

Kantian Turning Point in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

KRISTÍNA BOSÁKOVÁ*

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia

Abstract

The paper is treating the theme of a Kantian turning-point in the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer based on of the harmonic relationship between metaphysics and science in Kantian philosophy from the point of view of the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. The philosophical work of Kant had such an influence on Gadamer that without exaggerating we can talk about the Kantian turning-point in Gadamerian hermeneutics. Grondin, a former student of Gadamer, is talking about Kantian turning-point on the field of aesthetics, but in reality Kantian turning-point means much more than a mere change in the reception of the concept of judgement. It is a discovery of harmonical relationship between the beauty and the moral, between the reason and the sensitivity, between the modern sciences and the metaphysical tradition in the Kantian philosophy, made by Gadamer. This is what we call the Kantian turning-point in Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Keywords

Kantian turning-point; Ethics; Metaphysics; Hermeneutics

It is well known that Gadamer's interpretation of Kant's work does not represent anything new, because it doesn't bring anything revolutionary and it is probably the very typical application of the hermeneutical method with its historical consciousness. Despite of all that, Gadamer is expressing a very clear and a very positive message towards the Kantian

* Kristína Bosáková, Department of Philosophy and History of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia. E-mail for contact: kbosakova@yahoo.com. The paper is the outcome of the research project VEGA 1/0238/15 *Kant's Ideas of Reason and Contemporary World* supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

philosophy. In his message he is talking about a multilateral character of the Kantian philosophy as much as about the multiplicity of the meanings in the texts, which for several centuries belong to the classical western philosophy and he is accentuating the perpetual actuality of Kantian thinking. Immanuel Kant in Gadamer's reception is not a philosophical relict, but a reputable participant in the philosophical dialogue between the past and the present time of the western thinking.

1. Kantian Turning-Point in Gadamer's Hermeneutical Thinking

The first one, who is talking about the Kantian turning-point in Gadamer's philosophy, is Gadamer's most famous student, Jean Grondin. The chapter, called *The Kantian turning-point* occurs already in his introduction to Hans-Georg Gadamer, published 1999 in Paris under the title *Introduction à Hans-Georg Gadamer*. An English version of the book occurs in 2003 under the title, *The philosophy of Gadamer*¹. In the same year, the Spanish translation by Constantino Ruiz-Garrido Cortés is published².

If Grondin in his book is talking about the Kantian turning-point in Gadamerian hermeneutics, than he is thinking of Gadamer's inclination towards the Kantian philosophy especially on the field of aesthetics, of an artistic creativity or of an interpretation of the work of art; the themes which are profoundly treated in the first volume of *Truth and Method*. But the Kantian turning-point actually means much more than advancement in the understanding of the creative process of an artist or of the work of art which is perceived as a result of the mentioned creative process. Except of that, the Kantian turning-point does not occur only in the field of aesthetics, but also in the field of metaphysics or of the ethics reaching the entire spectrum of Gadamer's wide philosophical activities.

According to the mentioned monograph, in case of Gadamer the Kantian turning-point starts with the inclination towards the *sensus communis*, the concept that in Gadamerian hermeneutics represents the methodological base of the human sciences. Gadamer is inspired by practical wisdom of Aristotle, called *fronesis*, whose Latin equivalent can be expressed by the concept of *prudencia* in its original meaning. This concept cannot be perceived as some kind of duplicity, but as a capacity to make careful, cautious and deliberated decisions in consideration with the situations that frequently appear in the everyday life. *Fronesis* is a vital knowledge and its worth consists in the impossibility to learn it. It is formed, says Grondin, or cultivated, it does not have any exact content or any persisting dogmas. It's a knowledge that is based on the concrete experience and which at the same time is transcending this experience. It's a very different kind of knowledge, the knowledge that does not correspond with the one we can primarily get by the methods used in the natural sciences.

¹ Grondin, J. (2003), *The philosophy of Gadamer*, Tr. K. Plant., Acumenpublishing, Chesham.

