

Is Gadamer a Realist?

YUSUKE OKADA*

Abstract

Although Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has been accused of relativism, there have been several attempts to interpret his position as realism. Among them, the theory of Wachterhauser's "perspectival realism" offers a convincing reading. In this paper, however, it is demonstrated that Gadamer is not a realist in the normal sense by comparing Wachterhauser's theory and Gadamer's original text of *Truth and Method*. Although Wachterhauser captures the bipolar structure of Gadamer's argument regarding one reality and plural perspectives, he fails to grasp Gadamer's emphasis by overstressing the accessibility of reality, whereas Gadamer limits himself to perspectives which maintain that reality is nothing other than a continuity of these perspectives. The concept of reality, or in Gadamer's own term, the "world-in-itself," should not be used "constitutively" but "regulatively" in the Kantian sense: An objective statement about it should be avoided; rather, it works as the *focus imaginarius* of the linguistic perspectives. Gadamer's attitude towards Kant is also discussed in this context: Although Wachterhauser claims that Gadamer is anti-Kantian in his orientation, it is shown that Gadamer shares the principal spirit of critical philosophy with Kant, namely not taking phenomena as thing-in-itself. The reason that Gadamer did not take the last step to realism is, in the end, interpreted as his radical attitude of *docta ignorantia*, which warns against dogmatism and maintains a hermeneutic openness to the other possibility.

Keywords: H.–G. Gadamer, hermeneutics, phenomenology, realism.

1. Introduction. The Rise of Realism and the Fate of Hermeneutics?

In contemporary 21st century philosophy, the so-called "New Realism" seems to be gradually drawing attention in the academic philosophical discourse¹. As a philosophical theory in the global age, it is more like a group of local movements, which occur more or less simultaneously and unite together, rather than a centralized revolution radiating out from one geographical location — as was the case with the influence of Kantian

* Martin Luther Universität Halle–Wittenberg. y.okada12@gmail.com.

1. There are several streams of "New Realism". For example, see the international movement of Markus Gabriel (Gabriel 2015), the "Speculative Realism" of Quentin Meillassoux (Meillassoux 2006), and the "Object Oriented Realism" of Graham Harman (Harman 2011).

philosophy spreading from Königsberg. Although it is doubtless reckless to situate these contemporary movements in the history, it could be said that new realism is trying to get the status of “the koiné of 21st century”.

“The koiné of 21st century” presupposes the koiné of 20th century, which was the title of the hermeneutics developed by Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo 1987). New philosophical thoughts often overtake older ones by criticizing them, and the relationship between new realism and hermeneutics can be understood, to some extent, as such a dispute between the new and the old. This *Generationskampf* can be seen most vividly in today’s Italy. Maurizio Ferraris, the leader of *new realism* in Italy, used to be the successor of Gianni Vattimo, the representative of hermeneutics, but they later disagreed and parted from each other (e.g. Ferraris 2015). Including Ferraris, the critics of Vattimo’s postmodern hermeneutics point out the relativistic and nihilistic nature of his thought, which is mainly characterized by Nietzschean perspectivism. Umberto Eco analyzes this matter as follows: “what actually matters in the so-called philosophical postmodernism — which is nourished from forms of weak thoughts and deconstructive elements in the West — [...] is a easily recognizable essential feature (essentially Ferraris’ polemic is directed against this): the hermeneutic priority of interpretation, or to be precise, the slogan that there is no fact but only interpretations.” (Eco 2015: 36. Trans. by Author) Between the two poles of “fact” and “interpretation,” Vattimo emphasizes the latter, while Ferraris holds on to the former by making clear the distinction between ontology and epistemology. Today, according to *new realism*, hermeneutics is almost seen as a synonym for the postmodern philosophy.

Here it is not focused whether Ferraris’ critique of Vattimo or the position of new realism itself is relevant. Rather, regarding the issue of realism not as a specific problem to Vattimo but as general to hermeneutics itself, it is necessary to investigate how the problem of realism is treated in the position of hermeneutics. In this essay, although the perspectivism of Nietzsche is more dominant in Vattimo’s postmodern hermeneutics, the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is going to be analyzed as one of the most important sources of the contemporary hermeneutics. While Vattimo tries to read Gadamer in his postmodern manner through the perspectives of Nietzsche and Heidegger (Vattimo 2000), there are alternative realist interpretations, such as by Jean Grondin (Grondin 2007, 2010). In such a situation, it is necessary and natural to ask the question: is Gadamer a realist? The aim of this paper is to provide a persuasive answer to this question.

