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Gadamer, Kant, and the Enlightenment

(to be published in *Research in Phenomenology*, 2016 or 2017)

I. Introduction

Gadamer is prominent on the list of counter-enlightenment philosophers of the 20th century. He is on this list for good reasons and reasons that I will here briefly explore. Gadamer borrows much from Heidegger's critique of modernity and he adds to it. As we all know, Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment and modernity serves as an opening for a reappropriation of the Greeks, especially Plato and Aristotle. Gadamer is often taken to be, again for good reason, one of the leading voices revivifying the battle of ancients and moderns and urging, at least in some regards, the superiority of the ancients. Kant is without question the leading figure of the Enlightenment—at least within the German tradition, if not for the European Enlightenment in general. As such we should expect Gadamer to be strongly critical of Kant. And yet we find Gadamer's relation to Kant displaying a deep ambivalence. It is this ambivalence that this paper examines.

In the Library of Living Philosophers volume dedicated to Gadamer David Detmer contributed an essay simply titled: “Gadamer’s Critique of the Enlightenment.” Detmer writes of Gadamer’s “radical anti-Enlightenment views.”¹ Gadamer responds by writing:

It is extremely astonishing to me that my project of a philosophical hermeneutics ...[is] being discussed under the title ‘critique of Enlightenment’ What Kant calls enlightenment in truth corresponds to what hermeneutics has in view.²

In the same volume, in response to Francis Ambrosio’s essay, “The Figure of Socrates in Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics,” in which Ambrosio argues that the central figure in all Gadamer’s work is Socrates, Gadamer writes in response: “By and large I want to regard this as a correct appropriation. ... But I am missing the name of Kant here.”³ Ambrosio had mentioned the significance of Hegel and Heidegger for Gadamer. He had not mentioned Kant.

So why and how is Kant so important for Gadamer? Kant’s essay on enlightenment, “*Was heißt Aufklärung?*,” stands out as a culminating expression of what the Enlightenment is about. This is so not only for

¹ David Detmer, “Gadamer’s Critique of the Enlightenment,” in Lewis Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Library of Living Philosophers*, vol. XXIV (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 275

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reply to David Detmer,” *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 287.

³ Ibid., “Reply to Francis Ambrosio,” 274.

Gadamer but for most every writer and commentator on the Enlightenment—Foucault, for example. At the center of Kant’s articulation of the Enlightenment is the Latin motto, borrowed from Horace, “*Sapere aude!*”—dare to think for yourself. In the “Afterword” to *Truth and Method* Gadamer refers to the “abstract” character of this motto and its “blindness.”⁴ The motto’s blindness is a blindness concerning human finitude and the historical, traditional ineluctable context for any human endeavor including thinking. The context for the remark is Gadamer’s defense of his rehabilitation of authority in the face of the criticisms of Habermas and others. Yet in a later essay, “Science as an Instrument of Enlightenment” Gadamer approvingly appropriates the motto for himself and prescribes it to us to rescue us from our immaturity—an immaturity that is leading us to self-destruction.⁵ What we need is “reflection” and “judgment” and what these require is “the courage to think”—*Sapere aude!*

In trying to come to terms with Gadamer’s relationship to the Enlightenment and modernity it is important to recognize that for Gadamer it

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 571; for the German, see *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd 2: *Hermeneutik II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 470. Further references to Gadamer’s *Collected Works* in German: *GW*; further references to *Truth and Method*: *TM*.

⁵Gadamer, “Science as an Instrument of the Enlightenment,” *Praise of Theory*, translation by Chris Dawson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 71-83; for the German: “Wissenschaft als Instrument der Aufklärung,” *Lob der Theorie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983).

is a mistaken oversimplification to talk about the Enlightenment as though it is a single phenomenon (though he sometimes does just this, especially in *Truth and Method*).

II. The ‘Bad’ Enlightenment and Kant

Most importantly, Gadamer distinguishes between the “enlightenment of early modernity” and the larger enlightenment project. In a review essay on two books by Jürgen Mittelstraß that concerned themselves with modernity, Gadamer approves of Mittelstraß’s labeling early modernity as the “bad” Enlightenment—*die schlechten Aufklärung*.⁶ Elsewhere Gadamer refers to the “radical Enlightenment” and to the ideal of a “complete” Enlightenment.⁷ I take it that these three titles—the “bad” Enlightenment, the “radical” Enlightenment, and the “complete” Enlightenment—are titles for the same thing. The “complete” Enlightenment is what the “bad” or “radical” Enlightenment hopes for. Gadamer calls this the “idol” of modernity. Each and every reference to any of these three comes with a sharp criticism.