² Grondin, J. (2003), *Introducción a Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Tr. C. Ruiz-Garrido, Herder, Barcelona.

The loss of the original meaning of the concept of *common sense* brought the reduction of its cognitive functions till such a grade that the aesthetic judgment, even if based on the practical wisdom, renounced to be the matter of knowledge and became the matter taste without any epistemological value. The reduction of the *common sense* to its purely esthetic function, says Gadamer, would be a big mistake, because it would let us lose the key words of the humanist tradition and to sacrifice the traditional image of the human sciences on the altar of the natural sciences. Both, Gadamer and Grondin, agree on the fact that displacing *sensus communis* to the sphere of taste and of esthetics would mean a catastrophe for the human sciences. But meanwhile Grondin accuses the Kantian philosophy with its effort to rehabilitate the metaphysics as a science of the catastrophe; Gadamer is observing Kant in a much more benevolent way, when he perceives him as successor of the humanist tradition. Anyway, now we are facing here two thinkers with two different perspectives, when it comes to the participation of the Kantian philosophy in the crisis of the human sciences, caused by the reinterpretation of the concept of *sensus communis*. In *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, Grondin claims:

The great thinker responsible for this change was Kant. It should not be said that he is to blame, because according to Gadamer, Kant was still nourished by the humanist tradition. We can read between the lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that he calls lack of judgment "stupidity", for which he has no cure. We can also see in the "knowledge" which he mysteriously reserves for the use of the practical reason, and also in the eminently moral, if not metaphysical, weight which he gives to aesthetic and theological judgment in his third *Critique*. But by his interrogation and his success, Kant succeeds in making the humanist tradition invisible and obsolete. Kant's initial question has in the first place nothing to do with the humanist tradition (Grondin 2003, p. 28).

Gadamer, in contrary, thinks that the Neokantian philosophers were the ones, who have radicalized Kant's philosophical message till such a grade that at the end they all became servants of the modern natural sciences. In his opinion, the effort to rehabilitate the ancient metaphysics in its cognitive value and to give the metaphysics back its previous dignity, which means Kant's effort to establish the metaphysics as a science, meant an attempt to reconstruct it and not an attempt to transform it into the natural science. According to Grondin, Kant's effort to develop the metaphysics in coincidence with the criteria of the exact sciences made it finally disappear; or at least, it made disappear the metaphysics in its original intentions, and not even the following German Idealism succeeded in the restoration of the former position of the metaphysics or of its pretensions on the field of epistemology.

As the human sciences were suffering since their beginning the lack of methodology, they were not able to compete with the natural sciences, and step by step they went slowly losing all of the pretensions for any kind of a real knowledge. Hence, all of the knowledge had to be situated into the dominium of the natural sciences, and Kant, who according to Grondin, knew very few about the methods in the natural sciences, inspired by Newton, tried to apply these methods in the area of humanities.

From this point of view, the human sciences have suffered from a deficit in methodology from the start. But if the human sciences are implicated in the Kantian turning-point, it is because all of the humanist tradition is discredited by its non-methodological knowledge. Cultural knowledge, which cannot be reduced to an apprenticeship of content and of strict method, but which only makes a more successful contribution to the formation of judgment, of common sense and of taste, is not science. But as it is nothing, to what order does it belong? The reply which is prefigured in Kant, but which his successors have radicalized, is to aesthetics. The “culture” of good taste has become what it is today, a purely aesthetic matter. But that has made us lose sight of the cognitive aspects of the humanist sense of culture (Ibid, p. 29).

For Grondin, Kant wasn't a successor of the humanist tradition, but he was a thinker who, in some way, caused the destruction of the last relicts of the humanist heritage. In this point, Gadamer seems to be less radical, because he does not see Kant as an ancestor of positivism, but much more as a hereditary of the metaphysical tradition. Except of that, Gadamer perceives Kant's aversion towards the metaphysical dogmatism, which was predominating especially in the last periods of the middle ages with comprehension, and he accentuates that it wasn't Kant's intention to transform the metaphysics into the natural science, but instead of that, Kant tried to free the metaphysics from the medieval dogmatism. The justification of this assertion demonstrates, according to Gadamer, on one way the text of *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, which should represent the new material for the metaphysical form, and on the other way, it demonstrates «an element a priori which went beyond empirical universality (Gadamer 2004, p. 37) and which is always present even in the questions of taste.

