Is Hermeneutics Realistic?
On the Normative Orientation toward Plurality

Theodore D. George

Abstract

Significant proponents of both postmodern and realistic hermeneutics suggest that our efforts to understand are better when they involve a plurality of interpretative perspectives. The author of this essay argues, however, that a realist approach can provide a more persuasive reason for this orientation toward plurality. Postmodern approaches in hermeneutics suggest that we should pursue a plurality of interpretations to help us break free from the influence of reductive interpretations inherited from the past. Yet, this normative orientation runs the risk of a proliferation of interpretations that leaves us in hermeneutical isolation from one another. A realistic hermeneutics, by contrast, suggests that we should pursue a plurality of interpretations because the matters of mutual concern to us are, in and of their own reality, plural. This realistic reason to pursue a plurality of interpretations does not silo us from one another but, on the contrary, reminds us of the need for conversation that allows us to address our shared world of matters of mutual concern.

Keywords: hermeneutics, postmodern approach, realistic approach, plurality

Scholars observe that the broad impact of interest in 'new' and 'speculative' realism across the discipline of philosophy has also led to a rift in hermeneutics between 'postmodern' and 'realistic' approaches

to interpretive experience[1]. While this rift in hermeneutics warrants attention along several lines, the focus of this essay will be to consider a normative dimension of this rift. Significant proponents of both postmodern and realistic hermeneutics suggest that understanding is better when it involves a plurality of interpretations. Yet, as I wish to show, a realistic approach can provide a more persuasive reason for this normative orientation toward plurality. We are familiar with the postmodern claim that interpreters should pursue a plurality of interpretative perspectives, roughly, because this will help us to break free from the hold of other, more reductive interpretations that we have inherited from tradition. In such a postmodern hermeneutics, however, the normative orientation runs the risk of leading to a proliferation of interpretative perspectives so divergent from one another that they threated to divest us of any shared world whatsoever.

In a hermeneutics oriented by realistic concerns, by contrast, things are otherwise. There, as I shall argue, the concern is not primarily that interpreters should pursue a plurality of interpretive perspectives because this will help us break the hold of reductive prejudices of the past. Rather, in realistic hermeneutics, the hold of reductive interpretations inherited from the past can be broken if we recognize that interpretations should bring into focus the plural character of the matters themselves. On this realistic approach, interpretations bring into focus a plurality of perspectives on a matter, but each perspective is nevertheless made possible through reference to the reality of that matter itself. In view of this, our pursuit of a plurality of interpretations does not silo us in interpretations that have little to do with one another, but, on the contrary, grant us access to a shared world with points of reference in matters themselves.

---

[1] This rift has been discussed, for example, by Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo 2017), Günter Figal (Figal 2010). For a summary of the difference between postmodern and realistic hermeneutics see George 2021: sections 7 and 8.4.

1. Postmodern Hermeneutics and Plurality

Postmodern hermeneutics is influenced by the normative orientation of postmodernism toward plurality. While postmodernism has been described in different manners, within philosophy Jean François Lyotard's approach has been especially definitive. In his *Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard identifies postmodernism with an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1993: xxiv). By 'metanarratives', he has in mind broader narratives that are told in order to give legitimacy to discourses of modern sciences – for example, stories meant to show that we should trust in the power of science to contribute to the betterment of society. Postmodernism, then, is an incredulity toward these stories. Such incredulity might take hold, say, when we become exposed to discourses about nuclear war or environmentalism that take the legitimating punch out of stories celebrating nuclear physics because it has led to the betterment of society through the production of a new and inexpensive energy source. Lyotard believes that once such incredulity toward metanarratives takes hold, there is no going back, so that what remains for us in our times now is to discern how we should best respond to this new, postmodern condition. He believes that the greatest danger of the postmodern condition is that without the legitimation formerly provided by metanarratives, knowledge will become commodified and access to it will become restricted (14).

