

Jes Conill-Sancho. *ica hermentica. Crica desde la facticidad.*
[Hermeneutic Ethics. The Critique of Facticity]. Madrid: Tecnos,
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Preview

Book Review. Jes Conill-Sancho. *ica hermentica. Crica desde la facticidad.* [Hermeneutic Ethics. The Critique of Facticity]. Madrid: Tecnos, 2006.

Jesús Conill-Sancho. *Ética hermenéutica. Crítica desde la facticidad* [Hermeneutical Ethics. The Critique of Facticity]. Madrid: Tecnos, 2006.

In ethical “histories” and “encyclopaedias,” it is uncommon to find any chapters on hermeneutical ethics. This is rather curious, considering that the most significant representatives of contemporary moral and political philosophy come from a hermeneutic setting (Rawls, Walzer, Taylor, MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Rorty, Gadamer, Apel, Habermas, Vattimo). Why should there be such reluctance to talk specifically about hermeneutical ethics when its presence is unquestionable?

Hermeneutics is often accused of lacking any critical sense, while one of the functions of philosophy is precisely to be critical. But when some hermeneutical thinkers put forward critical claims, they are reproved for forgetting the weight of facticity and the depth of experience. The purpose of this book is to overcome both the critical and the hermeneutical deficiencies by attempting to structure the demands of reason and life in a “hermeneutical ethics that is critical from facticity.” The means of undertaking this consists in taking a hermeneutical approach to Kant through Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, and taking advantage of the most relevant initiatives in critical theory from the hermeneutical sphere itself: discursive ethics (Apel and Habermas), the ethics of otherness and recognition (Ricoeur), of authenticity (Taylor), and of *pietas* (Vattimo). This would be an impure hermeneutical ethics, open to scientific thought, as demanded by critical rationalism (Albert), and it assumes the facticity of vital experience but also that of scientific knowledge and technological transformations.

This book sets out to prove that a new critical hermeneutics can be developed from facticity, and that it is possible to open up critical reflection from the hermeneutics of facticity, discovering the Kantian roots of this hermeneutics, to the extent of presenting a “hermeneuticizable” Kant. There are obvious difficulties involved in this endeavour, at least three of which are undeniable. First of all, it is not easy to hermeneuticize Kant due to the widespread acceptance of Gadamer’s interpretation in *Truth and Method*, according to which the *Critique of Judgment* constitutes a subjectivizing deviation that prevents any model of hermeneutical thought from being put forward. The second difficulty stems from the Heideggerian influence, which has guided contemporary hermeneutics—particularly that of Gadamer, a faithful disciple of Heidegger—because its complex or, rather, tangled thought often seems indisposed to any ethics or, at least, to an ethics compatible with the modern critical spirit. Thirdly, it is also difficult to consider ethics as a central aspect of philosophical hermeneutics in the manner that I call the “Gadamerian way” (which goes from Dilthey to Gadamer through Heidegger) when

its defenders can be seen to have preferred interest in issues other than strictly ethical ones, such as aesthetic and ontological ones. In fact, the first part of *Truth and Method* has generally been considered a contribution to aesthetics, and the third part to ontology.

The strategy that is used in this book against these three difficulties is as follows: Conill-Sancho first attempts to show that the Gadamerian interpretation is not appropriate and that a potential for hermeneutics can be found in Kant. As he sees it, contemporary hermeneutics can connect with Kant at a number of points: (1) with the *Critique of Judgment*, in which outstanding elements are the “ability to judge” as such, the new function of the imagination, and an underlying idea of life, to which very little attention has been given; (2) with a practical or moral anthropology (anthropology in a practical sense) that includes an “aesthetics of freedom,” and a “Methodology of Practical Reason,” which, along with the capacity to judge, constitutes the basis for a new model of ethical “application” and thus, in the author’s opinion, a “Pragmatics of freedom.”

Few authors have stressed this potential relationship between Kant and hermeneutics, and even fewer have taken advantage of it. Nevertheless, in Conill-Sancho’s view there are at least two ways in which Kantian philosophy can be transformed to lead to the hermeneutical horizon of present-day philosophy: the Nietzschean and the Gadamerian approaches.