We will see, Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, that Kant's grounding of aesthetics on the judgment of taste does justice to both aspects of the phenomenon: its empirical nonuniversality and its a priori claim to universality. But the price that he pays for this legitimation of critique in the area of taste is that he denies taste any significance as knowledge. He reduces *sensus communis* to a subjective principle. In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness. As we know, Kant sees this feeling as based on the fact that the representation of the object is suited (*zweckmässig*) to our faculty of knowledge. It is a free play of imagination and understanding, a subjective relationship that is altogether appropriate to knowledge and that exhibits the reason for the pleasure in the object. This suitedness to the subject is in principle the same for all—i.e., it is universally communicable and thus grounds the claim that the judgment of taste possesses universal validity (Gadamer 2004, p. 38).

The result of these singular characteristics of the judgment of taste is its special position, the border position between the rationality and the area of the irrational, between the subjectivity and the objectivity, between the cognition and the pure aesthetics. And

because it's an ethical perspective that Kant applies on the judgment of taste, hence the judgment of taste, in the same way like the categorical imperative, is given a priori and because of this apriority it acquires its universal validity. (KU, AA 05: 361. 482.) Anyway, although the taste is typical for the cognizant, the subject, it's not the way to express the subjectivity and it's not the matter of willfulness but, according to Gadamer's formulation: "*Taste is reflective.*" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 38). This is the tendency, Gadamer claims that makes Kant feel and behave like a real successor of the humanist tradition.

Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral in the same way like *Critique of Judgment*, and it's not exaggerated to say that even all of the three *Critiques*, they definitely demonstrate strong metaphysical foundation of the Kantian philosophy. Including the definition of the *categorical imperative*, which may be one of the most famous maxims of the Kantian thinking, as we read in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, expresses essentially the necessity of improvement of the social relations thru the moral code, the principles of which are given a priori, which means they are established in the area of metaphysics. Kant says it in a following way:

One saw the human being bound through his duty to laws, but it did not occur to one that he was subject *only to his own* and yet *universal legislation*, and that he was obligated only to act in accord with his own will, which, however, in accordance with its natural end, is a universally legislative will. (GMS, AA04: 432).

Except of that applying the principle of universality from the Kantian ethics on the division of beauty into the free and the bound beauty, Gadamer decides to rehabilitate and to recover the truth of the work of art. Although Kant prefers the free beauty of the nature, Gadamer is following the concept of bound beauty of the work of art, created by a human being and together with the ethical value he is attributing to the work of art the universality of the hermeneutical message. Gadamer combats the abstraction of the aesthetic consciousness, caused by the romantic period with the "rehabilitation of allegory" (Gadamer 2004, p. 61–102).

Allegory was ones more an experience of reality, rather than an experience of itself. But the fact that allegory was an experience of reality and truth led Gadamer to reinstate the participation of truth in allegory. It is one of the forms of art, and of discourse, that underlines the fact that the pernicious separation of art from truth can never be total. Gadamer questioned this radical, fatal cut when he spoke of the abstraction of aesthetic consciousness. (Grondin 2003, p. 63).

From this point of view, the artistic creation stops being an exclusive matter of the bohemian genius, as described by the romantic aesthetics, and following the very concrete intention, the process of creation becomes a conscious, rational or even a pragmatic activity. In this way, Gadamer gives to the work of art back its own cognitive value when he makes an artist *responsible* for his creation. And as we know, *responsibility* represents one of the key categories in the Kantian philosophy. The same opinion about the truth,

hidden in the work of art, expresses José Ortega y Gasset in his *Meditations on Quixote*, in the chapter about literary genres, where he claims that the human being has always been the main theme of art and that every period of the history brings an entirely new interpretation of the human being (Ortega y Gasset 2000, p. 113).