Yet, Lyotard observes that in consequence of our incredulity toward metanarratives, our power to create stories is also freed from its former servitude to the legitimation of modern science. Accordingly, he believes that we should resist the reduction of knowledge to an information commodity through the production of narratives that proliferate an irreducible multiplicity of meanings, and with them, an irreducible multiplicity of standards of value. Indeed, in a celebrated

passage from his *Just Gaming*, Lyotard associates this postmodern normative orientation toward plurality with justice itself, arguing that we should affirm the proliferation of a "multiplicity of justices", that is, narratives about what justice means. This affirmation of the multiplicity of justices, however, really amounts to a (paradoxically universalistic) normative commitment to the "justice of multiplicity" (Lyotard and Thébaud 1996: 100).

Several philosophers associated with hermeneutics have been influenced by the spirit, if not the letter, of Lyotard's postmodern normative orientation toward plurality (see Vattimo 1989; Caputo: 1987, 2018). One of the most familiar is Gianni Vattimo, and the postmodern influence on hermeneutics is recognizable in his celebrated conception of 'weak thought' (see Vattimo 1988). By weak thought, he has in mind thought in the form of interpretations that incrementally weaken the hold that reductive interpretations inherited from the past continue to have over us. Whereas Lyotard believes that postmodernism is defined by incredulity toward metanarratives, Vattimo, for his part, remains concerned that interpretations inherited from tradition can continue to have an effect. Building on Heidegger and Nietzsche, he argues that interpretations inherited from the tradition of Western metaphysics continue to influence us, often tacitly and obliquely shaping a broad sweep of our beliefs, values and practices. In this, he emphasizes how such interpretations inherited from Western metaphysics can lead to a fatalistic complacency. Writing of traditional Western metaphysical conceptions of truth, for example, he states, "When you pick apart" the kind of "knowledge of the rational order of the world" that such conceptions of truth reveal, "at the core of it you uncover an enormous metaphysical reverence for the necessity that transcends us: things are like that, they can't not be like that, and I may as well be content because I have to be content" (Vattimo 2010: 96). For Vattimo, interpretations inherited from the tradition of West-

ern metaphysics may purport to concern the truth about things, but, in effect, they function to stultify us.

Against this backdrop, Vattimo argues that the normative orientation of interpretation is not to understand the world as it is, but, on the contrary, to engage in weak thought, or, the production of a plurality of interpretations that help us to chip away at the complacency to which reductive interpretations inherited from Western metaphysics continue to lead. As he puts it,

> contrary to the letter of Marx's famous phrase about philosophers who only interpret the world […] it is precisely by interpreting the world – and not by pretending to describe it in its given 'objectivity' – that one contributes to its transformation" (see Vattimo and Zabala 2014: 102).

While Vattimo's allusion to Marx's celebrated *Theses on Feuerbach* suggests a revolutionary intention, he nevertheless argues that weak thought actually proceeds as a slow, incremental turning, or recovery (*Verwindung*) from the influence of interpretations inherited from the tradition of Western metaphysics. Ironically, Vattimo argues that this process of recovery may be understood as progress toward complete nihilism. Of course, in the interpretations we have inherited from Western metaphysics, belief in God, the laws of nature, or being were typically held up in opposition to the dangers of nihilism. But, for Vattimo, such Western-metaphysical beliefs are themselves the danger, so that progress toward complete nihilism is really nothing else than progress toward our emancipation.

Vattimo's postmodern hermeneutics, then, suggests that the reason we should pursue a plurality of interpretations is to help us break free from the stultification produced by the reductive interpretations that we have inherited from the tradition of Western metaphysics. In

this, what we should do is pursue a plurality of interpretations help us get over the pretense that our interpretations concern matters that are creations of God, that have a nature, or belong to being – in short, that our interpretations refer to anything like a fixed reality.