But Gadamer considers this ‘bad’ Enlightenment to be a mere ‘interruption’ of the development of modern thought and culture—an

⁶ Gadamer, “Neuzeit und Aufklärung,” *GW* 4, 64.

⁷ “Reply to David Detmer,” *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 287.

interruption that is relatively brief. The legacy of this bad Enlightenment remains for us a tendency in contemporary Western culture but it is only that—a tendency, one among others. It finds its 20th century philosophical expression in logical positivism and utilitarianism and their sometimes union. This ‘interruption’ was inaugurated by Descartes and ended with Rousseau and Kant. Gadamer writes: “Since Rousseau and Kant this idol of the Enlightenment is over.”⁸ Measured this way the interruption was a mere 115 years (1637 till 1754 when Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* was published).

Gadamer does not, however, distinguish between the good Enlightenment and the bad Enlightenment in *Truth and Method*. Almost every reference to the Enlightenment in this work is negative and, in light of the distinction that he makes elsewhere, pertains to the ‘bad’ Enlightenment.

Before we turn to how Kant helped end this ‘interruption,’ let us look quickly at the features of the Enlightenment of early modernity about which Gadamer is so critical. Fundamental to the theoretical and scientific project of early modernity are a representational epistemology. In short, what is first for us is the ideas or representations that we have in our mind. The epistemological question is whether they accurately portray what is external

⁸ Gadamer, “Rationalität im Wandel der Zeiten,” *GW* 4, 36.

to consciousness, to mind. We are left with a quandary however, since all we have is our own ideas and there is no way to “get out of our heads”-- to compare the real world with our ideas to see whether they truly correspond. This representational epistemology with its Cartesian paradigm is basic to both the Continental rationalists and the British empiricists. Locke, for example, asks the following question: “How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?”⁹ This epistemological quandary leads to Hume’s skepticism. This, of course, is the problem that Gadamer is referring to in the chapter title of *Truth and Method*: “Overcoming the Epistemological Problem through Phenomenological Research.” (Part II. I. 3.)

Hand in hand with this epistemological problem comes subjectivism. The Cartesian starting point is the mind, the subject. The question or problem concerns the mind’s or subject’s grasp (*greifen, begreifen*) of the object. Language is considered an instrumental sign by which we communicate to others whatever grasp we have (the subject has) of the objects of experience. To insure the objectivity of the subject’s grasp of the object, the subject must follow the scientific method which requires a rejection of previous assumptions, of traditional ways of taking the object, of

⁹ Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter iv, no. 3.

any pre-judgment or prejudice about the matter at hand. We are to start with a clean slate. The method insures success. Modern science is the arbiter of truth. Subjectivism, scientism, and 'methodologism' come hand in hand.

On the practical side, the side of ethics and politics (the side that is paramount for Gadamer), the early Enlightenment is marked by the attempt to establish an ethics and politics on the basis of well-founded rules and laws. The ancient and medieval tradition of a virtue ethic in which prudence (*phronesis*) is paramount is rejected. Prudence is demoted to a kind of cautionary principle, a careful avoidance of risk. Ethical decisions are not be the function of judgment but an ethical calculus, a derivation from a rule. The modern approach, as best seen in Hobbes and Locke, is a kind of atomistic individualism that ethically culminates in the development of utilitarianism. It pays little attention to friendship and solidarity. It rejects authority and belittles rhetoric. It enthusiastically understands its project as establishing a republic of reason and sees evidence of the progress of humanity as it embraces modern science, democracy, and human rights. A number of basic dichotomies underlie this Enlightenment project: subjectivity and objectivity, ought and is, feeling and reason, authority and reason, rhetoric and reason. This list can be extended: body/mind, female/male, compulsion/freedom and so on.