Although Kant, in his entire work, prefers the discussions about the possibilities of reasonable knowledge, he does not forget also the themes from aesthetics, ethics and theology. And it is certainly not an exaggeration to claim that the whole Kantian philosophy, as much as many centuries ago the philosophy of Plato and of Aristotle, seems to be an original combination of the practical with the metaphysical and just like the Plato's vital beverage, it represents the harmonic mixture of the obligation to follow the rules and the necessity to apply free thinking of the innovative spirit. Anyway, Gadamer's discovery of the harmonic relation between the beauty and the moral, between the modern sciences and the metaphysical tradition in the Kantian philosophy, this is what should be called the Kantian turning-point in the Gadamerian hermeneutics. This is the reason, why Gadamer was fascinated by Kantian philosophy during his whole life till such a grade that, in his opinion, Kant was the only thinker of the time of Enlightenment, whose philosophy was still worth to be repeated.

2. Gadamer and Kant as a Big “Metaphysician”

Because of his three *Critiques*, Immanuel Kant is traditionally held for a theoretician of knowledge and a critic of metaphysics. Without underestimating his deserving in the area of knowledge, Gadamer is attributing the same importance to Kant's earnings on the field of metaphysics, especially when it comes to the attempts to innovate the traditional content of the old metaphysics. Hence, the object of Gadamer's hermeneutical investigations is not Kant, the theoretician of knowledge, but it's Kant, the metaphysician, the philosopher who tried to postpone the metaphysical themes from the area of epistemology to the field of ethics and to formulate the old metaphysical questions in a new way.

Kant's metaphysics of moral confirms the theses about the universality, the intemporality and the objectivity of the moral imperative, and for Gadamer it represents a valuable attempt to revise and renew the content of the metaphysics. In consequence of this reconstruction the many centuries persisting tension between the philosophy and the modern sciences should disappear and the modern sciences should accept the cognitive demands of philosophy and give back to the philosophy its lost dignity. (Gadamer 1999, p. 1). In his review of the monograph *The Modern Age and the Enlightenment (Neuzeit und Aufklärung)*³, Gadamer claims that “the modern philosophy is circulating around Kant,

³ Mittelstrass, J. (1970), *Neuzeit und Aufklärung. Studien zur Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und Philosophie*, Berlin, De Gruyter 1970.

who is a final object of an Enlightenment and an absolute criteria of the scientific philosophy" (Gadamer 1971, p. 60 f.).

In his essay *Kant's >Critique of Pure Reason< after 200 years (Kants >Kritik der reinen Vernunft< nach 200 Jahren)*, Gadamer compares Kant to Copernicus, and the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason* represents for him an event of the same importance like the French revolution. (Gadamer 1981, p. 336) Kant without any doubt was an admirer of the French revolution, what can be clearly seen in his political philosophy, and if the French revolution brought to the society the liberation of the feudal relations, than the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason* meant for the western thinking something same revolutionary and same liberating like the French revolution itself. It was a turning-point, similar to the one of Copernicus, the beginning of the new époque; it was a triumph of the modern thinking over the metaphysical dogmatism. But this victory did not occur in the way the critics of metaphysics used to imagine it. Kant, according to Gadamer, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, does not destruct the metaphysics entirely; but he tries to give new content to the metaphysics thru the innovation of its original orientation, the orientation towards Plato and Aristotle. Kant alienates himself from the medieval metaphysics just to get closer to the ancient Greek metaphysics of Plato and of Aristotle. The result of this process represents *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*.

This means that he tried to introduce the new science of the transcendental philosophy, in a way that he made it more apprehensible thru the skepticism of Hume, but in the same time he confirmed it again like the natural orientation of the human being towards the metaphysics (Gadamer 1981, p. 337).