Yet, the character of Vattimo's normative orientation toward a plurality of interpretations leaves us to wonder what will be left of any shared world of interpretations as we progress toward complete nihilism. What, we may ask, might remain of a shared world of interpretations as we recover from the shared (albeit stultifying) world given by interpretations inherited from the tradition of Western metaphysics, or, for that matter, as we recover from the pretense of a shared world based in reality? Indeed, we may come to wonder whether Vattimo's vision of our recovery from Western metaphysics might, at the same time, introduce the risk of a different malady, a fragmentary proliferation of interpretations that leave us with fewer and fewer matters of mutual concern.

2. Realistic plurality

Recent interest in 'new' and 'speculative' realisms has proved to be an inspiration for several philosophers to develop a hermeneutics oriented by realistic concerns[2]. These realistic approaches, like postmodern hermeneutics, suggest that our efforts to understand require us to pursue a plurality of interpretive perspectives. Yet, in realistic hermeneutics, there is a different reason for this normative orientation. Postmodern approaches, as we have seen, suggest that we should pursue a plurality of interpretations in order to break free from the hold of reductive interpretations that we have inherited from tradition. In realistic hermeneutics, by contrast, our efforts to under-

---

[2] Philosophers associated with hermeneutics who have been found an impetus in 'new' and 'speculative' realisms include Günter Figal, Anton Koch, Tobias Keiling, as well as Get-Jan van der Heiden, and others.

stand require us to pursue a plurality of interpretations because the matters we are interpreting themselves present us with a plurality of possible meanings. Here, we need a plurality of interpretations because the matters we are concerned about are more complicated than any one interpretation (or even any finite number of interpretations) can fully get at.

Günter Figal, a current proponent of a realistic hermeneutics, observes that this realistic-hermeneutical reason for a normative orientation toward plurality is anticipated in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It is true, as Figal observes in his *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy*, that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has received acclaim foremost for his celebration of plurality. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is celebrated for the claim that our efforts to understand comprise an 'infinite conversation. no less than for his stress on motifs such as openness, listening, and play. In this, Gadamer has received acclaim for aspects of his hermeneutics that seem most compatible with postmodern sensibilities. Yet, less appreciated is that Gadamer provides what seems to be a realistic reason for his normative orientation toward plurality. Gadamer, after all, maintains that our efforts to understand present an infinite task, and that interpretive experience has to remain open, precisely because our efforts to understand should remain *sachlich*, that is, salient or substantive, and thus remain focused on the matters themselves (see Figal 2010).

In *Truth and Method* and elsewhere, Gadamer clarifies how his normative orientation toward plurality derives from concern for the matters themselves in connection with what he calls a hermeneutical "conversation" (Gadamer 2013: 401 ff). Gadamer's conception of a hermeneutical conversation may be understood as a conversation in a restricted sense. Generally, a conversation is a phenomenon that involves interlocutors who listen and speak to one another in turns,

whether for the sake of their mutual (or respectively different) practical interests, for the sake of conviviality, or some other reason. But, more narrowly, a hermeneutical conversation is a conversation for the sake of genuinely understanding something of mutual concern to the interlocutors. In this more restricted sense, Gadamer believes that a conversation is an event that takes place, paradigmatically, between two persons, though, as we know, he famously maintains that this paradigm applies to the hermeneutical situation of text interpretation – for him, text interpretation is a 'conversation' between interpreter and text. In hermeneutical conversation, however, interlocutors do not primarily listen and speak in turns to further pregiven practical interests or for the sake of conviviality. Rather, in hermeneutical conversation, interlocutors listen and speak to one another for the sake of learning the truth about a matter of mutual concern. In hermeneutical conversation, the point, then, is to understand the matter as it truly is.