The author put forward the first of these in *El poder de la mentira*, reaching a certain ethics of radical facticity in the will to power, an “ethics of transvaluation.”¹ In this text, however, the author concentrates on the second form, the Gadamerian approach, by means of which contemporary philosophical hermeneutics has been structured and with whose aid he advances a hermeneutical ethics of facticity with a new critical sense: a hermeneutic theory of ideality from facticity.

This is the reason for attempting, secondly, to reconstruct certain ethical aspects in this Gadamerian form of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, particularly from the first Heideggerian “hermeneutics of facticity” that fascinated Gadamer so much and in which can be found components compatible with the modern critical sense. There is a need to point out the sources from which this hermeneutical ethics is drawn (Heidegger, Hegel, Kant, Aristotle) and how it is possible to structure their contributions. From this research it will be possible to determine, thirdly, the characteristics of a hermeneutical ethics, and consider this fundamentally as the “ethics of facticity.”

¹ Jesús Conill, *El poder de la mentira. Nietzsche y la política de la transvaloración* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1997).

It is indeed precisely when the characteristics of such an ethics are brought up that we begin to see its contributions to contemporary ethics: it enables the extension of the moral sphere, or rather the recognition of the experiential basis of the moral sphere in our lives, historical and vital facticities; it helps to determine the statute of reason at work in the so-called “applied ethics.” The need to articulate the growing vital complexity and respond to the demands of pluralism in the diverse spheres of our personal, professional, and institutional lives has given rise to the emergence of applied ethics, and a hermeneutical ethics like the one proposed here helps to clear up the statute of reason being used in these; it is even seen as an “ethics of responsibility” by taking into consideration the wealth and depth of life’s experience, as opposed to formalisms and proceduralisms.

This book is divided into three parts: the first part asks whether one should talk of a “hermeneutic” or at least a “hermeneuticizable” Kant, in view of Gadamer’s forthright negation of such a move. This first part is further subdivided into three sections: the first stresses certain aspects of the Kantian *Critique of Judgment* connected with hermeneutics, such as the new function of imagination and the importance of the “feeling of life,” the same term that would later be used by Dilthey; the second subdivision attempts to reveal what I have ventured to call an “aesthetics of freedom” and a “pragmatics of freedom,” from Kantian “Practical Anthropology” and “Methodology of Practical Reason”; the third subdivision sets out to correct the interpretation of the “humanist tradition” proposed by Gadamer. In the author’s view, Gadamer misappropriates the humanist tradition by presenting it as an alternative to Kant’s aesthetics when it actually constitute a further bond between Kant and the proposed critical hermeneutical ethics.

The second part of the book is also subdivided into three sections: the first gives the main meanings (ontological and ethical), that have been assigned to the “hermeneutics of facticity,” which tend to be considered, in the Gadamerian approach, as the first formulation of fundamental contemporary philosophical hermeneutics. The second and third parts give the main traits of the particular form of knowledge provided by this “hermeneutics of facticity,” taken in an ethical sense: a practical and hermeneutic knowledge (of application and experience), which sets out from the facticity and historicity of experience, and whose model is in theory the Aristotelian *phronesis* located in a particular *ethos*. Any who seek to keep a genuine critical sense must wonder if this *ethos* is not lacking in reflection.

The third part of the work tackles the difficulty generated above: the possible lack of critical reflection. Is it possible to combine the ethics of Aristotle and Kant, the facticities of vital and historical experience and critical reflection? How can one practise “criticism” without falling into the difficulties of an ethical proceduralism,

and attain something like a “hermeneutic universalism” from the facticity of experience, of life, and of history?

The answer the author attempts to give to this question comes from several initiatives incorporating the critical sense from the hermeneutic sphere itself: discursive ethics (Apel and Habermas), the ethics of alterity and recognition (Ricoeur), the ethics of authenticity (Taylor) and the ethics of *pietas* (Vattimo). To prevent hermeneutics from closing in on itself and precluding further developments, however, it must also be opened up to scientific thinking, as is demanded by critical rationalism (Albert). An impure hermeneutic ethics, if it is to respond to the complexity of the real, must assume not only the facticity of experience but also the facticity of scientific knowledge.