The mentioned natural orientation of the human being towards the metaphysics is, in the opinion Gadamer, the reason of why the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason* should be considered as a new era in the history of the western thinking. It was the beginning of the new period that has been persisting till nowadays. Not even such personalities of the western thinking like Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger or Wittgenstein proved to create such a transformative philosophical doctrine moreover, with the capacity to predestinate the thinking of the future times, just like Kant did it. Only the question about the possibility of metaphysics had not been formulated ever before, meanwhile every kind of thinking after Kant couldn't move forwards without being aware of the question about the possibility and the sense of metaphysics. From the Gadamerian perspective, Kant should be considered the most significant metaphysician of the modern time.

So how is it actually possible, Gadamer is asking that Kant – the big metaphysician – was turned into Kant – the theoretician of knowledge? The answer on the question consists in the aversion of the Neokantian philosophy towards the metaphysical system of Hegel. In this way, Gadamer claims, the Neokantians in Marburg, in their effort to get back to Kant, very soon found themselves in a paradox situation. Instead of getting to Kant, they made one step back directly to Fichte and to Hegel. Hence, so Gadamer, even the Neokantian critique during the First World War seem to be very similar to the critique of Hegel, made

by Kierkegaard in his own philosophy and an alienation from the Kantian positions meant nothing less than a leaning into the direction of his metaphysics. (Gadamer 1981, p. 339).

The return to the Kantian metaphysics, although still not completed, occurred according to Gadamer in the following period, in the philosophy of Wolf, Bichler or Hartmann; these thinkers have already admitted the metaphysical tendencies in the philosophy of Kant. But they were still persisting in understanding it like the *metaphysics of knowledge*, without being aware of the fact that Kant, in Gadamer's interpretation, established his newly defined metaphysics on the base of the practical philosophy, in the same way like Plato and Aristotle had done it. (Gadamer 1981, p. 343). So who can really be considered the follower of Kant in his effort to rehabilitate the traditional but not dogmatic metaphysics?

Gadamer without any doubt is responding: Jaspers and Heidegger. These two have tried to reconstruct the metaphysics although every one of them in a different way. Meanwhile Jaspers, who according to Gadamer wasn't probably aware of his proximity to the Kantian philosophy, tended mostly to understand the practical reason in the same way like Kant and he got very close to the metaphysics of moral; Heidegger decided to construct the new metaphysics without the practical reason. Heidegger was inspired by the ancient *Sofia* and he believed he had discovered in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the renaissance of metaphysics based on the theoretical knowledge.

But despite the differences both thinkers have presented something that Gadamer calls the natural orientation of the human being towards the metaphysics, and they have constructed their own philosophical doctrines based on this natural orientation, the doctrines that were always treating the theme of the incapability of the modern sciences to answer the most important questions of the human life. With this access to the problem they not only reactivated the Kantian philosophy, but they also situated successfully the Kantian philosophy, rooted in the 18th century metaphysics, into the context of the contemporary thinking. In their effort, they were definitely following the significance of something that, according to Gadamer, we can find in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although it is not formulated explicitly. Gadamer is talking about the significance of the practical wisdom for any kind of theoretical knowledge, which means for the problems of metaphysics. In this way, in the thinking of Kant, the harmonical relation between the theory and the practice was established, the relation that effected the reunion of the human rationality under the capability of critical judgment, of the *sensus communis*. (Gadamer 1981, p. 348).

2. Kantian Categorical Imperative and the Hermeneutical Ethics

Jesús Conill Sancho, in his book, *Hermeneutical Ethics. Critique from the facticity (Ética hermenéutica. Crítica desde la facticidad)*⁴, accentuates the importance of the Kantian

⁴ Conill Sancho, J. (2006), *Ética hermenéutica. Crítica desde la facticidad*, Tecnos, Madrid.

work for the Gadamerian ethics, and he defends the Gadamerian interpretation of the *Critique of Judgement* that we can read in *Truth and Method*, till such a grade that Manuel Sánchez Rodríguez, in his review of the mentioned monograph from Conill Sancho, in coincidence with the author is talking about the *hermeneutical* Kant. (Sánchez Rodríguez 2008, p. 433)