According to the claim of Gadamer cited above, Kant, together with Rousseau, put an end to this bad Enlightenment. The obvious and large difficulty with this claim is that almost all the characteristics of the bad Enlightenment—all the dichotomies and dualisms--of which Gadamer is so critical are carried forward and often intensified in the work of Kant. Kant brings epistemological representationalism to its culmination. Anything intellectual is a representation (*eine Vorstellung*) for Kant. Intuitions and concepts, the stuff of consciousness are representations. Of course, as is well known, Kant found a way out of the dilemma of modern epistemology by abandoning any claim of knowledge of the things as they are in themselves. We know only appearances, that is, things as they are represented by us. Appearances are representations. This way out, Kant's Copernican turn in philosophy, is led by the question as to what are the conditions of the possibility of experience. But experience for Kant ultimately means science—and the natural sciences. It is not an accident that 19th century turn away from Hegel and back to Kant was motivated largely by a concern for an adequate account of science. Neo-Kantianism is often, especially in its positivistic mode, a scientism. Gadamer recognized Kant's legacy in the scientism of the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, in

the late essay “Humanismus und industrielle Revolution,” Gadamer writes how under Kant’s authority the lifeworld was ignored on behalf of science.¹⁰

This theoretical ignorance is directly related to the practical side of the ‘bad’ Enlightenment. At the heart of the Enlightenment project is the pushing aside of prudence on behalf of appropriately grounded ethical rules. One can see this most clearly and simply in Hobbes when he writes that “as much experience is *prudence*; so, is much science, *sapience*. ... both useful, but the latter infallible.”¹¹ Hobbes would replace prudence with or subordinate it to an ethical-political science. Kant follows him on this.

Kant’s German for prudence (*prudentia*) is *Klugheit*. *Klugheit* for Kant is not moral. It is a matter of skill and is merely “pragmatic”:

The practical law from the motive of happiness I call pragmatic (rule of prudence [*Klugheit*]; but that which is such that it has no other motive than the **worthiness to be happy** I call moral (moral law).¹²

This is to say that prudence, so called, is a function of the hypothetical imperative and not the categorical imperative.

Now, skill in the choice of means to one’s own greatest well-being can be called *prudence* [*Klugheit*] in the narrowest sense. ... the precept of prudence [*Klugheit*], is still always *hypothetical*¹³

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Hermeneutische Entwürfe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 31.

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter V, Para #21.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translation by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), A806/B834.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translation by Mary Gregor in *Practical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 68-69; for the German, see the Akademie edition IV, 416.

In short, prudence is the ability to determine how best to accomplish one's goals, whether they are moral or not. 'Best' here may be taken to mean 'most effectively' or 'efficiently.' As such it is not a moral virtue. From an Aristotelian (and Gadamerian) perspective, the moderns, including Kant, have turned *phronesis* into *deinotes*, that is, cleverness.

Kant's approach to ethics is rule-governed and principle-based. However much the contemporary advocates of Kantian ethics want to show us the importance of the virtues for a Kantian ethic, it is undeniable that virtue is subordinate to principle and rule. And Gadamer is an advocate of virtue ethics and is critical of modern rule-based ethics.

Kant also is one with the Enlightenment rejection of tradition and authority as antithetical to reason. Similarly, Kant in his political writings embraces much of Hobbes' view of the human endeavor. Additionally he accepts Mandeville's idea of the 'invisible hand' at work through the greediness and cleverness of competing individuals. Kant too sees progress of a sort in human history. He is ambivalent about this because the progress he sees—in science, in politics and economics—is not moral progress, the only kind of progress that really counts.

We could extend this list of the many ways that Kant is an exemplar of what Gadamer counts as the 'bad' or 'radical' Enlightenment much

further. But let us round out this list with the brief mention of two other items: 1) rhetoric, and 2) the subjectivization of aesthetics. Among other things, Gadamer attempts to revive the rhetorical tradition. This goes hand in hand with his rehabilitation of authority and tradition. They are closely related. And the Enlightenment, simply put, rejects rhetoric. Hobbes attacks rhetoric as the “abuse of speech.”¹⁴ Locke follows Hobbes, calling “figurative speech” an “abuse of language” and rhetoric “perfect cheat.”¹⁵ Kant agrees, writing that rhetoric “is not worthy of any respect at all.”¹⁶ For Kant, like Locke, the art of persuasion is the art of “deceiving by means of beautiful illusion.”¹⁷ It moves men “like machines,” Kant writes.¹⁸ In short, it violates human freedom and is in opposition to reason. Gadamer finds the Enlightenment and Kantian antithesis of tradition and reason, of authority and reason, and of rhetoric and reason to be false. Gadamer acknowledges that, of course, “rhetoric appeals to feelings,” but “that in no way means it falls outside the realm of the reasonable.”¹⁹ That is, the antithesis of reason and feeling is another false antithesis. In defense of his attempt to

¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter IV, #14.

