

ON JEAN GRONDIN'S *METAPHYSICAL HERMENEUTICS*

SOBRE METAPHYSICAL HERMENEUTICS DE JEAN GRONDIN

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Jean Grondin, *Metaphysical Hermeneutics*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.

Metaphysical Hermeneutics presents a conceptual singularity that simultaneously integrates a type of knowledge, a vital relation of the subject and a methodologically rigorous formal systematisation. This singularity lies in a novel and complex staging of metaphysics, far removed from the traditional negative judgements, and presented instead, in the form of a vindication of its philosophical role, as a generic structure of hermeneutic procedures. In this key, Jean Grondin succeeds in testifying from a plural approach: the communicating vessels between being, the meaning of things and understanding, as constitutive cores of philosophical work. This proposal, however, poses significant challenges in a contemporary world where hermeneutics has turned towards the critique of grand narratives and the revision of ontological frameworks from situated, decolonial or technodiscursive perspectives.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that Grondin uses a progressive methodology of interpretation/understanding and proposes the text as a global analysis of the history of metaphysics in its link with philosophy and hermeneutics. This orientation responds to two fundamental factors: firstly, to an exercise in investigative continuity with regard to this problematic, already addressed in his works *Du sens des choses: l'idée de la métaphysique* (2013) and *La belle de la métaphysique: Essai sur ses piles hermeneutiques* (2021). Secondly, it is due to the author's intellectual profile as a senior lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Montreal, particularly linked to a line of research centred on the works of Martin Heidegger and Hans-George Gadamer.

In this respect, Grondin argues that the articulation of these ideas offers a guideline for delineating the contours of a metaphysical hermeneutics, based on the capacity of human beings to appropriate meaning and to understand

the meaningful orientation of being. However, the search for the meaning of experience requires that this metaphysical hermeneutics also be configured as a hermeneutic metaphysics, insofar as it attends to the historical balance of being and the weighting of approaches present in ancient, medieval and modern philosophies. It follows that another of Grondin's manifest objectives is to show both perspectives from the possibility of a conciliation capable of attenuating the historical tensions between them.

Given the theoretical complexity involved in this research, Grondin has structured the text in 8 chapters, with the purpose of offering a summary exposition that allows us to examine the thematic horizon associated with his proposal: (1) *Sensus Hermeneuticus*, (2) What Is Metaphysics, (3) How Does a Metaphysical Hermeneutics Tackle the Meaning of Life Issue?, (4) The Metaphysical Dimension of Gadamer's Hermeneutics, (5) The Metaphysics behind the Universality of Hermeneutic Understanding, (6) Thinking beyond the Confines of Nominalism: Gadamer's Important Metaphysical Reading of Heidegger, (7) The Possible Legacy of Leibniz in a Metaphysical Hermeneutics, and (8) Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?

In view of this internal physiognomy, the first two chapters are based on a historiographical-epistemological reconstruction of the key concepts: hermeneutics and metaphysics. They identify the invariants, the systematisations and the points of convergence that make up this fundamental relationship. In this way, Grondin not only sets out to elucidate the meaning of the two terms, but also, through a dialogical approach, seeks to clarify the metaphysical components of hermeneutics, as well as the hermeneutic character of metaphysics itself. This attitude of the author reflects his commitment to the hermeneutic tradition and to the act of understanding, for he submits the destinies of these two concepts to a critical and questioning analysis, resorting to a meaning-restoring exercise: 'Metaphysics remains for many of them an arch-enemy or a convenient bugbear. Hermeneutics reminds us that this is by no means the only sensible metaphysics'(p.150). However, this dialogical approach, both hermeneutic and metaphysical, faces criticism from authors such as Walter Mignolo, who in *De la hermeneutica y la semiosis colonial al pensar descolonial* (2013) argues that this perspective does not constitute a true dialogue, but, rather, is presented as a strategy aimed at legitimising a Western epistemology. Here the roadmap of hermeneutics according to Mignolo points out how differences in forms of understanding are marked by the landscape, and more specifically by cultural boundaries.

