

Why H. G. Gadamer’s “Philosophical Hermeneutics” Cannot Belong to the “Metaphysics of Presence”?

ARŪNAS MICKEVIČIUS

Department of Philosophy, Vilnius University, Universiteto St. 9/1, LT-01513 Vilnius

E-mail arunas.mickevicius@fsf.vu.lt

H. G. Gadamer’s “philosophical hermeneutics” elicited a controversial response in contemporary philosophy. R. Rorty and G. Vattimo tried to impart a more relativistic shade to H. G. Gadamer’s hermeneutics. In contrast, J. Derrida was inclined to consider H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics more dependent on the previous epoch of “metaphysics of presence”. This article purposes to reveal the points of contact and division between the thinking strategies employed by hermeneutics and deconstruction, providing theoretical arguments why H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics should not be reduced to the so-called “metaphysics of presence”. The question whether H. G. Gadamer’s hermeneutics belongs to “metaphysics of presence” or not is closely intertwined with the problem of dogmatism of meaning and relativism of meaning. J. Derrida was inclined to regard H. G. Gadamer’s hermeneutic as a theory of a search for and discovery of a pre-existing or objective meaning which accounts for the theory’s persistent belonging with metaphysical dogmatism. In opposition to such judgement, this article seeks to substantiate the following thesis: in H. G. Gadamer’s hermeneutics which is based on the “good will” to understand, the problem of dogmatism of meaning (there is one universal objective meaning or truth) and relativism of meaning (there is a multitude of meanings open to interpretation without reference to the primary signified) can be solved by taking into consideration the way offered by E. Husserl phenomenology, i.e. by understanding any possible “thing” (die Sache) as a “thing-in-itself” only in different perceptual perspectives (die perspektivischen Abschattungen).

Keywords: hermeneutics, deconstruction, good will to understand, hermeneutical meaning, metaphysics of presence

INTRODUCTION

H. G. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics elicited controversial responses in contemporary philosophy. R. Rorty and G. Vattimo tried to impart a more relativistic shade to Gadamer’s hermeneutics. In contrast, J. Derrida was inclined to consider Gadamer’s hermeneutics more dependent on the previous epoch of the “metaphysics of presence”. This article examines the Goethe-Institut-Paris debate between H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida which took place in April 1981 and brought to light disagreement between the strategies of H. G. Gadamer’s

philosophical hermeneutics and J. Derrida's deconstruction. The H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida debate invited exhaustive and interesting analyses by such authors as F. Dallmayer, P. Forget, M. Frank, J. Simon, J. Risser, Ch. Shepherdson, G. B. Madison, H. Rapaport, D. G. Marshall, R. Shusterman, D. F. Krell, R. Bernasconi, J. Sallis, J. D. Caputo, N. Oxenhandler and G. Eisenstein. Articles of these authors were published in the book *"Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer–Derrida Encounter"*. Among recent scholarship devoted to the Gadamer and Derrida polemic, the articles by B. Vedder (Vedder 2014), G. J. van der Heiden (Heiden van der 2014), R. J. Bernstein (Bernstein 2008), D. Di Cesare (Di Cesare 2004), C. Swartz and P. Cilliers (Swartz 2003), J. Grondin (Grondin 1999), A. T. Nuyen (Nuyen 1994), S. M. Feldman (Feldman 2000), F. Dallmayr (Dallmayr 1993) should be mentioned. In them similarities and differences between H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida are shown anew from different points of view.

This article is partly prepared on the basis of my previous article "The Meaning of Good Will to Understand in H. G. Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics"¹ and supplemented with new material and insights on the solution of the problem of dogmatism and relativism based on E. Husserl's phenomenological propositions. Within the context of the above body of scholarship, this article purposes to reveal the points of contact and division between the thinking strategies employed by hermeneutics and deconstruction, providing theoretical arguments why H. G. Gadamer's hermeneutics should not be reduced to the so-called "metaphysics of presence". Giving his opinion on H. G. Gadamer's theory of hermeneutical understanding, which, as we shall see, is based on a "good will" to understand, J. Derrida was inclined to regard it not as a theory of meaning "creation" but as a theory of a search for and discovery of a pre-existing or objective meaning which accounts for the theory's persistent belonging with metaphysical dogmatism. In opposition to such judgement, this article seeks to substantiate the following thesis: in H. G. Gadamer's hermeneutics which is based on the "good will" to understand, the problem of dogmatism of meaning (there is one universal objective meaning or truth) and relativism of meaning (there is a multitude of meanings open to interpretation without reference to the primary signified) can be solved by taking into consideration the way offered by Husserl phenomenology, i.e. by understanding any possible "object" (die Sache) as a "thing-in-itself" only in different perceptual perspectives (die perspektivischen Abschattungen) when consciousness is able to synthesize them, widening in this manner the horizon of understanding.