¹⁵ Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, Book III, chapter X, #34.

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, translation by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 205; German Academy edition V, 328.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204; 327.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 205; 328.

¹⁹ *TM* 568; *GW* 2, 467.

rehabilitate rhetoric and against his critics, Gadamer writes: “I find it frightenly unreal when people like Habermas ascribe to rhetoric a compulsory quality that one must reject in favor of unconstrained rational dialogue.”²⁰

And, finally, Gadamer is critical of Kant for his legacy in aesthetics, a legacy of the subjectivization of aesthetics and the severing of aesthetic considerations from the consideration of truth. As we all know, Gadamer develops this critique in the opening pages of *Truth and Method*. The play of beautiful representations (again, Kant’s representationalism) provides us with disinterested aesthetic pleasure. The basis for this pleasure is the fit between our cognitive faculties—intuition and conception. The *locus* of the aesthetic is in the subject. The aesthetic is distinct and not a matter of truth or morality.

So where does this leave us? Kant would seem to be the very embodiment of the ‘bad’ Enlightenment. Why and how does Gadamer write that with Kant, the ‘idol’ of the Enlightenment is over and with him (together with Rousseau) the interruption of the bad Enlightenment is over? How and why does Gadamer identify his hermeneutics with the Enlightenment?

²⁰ *TM* 568; *GW* 2, 467.

III. Reclaiming Kant for Hermeneutics

One might be given to wonder whether this is somehow a matter of Gadamer's development. There are no positive remarks about the Enlightenment in *Truth and Method*. The publications in the period just after the publication of this, his main work, are similarly uniformly negatively critical. One sees his claim on the Enlightenment emerge in defense of his thought against the critics who see in his hermeneutics, irrationalism and romanticism. But I do not believe it is a matter of development or change of thought on Gadamer's part. To shorten the argument, we need only go back to Gadamer's Inaugural Address (1947) as he became Rektor of Leipzig University in the aftermath of the war. Here he blames Germany's embrace of Nazism, both broadly in the population and specifically in the universities, on the abandonment of the Enlightenment ideal of reason--life according to reason.²¹

The short answer as to why Gadamer reclaims Kant is Kant's ethics. There are three closely related aspects of his ethics for which Gadamer wishes to reclaim Kant for his hermeneutics and for a philosophical ethics and politics. These three things are

²¹ Gadamer, "On the Primordality of Science: A Rectoral Address," in Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, ed., *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, translation by Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: SUNY Press), pp. 15-21.

- 1) freedom,
- 2) human finitude, and
- 3) the primacy of the practical.

Kant importantly ends the ‘interruption’ of the bad Enlightenment by finding it necessary, as he writes in the B Preface, “to limit knowledge to make room for faith.” This limitation of knowledge and science is both a proclamation of human finitude and an assertion of the primacy of the practical. As is well known, Kant declares freedom, the realm of the practical, to be the keystone of his thought: “the concept of freedom ... constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason....”²²

It is important that this rocky metaphor is that of a ‘keystone’ and not a ‘foundation’ stone or cornerstone. Two important aspects of Kant’s thought related to this metaphor of the keystone are Kant’s clear rejection of mathematics as a model for philosophical thought and his declaration that, though philosophical thought must be systematic, philosophy is not to produce a system. Descartes and Hobbes and their progeny saw the system of Euclidean geometry to be the model for philosophy. The goal is a single system of deductive inference that lays out all knowledge. This goal

²² Kant, “Preface” to *Critique of Practical Reason* in *Practical Philosophy*, p. 139.

remained the goal of 20th century logical positivism. In the *Methodenlehre*, the doctrine of method, at the conclusion of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, -- an often overlooked part of this work—Kant breaks with this central aspect of early modern and Enlightenment thought.