Gadamer emphasizes that when hermeneutical conversation succeeds, interlocutors also come to learn something about themselves, thus achieving new self-understanding. Interlocutors achieve such self-understanding in that their efforts to understand a matter can lead them to recognize prejudices which have allowed them to misunderstand that matter in important regards before they began to converse about it. As interlocutors come to recognize these prejudices, they can come to understand themselves differently, and perhaps even to grow or change. Of course, the pursuit of such self-understanding is a lifelong project, and interlocutors are never finished with discovering their own prejudices. Yet, even in this, a conversation leads interlocutors to new self-understanding only thanks to their mutual concern to understand a matter as it truly is. In hermeneutical conversation, self-understanding is an indirect consequence, not the express purpose, of the interlocutors' listening and speaking

to one other. The express purpose is to understand a matter as it truly is.

Gadamer's conception of hermeneutical conversation brings into focus that the truth of a matter appears not as something self-evident but rather as something that is able to come into question. After all, a hermeneutical conversation can only begin once interlocutors recognize that the truth of the matter of mutual concern to them is no longer obvious. Gadamer suggests that a matter is defined by the fact that interlocutors can dispute what it truly is. In this, he draws a connection between his hermeneutical notion of a matter, or *Sache*, and the Latin notion of *causa*, a term used historically in the context of Roman law. In his essay, "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things", he explains:

> the meaning of the German *Sache* is permeated above all by what is called *causa*, that is, the disputed 'matter' under consideration. Originally, it was the thing that was placed in the middle between disputing parties because a decision still had to be rendered regarding it (Gadamer 1977: 71).

When Gadamer says that a hermeneutical conversation is about a matter, he means that it is about something which can and, for whatever reason, has come to be contested. Moreover, as the historical example of a legal case makes clear, a matter is not a simple entity but, instead, an affair or event, the determination of which requires that we pay attention to a complex interplay of relevant problems, judgments, and consequences.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics seems, then, to suggest that in our efforts to understand, what allows our interpretations to fall into dispute, what allows for a plurality of interpretations that can lead to such a dispute dispute, is ultimately nothing else than the

character of the matters themselves. Certainly, in hermeneutical conversation, interlocutors may fall into dispute about the truth of a matter of their mutual concern because of the different traditions to which they belong, the different life-contexts of the experiences they have had, or the different contexts of experience they have had with that matter in the past. But, what distinguishes a hermeneutics as realistic is the idea that these differences are only able to make a difference because the matter is available to be experienced differently through these different contexts in the first place. Yes, different contexts of experience can lead us to understand a matter as it truly is in different manners. But, more originally, such a plurality of interpretations is made available by possibilities of being interpreted that already belong to the matter.

In hermeneutical conversation, then, the truth of a matter comes into dispute – not, however, simply because of the different contexts of experience that interlocutors contribute to their efforts to understand. Rather, they have been able to form different contexts of experience about the matter of mutual concern to them because the matter is itself many-sided, complex, and intricate.

Figal, in his own contributions to a realistic hermeneutics, maintains that Gadamer's realistic-hermeneutical reason for his normative orientation toward plurality remains too understated, however. Figal argues that Gadamer's understatement is due to the fact that he remains too indebted to his mentor Heidegger's claim that understanding has the sense of an 'enactment' of human existence (see, for ex., Figal 2010: 66–77). Figal reminds us that Gadamer, building on Heidegger, maintains that understanding, grasped as a fulfilment of interpretive experience, comprises an enactment of human existence. As we have seen, Gadamer understanding results in self-understanding as a consequence of our express purpose of interpretating what a matter truly is. But, for Gadamer, following Heidegger,

our express purpose to interpret matters is itself oriented by our care, or worry, for our own existence[3].

Figal, for his part, attempts to remedy Gadamer's understatement by placing stress on the fact that in comprising an enactment of our existence, understanding always involves a sense of 'reference' to matters themselves (see Figal 2010: 66–77; see also Figal 2014: 15–20, esp., 19). As Figal argues, Gadamer is quite right that all off our efforts to understand a matter is oriented by our care, or worry, for our own existence. But, Gadamer's emphasis on the fact that our efforts to understand are therefore an enactment of our existence always refer us to something. Our efforts to understand are oriented by our care, or worries, to work out the terms of our existence, but these depend originally on what we wish to understand in the first place, the matters themselves. As Gadamer recognizes but does not emphasize adequely enough, our efforts to work out the terms of our existence always work *on* and work *through* something; indeed, something *else*, something not circumscribed by either our worries or those of our interlocutor. Thus, interpretive experience is more than an enactment of our existence, this enactment itself always refers us to matters beyond us.