INTEGRITY OF UNDERSTANDABLE MEANING VERSUS RE-CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

H. G. Gadamer linked the actuality of his "philosophical hermeneutics" with practical necessity to understand the nature of humanitarian and, in part, social fields of science. Indeed, meanings of definite historical facts are not given to us directly. Historical facts are recorded in historical sources. Can the knower seeking to understand the last epoch or the meanings of things intended in a cultural tradition determine their objective meaning or truth? Can he discover the true picture of events? Are the criteria of objectivity applicable to historical understanding? Seeking to answer these and similar questions, H. G. Gadamer stated that already F. D. E. Schleimacher and W. Dilthey were concerned about these issues in their own way. However, neither the romantic approach of the former nor the methodological one of the latter were acceptable to H. G. Gadamer as meaning-detecting tools. Discussing the understanding of history, he opposed the so-called methodological historical consciousness of

¹ See Mickevičius, A. 2010. „Hanso Georgo Gadamerio filosofinė hermeneutika ir geros valios suprasti prasmė“, Santalka. Filosofija 18(1): 37–43.

a historian to his hermeneutical historical experience; discussing art and art understanding, he opposed the aesthetic consciousness to the hermeneutical experience of art.

H. G. Gadamer appealed above all to the Heideggerian interpretation of understanding as a way of man's being, i.e. understanding as one of many *In-der-Welt-Sein* moments. This means that in the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics, man's being in the world became man's historical, temporal being within a cultural tradition. In such case the above *historical experience* coincides with a particular position of consciousness where the knower discovers himself involved in a relation of the ontological *belonging* (*Zugehörigkeit*) with a particular historical cultural tradition (*Überlieferung*) already from the beginning. Such relation transcends the subjectivity of the subject. Consequently, the very hermeneutical process of understanding was interpreted by H. G. Gadamer not as a performance given by the subject who relies on various methodological rules but as the knower's participation and involvement in a historical tradition or historical process of tradition. The relation between the knower and the object of understanding (tradition) is neither objective nor epistemological; it is intentional and ontological. H. G. Gadamer concretized the ontological relation employing the notion of *prejudice* (*Vorurteil*). According to H. G. Gadamer, it is not possible to understand anything or anyone from an absolute point of view, unless the point is determined by situation or based on prejudice. However, this does not mean that the knower who seeks to understand the meaning of any "object" (*die Sache*), just establishes it freely, relying on prejudices available to him. Such strategy would presuppose not hermeneutical but closed up, narcissistic, methodological consciousness based only on the rules created by itself. In relation to the object of understanding (e.g. a text, a piece of art, a historical fact or any other artifact in general), prejudices upon which consciousness relies and cannot but rely may be legitimate or illegitimate. H. G. Gadamer charges the hermeneutical consciousness of the knower to separate legitimate prejudices from illegitimate ones. This task can be accomplished only by consciousness open to *the Otherness*. He argued:

"That openness for the opinion of the other or of the text will always include setting it in relation to the whole of one's own opinions or setting oneself to it. <...> And whoever "hears past" what the other is really saying will not in the end be able to fit it into his own manifold expectation of meaning. <...> Whoever wants to understand will not rely on the fortuitousness of his own pre-opinions, so as to "hear past" the text's opinion as consistently and stubbornly as possible – until it becomes deafening and topples the would-be understanding. Rather, the person who wants to understand a text is ready to be told something by it. So a hermeneutically trained mind must from the start be open to the otherness of the text. <...> One has to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text presents itself in its otherness and in this manner has the chance to play off its truth in the matter at hand against the interpreter's pre-opinion" (Gadamer 1993: 60–61).

As we can see, condition of the above task to understand whether our prejudices are legitimate or illegitimate is not so much the plane of consciousness itself, not so much my own insiderness and not so much *I as the Other*.

Such strategy of "hermeneutically trained mind" anticipates a specific structure of hermeneutical experience which was compared by H. G. Gadamer, by way of analogy, to the structure of a conversation: the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge is analogous to the *I and Thou* relationship where *Thou* is to be understood in its differentness and uniqueness. Thus, both hermeneutical experience and *I and Thou* relation structure are to secure the following condition: *I* who seeks to understand must be always open to *Thou*.