There are already several researches concerning this problem. Grondin defends a realistic reading of Gadamer (Grondin 1990) and Echeverria puts forward his own interpretation criticizing Grondin (Echeverria 2006). Although both of them offer relevant argument for the matter, they tend

to be partial, because they do not treat the problem in the universal aspect of hermeneutics, namely in linguisticity, but mostly in the context of text–interpretation. Chisholm proposes the realist sketch of hermeneutics and received the short response from Gadamer (Chisholm 1997). However, Chisholm’s argument is not a reconstruction of Gadamer’s position but rather the general image of hermeneutics itself. Also, the dialogue between them does not function well because the response from Gadamer is too short and does not get the point of Chisholm’s argument. Frazier takes up the hermeneutic problematics of “realism” in the context of religion. But she shows almost only the summary of previous research for on this theme (Frazier 2008). Among these researches, the essay by Wachterhauser is a remarkable challenge that tried to interpret Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as a realistic philosophy. (Wachterhauser 1994)² Therefore, in his paper, Wachterhauser’s research is first introduced (Section 2), and next his interpretation is going to be verified based on the original text of *Truth and Method* (Section 3). And finally, it also discusses how the problems of Kantian philosophy are involved in this question (Section 4).

2. Wachterhauser’s realist interpretation: Perspectival Realism

Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics has been criticized as relativism for a long time, but there are also some attempts to argue against it by emphasizing its realist aspects. The interpretation of Brice R. Wachterhauser offers an especially relevant argument for this position. According to him: “At the risk of oversimplifying we can characterize Gadamer as a thinker who both accepts a version of the realist account of knowledge and the fact that all thought takes place in a historically mediated linguistic context.” (Wachterhauser 1994: 149) On the one hand, as is emphasized in the second and third parts of *Truth and Method*, the knowledge and view of human–beings are mediated and conditioned by the finitude of human historicity and linguisticity. On the other hand, Wachterhauser claims that no matter how limited and finite, it is nonetheless knowledge about nothing else than “reality” itself. Using Nietzsche’s phrase “there is no fact but only interpretations” as a paradigm, it can be explained as follows: although human beings have a number of conditioned and mediated “interpretations,” it is nonetheless possible to know the “fact” through these interpretations. Wachterhauser names this hermeneutical realism, “perspectival realism.” (Wachterhauser

2. Wachterhauser also writes another article on Gadamer’s realism, but the study shown provides a better argument (Wachterhauser 2002). In general, Wachterhauser 1999 is also helpful to understand his position.

1994: 154) As can be gleaned from the word “perspectival,” human beings have a number of perspectives by which their knowledge is mediated — historically and linguistically. However, these remain perspectives about one and the same “reality.” Wachterhauer argues that these two elements in his theory should be emphasized at the same time (Wachterhauser 1994: 154), but from the fact that it was not named “realist perspectivism,” it is also obvious that the moment of “realism” was what Wachterhauser really wanted to put forward.

In order to give grounds for his interpretation, Wachterhauser focuses on a passage in the third part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s philosophy of language. Gadamer argues about the linguistically characterized world–experience by mentioning Husserl’s argument of shadings (*Abschattungen*) and comparing it with his own theory:

Seen phenomenologically, the „thing-in-itself“ is, as Husserl has shown, nothing but the continuity with which the various perceptual perspectives on objects shade into one another. [...] In the same way as with perception we can speak of the “linguistic shadings” that the world undergoes in different language–worlds. But there remains a characteristic difference: every other and each helps co–constitute the “thing-in-itself” as the continuum of these nuances — whereas, in the case of the shadings of verbal worldviews, each one potentially contains every other one within it — i.e. each worldview can be extended into every other. It can understand and comprehend from within itself, the “view” of the world presented in another language. (TM.445/WM.451–2)

Here it is not going to be discussed whether Gadamer’s interpretation of Husserl is itself relevant or not.³ What matters is the commonality and difference between Husserl’s shadings of the perception and Gadamer’s linguistic shadings. As a commonality, Gadamer argues that Husserl’s “thing-in-itself,” on the one hand, consists of the continuity of several perceptions from different perspectives. For example, as long as a “castle on a hill” is perceived from the front, the perception from behind is not accessible. In order to get the whole image of the castle, it is necessary to start from the front, move to the side, go around to the back, and get a view of the castle from all the angles. Thus, the continuity of these perceptions from several perspectives constitutes the “castle-in-itself.” Getting a hint from this idea, Gadamer, makes an argument about the linguistic shadings of world–experience. According to him, the world consists of the continuity of experience from different linguistic perspectives.

