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Dossier

## The environmental issue as eco-hermeneutics

A questão ambiental como eco-hermenêutica

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### ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to discuss the connection between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and environmental issues as a kind of eco-hermeneutics. In this sense, one seeks to discuss the contribution of Gadamer's ontological-practical thought in ecological terms as a branch of philosophy in which issues around the environment constitute a common point in the scope of human praxis. Pointing out the ecological crisis as an essential issue, Gadamer indicates a way to think about the constitution of the way of being in the world with others, situated on a current and increasingly degraded sphere of praxis. In essence, he offers an interpretative horizon to ecological questioning as an avenue through which to think about hermeneutical solidarity in terms of ecological solidarity and thereby provide a possibility of rehabilitating praxis from the shared environment.

**Keywords:** understanding, praxis, solidarity, environment, ecological crisis.

### RESUMO

Este artigo pretende discutir a conexão entre a hermenêutica filosófica de Gadamer e a questão ambiental, enquanto uma espécie de eco-hermenêutica. Nesse sentido, busca-se discutir a contribuição do pensamento ontológico-prático de Gadamer em termos ecológicos, como um ramo da filosofia no qual as questões em torno do meio ambiente constituem um problema comum no âmbito da práxis humana. Apontando a crise ecológica como questão básica, Gadamer indica uma forma de pensar a própria constituição do modo de estar no mundo com os outros, situado em uma esfera de práxis atual e cada vez



mais degradada. Em uma palavra, ele oferece um horizonte interpretativo ao questionamento ecológico como um dos caminhos onde ainda se pode pensar a solidariedade hermenêutica em termos de solidariedade ecológica, como possibilidade de reabilitação da práxis desde o ambiente comum.

**Palavras-chave:** compreensão, práxis, solidariedade, ambiente, crise ecológica.

## 1 Introduction

Gadamer places the environmental issue on the horizon of hermeneutical reflection on the sphere of praxis, especially in the aftermath of the publication of *Truth and Method*. Dedicated to thinking about hermeneutical questions in practical terms, Gadamer refers to the symptomatic moment of the ecological crisis as a sign of the degradation of praxis (Gadamer, 1983). In this sense, Gadamer treats the ecological crisis as an ontological-practical problem since we experience a continuous and progressive deterioration of the practical and basic level of human existence under the practical and expansive domain of science and technology and self-sufficient rationality. In other words, for Gadamer, we live a situation marked by the logic of the technical-scientific mode of production, as opposed to maintaining the praxis of ordinary life. In Gadamer's words,

*[...] our cultural self-understanding is dominated by the one-sided concept of the scientific procedure resulting in unlimited technology. One may note that the ideal of the complete mastery of the tasks and problems of our civilization by science conceals an insoluble contradiction between the role and function of the expert as the master of a field of controllable, learnable, and applicable scientific knowledge on the one hand, and the fact of his membership in the society, on the other (Gadamer, 1975a, p. 310).*

Gadamer points to another possibility of thinking about the environmental issue, supported by the practical elements of philosophical hermeneutics. In this way, the environment can also be considered as a text, in the wake of language and its meaning in the ontological tradition of ontological hermeneutics, especially from the contributions of Martin Heidegger. Thus, the environment can be considered the common ground of essential coexistence with others and as another that we share with other beings. As stated by Duque-Estrada,

*As in practical philosophy, the function of hermeneutics is that one of assisting out capacity of going beyond the immediacy of our present situation and re-establishing, again and again, through the understandable relation with the Other, the dialogical space of commonality that sustains us all as historical beings (Duque-Estrada, 1993, p. 173).*

Thinking about environmental hermeneutics (or eco-hermeneutics) does not simply mean rethinking the environmental issue and its different unfolding in the light of the theoretical-interpretative procedures typical of the ontological-hermeneutic relationship with things in general. To reinterpret current ecological issues in the light of Hans-Georg Gadamer's contributions is, instead, investigating the environmental issue from the fundamental mode of understanding ecological questioning as a common problem of thought about by the community in general. In other words, considering Gadamerian philosophical-practical investigation as a way of thinking about the environment itself, one cannot analyze it without placing it in a broader context, in which every relationship with the environment, careful or not, is thought of primarily in scientific terms. It is therefore vital to consider the environment as a place where all humans live and act and, in the last instance, understand. As Gadamer in *Truth and Method* notes,

*the environment is the 'milieu' in which man lives, and its importance consists in its influence on his character and way of life. Man is not independent of the particular aspects that the world shows him. Thus the concept of environment is originally a social concept that tries to express the individual's dependence on society – i.e., it is related only to man. In a broad sense, however, this concept can be used to comprehend all the conditions on which a living creature depends (Gadamer, 1996, p. 443-444)*

According to Gadamer, it is not enough to think about the environment that we are surrounded by as technical-scientific formulations dealing with diagnoses that clarify specific problems and searching for technical solutions. It is necessary to consider the issue at a broader level of discussion beyond the expert's opinion. At this point, Gadamer suggests another aspect to be considered in the debate: it is what we call the rhetorical character of the environmental problem. That is fundamental in considering another way of raising awareness of the issues and the feasibility of standard solutions. This rhetorical element referred to above places Gadamer's thought between Heideggerian and Frankfurtian approaches regarding technique and its relationship with the environment. At the same time, it is essential to cultivate another level of discussion raised by the environmental issue itself, i.e., to think about the practical nature of the relationship with the environment where we are all linked, often made visible by environmental issues that arise in cities, impacted by ethical, political and social issues that result from intervention techniques in the environment, or even the values that we could perceive in discourses about the environment.