E.g. in a conversation, such hermeneutical consciousness structure of *openness to the Other* presupposes, and means, a chance to allow *the Other* say something, providing the knower with a desire to understand the meaning of what *the Other* actually says. H. G. Gadamer claimed that the *openness to opinions* expressed by *the Other* or text demands to recognize that *I*, as the knower who wants to understand, must make concessions for *the Other's* differentness. The currently discussed hermeneutical thematization of consciousness structure was directly called the thematization of *consciousness logical openness structure* by H. G. Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. In his subsequent texts he called it the knower's "good will to try to understand one another" (Gadamer 1993a: 343). As shall be seen later, it was this particular H. G. Gadamer attitude to the knower's "good will" that provoked J. Derrida's criticism. So, it is important to find out what meaning J. Derrida gave to this approach, and by what counter arguments H. G. Gadamer sought to defend the persuasiveness of the "good will" to understand the attitude against J. Derrida's criticism.

Seeking to understand, we address *the Other* as we would address *Thou* who actually has to tell something to me, the one who seeks understanding. H. G. Gadamer maintained that *the Other's* appeal directed at the knower must not necessarily represent an *directed utterance* made by another human: the whole cultural tradition addresses us just like *Thou* does. I have to allow the tradition to preserve its meaning not only by recognizing directly the differentness of the past but by recognizing that it has to tell something to me as the knower. In order to understand what another says, to make the utterance of the other meaningful, the knower is to raise a question implied by one or other *utterance* directed at the knower. So, in order to understand the meaning expressed by a text, it is necessary to possess the Socratic reflective insight – i.e. the knowledge of one's own ignorance. But that is not all.

H. G. Gadamer argued that we can understand what the text means only if we perceive its directed utterance intended for us or touching us. Such *directed utterance* demands suspension of the knower's prejudices and their critical testing in front of the otherness. This means that hermeneutical understanding seen as the coming face to face with *the Other*, the past, etc., means also the definite self-reflection of the subject or his self-understanding (*Selbstverständnis*) which is realized not as much through *I as a self-conscious centre as the Other*. For this reason understanding as a grasp of meaning is not a projection of a first person singular pronoun. It must be noted that when efforts are made to understand the text's directed utterance by raising a question, this question or knowledge of one's own ignorance is not a formal act of reflection from the point of view of H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics. This *knowing of ignorance* or question is just a question about the meaning of a definite thing (*die Sache*). We try to understand things, so it is necessary to ask what one or other directed utterance (appeal made by the Other) in the text tells us. From this point of view, the hermeneutical understanding means understanding of things which concern us. Thus, the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics differs from the hermeneutics developed by F. D. E. Schleimacher or W. Dilthey who were more concerned about the author's personality or the depths of his soul. On the other hand, it is possible to indicate such border experiences in communication where an directed utterance made by the Other fails to trigger in the addressee any question about the thing. Such communication would be simply pointless, and the *directed utterance by the Other*, from the point of view of non-asking consciousness unaware of its ignorance, would be only a pointless background noise.

A hermeneutical conversation taking place between me as the knower and *the Other* (tradition, text), is, strictly speaking, neither "my" nor "his" conversation; it is a conversation started and fuelled by things themselves. An utterance (appeal made by the Other) directed

at us engages the knower reflectively, involving him into the object-related communication process in which the knower's subjective and target attitudes retreat to the background. This is a specific communication experience or consciousness where the knower is not an impartial observer or analyzer but a participant. And so, understanding, according to H. G. Gadamer, means participation in a communicative process of tradition, linking the past and the present, or a process in which neither the knower nor the text can be autonomous. H. G. Gadamer stated that the hermeneutical understanding must be perceived not as a subjective act but as moving towards the process of communication in which the past and the present interact continually. From the hermeneutical point of view, understanding of the past, just like grasping any other meaning, does not mean simply *re-construction* of a different view or world outlook, i.e. recreation of a primordial meaning. This approach was characteristic of the F. D. E. Schleiermacher hermeneutics. However, the H. G. Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics is concerned about *integrity*: it seeks to understand the communicated meaning – *not to recreate* it objectively but *to integrate* it into the field of own experience, widening the understanding of one or other thing. This would mean that the meaning of a directed utterance directed at us can be understood by us always differently, because its perception is always realized basing on the knower's actual experience. In this respect, H. G. Gadamer definitely rejects the approach on the basis of which the meaning could be reduced to a final and objective one – anticipating a stable and dogmatic Platonic world of *eidos*. To put it otherwise, a hermeneutical desire to understand does not mean that from the very beginning there has existed a semantic *container* – implicit-in-itself and resting-for-itself, from which, in due course, emerges or is rebuilt at will, i.e. re-constructed something that was really present in the past. Such position would have really presupposed the “metaphysics of presence” criticised by J. Derrida.