It must be stressed that what Gadamer calls “language” here should not only be understood in the narrow sense of natural languages such as

3. Gadamer refers to the following work of Husserl as the source of the argument. “Ideen I, §41” (Der reelle Bestand der Wahrnehmung und ihr transzendentes Objekt).

German or Italian. Language, or linguisticity more precisely, means here the perspective or view of the world in the broadest sense, or the radical accessibility to the things that appear in the world. It includes not only natural languages, but also each sciences and knowledge, such as physics or literature as different perspectives of world-experiences. A “castle on a hill,” understood in physics, could be explained as an assemblage of atoms or even smaller units. Or it could be depicted by poets in their fine words and senses. Both of them are experiences from different perspectives, and the continuity of these different perspectives constitutes the “castle on a hill” in itself.

Although Wachterhauser does not emphasize, such perspectivism is also the ground of Gadamer’s anti-naturalism. Against the naturalism, which insists that all the descriptions of reality should be reduced to those of the natural science and ultimately to physics, Gadamer argues that natural science is nonetheless a relative view on the world, although its results and prospective range is undoubtable as in the contemporary technology. For natural science is just one perspective among many others — including the experience of lifeworld. As Gadamer notes, “[t]hus the sun has not ceased to set for us, even though the Copernican explanation of the universe has become part of our knowledge” (TM.445/WM.452), Gadamer emphasizes that the experience of lifeworld has its own right and it is not totally reduced to the view of natural science.

What then is the difference between the theories of Husserl and Gadamer? In Husserl’s shadings of perception, according to Gadamer, each perspective is exclusively distinguished from each other. As long as the “castle on a hill” is seen from the front, the view from the behind can never be given. The view from the front and that from behind are exclusively distinguished from each other in this sense, and therefore it was necessary to collect the views from all the perspectives in order to constitute the whole image of the castle. Contrary to this, in Gadamer’s linguistic shadings, the languages as perspectives are not exclusively distinguished, but rather belong each other. In other words, they are able to expand themselves to the others. A poetic expression about the “castle on a hill”, for example, can be re-described in the dull — but scientifically accurate — explanations of physics. However, it never means that one linguistic perspective could be *reduced* to another, but rather it is a kind of translation. As in a translation of literature from one language to another, the aesthetic quality of poetic expression is always lost once it is translated into natural and physical information. Nevertheless, what is significant here is that there is not fundamental incommensurability between two linguistic perspectives. There is always the possibility of moving from one to another in spite of limitations.

Now Wachterhauser deduces the four essential elements of his “perspec-

tival realism” from Gadamer’s quote and the observations above:

- a) There are different linguistic views of reality
- b) There is no fundamental incompatibility between these linguistic views, qua linguistic views, and reality.
- c) Each linguistic view can be seen as a finite presentation of reality, i.e., one and the same reality shows itself in different ways in various linguistic contexts.
- d) Each linguistic view potentially contains within itself all other linguistic views. (Wachterhauser 1994: 156)

First, the basic structure of perspectival realism is introduced, namely one and the same reality and a number of linguistic perspectives around it (a). Second, the access from these linguistic perspectives to the reality is possible: these linguistic perspectives certainly reflect how the reality really is (b). However, these linguistic perspectives are not the absolute copy of reality, but only the finite representation of it (c). The fact that it is only a finite representation of the reality makes the first proposition possible, that one and the same reality is represented and described in a number of linguistic views. Finally, the linguistic views surrounding reality potentially contain each other and thus they are commensurable (d).

So far in this section, the gist of Wachterhauser’s “perspectival realism” was introduced. This theory tried to describe Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as a kind of realism by holding the hermeneutic plurality of linguistic views, and at the same time focusing on reality as the object of these views.