Handling the environmental issue hermeneutically means, at first, affirming that the different ways of thinking about the environment are not limited to the contributions of ecology (as science) and its repercussions in the world of life; rather, they are amplified by the human experience of the familiar environment in its various levels of meaning. In other words, they can also be thought of as an ethical-political issue, in the horizon of praxis as understood by Gadamer. As Gadamer states,

*Practical philosophy is not the application of theory to praxis, as we naturally use it in the area of practical activity, but arises itself from the experience of praxis due to the reason and reasonableness inherent in it. Praxis does not merely mean acting according to rules and is not merely the application of knowledge, but means the whole original situatedness of humans in their natural and social environment (Gadamer, 1992, p. 217).*

Therefore, understanding the environment as a realm of different levels of meaning requires a type of essential practical attitude that does not limit it to scientific interventions and answers but expands the environment's way of being, both in a natural and cultural sense. To think about eco-hermeneutics in Gadamer means, ultimately, to seek a theoretically responsible path that thinks about the environmental issue by questioning the questions and discussions it opens, taking hermeneutical character as another trait of man's relationship with the environment. On the horizon of recovering the issue, in practical terms, it is envisaged to face the impacts of the ecological crisis and its technical-scientific consequences as a path that increasingly faces the definitive degradation of the familiar environment, ignoring the possibilities of renewing the relationship of care and sustainability with it. Perhaps it would be interesting to return to how Heidegger, even in the context of Being and Time, addressed the meaning of care through the notions of *Sorge*, *Besorgen*, and *Fürsorge* as a way of illuminating the relationship between care and sustainability.

In this way, rethinking ecology in hermeneutic terms makes it possible to expand this area beyond science and technology and promote an environmental consciousness that addresses the environmental issue in terms of practical solidarity. This solidarity requires more than a theoretical position; rather, it signifies the recovery of an environmental citizenship stance. This level of citizenship does not ignore

the various elements that matter in this questioning, mainly what is discussed by science and politics, but also promotes several actions that focus on all kinds of situations of annihilation, preservation, and sustainability of the shared environment where we are all located and that, at the same time, naturally it constitutes us. In Duque-Estrada's words, "like the question of the Good, the structure of solidarity that founds mutual communication in the social life is something that must be re-established again and again" (Duque-Estrada, 1993, p. 173), especially in the approach to the environmental issue. So, "environmental hermeneutics is a philosophical stance which understands how the inevitability of what Gadamer calls our 'hermeneutical consciousness' informs our relationship with environments" (Clingerman, et al., 2013, p. 4).

## 2 Eco-hermeneutics as practical philosophy

The awareness of the growing complexity of the impacts of human activity on the environment and its possible common condition of irreversibility, mainly through the impacts of the development of technology, has provoked, notably from the 70s, several initiatives aimed at preserving the environment as a path to the formation of a shared ecological conscience. In this sense, Gadamer points out the question speaking about the condition of energy sources:

*Currently, humanity's energy needs are being satisfied through the irrational and blind exploitation of energy sources, which in German is called Raubbau (overexploitation, destruction, excessive exploitation). So, all procedures have been called for irreversible transformations, like the depletion of forests and crops. The limited character of carbon, oil, and natural gas reserves is known, and their depletion is an irreversible process. In the long term, only nuclear energy, and perhaps solar energy, will be the only solutions, however dangerous they may seem (Gadamer, 2002, p. 40-41).*

As Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us, historically, the ecological emergency showed itself, on the horizon of modern life, as a rising and irreversible picture that has been seen as a common issue in all global society. Gadamer thinks of this problem as a possibility for all humanity to search for different forms of ordinary life and face. Therefore, the urgency of the question is to increase the confrontation of the same crisis and their still unknown impacts through a path that goes beyond scientific diagnosis, in the horizon of human life shared with all living beings, thinking of the environment also in social terms. As Gadamer states,

*[...] a more general experience, which as a whole appeals to our practical reason inasmuch as it makes us aware of the limits of our technical rationality: the ecological crisis. It consists of the fact that a potential outgrowth of our economy and technology on the path that we have hitherto been trading is leading in the foreseeable future toward making life on this planet impossible. (Gadamer, 1983, p. 84)*

Treating the environmental issue initially through the thematization of the ecological crisis, as something that draws the global community's attention in different ways, Gadamer reaffirms the necessity of thematizing this question through the practical nature of hermeneutic ontology. Such a stance indicates an extension of the practical character of his thinking to the most diverse ecological questions that have arisen in contemporary life, thereby reformulating the very scope of praxis. To think about the environmental issue on the horizon of praxis means saying that ecological discussions are also fundamental for an interpretative thought that has been seeking, again and again, alternative ways in the face of the degradation of praxis (also ecologically) beyond the sphere of the practical application of scientific solutions to the environment. Instead, the environment must be thought of as a vital and natural space

that includes not only the social world of human things but also the surrounding world as a natural and social environment, basically linked. As Gadamer (1983, p. 85) says, "this insight [about the environment] is still provisionally restricted to very limited portions of our experience and has not yet risen to being a leading model of our experience of the world. But what announces its presence here is more than a technical problem".