From Gadamer's point of view, the philosophy of the modern age does not represent anything new and it cannot be perceived in total separation from the tradition of the western thinking. For Gadamer it's much more an attempt to see the oldest questions of the western philosophy from the new perspective, the questions which were already formulated by Plato or by Aristotle. Because of that, for Gadamer, the philosophy of Enlightenment does not begin with Descartes but it starts directly with Kant. The Kantian philosophy in the Gadamerian hermeneutics is featuring perpetual actuality; and even if Gadamer does not perceive the philosophy of Enlightenment in a very positive way, he is actually impeaching its legitimacy, despite of that he claims that it's always necessary to stay in contact with the Kantian heritage. For Gadamer, Kant represents an insuperable thinker and his work is a big challenge for every philosopher.

Just like in case of the ancient Greek philosophy represented in the Gadamerian thinking especially by Plato and by Aristotle, practical philosophy should be considered as the focus of the themes treated in the hermeneutically understood modern philosophy. Meanwhile in the classical Greek philosophy, Gadamer dedicates more attention to Platonic-Aristotelian model of the practical philosophy, he accentuates that Kant and Rousseau were those philosophers of the modern times who were most occupied by the questions of the ethical practice, trying to return to the practical philosophy its original significance and meaning. Although Gadamer perceives the philosophy of Enlightenment and partially even the entire modern philosophy, except of Hegel, in a very negative way, he never forgets to accentuate that the most important deserving belong to the modern practical philosophy, which for Gadamer and for Kant represents *the metaphysics of moral*.

Gadamer dedicates several essays to the Kantian philosophy, among the others for example: *Kant and the Question of God (Kant und die Gottesfrage*⁵), *Kant and the Hermeneutical Turning Point (Kant und die hermeneutische Wendung*⁶) or *Kant's >Critique of Pure Reason< after 200 years (Kants >Kritik der reinen Vernunft< nach 200 Jahren)*. But the focus of his hermeneutical interpretation of the Kantian ethics represents the text: *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics*⁷ from 1963. Gadamer develops further the results of the mentioned study on the last pages of his essay *The Idea of Good*

⁵ Gadamer, H.-G. (1941), "Kant und die Gottesfrage", en *Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten, GW 4* (1999) Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 349–360.

⁶ Gadamer, H.-G. (1975), "Kant und die hermeneutische Wendung", en *Neuere Philosophie I. Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, GW 3* (1999), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 213–222.

⁷ Gadamer, H.-G. (1992), "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics", Tr. by J. Weinsheimer, en *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (2007), Ed. by R. E. Palmer, North Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois, pp. 274–289.

*between Plato and Aristotle (Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*⁸), published in 1976. The study *On the Possibility of Philosophical Ethics* on the first sight seems to be a critical confrontation between the Kantian and the Aristotelian philosophy of moral. Meanwhile many authors explain it exactly as mentioned above, the perspective of Grondin is different:

The opposition between Kant and Aristotle has been noted particularly in an important article of 1963, “On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics” (GW 4, 175–188), which played a large part in the rediscovery of the Aristotle’s ethical actuality and in what has been called in Germany “the rehabilitation of practical philosophy”. As the debates that have ensued have had a tendency to contrast Kant’s universalism with Aristotle’s relativism, Gadamer has insisted more in his recent works on their solidarity, notably in “Aristotle and the Ethics of Imperative”, GW 7, 381–95, where Kant, read through Gerhard Krüger, appears as a critic of the ethical Enlightenment, and Aristotle’s inheritor in the tradition of practical philosophy (Grondin 2003, p. 167).

There is a great argumentative potential, hidden in the comparison of these two thinkers, a potential that should serve to the rehabilitation of practical philosophy not only in Germany, as mentioned above by Grondin, but in the whole western thinking, which influenced by methods of the natural sciences has a tendency to believe in a permanent moral progress. Touched by the events of the Second World War, Gadamer is convinced that there is no moral progress and that it’s exactly the practical philosophy, which can indicate us how to resolve moral dilemmas related to the obligation to make a choice of how to act in our everyday lives.