3. “Views of the world” and the “world-in-itself”: a verification following Gadamer’s texts

Now it needs to be assessed to what extent Wachterhauser’s interpretation is relevant by comparing it with Gadamer’s own text. Generally, it is possible to say that perspectival realism offers a convincing argument for Gadamer’s realism by accepting hermeneutic pluralism and connecting it to realism. However, although Wachterhauser’s argument seems to be convincing, is it really justified to characterize Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as realist? In order to assess this point, let us look into a passage from Gadamer’s, located just before his argument on Husserl and linguistic shadings.

The criterion for the continuing expansion of our own world picture is not given by a “world in itself” that lies beyond all language. Rather, the infinite perfectibility of the human experience of the world means that, whatever language we use, we never succeed in seeing anything but an ever more extended aspect, a “view” of the world. Those views of the world are not relative in the sense that one could oppose them to the “world in itself,” as if the right view from some possible position outside the human, linguistic world could discover it in its being-itself. No one doubts that the world can exist without man and perhaps will do so. This is part of the meaning in which every human, linguistically constituted view of the world lives. In every worldview the existence of the world-in-itself is intended. It is the whole to which linguistically schematized experience refers. The multiplicity of these worldviews does not involve any relativization of the “world.” Rather, the world is not different from the views in which it presents itself. (TM.444/WM.451)

Here, Gadamer remarks on the distinction between the “world in itself” (*Welt an sich*) and “view of the world” (*Weltansicht*). This distinction by a small “t” at the end of the German word, corresponds to that of „reality“ and “linguistic perspectives“ in Wachterhauser’s “perspectival realism.” Gadamer criticizes the idea of the “world in itself,” which stands outside of the expanding “view of the world.” According to him, the world-experience of human beings never reaches the “world in itself,” which statically exists as the goal or terminal point, but it always remains in the “view of the world,” which expands dynamically and endlessly. And the “world in itself” is nothing but the continuity of these several “views of the world” as it was shown in the comparison with Husserl’s theory of shadings.

Then, what happens if one actually sets the “world in itself” outside of “view of the world”? Gadamer argues as follows. (This passage is located in the context of the comparison with Husserl’s shadings, but Wachterhauser omitted it when he quoted).

A person who opposes “being-in-itself” to these “aspects” must think either theologically — in which case the “being-in-itself” is not for him but only for God — or he will think like Lucifer, like one who wants to prove his own divinity by the fact that the whole world has to obey him. In this case the world’s being-in-itself is a limitation of the omnipotence of his imagination. (TM.445/WM.451)

Here it can be read as an allusion with religious vocabularies to the position, which sets “being-in-itself” (*Ansichsein*) outside of “aspects” (*Ansichten*), and gives priority to one of them. On the one hand, if one and the same “being-in-itself” is endorsed against several conflicting “aspects,” it is just a pretense to be God’s perspective, which exceeds all the finite “aspects” and stands outside of them. On the other hand, if the “being-in-itself” is negated insisting that there are only several “aspects,” it naturally leads to the thought that the world is equal to these “aspects” that are mere arbitrary phantasies, but it is in fact not and the world as phantasy does

not belong to someone. Although Gadamer himself does not develop this argument further, it can be complemented as follows: The one who thinks “like Lucifer” realizes that his arbitrary and seemingly boundless phantasy bumped into something that hinders it, and thinks to abandon the “aspects” as his phantasy and to support the independent “being-in-itself” directly (but he again goes back to God’s perspective and gets into the never-ending circulation). Thus, by showing the irrationality of “being-in-itself” outside of “aspects,” Gadamer proposes to avoid this problem of “being-in-itself” or reality itself.

Once such passages by Gadamer are observed, it is difficult to attribute to him a realist position. Gadamer is trying to avoid the problem of realism, understood as the “world in itself,” which stands outside of “view of the world.”⁴ However, this should not be understood as a mere idealism. Gadamer’s claims that “[n]o one doubts that the world can exist without man and perhaps will do so” and “[i]n every worldview the existence of the world-in-itself is intended” should be taken seriously. Moreover, Gadamer is not a mere relativist. Each “view of the world,” as preunderstanding or hypothesis of understanding, can be improved by the hermeneutic circles of temporal distance and the circle of whole and part.⁵ If these preunderstandings or hypotheses are not to be held due to the incompatibility with the data and whole schema, they need to be negated and one has to be open to this negativity — as Gadamer argues in the chapter, “The concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) and the essence of the hermeneutic experience” (WM.352–368). Views of the world are always expanding, and they are commensurable with each other. According to Gadamer, it is possible to improve and expand these “world-views” and to share them with others. On this point, as Wachterhauser rightly recognized, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is closer to realism. However, it is obvious from the quote that Gadamer tries to avoid this problematic and does not take the position of realism itself. It is perhaps allowed to say that Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is “realistic” but not “realist.” The argument above could be summarized as follows.