WHAT DOES THE HERMENEUTICAL “GOOD WILL” TO UNDERSTAND MEAN?

Owing to the efforts of Professor Philippe Forget from Sorbonne University, a symposium was organised at Goethe-Institut-Paris in April 1981. This event is special for hosting the first open H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida discussion about the following problem: how should the concept of “interpretation” in the process of which the meaning of a text is understood be interpreted? The discussion revealed quite differing theoretical approaches to the interpretative understanding of the text meaning. As has been mentioned, H. G. Gadamer perpetually stressed that a common meaning or understanding of some thing constitutes only in a live speech, or dialogue. In contrast, the J. Derrida deconstruction method indicates towards writing (*écriture*) as a specific tangle of semantic relations in which any uniformity and identity is annulled; in this way the stepping over the so-called “metaphysics of presence” takes place. In his symposium paper *Text and Interpretation* H. G. Gadamer presented his opinion about the understanding of meaning contained in a text. It must be borne in mind that the “philosophical hermeneutics” project developed by him was inseparable from the critique of methodologism characteristic of the era in which idealism and cognitive theory are prevalent. He wrote:

“I took as my own point of departure the critique of the idealism and methodologism in our era dominated by epistemology; and in my critique Heidegger's extension of the concept of understanding to an existential, that is to a fundamental categorical determination of human existence, was of particular importance for me. That was the impetus that induced me to go critically beyond the discussion of method and to expand the formulation of the hermeneutic question so that it not only took science into account, but the experience of art and of history as well. <...> Thus, in full accord with Heidegger's critique of the concept of subject,

whose hidden ground he revealed as substance, I tried to conceive the original phenomenon of language in dialogue" (Gadamer 1993a: 331–332).

Turning his back on the speculative dialectic methodologism subordinate to the pure concept and logical solution, H. G. Gadamer took a path leading to a live conversation or a Socratic dialogue. On this way he "tried to hold fast to the inexhaustibility of the experience of meaning by developing the implications for hermeneutics of the Heideggerian insight into the central significance of finitude" (Gadamer 1993a: 333). H. G. Gadamer recognized that to him, the follower of M. Heidegger, J. Derrida's texts became a real challenge. J. Derrida argued that raising a question about the essence of truth and the meaning of being, M. Heidegger still regarded the meaning as present and discoverable, having not yet done away with the "metaphysics of presence". F. Nietzsche, on the contrary, according to J. Derrida, was more radical because "his concept of interpretation does not entail the discovery of preexisting meaning, but the positing of meaning in the service of the "Will to Power". Only then is the logocentrism of metaphysics really broken" (Gadamer 1993a: 333).

Following in the footsteps of "fundamental ontology" developed by M. Heidegger, H. G. Gadamer, seeking to defend M. Heidegger's and also his own stance, pointed to J. Derrida's fault – his inability to appraise the significance of seduction in F. Nietzsche's thought:

"I find that the French followers of Nietzsche have not grasped the significance of the seductive in Nietzsche's thought. Only in this way, it seems to me, could they come to believe that the experience of Being that Heidegger tried to uncover behind metaphysics is exceeded in radicality by Nietzsche's extremism" (Gadamer 1993a: 334).

By the way, H. G. Gadamer does not explain his own understanding of seduction. Detailed interpretational development of this phenomenon within the general context of H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics could be analysed separately. Following the course of H. G. Gadamer's thoughts I shall provide only short remarks. Any seduction presupposes a communication partner. This means the following: like a seducer cannot help staying impartial towards a seducee, so F. Nietzsche's radical incitement, i.e. seduction to move beyond the logocentrism of metaphysics, cannot remain impartial. In order to seduce someone or something, some presence of the encountered Other is needed. Evidently, H. G. Gadamer wanted to emphasize the following: the seducee, coupled with the seducer, represents the presence of being or truth which, having emerged in a primary way, hides, touching seductively the knower and putting questions to him. It is no accident that M. Heidegger asserted that we can query or ask a question about the meaning of being only because our very being is queried. Following the attitudes of M. Heidegger's "fundamental ontology", H. G. Gadamer, explaining a desire to understand, not accidentally linked the phenomenon of understanding with the dialectic structure of question and answer and of listening (Hören) and belonging (Gehören).