Figal's criticism of Gadamer, then, is that in his philosophical hermeneutics, our interpretive experience of the being of something from tradition does not ultimately have a referential sense. Now, it is true that the occurrence, or movement, of hermeneutical experience is initiated when something from tradition first appears as questionable to us. But, Gadamer characterizes this experience of questionableness not primarily as a question *about* a matter that stands on its own; instead, he conceives of such questioning as the initial moment *of* the enactment of tradition. The occurrence, or movement, of inter-

---

[3] Indeed, it is precisely this conception of understanding as an enactment of human

pretive experience is an enactment of tradition precisely as the transmission of the being of something from the tradition in its truth through linguistic experiences such as those of conversation or text interpretation. Figal writes,

> Heidegger, and, following him, also Gadamer, conceive of things exclusively on the basis of movement; for them, there is nothing that eludes, respectively, the movement of Dasein and the occurrence of inheriting something form the past. The attempt to distance oneself from the enactment of Dasein or from the occurrence of inheriting something from the past must itself accordingly be seen to belong to the enactment or occurrence (Figal 2010: 17).

Gadamer, despite his insistence that interpretive experience should remain focused on the matters themselves, reduces our hermeneutic distantiation from a matter to nothing more than a moment of the enactment of understanding.

Figal, for his part, maintains that our efforts to understand should demand a plurality of interpretations precisely because interpretive experience has a sense of reference to the matters themselves. For Figal, such a reference to a matter is to be grasped as a "possibility of its reality" (*ib*.). When we successfully refer to something, the reference is not first of all a contribution of the subject, but, instead, the realization of a possibility of the matter itself. Thus, following Figal, we can say that when we successfully refer to a matter, that matter is really there in the reference, as a possibility or mode of its reality, and that the matter has thus proved really to have been available for the reference made to it (see Figal 2014: 17).

---

existence for which Gadamer finds a model in Aristotle's practical philosophy.

But, because reference is to a possibility, it is bound up with a plurality of other possible references. Our interpretive experience of a matter can accordingly be grasped as a "complex play of possibilities of reference and of possibilities of being there directly or indirectly" (Figal 2015: 3). So, in our interpretive experience, the matter that our interpretation is about is there in references and is available for references; but this matter is nevertheless there in reference only ever incompletely, in aspects. Or, if we are permitted to supplement Figal's terminology with another term that originates with Husserl: a matter is there in reference, but incompletely, in 'profiles' (*Abschattungen*). In such interpretive experience, the 'complex play' itself cannot be reduced to a fully determined unity. Figal writes,

> one refers to something, and this – the something – is in a certain manner there, as it can also be there in other references or as it can only be there in this reference. The play in its entirety is inexhaustible; with every *Sache* and *Sachverhalt* it is different and just as much so with every possibility of reference, which, however negligible, differs from other possibilities (*ib*.).

A matter is there in our references to them; and, this is confirmed by the fact that the matter also appears in other references. But, by the same token, however, this matter itself always exceeds its being there in any one or in even any nexus of references.