- a) Gadamer is not an idealist or relativist.
- b) Therefore, his position is close to realism.

4. For example, Heidegger, the philosophical master of Gadamer, also takes this strategy to avoid the problematics of the “outer world” (*Außenwelt*) as reality. “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ does not consist in the fact that this proof is still lacking up to now, but in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.” (Heidegger 1979: 205; Eng. 190). Rather, “[i]t is not a matter of proving that and how an ‘external world’ is objectively present, but of demonstrating why Da-sein as being-in-the-world has the tendency of ‘initially’ burying the ‘external world’ in nullity ‘epistemologically’ in order first to prove it.” (Heidegger 1979: 206; Eng. 191)

5. Grondin 1990 and Schmidt 1985 defend this aspect of Gadamer.

c) However, it is not realism itself. (Or he avoids this problem).

In order to understand this subtle differentiation that Gadamer requires, it is helpful to introduce the Kantian conceptional distinction between the “constitutive” and “regulative” use of the reason. In the appendix of the transcendental dialectics, Kant distinguished the constitutive and regulative use of the concepts such as immortality of soul, freedom, and God, which he also calls “idea” (*Idee*). On the one hand, the constitutive use of the ideas assumes that the object of the concept exists objectively, but according to Kant, reason actually has no right to do so outside of the possibility of experience: therefore this use of reason is not only invalid but also causes several metaphysical problems that are in principle insolvable. On the other hand, the regulative use does not question whether the object of concept actually exists in itself, but rather lets the concept function as the aim of all the rules of understanding, or as a *focus imaginarius*. (Kant 1998: 710; A644/B672) Kant insists that the afore-mentioned concepts should be understood not in the constitutive, but rather in the regulative sense. (Kant 1998: 709–710; A644/B672) Thus, the concept of God for example, causes a number of metaphysical problems once it is used constitutively and supposed that the objective existence of God should be proven by the human rationality, while its regulative use is totally admitted, if it does not thematize the existence of God directly but commands the reason to suppose only that all the ordered connections in the universe and nature derive from one and the supreme being. (Kant 1998: 743; A686/B714)

The concept of the “world” in Gadamer could be explained in a similar way. On the one hand, the idea that there is the “world in itself” outside of the “views of the world” as its criterion or goal should be rejected as a constitutive use of the concept “world”. According to Gadamer, the human experience of the world is characterized by linguisticity from beginning to end, and the assumption of “non-linguistical experience of the world itself” is what Kant would accuse as “outside of the possibility of experience”. On the other hand, when Gadamer says that “[i]n every worldview the existence of the world-in-itself is intended. It is the whole to which linguistically schematized experience refers” (TM.444/WM.451), the world is understood as an aim of several “views of the world,” namely as the *focus imaginarius*, and their continuity is nothing but the world in itself. Here it is possible to distinguish three different concepts regarding the world, namely the “world in itself”, “views of the world”, and “the world”. The “world in itself” must be dismissed as a constitutive use of the concept of the world, and “views of the world” are the plural perspectives of linguistic shadings. Finally, “the world” is the regulative use of the concept of the world and at the same time the *focus imaginarius* where the “views of

the world” converge. Once thought in this way, there is seemingly a certain vagueness or some possibilities for interpretation in Gadamer’s position. If it is emphasized that “the constitutive use of world is forbidden”, then the concept of “world in itself” is dissolved and the weight of “views of the world” increases, resulting in the idealistic and relativistic tendency (although it is not idealism or relativism itself). However, if it is emphasized that “the regulative use of world is welcomed”, then the concept of the world functions as the *focus imaginarius*, which supports the realist effort of human scientific enterprise. That said, this is still not to be thought of as “realism”, because the “world in itself” in the constitutive sense is by no means admitted by Gadamer.