As we can see, H. G. Gadamer, discussing seduction, appeals to a specific experience of communication, or, in other words, to the dialogical experience of a human being in the world. It must be noted that in H. G. Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics this experience, be it directed to interpersonal, intertextual or any other understanding, is always a linguistic experience. He asserted:

"The dialogical character of language, which I tried to work out, leaves behind it any starting point in the subjectivity of the subject, and especially in the meaning-directed intentions of the speaker. What we find happening in speaking is not a mere reification of intended meaning, but an endeavour that continually modifies itself, or better: a continually recurring temptation to engage in something or to become involved with someone. But that means to

expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking one's mind has little to do with a mere explication and assertion of our prejudices; rather, it risks our prejudices – it exposes oneself to one's own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other" (Gadamer 1993a: 335).

Regarded in this light, the commonality of meaning which should be viewed as achieved understanding is born within a language, i.e. through lexical exchange, incorporating the otherness of the Other. In H. G. Gadamer's opinion, there cannot be any essential difference between lexical exchange and writing because a piece of writing itself should be interpreted as a hermeneutical concept, which means that a text ought to be viewed not from a grammatical or linguistic perspective: grammatical or linguistic analysis of the text would only seek to explain the language functioning mechanism. Viewed from the hermeneutical perspective, a piece of writing (text) is just an alienated linguistic abstraction, an orphan demanding for understanding in a live conversation. Gadamer argued: "Thus, for a written conversation basically the same fundamental condition obtains as for an oral exchange. Both partners must have the good will to try to understand one another" (Gadamer 1993a: 343).

Such Gadamer hermeneutical stance based on the principle of "good will" to understand attracted Derrida's criticism. In his 1981 symposium paper "*Three Questions to Hans Georg Gadamer*" he asked:

"Doesn't this unconditional axiom nevertheless presuppose that the *will* is the form of that unconditionality, its last resort, its ultimate determination? What is the will if, as Kant says, nothing is absolutely good except the good will? Would not this determination belong to what Heidegger has rightly called "the determination of the being of beings as will, or willing subjectivity?" Does not this way of speaking, in its very necessity, belong to a particular epoch, namely, that of a metaphysics of the will?" (Derrida 1989: 52–53).

Now we have approached the main question: Can Gadamer's hermeneutical understanding as a live conversation or dialogue, be reduced to "metaphysics of presence", which Derrida sought to deconstruct? By reconstructing H. G. Gadamer's logic of argumentation, let us try to explain what his true intentions are and why J. Derrida's criticism is not substantiated. Firstly, because "good will" to understand has nothing in common either with the epoch of "metaphysics of presence" or with I. Kant's ethics. It does not point to any normative obligation when understanding. H. G. Gadamer stated:

"I absolutely cannot see that this effort would have anything to do with "the epoch of metaphysics" – or, for that matter, with the Kantian concept of good will. I state quite clearly what I mean by good will: for me, it signifies what Plato called *eumeneis elenchoi*" (Gadamer 1989a: 55).

The Platonic expression "*eumeneis elenchoi*" presupposes a specific attitude of the knower's consciousness not so much anxious about proving its rightness by identifying weaknesses or non-trustworthiness in its interlocutor's statements as consolidating the point of view of the other, i.e. the communication partner for the purpose of making it clear and understandable. To put it otherwise, involved in a conversation, we always seek to understand each other; and this requires hermeneutical "good will" to understand disposed not to weaken but strengthen arguments provided by our communication partner, making them lucid. These aspects are characteristic of any conversation. Even amoral humans making an amoral plan inevitably have to rely on each other's "good will" in order to elucidate the meaning of such endeavour and put it into effect. In this respect, the Gadamerian "good will" to understand has nothing in common with the Kantian ethics and, accordingly, with the epoch of "metaphysics of presence" mentioned by J. Derrida.