The third chapter addresses the question of meaning or the notion of meaning as applied to life as a common axis between hermeneutics and metaphysics. This section refers to a principle of immanence in things, which is conditioned by the way human beings relate to reality. On the one hand, the main task of hermeneutics is to inquire into the meaning of something; on the other hand, it is the task of metaphysics to ensure that this meaning is constituted as an inherent property of the object. It follows from this that the factors of action of both disciplines include at their root the possibility of the meaning of life. While the treatment of the meaning of life as a common axis between hermeneutics and metaphysics is fertile, what is missing is a more explicit consideration of how this meaning is constructed socially, historically and technologically, especially in non-Western or hyper-connected contexts, where the traditional categories of being and object are radically problematised.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters are closely interdependent, giving the text as a whole a constitutive vision of the debate. The articulating axis that powers this movement responds to a single name: Hans-George Gadamer. In particular, chapter four is devoted to the study of the metaphysical dimension present in Gadamer's work as a foundational figure of the hermeneutic tradition. From this perspective, Grondin seeks to highlight (with limited resources at his disposal) those metaphysical approaches from which Gadamer distanced himself in developing his theoretical-philosophical apparatus, but which, paradoxically, form the basis of his critique of metaphysics and the formulation of his theses: Gadamer is reluctant to address the ontological foundations that underpin his claims. However, Grondin does not clarify exhaustively the metaphysical implications that can be derived from Gadamer's hermeneutic proposal. Following this line, the fifth chapter is closely linked to the previous one, since it takes up the issue of hermeneutic universality in Gadamer in order to analyse it in his condition of manager of the theses on being, the scope of knowledge and language. The sixth chapter, for its part, enables a reading of Gadamer's interpretations of Heidegger, underlining the latter's position in his effort to overcome nominalism, as a specific form of metaphysics that reduces the framework of meaning and sense to mere human constructions with no real connection to the structure of the world.

The seventh chapter allows for the historical exposition of non-antagonistic relational models that refer to a metaphysical hermeneutics. It is interesting that, in order to carry out this task, Grondin himself finds in Leibniz his specific model (just in a contemporary context strongly proclaimed anti-metaphysical), highlighting how his rationalist metaphysical project leads him to instances of

dialogical understanding, enhancing the hermeneutic substratum. Nevertheless, it is surprising that Grondin identifies Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur as the three interlocutors par excellence from which an approach could be sought, but who did not respond to this call to show Leibnizian theory in conjunction with its hermeneutic complements.

Finally, chapter eight is conceived as a closing chapter, and confronts the reader with an apparently already settled and overcome dilemma: after an exhaustive survey that contributes to the debate about the possibility of this metaphysical hermeneutics, with its different variants and key figures in the history of philosophical thought, can metaphysical or nihilistic consequences be drawn from hermeneutics?

In taking stock of the main proposals of the text, this question takes on a central role, as it cuts across the very dynamics of the research. The historical overview shows how the treatment of metaphysics has tipped the balance towards a strong nihilistic component within hermeneutics, with Heidegger, Nietzsche, Derrida and Vattimo being where this phenomenon manifests itself most intensely. However, it is precisely this orientation that Grondin rejects and criticises as imposing a significant limitation. Even so, this critique of hermeneutic nihilism does not sufficiently consider the critical reasons that feed this same turn: the distrust of totalising discourses, the decentring of the modern subject, or the emergence of a reality mediated by technology.

Where Grondin is resolutely committed to the consolidation of an epistemological system called metaphysical hermeneutics, the deficient traces of the past persist, strained by the speed of the present. This contextualisation makes it possible to situate Metaphysical Hermeneutics in the face of the objections raised by post-metaphysical hermeneutics, such as those of Vattimo (*piensero debole*), Rorty (philosophical pragmatism) and Levinas (ethical thought), showing that the articulation between hermeneutics and metaphysics can compromise their openness to contingency, to the historicity of meaning and to otherness. If the author's purpose is to propose an interpretative model of the world that allows us to manage the experience of life, then its theoretical structure and functionality must respond coherently to this purpose, avoiding both the apology of the historical legacy and the adherence to theoretical constructions of an illusory nature. Along these lines, metaphysical hermeneutics should be oriented towards the guiding principles of the hermeneutic phenomenology proposed by Paul Ricoeur, insofar as these constitute the core of a philosophy of action mediated by interpretation. This is crucial in order to safeguard the creative essence of

hermeneutics, as it distances itself from reductionist approaches in order to favour integral and rigorous understandings. In other words; Grondin's proposal reveals itself as a valuable exercise in historical synthesis, however, instead of shaping a truly transformative project, it adopts a markedly eclectic character.

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