How is Gadamer’s position then to be characterized? Here it should be noted that his position is a kind of “inbetweenness”. According to him, “in-between” is “[t]he true locus of hermeneutics [. . .]” (TM.295/WM.300), although this word is used in a different context of strangeness and familiarity of text–interpretation.⁶ Supposing there is a scaffold with two poles, realism on one side and idealism or relativism on the other, it is the idea of inbetween to retain distance from both poles in order not to fall down. Gadamer tends to step away from the pole of idealism and relativism and moves toward that of realism, but he stops just before the edge and does not walk into that position. This sort of negative positioning of “neither–nor” could be the stance of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. However, why did Gadamer not take the last step toward the pole of realism? To understand the reason, it is necessary to discuss the element of Kantian philosophy that has already appeared several times in this essay.

4. Gadamer and Kant: Hermeneutics and Criticism

On the research topic “Gadamer and Kant,” it is possible to set several problems: for example, Gadamer’s reception of Kant is evinced in the first part of *Truth and Method*, where Gadamer criticizes Kant and the subjective turn of aesthetics.⁷ However, what should be discussed here is their attitudes towards the problematics of realism. In other words, the similarity of Gadamerian and Kantian attitudes towards this theme, that Gadamer’s con-

6. For other research that characterizes Gadamer’s hermeneutics as the position of “inbetweenness,” see the following study on Gadamer’s political philosophy (Kato 2012). It can also be compared with the classic study of Bernstein (1984), which tried to identify the general tendency in contemporary thought with the motto “Beyond the Objectivism and Relativism.” However, it is still to be discussed whether Gadamer tried to go “beyond” this dichotomy or to stay “inbetween.”

7. For research about “Gadamer and Kant” based on the discussion of aesthetics in *Truth and Method*, see for example, De Simone 1996, De Monthoux 1998, and Gjesdal 2009.

ceptional pair of the “world in itself” and “views of the world” corresponds to Kant’s “thing-itself” and “phenomenon”. This problem-setting can be found sometimes in Gadamerian-research in US. For example, according to Wachterhauser, Gadamer is anti-Kantian in that he insists it to be possible for human beings to cognize the thing-in-itself and reality, while he is at the same time Hegelian in that this thing-in-itself is given with (or through) phenomena. (Wachterhauser 1994: 152)⁸ A commentary on Wachterhauser’s research, therefore, requires an exploration of the relationship between Gadamer and Kant.

Now, Gadamer put the footnote as follows when he argued about Husserl’s shadings:

Hence it is a sheer misunderstanding if one appeals against idealism — whether transcendental idealism or “idealistic” philosophy of language — to the being-in-itself of the world. This is to miss the methodological significance of idealism, the metaphysical form of which can be regarded, since Kant, as outmoded. Cf. Kant’s “disproof of idealism” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, B274ff. 489 (TM.489/WM.451–2)

Here it is rejected as a misunderstanding to refer to the “world in itself” against the idealistically grasped “views of the world”. Consider the argument in the previous section: because the “world in itself” outside of “views of the world” is possible only from the perspective of God, it is not reachable in any sense for finite human beings. What is really accessible is only the constantly expanding “views of the world”. In this quote, Gadamer characterizes his position as a kind of idealism. However, it is by no means the “metaphysical idealism” that was rejected by Kant, but a “methodic idealism”. Here it is clear from the original context of Kant that the “metaphysical idealism” refers to that of Berkeley, “[. . .] who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary.” (Kant 1998: 320; B.274; Eng. 326) It is an idealism in a strong sense, which denies the existence of space and materials. But Gadamer does not take this position. As was already attested, “[n]o one doubts that the world can exist without man and perhaps will do so” (WM.451). Rather his position is one of “methodic idealism.” What, then, is this “methodic idealism”?