Attention must be paid to the circumstance that in his work *Truth and Method* published as early as in 1960 H. G. Gadamer emphasized the importance of the "question and answer" dialectic relation to understanding. Although there is no direct mention of "good will" to understand in the work, it is implied also in the question/answer dialectics: he who seeks to understand raises questions addressed to his interlocutors or texts not for the purpose of catching his communication partner by surprise or pulverizing him; he does it in order to allow *the Other* or text, within the context of the posed question, to express what they wish, helping them to consolidate the delivered view even more. H. G. Gadamer stated that the hermeneutically-educated consciousness should always be perceptive and open to the otherness of *the Other*. However, it should be added that the hermeneutically-educated consciousness will always be based on a good will to understand. In contrast, a type of consciousness enclosed or bolted up in the system of exclusively own meanings was called methodological and narcissistic by H. G. Gadamer. "Good will" to understand has nothing to do with I. Kant's ethics and the related epoch of metaphysics because even amoral beings seeking mutual understanding inevitably have to rely on their "good will" to understand.

The question whether the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics belongs to "metaphysics of presence" or not is closely intertwined with the problem of dogmatism of meaning and relativism of meaning. Dogmatism of meaning presupposes a desire to have an only "objective" meaning. And vice versa, relativism of meaning is a position recognizing that all interpretations without exception are equally legitimate, and that they do not point to a real or actual condition of things. Regarded in this light, it becomes evident that J. Derrida accused the Gadamerian hermeneutics for dogmatism characteristic of the epoch of "metaphysics of presence". According to J. Derrida, F. Nietzsche who regarded interpretation not as a *discovery* of the present meaning but as its *creation* basing on "will to power" got over the "metaphysics of presence". H. G. Gadamer disagreed with J. Derrida's opinion. To his mind, F. Nietzsche got into another extreme – which is relativism. In the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics we also encounter the problem of dogmatism and relativism of meaning. This problem of the dogmatism of meaning (a desire to have an only "objective" meaning) and relativism of meaning (all interpretations without exception are equally legitimate; they do not indicate a real or factual condition of things) which we come across in the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics is solvable basing on the E. Husserl phenomenology approach describing a way by which we get to know the meaning of some "thing" as a "thing-in-itself" in different perceptual perspectives (die Perspektivischen Abschattungen) when consciousness is able to synthesize them, widening in this way the horizon of understanding. H. G. Gadamer described this phenomenological method as follows:

"In every worldview (Weltansicht) the existence of the world-in-itself (das Ansichsein der Welt) 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. The relationship is the same in the perception of things. Seen phenomenologically, the "thing-in-itself" as Husserl has shown, is nothing but the continuity with which the various perceptual perspectives (die perspektivischen Abschattungen) on objects shade into one another. A person who opposes "being-in-itself" (Ansichsein) to these "aspects" (Ansichten) 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.

In the same way as with perception we can speak of the “linguistic shadings” (sprachlichen Abschattung) that the world undergoes in different language-worlds” (Gadamer 1990: 451).

The meaning of an understandable text as a “thing-in-itself” emerges exclusively in various different “perceptual perspectives (die perspektivischen Abschattungen)”, yet these emerging different interpretations of the meaning, in their turn, can be legitimate only to the limit of their ability to point to the present “thing-in-itself”. This phenomenological position, on the one hand, does not allow to “dissolve” the meaning of the object of understanding in the relativistic abundance of self-referential interpretations; on the other hand, it destroys a chance to speak about one universal and dogmatically-objective correct meaning of an object, reducing in this way everything to the “metaphysics of presence”.

In general, as noted by many analysts, this symposium witnessed miscommunication between H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida. Later, in his “*Letter to Dallmayr*” (1984) and in his articles “*Destruction and Deconstruction*” (1985) and “*Hermeneutics and Logocentrism*” (1986) H. G. Gadamer not only defended from various perspectives the conception of philosophical hermeneutics developed by him, and, at the same time, the Heideggerian thought, against J. Derrida’s criticism but also tried to show its possible points of contact with the strategy of deconstruction developed by J. Derrida. What are essential differences/similarities between the strategies employed by H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics and J. Derrida deconstruction? H. G. Gadamer claimed:

“I cannot agree here with Derrida, who would relate the hermeneutical experience, especially in live conversation or dialogue, to the metaphysics of presence” (Gadamer 1989b: 95).

Despite this essential difference, H. G. Gadamer recognised that in certain respects his stance was, to a certain degree, similar to and common with J. Derrida deconstruction principles. Discussing the dialogue, H. G. Gadamer, like J. Derrida, always based himself on the fact that understanding and agreement was missing initially in every pre-intended meaning or *vouloir-dire*. To H. G. Gadamer’s mind, in this respect J. Derrida was quite right in paying attention to the primordial “*difference*”:

“Conversation defines itself precisely by the fact that the essence of understanding and agreement are not found in the “*vouloir-dire*” or intended meaning, through which the word supposedly finds its meaning, but rather in what aims at being said beyond all words sought after or found. Derrida is right to insist on this essential “*difference*”, and I myself recognize it fully. But in my view, it does not require any return to “*écriture*”, to writing” (Gadamer 1989c: 118).