3. Plurality, realistically

Postmodern and realistic hermeneutics suggest that our efforts to understand should demand of us a plurality of interpretations. But, as we have seen, the two approaches provide very different reasons for

this normative orientation. In postmodern hermeneutics, the reason to pursue a plurality of interpretations is to help us break free from reductive interpretations that we have inherited from the past. In a realistic hermeneutics, by contrast, the reason that our efforts to understand require a plurality of interpretations is that the matters themselves present a plurality of perspectives. It speaks in favor of the postmodern 'should' that it reminds us always to resist, subvert, revise, and otherwise break apart reductive interpretations we have inherited from the past. But, the realistic 'should' teaches that the demand for plurality originates not from our interpretive practices alone. Quite to the contrary, the realistic 'should' reminds us that in our efforts to understand, the matters themselves hold more possibilities than can be counted – not only to resist or subvert interpretations we have inherited from the past, but also to interpret our way to a shared future that brings us closer to the matters of mutual concern to us.

The difference in these postmodern and realistic reasons to pursue a plurality of interpretations is, I believe, of real consequence. In postmodern hermeneutics, the pursuit of a plurality of interpretations that helps us break free from reductive interpretations inherited from the past is, at the same time, a break from the univocity, even hegemony, that can result from such reductivism. The postmodern normative orientation toward plurality helps us to throw off any one-size-fits-all interpretation that has been passed down to us. But, this postmodern normative orientation toward plurality may therefore also run the risk of separating us from one another, leaving us siloed in interpretations that have little or nothing to do with each other.

In a realistic hermeneutics, too, the normative orientation toward plurality will also help us break free from reductive interpretations inherited from the past – not because we produce new

interpretations that break apart old, reductive ones, but rather because of our interpretive attention to the matters themselves. In such a realistic approach, however, the normative orientation toward plurality does not lead us to be stranded in isolated interpretive silos. It leaves us there together, facing matters of mutual concern, though without adequate hermeneutical resources, since we cannot yet understand the matters and will never be able to produce a plurality of interpretations large enough fully to understand them. In a realistic hermeneutics, the consequence of the normative orientation toward plurality is that by the time interlocutors enter into hermeneutical conversation, they have already stumbled into something that matters to both of them; that despite all interpretations inherited from the past, they are not quite sure what it is or what to do about it; and that their best hope is not to isolate themselves from one another through an insistence on divergent interpretive perspectives, but rather to work together to interpret the matter as much as possible as it truly is.

The consequences of the difference between postmodern and realistic reasons to pursue plurality can be clarified by concrete examples of interpretive practice. A case in point is a recent account given by Graham McCaffrey, a scholar and practitioner of nursing whose research is heavily influenced by hermeneutics. McCaffrey does not identify himself with the program of a realistic hermeneutics, but his sensitivity to issues of interpretation nevertheless help me to draw out the consequences of the difference between postmodern and realistic approaches pursuits of plurality. In his recent book, *Nursing and Humanities*, he recounts an encounter with (what I would see as a decidedly postmodern) phrase, 'multiple realities'. He writes:

> It is a phrase I sometimes hear from graduate students trying to grapple with different points of view that look and sound irreconcilable […]. But it is a phrase I discourage because it does suggest we can all live in our own separate worlds, somehow getting by respecting each other's reality when in fact we have to contend and cooperate within one real world in its materiality (McCaffrey 2020: 53).

In McCaffrey's experience of the phrase 'multiple realities' among his students, we find – despite the appearance of the word 'reality' – the consequence of a decidedly postmodern normative orientation toward plurality. For Vattimo, we recall, our pursuit of interpretive plurality is not about a matter, but about our efforts to break free from reductive interpretations inherited from the past. With McCaffrey's experience of 'multiple realities', we find a position like Vattimo's treated as doctrine: since the plurality of interpretations are, after all, all that there are; and since, after all, there could not be any distinction between interpretations and reality anyway, why not then simply identify the plurality of interpretations as realities in the first place?