Gadamer accentuates the fact that the ancient Greek thinking did not see in its ethics the modern division between the theory and the practice and not even the tensions between them that can be perceived nowadays. Although the Greeks have always noticed the difference between *episteme* and *techne*, in ethics they clearly recognized *the practical wisdom*. In the practical wisdom, Gadamer claims, there was always a graduation from one to another with the aim to get to the *unconditional* knowledge, independent from the personal interests, as Kant says in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, the knowledge that had to be applied on the creation of the statement in a very concrete situation. Modern thinking has brought to the philosophy of moral an antagonism between the theory and the practice, which represents the division of ethics into the moral imperative, independent from any personal interest and its practical application, which in the philosophy of Kierkegaard can be recognized as a Christian commandment of love to the fellow creature.

⁸ Gadamer, H.-G. (1978), “Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles”, en *Griechische Philosophie III. Plato im Dialog*, GW 7 (1991), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 128–227.

Hence, how it is possible, Gadamer asks, to resolve in a relevant way the dilemma between the theory and the practice in philosophical ethics? An answer does not surprise, Gadamer indicates two ways towards the rehabilitation of the philosophy of moral. The first way implies to get back to Aristotle and to his understanding of practical wisdom reflected in his concept of *fronesis*; meanwhile the second way proposes to get back to Kant, to his *metaphysics of moral*. The acceptance of Kantian ethics means especially the *recognition of the values a priori*. Kant formulates it in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral* in a following way:

One can, if one wants, distinguish the 'pure' philosophy of morals (metaphysics) from the 'applied' (namely to human nature) (just as 'pure' mathematics and 'pure' logic are distinguished from 'applied'). By this terminology one is directly reminded that moral principles are not grounded on the peculiarities of human nature, but must be subsistent a priori for themselves; but from them human practical rules must be derivable, as for every rational nature (GMS, AA04: 410).

Gadamer appreciates a lot the fact that Kant rises against the almighty reason, pursued by the philosophy of Enlightenment especially on the field of ethics; but in the same time he criticizes him for the lack of empirical conditionality in the metaphysics of moral. Gadamer, moreover, claims that Kant doesn't develop his philosophy of moral on the base of the ethical imperative, but he does it according to the principles of a *good will*, the exact definition of which appears later on, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Gadamer accentuates a very specific position of the concept of will in the philosophy of Kant, the position that situates the will behind the limits demarcated by causality, by the pure reason and partially even by the empirically-sensual world. The will, characterized in this way, should be capable to respect the moral law, which is empirically unconditional and admitted by the practical reason; moreover, the practical reason itself, according to Kant, assumes this type of will.⁹

The moral imperative becomes in this way one of the basic attributes of the free will. In this point Gadamer argues that the moral consciousness of the human being contents in reality much more of the empirical conditionality than Kant was able to admit. Kantian ethics also doesn't count with individual conditions in a concrete situation, in which it is necessary to apply the moral law. From the methodological perspective, Gadamer accepts fully and entirely an imperative understanding of the rule in moral, because it represents the guide to the investigation of law with the help of the practical reason, but he does not agree with its universal value and its unconditionality without taking in consideration the situations which can be classified as extraordinary. A very typical example which, according to Gadamer, causes necessarily the breakdown of the

⁹ Véase: Kant, I. (2003), *Critica de la razón práctica*, Tr. J Rovira Armerngol, Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires, p. 16–20.

categorical imperative is a case of a suicide. In the Kantian version of the story, the categorical imperative makes the self murder reflect the sense and the consequences of his act; meanwhile in the Gadamerian version, the person that decides to end its life in such an extreme way, may not be capable to reflect or evaluate anything.