H. G. Gadamer, like J. Derrida, interpreted hermeneutical understanding as communication starting from the primary difference: “There’s no first word, like there is no last word” (Gadamer 1993b: 408). H. G. Gadamer also stated that if we understand something or someone, this means that we do not understand it better or worse, in the Kantian or Schleiermacherian sense; this means that we always understand it in a slightly different way, i.e. differently.

“I too affirm that understanding is always understanding-differently (Andersverstehen). What is pushed aside or dislocated when my word reaches another person, and especially when a text reaches its reader, can never be fixed in a rigid identity” (Gadamer 1989b: 96).

This is another characteristic linking stances held by H. G. Gadamer and J. Derrida. A meaning in hermeneutics is neither pre-existing nor final givenness. It is a perpetually and ever differently self-establishing thing within the ever-changing actual present of communication. The meaning perpetually establishing itself in the process of understanding cannot be turned into an objective meaning. The hermeneutical meaning has nothing in common with the propositional logic of proof leading to the conception of a total mind stuck in the framework

of metaphysics of presence or with the *intellectus infinitus* doctrine. Regarded in this light, the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics is neither total and dogmatic nor belonging to the "metaphysics of presence"; it is universal.

CONCLUSIONS

1. H. G. Gadamer, basing on the Heideggerian "fundamental ontology" approaches, developed a theory of hermeneutical understanding. This meant that in the Gadamerian hermeneutics, the Heideggerian man's being in the world turned into a historical temporal man's being within a cultural tradition. From the very beginning, the knower discovers himself related to a historical and cultural tradition (Überlieferung) by a relation of ontological belonging (Zugehörigkeit). Such relation oversteps the limits of the subjectivity of the subject. For this reason he interpreted the hermeneutical process of understanding not as a performance carried out by a subject relying on various methodological rules but as the knower's participation and involvement in a historical tradition and a historical process of tradition.

2. H. G. Gadamer subordinates the knower to the meaning of "things" intended in tradition, suggesting that he should test the legitimacy of his own prejudices with respect to these "things". Understanding the meaning demands from the knower his "good will" to understand which must be interpreted not in the light of the Kantian normative ethics but as a stance taken by the knower's consciousness not so much anxious to prove its own rightness and pulverize the interlocutor or identify the weaknesses or improbability of what he wanted to impart as to consolidate the point of view of the other or the text of understanding, i.e. a communication partner for the purpose of making it even more clear and understandable.

3. The H. G. Gadamer hermeneutical understanding of meaning as a live conversation or dialogue based on the knower's "good will" to understand does not have anything in common with the Kantian normative ethics; it should not be reduced to the "metaphysics of presence".

4. The question whether the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics belongs to the "metaphysics of presence" or not is closely intertwined with the problem of dogmatism of meaning and relativism of meaning. The problem of dogmatism of meaning (a desire to have an only "objective" meaning or primary signified) and relativism of meaning (all interpretations without exception are equally legitimate, they do not point to a real actual condition of things) encountered in H. G. Gadamer's hermeneutics is solvable basing on the E. Husserl phenomenology approach describing the way in which we come to know the meaning of a definite "object" (die Sache) as a "thing-in-itself" in different "perceptual perspectives (die perspektivischen Abschattungen)". This phenomenological stance, on the one hand, does not allow us to "dissolve" the meaning of object of understanding in the relativistic abundance of self-referential interpretations; on the other hand, it destroys a chance to anticipate one universal, dogmatically objective and proper meaning of some object, and to reduce such interpretation of the "meaning" to the "metaphysics of presence".

5. The concept of "meaning" in the H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics is neither pre-existing nor final givenness. It cannot be recorded in any rigid identity. It is a perpetually and ever differently self-establishing thing within the ever-changing actual present of communication. The meaning perpetually establishing itself in the process of understanding cannot be turned into an objective meaning, so H. G. Gadamer hermeneutics should not be deemed reducible to the "metaphysics of presence".