Yet, as McCaffrey's observations make clear, there is a danger in this consequence of postmodern orientation toward plurality. With the postmodern normative orientation toward plurality, we run the risk that what our interpretations are supposed to be about, the matters of mutual concern to us, will dwindle from being a matter under dispute to becoming a matter merely of indifference, something that no longer serves as a common point of reference for our different interpretive approaches. In a realistic hermeneutics, the normative orientation toward plurality reminds us that when we find ourselves confronted by a matter that leads us into a dispute, it is not enough to retreat from the dispute into our own perspective, or to retreat simply

in the name of conflict avoidance, using the excuse that we all simply have our own different, and in this case divergent, interpretations of things. In a realistic hermeneutics, the normative orientation toward plurality brings into focus that even in our divergent, contested, and conflictual interpretive experiences, we are nevertheless bound to one another by something. We are not, of course, bound by the possibility that we will achieve a univocal interpretation, but, instead, by our orientation toward the reality of our mutual, if interpretively complex, points of reference: the matters themselves.

4. The person of experience, revisited

In all of hermeneutics, perhaps the most iconic image of the norms that orient our efforts to understand is found in Gadamer's invocation of what he calls the 'person of experience'. In his *Truth and Method*, we recall, Gadamer maintains that the interpretive experience of truth is distinctive because it contributes to our education (*Bildung*). Yet, as Gadamer makes clear, this education amounts neither to a cultivation of skills nor to a process of formation that helps us to conform to a pregiven ideal of the human being. Rather, as becomes evident from Gadamer's approach, this is an education that principally serves to ready us always to become – more educated through further interpretive experiences. Thus, to become educated is nothing else than to become a person of experience, and, as Gadamer maintains, the hallmark of this person is to have become 'radically undogmatic'. He writes,

> The experienced person proves to be […] someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper

fulfillment not in definite knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself (Gadamer 2013: 364).

In hermeneutics, to become educated through interpretive experience is not to become knowledgeable, or at least, not in the sense of accumulating definitive knowledge or expertise. Rather, it is to achieve a radical openness to new experience.

What, however, counts as radically undogmatic, and what constitutes such radical openness? It is not difficult to imagine how a proponent of postmodern hermeneutics might interpret Gadamer's image of the person of experience. From this postmodern perspective, persons of experience are radically open, in that they have experience of many interpretations, and, thereby, have become ready to produce new interpretations that break free from the old, reductive interpretations they have inherited from the past. What a realistic hermeneutics suggests, by contrast, is that persons of experience become radically open though their many experiences of the matters themselves, and, accordingly, through their experience of reality. The wisdom of experience is not simply that we must always be ready to interpret again and anew. More originally, the wisdom of experience is that even as we belong to the world, and even as we find ourselves confronted always and again by matters themselves, our interpretation will never be an equal to these matters in their reality. On the one hand, we find ourselves entrusted to the world, to matters of concern in their reality, and, because we are thus entrusted, also dependent on and vulnerable to them. Yet, on the other hand, we time and again find ourselves forced to admit that this reality we trust in and depend on is itself ambiguous, impossible to understand or manage definitively.

References

Caputo, J. D. (1987)*. Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D. (2018). *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*. Pelican Books.

Figal, G. (2010). *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Figal, G. (2014). Phenomenological Realism, some programmatic considerations. *META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*, Special Issue: 15–20.

Figal, G. (2015). *Unscheinbarkeit: Der Raum der Phänomenologie.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1977). The Nature of Things and the Language of Things. In D. Linge (ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 69–81.

Gadamer, H.-G. (2013). *Truth and Method*. London, New Dehli, New York, and Sydney: Bloomsbury.

George, Th. (2021). Hermeneutics, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.): https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/hermeneutics/; sections 7 and 8.4.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1993). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, ninth printing.

Lyotard, J.-F., and Thébaud, J.-L. (1996). *Just Gaming*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, fourth printing.

McCaffrey, G. (2020). *Nursing and Humanities.* London and New York: Routledge.

Vattimo, G. (1988) *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Vattimo, G. (1989). *Beyond Interpretation*, Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Vattimo, G. (2010). *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Vattimo, G. and Zabala, S. (2014). *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Vattimo, G. (2017). *Of Reality: The Purposes of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.