Although Gadamer does not directly explain this term, its meaning can be inferred from his gesture towards Kantian philosophy. For example, Gadamer states as follows: “[h]ence hermeneutics has to see through the

8. Although it does not have to do with this argument directly, Chisholm also takes up the theme of “Gadamer and Kant,” trying to show that hermeneutics does not have to be a Kantian philosophical position (Chisholm 1997).

dogmatism of a “meaning-in-itself” in exactly the same way critical philosophy has seen through the dogmatism of experience” (TM.468/WM.477). Although here the focus is not on the “world in itself” but rather “meaning-in-itself” in the context of text-interpretation, the structure of problem is basically the same. Kant’s critical philosophy was able to identify the metaphysics, that misunderstands the phenomenon as the thing-in-itself and dares to make several judgments on transcendent themes outside of the possibility of experience, as dogmatism and reject it. According to Gadamer, this critical spirit is alive in his philosophical hermeneutics. On the one hand, in the problematics of “world”, the moment of constantly and dynamically expanding “views of the world” is emphasized against the static “world in itself” of realism, which is set from the perspective of God and functions as the criterion of all the knowledge typically driven by natural science. On the other hand, in the problematics of “meaning of a text”, the plurality of meaning and inexhaustibility of text is emphasized against the objective hermeneutics, which tends to reduce this plurality into the monic and normative “meaning-in-itself” (such as the intention of the author). The commonality between these two is the intellectual prudence and humility that never takes what appears to them (phenomenon, view of the world, interpretation) as the being-in-itself, but always suspects the possibility of error and the possibility that the things might appear differently to others.⁹ Gadamer’s “methodic idealism” could be thought as a hermeneutic expression of *docta ignorantia* against dogmatism.

To repeat, it is clearly distinguished from the “metaphysical idealism” of Berkeley. The “world” certainly exists without human beings as its observers. However, in the spirit of criticism, that which is cognized, understood, and interpreted — not as being-in-itself but always distanced from it — lives in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. This fact can also be attested by the following quote, where Gadamer explains the gist of his hermeneutics:

“Hermeneutic” philosophy, as I envision it, does not understand itself as an “absolute” position but as a path of experiencing. Its modesty consists in the fact that for it there is no higher principle than this: holding oneself open to the conversation. (GW2.505; Eng. 36)

5. Conclusion

In this essay, the question was asked whether Gadamer should be considered as a realist, with the contemporary background of the rise of realism. The persuasive arguments of Wachterhauser’s “perspectival realism” surely

9. Therefore, Echeverria (2006) is right in characterizing Gadamer as a fallibilist.

captured the structure of Gadamerian hermeneutics, and seemingly succeeded in showing it as a kind of realism. However, the careful analysis of Gadamer's original text in this study made it clear that his conception was more complicated. While Gadamer rejects the position of idealism and relativism, he does not make the last step to realism, and keep the position of "in-betweenness". It was because of the humility of *docta ignorantia* that alerts against dogmatism, against the misunderstanding of grasping the "reality" or "truth" in its hand.

The debate in Gadamerian research between the anti-realist and realist positions could be understood, at best, as resulting from the vagueness of his "in-betweenness." This vagueness also seems to be shared by the representatives of the opposite positions concerning Gadamer-interpretation. Vattimo, on the one hand, distances himself from realism, pointing out that realism tends to get violent by privileging and monopolizing its access to the objective "truth" (Vattimo & Zabala 2011), although he feels at the same time the temptation to realism as a logically consequent position. (Vattimo 2012: 83) Grondin, on the other, takes the position of realism, maintaining that the hermeneutic objectivity in the sense of constant improvement of preunderstandings is possible, although, according to Grondin, Gadamer would not "reject" Vattimo's nihilistic hermeneutics but only "resist" to go to the same direction. (Grondin 2007) In this sense, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a starting point of *Wirkungsgeschichte* where diverse elements coexist and several interpretations and positions derive from.

Lastly, what would be the contribution of this essay to the new realism and contemporary philosophical scene?¹⁰ Even if realism is successful as a philosophical position and the research is undertaken in this direction, Gadamer's methodic perspectivism always requires us to stop and think whether there are other perspectives and "views of the world." This sense of openness is the lesson from Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, which can never be overemphasized.