One might want to argue that the title of what is perhaps Kant's most read book among his ethical writings works against any reading of Kant as avoiding foundationalism—sometimes translated as *Foundations (Grundlegung) for a Metaphysics of Morals*. Is not Kant attempting here to provide a “ground” or “foundation” for a metaphysics of morals? This title notwithstanding, Gadamer would say no. Gadamer reads Kant phenomenologically. There have been endless debates about whether Kant's argument succeeds in providing an adequate foundation for a metaphysics of morals. The argument of the *Foundations* is circular. The argument of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, that is, the transcendental deduction of the moral, appeals to freedom as a “fact of reason” [*Faktum der Vernunft*]. Kant in no way attempts to justify this fact. Thus this phenomenological reading of Kant finds Kant presupposing freedom and not ‘proving’ it. This reading finds Kant providing a description of moral experience as we experience the humiliating and sublime moral law in the person that we face. Gadamer claims that Kant “clarifies” and does not “justify.” He relies much on

Gerhard Krüger's treatment of Kant's ethics in his book *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Ethik*.²³ Krüger was a student friend and colleague of Gadamer in Marburg. One can see Heidegger's influence on Krüger's reading of Kant. Following Krüger Gadamer criticizes those readers of Kant who see Kant's ethics as a "*Sollensethik*"—an ethic of principle from which one derives what one should do.²⁴ Gadamer argues that Kant's ethics is rather a critical ethic. By which he means that the categorical imperative serves not so much as a principle of what one should do but rather a critical guide to what one should not do. In response to Alisdair MacIntyre who might be seen as an ally in this context, Gadamer writes that MacIntyre and others "miss Kant's wisdom."²⁵

Kant's wisdom, among other things, includes the rejection of the scientism of the 'bad' Enlightenment. The ultimate arbiter of truth is not

²³ Gerhard Krüger, *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Ethik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967, 2nd edition). This was Krüger's habilitation of 1929 which he did under Heidegger's direction. In "Wertethik und praktische Philosophie" Gadamer writes that this book was of great help to him. *GW* 4, 208.

²⁴ In conversation with Carsten Dutt, Gadamer comments that he opposes any "ethics of the *ought*," that is, any "*Sollensethik*," "Gadamer in Conversation with Carsten Dutt," *Gadamer in Conversation*, edited and translated by Richard Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 82. For the German, see *Hans-Georg Gadamer im Gespräch*, hrsg. Carsten Dutt (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter, 1995), p. 70.

²⁵ "vernachlässigt ... die Vorsicht und die Weisheit, mit der Kant das Problem einer philosophischen Ethik exponiert." Gadamer, "Ethos und Ethik," *GW* 3, 357.

science. Ordinary experience (as practical) and aesthetic experience are not reducible to the tenets of science.

One way to see this distinction with its profound political implications is through Kant's distinction between the hypothetical and categorical imperatives. This Kantian distinction echoes, for Gadamer, the Aristotelian distinction of *phronesis* and *techne*—prudence or good judgment and technology. Gadamer writes of Kant's contribution in this regard that it

remains true against every attempt to replace human moral action (*Praxis*) with technology (*Technik*) and against every attempt to confuse the rationality of our planning, the certainty of our calculation and the reliability of our prognoses with what we are able to know with unconditioned certainty.²⁶

This latter, that which Kant and Gadamer (following him) claim that we can know with “unconditioned certainty,” is our moral duty. Accordingly, for Gadamer Kant's great service is to preserve the distinctively moral against the merely useful. Gadamer is obliquely referring to utilitarianism when he writes:

We owe Kant our unending thanks for disclosing the consequential impurity of moral reasonings, that ‘disgusting mishmash’ of moral and practical motives which the ‘practical worldly wisdom’ of the Enlightenment validated as a higher form of morality.²⁷

²⁶ Gadamer, “Kant und die hermeneutische Wendung,” *GW* 3, 221. He makes a similar comment in the “Afterword” to *Truth and Method*, 570 (*GW* 2, 469)

²⁷ “On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics,” *Gadamer Reader*, edited by Richard Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 288; *GW* 4, 187.

He writes more straightforwardly elsewhere: “The point is to overcome conceptually the utilitarianism of the Enlightenment and to restore once again the simple evidence of duty.”²⁸ More than once Gadamer identifies the ethics of the Enlightenment, the ‘bad’ Enlightenment with utilitarianism. Inasmuch as this is so, Kant is not an Enlightenment thinker but an early counter-Enlightenment figure who follows Rousseau in this regard.