But despite of his critique, Gadamer appreciates the formative value of Kan's *ethical rigorousness*, because it leads to the priority of duty to the egoistic personal interests and shows how to cultivate the human nature, it means how to teach a human being to be able to resist even in an extraordinary situation. Except of that, Gadamer compares *Kantian ethical rigorousness* to the *ethical rigorousness of Plato*, and finding certain analogies between them he discovers a harmonical relation between the theoretical knowledge of moral in the metaphysics of moral and its practical application in an everyday life. He accentuates his discovery especially in *The Idea of Good between Plato and Aristotle*, where he says that from all the modern philosophers Kant was the one, who got closest to the Platonic-Aristotelian heritage (Gadamer 1978, p. 223).

4. Conclusion

Gadamer is not an unquestioning admirer of his philosophical precursors. He is, without any doubt, an understanding reader, able to recognize deficiencies or too many pretensions, especially when it comes to the big personalities of the western philosophy. Despite of that, he does not question the value of works from the past, although on the first sight they might seem archaic or surpassed. In his opinion, they can still offer us many reasonable and actual answers even on the most important questions of the present time. And of course it's always necessary to have in mind that there is no finished philosophical doctrine and that every careful reader should not only recognize the deficiencies of the work he is reading, but at the same time he should be able to forget about them, because sometimes the great value of the work is hidden under the huge critique of these small mistakes. Exactly in the above mentioned attitude, there is the real value of the Gadamerian interpretation of the Kantian philosophical work, in the ability to conserve the harmonic relation between the critical statement and the accentuation of Kant's extraordinary philosophical message.

Bibliography

- Kant, I. (2007), *Fundamentación de la metafísica de las costumbres*, Tr. M. García Morente, Ed. P. M. Rosario Barbosa, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- (2003), *Crítica de la razón práctica*, Tr. J Rovira Armerngol, Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires.
- (2002), *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, Ed. and Tr. by Allen W. Wood, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

- (1799), *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, en *Gesammelte Schriften* Hrsg.: Bd. 5 Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- (1787), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, en *Gesammelte Schriften* Hrsg.: Bd. 5 Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Conill Sancho, J. (2006), *Ética hermenéutica. Crítica desde la facticidad*, Tecnos, Madrid.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2004) *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Tr. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Continuum, London, New York.
- (1999), “Vorwort”, en *Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten, GW 4* (1999) Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 1.
- (1993), *Verdad y método I, Fundamentos de una hermenéutica filosófica*. Tr. A. Agud Aparicio, R. de Agapito, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca.
- (1992), “On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics”, Tr. by J. Weinsheimer, en *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (2007), Ed. by R. E. Palmer, North Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois, pp. 274–289.
- (1992), “Sobre la posibilidad de una ética filosófica”, en *Philosophica Malacitana 5* Tr. L. de Santiago Guervós, pp. 173–187.
- (1989), “Aristoteles und die imperativische Ethik”, en *Plato im Dialog, GW 7* (1991), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 381–395.
- (1981), “Kants ›Kritik der reinen Vernunft‹ nach 200 Jathren. ››Von hier und heute geht eine neue Epoche der Weltgeschichte aus‹‹”, en *Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten, GW 4* (1999) Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 336–348.
- (1978), “Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles”, en *Griechische Philosophie III. Plato im Dialog, GW 7* (1991), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 128–227.
- (1975), “Kant und die hermeneutische Wendung”, en *Neuere Philosophie I. Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, GW 3* (1999), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 213–222.
- (1971), “Neuzeit und Aufklärung (J. Mittelstrass)”, en *Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten, GW 4* (1999) Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 60–67.
- (1941), “Kant und die Gottesfrage”, en *Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten, GW 4* (1999) Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 349–360.
- Grondin, J. (2003), *Introducción a Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Tr. C. Ruiz-Garrido, Herder, Barcelona.
- (2003) *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, Tr. K. Plant.: Acumenpublishing, Chesham.
- Mittelstrass, J. (1970), *Neuzeit und Aufklärung. Studien zur Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und Philosophie*, Berlin, De Gruyter 1970.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. (2000), *Meditaciones on Quixote*. Tr. by Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marín. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago.
- (1998), *Meditaciones del Quijote*. Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
- Sánchez Rodríguez, M. (2008), *Hermenéutica y Moral, Isegoría*, N.º 39, julio-diciembre, pp. 373-446.