6. References

- Bernstein, Richard J., 1983, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chisholm, Roderick M., 1997, *Gadamer and Realism: Reaching an Understanding*, Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.) "The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer," La Salle: Open Court, pp.99–110

10. On this topic, Gaetano Chiurazzi also argues for the position of hermeneutics (Chiurazzi 2011 and 2012).

- Chiurazzi, Gaetano, 2012, *La realtà dell'ermeneutica* Giulia Ballocca (a cura di) "Tempo e praxis: saggi su Gadamer," Roma: ARACNE editrice, pp.123–139.
- 2011, *Truth is more than Reality: Gadamer's Transformational Concept of Truth in "Research in Phenomenology"* (41) pp.60–71.
- De Monthoux, Pierre Guillet, 1998, *Esthétique du management: Gestion du beau et du sublime de Kant à Gadamer*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- De Simone, Antonio, 1996, *Tra Gadamer e Kant: Verità ermeneutica e cultura estetica*, Urbino: Quattroventi.
- Echeverria, Eduardo J., 2006, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Question of Relativism*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (eds.) "Hermeneutics at the Crossroads," Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp.51–81.
- Eco, Umberto, 2015, *Gesten der Zurückweisung. Über den Neuen Realismus*, Markus Gabriel (hrsg.), 2015, „Der Neue Realismus," 3. Auflage [2014], Berlin: Suhrkamp, S.33–51,
- Ferraris, Maurizio, 2015, *Was ist der Neue Realismus? Markus Gabriel (hrsg.), 2015, „Der Neue Realismus"* 3. Auflage [2014], Berlin: Suhrkamp, S.52–75.
- Frazier, Jessica, 2008, *Reality, Religion, and Passion: Indian and Western Approaches in Hans–Georg Gadamer and Rūpa Gosvāmi*, Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Gabriel, Markus (hrsg.), 2015, *Der Neue Realismus*, 3. Auflage, [2014], Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Grondin, Jean, 1990, *Hermeneutics and Relativism*, Kathleen Wright (ed.) "Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans–Georg Gadamer's Work," Albany: State University of New York Press, pp.42–62.
- 2007 *Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics: Why Did Gadamer Resist Postmodernist*, Santiago Zabala (ed.) "Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo," Montreal&Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill–Queen's University Press, pp.203–216.
- 2010 *Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?*, Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (eds.) "Consequences of Hermeneutics: 50 Years After Gadamer's Truth and Method," Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 190–201.
- Gjesdal, Kristin, 2009, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans–Georg, 1993, *Selbstdarstellung* "Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen/Register, Gesammelte Werke, Band 2", Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (English Translation *Reflections on my Philosophical Journey* Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.) "The Philosophy of Hans–Georg Gadamer," La Salle: Open Court, 1997, pp.3–63)
- 2010, *Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer Hermeneutik*, Gesammelte Werke, Band 1, 7. Auflage, [1960], Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. =WM.

- (English Translation by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method, Second, Revised Edition*, London / New York: Continuum, 2004 =TM)
- Harman, Graham, 2011, *The Quadruple Object*, Alresford: Zero books.
- Heidegger, Martin, 1979, *Sein und Zeit*, 15. Auflage, [1927], Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. (English Translation by Joan Stambaugh, *Being and Time*, Albany: State University of New York, 2010)
- Kant, Immanuel, 1998, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. (English Translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason trans.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Kato, Tetsuri, 2012, *Hans–Georg Gadamer’s Philosophy of Politics*, Tokyo: Sobunsha, (Japanese)
- Meillassoux, Quentin, 2006, *Après la finitude: Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*, Paris: Édition du Seuil.
- Schmidt, Lawrence, K., 1985, *The Epistemology of Hans–Georg Gadamer: An Analysis of the Legitimization of Vorurteile*, Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York: Peter Lang.
- Wachterhauser, Brice R., 1994, *Gadamer’s Realism: The “Belongingness” of Word and Reality*, Brice R. Wachterhauser (ed.), 1994, “*Hermeneutics and Truth*,” Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, pp.148–171.
- 1999, *Beyond Being: Gadamer’s Post–Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- 2002, *Getting it Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth*, in Robert J. Dostal (ed.), 2002, “The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer,” Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.52–78.
- Vattimo, Gianni, 1987, *Ermeneutica come koiné “aut aut” 217–218*, Gennaio–aprile, pp.3–11.
- 2000, *Histoire d’une Virgule: Gadamer et le Sens de l’Etre*, “Revue Internationale de Philosophie,” (54, N213) pp.499–513 (*Storia di una virgola. Gadamer e il senso dell’essere* in “Iride,” a XIII, n.30, maggio–agosto 2000, pp.323–334).
- 2012, *Della realtà: Fini della filosofia*, Milano: Garzanti.
- Vattimo, Gianni & Zabala, Santiago, 2011, “Hermeneutic communism: From Heidegger to Marx”, New York: Columbia University Press.