* understands themselves and thus performs a self-examination, which enables them to make fewer mistakes, and to live in a freer and more responsible manner. By broadening their way of looking, listening and perceiving the world, they go beyond the

narrowness of their particular points of view and interests and thus have the possibility to have a better orientation in the world. It is in the movement of going out of ourselves and encountering the other, dialogically, that we are entirely fulfilled, for, as Gadamer puts it,

conversation has a transforming force. When a conversation succeeds, something remains with us and something remains in us that transformed us. That is why conversation has a peculiar affinity with friendship. Friends only can meet ... in conversation and create that kind of commonality in which each one remains himself or herself to the other because both find the other and find themselves in the other (GADAMER, 1992, 207).

The fulness of a free and happy life occurs in the exemplary interaction of friends—mirrored in the concept of friendship. It is in the ethos of friendship that one can fearlessly accept the other's argument, broaden one's way of thinking and perceiving the world, and be who one is, acting responsibly. Happy and fulfilled people are those who are able to enter the other's circuit, who learn with the other, wish to get to know the other's horizon and are willing to play the game with the other; on the other hand, the unhappy ones are shut off, incapsulated, incapable of accompanying the other on the two-way street that is life. In this sense, I agree with Kögler, who argues that:

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics can provide a productive *starting point* to flesh out such an ethic. The decisive grounding of the interpreting self in a holistic context beyond her control rightly emphasizes the need to take into account the social situatedness of any ethical agent; more importantly, it provides a strong moral impulse toward *openness*, as the insistence on the finitude of the interpreter avoids any epistemic hubris, and defines an attitude of responsiveness that aims to learn and be challenged and advanced by the other (KÖGLER, 2014, 11).

3.3.2. Sociopolitical implications

Although this is implicit and not systematized by Gadamer, the *hermeneuticus I*, with their ethical posture, calls for the inclusion of perception, historicity and freedom in the process of philosophical understanding. As an idea and a project, the *hermeneuticus I* results in

personal and sociopolitical fulfillment. This is why Gadamer urges us to learn the virtue of hermeneutics. In his words:

I do venture to say, however, that if we do not learn hermeneutic virtue—that is, if we do not realize that it is essential first of all to understand the other person if we are ever to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together—if we do not, we will never be able to accomplish the essential tasks of humanity, whether on a small scale or large (GADAMER, 2000, 25).

The *hermeneuticus I* is thus a fundamental presupposition for the initiation into thinking in an “ecumenical manner,” which is an imperative for humankind, “which has to do so in order to learn to live together and, in this way, perhaps postpone self-destruction or even ... avoid it” (GADAMER, 1995, 271). It does not suffice not to treat the other as an instrument; rather, it is essential to treat the other as we would like to be treated and still ‘treat the other as he would like to be treated’⁵⁴, instituting an ethos where freedom reigns and enables the creation of networks among people, among human beings and nature.

Notes

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² Although the expression “hermeneutical self” is used by Paul S. Chung (2012) and there is a reference to “eu-hermenêutico [hermeneutical I]” in http://liliancomunica.com.br/site/o-eu-hermeneutico_my_proposal_is_different_due_to_the_effort_of_systematizing_and_defining_this_hermeneuticus_I_from_the_ethical_point_of_view.

³ On the topic of care, see the reflections developed in ROHDEN and KUSSLER, 2017.

⁴ On the relation between Gadamer’s hermeneutics and empathy, see KÖGLER, 2015.

⁵ I am currently researching and writing precisely about this dimension of morality in an article entitled "Ethical hermeneutics woven by the Golden and Copper Rule of Morals Ethical hermeneutics in light of the Platinum rule!".

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