References

1. Bernstein, R. J. 2008. "The Conversation That Never Happened (Gadamer/Derrida)", *The Review of Metaphysics* 61(3): 577–603.
2. Dallmayr, F. 1993. "Self and Other: Gadamer and the Hermeneutics of Difference", *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 5(2): 507–529.
3. Di Cesare, D. 2004. "Stars and Constellations: The Difference between Gadamer and Derrida", *Research in Phenomenology* 34: 73–102.
4. Derrida, J. 1989. "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer", in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamerian–Derrida Encounter*, eds. D. P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 52–54.
5. Gadamer, H. G. 1989a. "Reply to Jacques Derrida", in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamerian–Derrida Encounter*, eds. D. P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 55–57.
6. Gadamer, H. G. 1989b. "Letter to Dallmayr", in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamerian–Derrida Encounter*, eds. D. P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 93–101.
7. Gadamer, H. G. 1989c. "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism", in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamerian–Derrida Encounter*, eds. D. P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 114–125.
8. Gadamer, H. G. 1990. "Wahrheit und Methode", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
9. Gadamer, H. G. 1993. "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 57–65.
10. Gadamer, H. G. 1993a. "Text und Interpretation", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 330–360.
11. Gadamer, H. G. 1993b. "Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprach", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 8. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
12. Grondin, J. 1999. "La définition derridienne de la deconstruction – Contribution au rapprochement de l'herméneutique et de la deconstruction", *Archives de philosophie* 62(1): 5–16.
13. Feldman, S. M. 2000. "Made for Each Other: The Interdependence of Deconstruction and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26(1): 51–70.
14. Mickevičius, A. 2010. „Hanso Georgo Gadamerio filosofinė hermeneutika ir geros valios supraci prasmė“, *Santalka. Filosofija* 18(1): 37–43.
15. Nuyen, A. T. 1994. "Interpretation and Understanding in Hermeneutics and Deconstruction", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 24(4): 426–438.
16. Swartz, C; Cilliers, P. 2003. "Dialogue Disrupted: Derrida, Gadamer and the Ethics of Discussion", *South African Journal of Philosophy* 22(1): 1–18.
17. Vedder, B.; van der Heiden, G.-J. 2014. "Hermeneutics and the Provisional Character of Dialogue", *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 8(3): 343–359.
18. Van der Heiden, G.-J. 2014. "The Voice of the Past in the Present. On Dialogue and Testimony", *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 8(3): 426–444.

ARŪNAS MICKEVIČIUS

Kodėl H. G. Gadamerio „filosofinė hermeneutika“ negali būti priskirta „esaties metafizikai“?

Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – išryškinti sąlyčio ir skirtumo taškus tarp hermeneutikos ir dekonstrukcijos mąstymo strategijų ir pateikti teorinius argumentus, kodėl H. G. Gadamerio hermeneutika neturėtų būti redukuota į vadinamąją „esaties metafiziką“. Klausimas, ar H. G. Gadamerio hermeneutika priklauso „esaties metafizikos“ epochai, ar nepriklauso, yra glaudžiai persipynęs su prasmės dogmatizmo ir prasmės reliatyvizmo problema. J. Derrida H. G. Gadamerio hermeneutiką traktavo kaip iš anksto esamos ir objektyvios prasmės ieškojimo ir radimo teoriją, vis dar priklausančią metafiziniam dogmatizmui. Straipsnyje siekiama pagrįsti priešingą tokiam vertinimui tezę: H. G. Gadamerio hermeneutikoje, paremtoje „gera valia“ suprasti, prasmės dogmatizmo (egzistuoja viena universali ir objektyvi prasmė arba tiesa) ir prasmės reliatyvizmo (egzistuoja daugybė interpretacinių prasmų be referencijos į pirminį ženklinamąjį) problema gali būti išspręsta atsižvelgiant ir priimant E. Husserlio fenomenologijoje siūlomą būdą bet kokio galimo supratimo objekto kaip „daikto savaime“ prasmę suprasti tik skirtinguose „perspektyviuose profiliuose“ (die perpektivishen Abschattungen), kai sąmonė geba juos susintezuoti ir taip išplėsti savąjį supratimo horizontą. Ši fenomenologinė pozicija, viena vertus, neleidžia „ištirpdyti“ suprantamo objekto prasmės reliatyvistinėje savireferentiškų interpretacijų gausoje, kita vertus, draudžia kalbėti apie vieną universalią ir dogmatiškai objektyvią bei teisingą kokio nors dalyko prasmę ir taip tokią „prasmės“ traktuotę redukuoti į „esaties metafiziką“.

Raktažodžiai: hermeneutika, dekonstrukcija, gera valia suprasti, hermeneutinė prasmė, esaties metafizika