Closely connected with this criticism of the Enlightenment ethic of utilitarianism is what Gadamer sees as the great mistake of much of contemporary political thinking (both popular and ‘wissenschaftlich’), that is, the ‘replacement’ of *praxis* by *techne*. This replacement is what the Frankfurt School refers to as the “instrumentalization of reason.” It is also what Hannah Arendt points to as a basic and common fault of modern political thought. The figure who came a generation (or two) before these leaders of German 20th century thought and provided the sociological and political groundwork for this insight (that goes back to Kant) is, of course, Max Weber. It is not too much to say that German political philosophy of the 20th century—whether its Freiburg or Frankfurt--presents a kind of

²⁸ “Ethos und Ethik,” *GW* 3, 357.

Weberian consensus with regard to a core critique of modern and contemporary politics.²⁹

It is in this context that Gadamer reclaims Kant's borrowed motto for the Enlightenment—to dare to think for oneself. This call, *Sapere aude!*, Gadamer hopes, will awake us from what he calls our “technological dream”—the dream that we can solve all our problems with the right technology.³⁰

Yet we might object that, though Kant may have preserved the distinction of *phronesis* and *techne* in his distinction of the hypothetical and categorical imperatives, he accomplished this at the cost of the concept of *phronesis*, prudence. We might also object, that though there are reasons to accept a phenomenological reading of Kant's ethical writings, Kant did not present them as such and he explicitly uses the language of principle and of ‘laying a ground.’

A neater, cleaner, simpler Gadamer might have jettisoned Kant's thought together with the entire Enlightenment for the reasons mentioned

²⁹ In his reply to Detmer, Gadamer writes that “here the dialectic of enlightenment is right.” In the same comment he speaks of the “bureaucratization of societal circumstances.” (287) Gadamer late in life said he regretted not being able to carry out his intention to engage directly with Adorno after the publication of *Truth and Method*. He was not able to, he says, because of the relatively early death of Adorno. See his conversation with Carsten Dutt, “Gadamer in Conversation with Carsten Dutt,” *Gadamer in Conversation*, p. 83. For the German, see *Hans-Georg Gadamer im Gespräch*, p. 71

³⁰ “Science as an Instrument of Enlightenment,” *In Praise of Theory*, p. 83.

above and for an unambivalent embrace of classical Greek thought. But in his comment on Ambrosio's essay (mentioned above) Gadamer also says: "I do not want to dispense with Kant and his concept of freedom. ...one cannot say this word in Greek."³¹

I think that most would agree, speaking in a kind of shorthand, that the large major features and accomplishments of modernity (modernity as a function of the Enlightenment) are modern science and democracy. Gadamer would jettison neither. He embraces both. But following Kant, he critically limits the claims of science. And though democracy may have its origins in ancient Greece, the ethos of freedom that Gadamer would encourage goes beyond what we can find in Greece and Rome. It has at its center Kantian the sense of duty and respect for the dignity of the person, though I think it important to note that Gadamer's persistent call for solidarity goes beyond the Enlightenment individualism of Kant. Gadamer remarks, for example, that Kant in all his writings devotes only one page to the phenomenon of friendship.³²

Accordingly, Gadamer surprisingly (at least surprising to me) refers to the "continued viability of the Aristotelian-Kantian legacy."³³ These two

³¹ "Reply to Francis J. Ambrosio," *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 274.

³² "Freundschaft und Solidarität," *Hermeneutische Entwürfe*, 56.

³³ *GW* 3, 366.

names do not join one another very readily, not even with a hyphen, though one might argue that Heidegger does something like this in *Being and Time*. Gadamer does not profess to contribute much to ethics. He writes that the very “idea of a moral philosophy seems to be stuck in irresolvable difficulty.”³⁴ He also writes that he sees no way from the later Heidegger to an ethics, but that the way to a moral philosophy remains open through Kant *and* Aristotle. He writes: “Neither can do justice to the possibility of ethics per se, but both can do so for their parts of it.”³⁵

So the question that Gadamer leaves us with is how do we put together Aristotle and Kant to establish an ethics and a politics for this highly technological and globalized world. A short answer to this question may be Hegel. But it is interesting that in his writings explicitly about ethics, Gadamer, who in other contexts frequent refers to Hegel, almost never invokes the name of Hegel.

³⁴ *GW* 4, 177.

³⁵ *Gadamer Reader*, 279; *GW* 4, 177.