On this horizon, the environmental question is a practical matter still in the formulation process. This means that philosophical hermeneutics must also do justice to the common question, in the sense of reformulating it as a question that contributes both to environmental sustainability and the "principle of historical productivity" (Gadamer, 1975b, p. 51). The urgency of the environmental issue, verified by the rapid erosion and modification of the environment, requires, as an essential hermeneutic path, the recovery of the most genuine meaning of praxis, even though the issue is strongly marked by the instrumental character of science and technology. As Gadamer (2004, p. 30-31) argues,

*Formerly, the modification of our environment was due more or less to natural causes, for example, change in climate (the Ice Age), the influence of the weather (erosion, sedimentation, etc.), droughts, formation of swamps, and the like. Only occasionally was it due to the intervention of human beings. Such interventions were perhaps the deforestation of woods, which turned into barren lands as a consequence, the extinction of animal species through hunting, the exhaustion of soils through cultivation, the drying up of the resources in the ground as the result of exploitation. There were always more or less irreversible modifications. [...] Today, however, the technical exploitation of natural resources and the artificial transformation of our environment has become so carefully planned and extensive that its consequences endanger the natural cycle of things and bring about irreversible developments on a large scale. The problem of the protection of the environment is the visible expression of this totalization of technical civilization.*

For Gadamer, the way that science deals with environmental issues could not be considered fundamental because the ecological crisis itself is, to a large extent, one of the results of the domination of science. This kind of thinking spreads to all parts of society, as a product of instrumental reasoning, over the environment. In a certain sense, the ecological crisis itself only makes sense in a context in which there is a dense imbalance between the sphere of the praxis of human life, its ethical-political decisions, and the technical-scientific and instrumental field of practice such as production. Therefore, in Gadamer's view, thinking about the environmental issue demands the recovery of practical rationality that, therefore, disrupts the dominant instrumental rationality.

In this way, an approximation between philosophical hermeneutics and ecology would be initially started from an attitude of revision of the very notion of ecology. From the hermeneutic perspective, rethinking means assuming an attitude of revision since its emergence and original understanding of the term, that is, as a branch of biology that deals with natural environments and the interactions between living beings and their environments, and returning to the meaning that has been found sedimented in the term itself, by the junction of the Greek words *oikos* and *logos*, re-signifying the historical effectiveness of the concept itself, because of a broader sphere where the current environmental problems are inserted. Such a theoretical (or hermeneutical) stance does not simply aim to deny the scientific character of ecology but, on the contrary, to highlight the possible connections of meanings between the area of science and the broader plane where practical life takes place, and where science also has its place.

Even with another perspective on the relationship with several urgent issues, such as global warming, climate change, animal extinction, and water pollution, among others, the hermeneutic contribution has been a perspective that does not simply foresee the application of a philosophical theory to the environment. However, it concerns another philosophical attitude that starts from the problems of the environment's way of being. Thus, an interpretive ecology can be thought of from the analysis of

interactions with the environment, taking into account the most basic, often conflicting, relationships between human beings and the environment, enabling a more comprehensive and careful reflection of the issue beyond but not below, requires the role of science, rethinking practically the possibilities of standard and sustainable care, which, at the same time, require an increased understanding of the current condition of the environment.

In a second moment, thinking about an interpretive ecology also means exploring a field of knowledge open to interdisciplinary approaches that share a common ground of prior experiences. Considering the environment as a sphere full of meaning, with several possibilities of being with us, it is also essential to pay special attention to the various layers of meaning that are often ignored, which somehow can also be contemplated in a diversity of languages accessed by artworks, architecture, texts, reports, theses, books, interviews, manifests, conversations, among others, that interpret the environment, mainly in its shared character with other living beings. In this sense, our idea of ecology extends beyond its strictly scientific character.

Thus, an eco-hermeneutic posture indicates the elucidation of a dialogical and critical experience on an environmental issue, sharing a common language (Gadamer, 1996, p. 435), even though, to a large extent, the conversation has always been marked by conflicts of interpretations (Ricoeur, 1978). Understanding the hermeneutic relationship with the environment and its various possibilities of approach and care, as essentially dialogical and critical, does not mean understanding them as peaceful and respectful, but also emphasizes the profoundly conflicting and critical character of dialogue that simultaneously enables new ways of experiencing the sense of the environment. As Richard J. Bernstein (1992, p. 4) reminds us,

*The basic condition for all understanding requires one to test and risk one's convictions and pre-judgments in and through an encounter with what is radically "other" and alien. To do so requires imagination and hermeneutical sensitivity in order to understand the "other" in its strongest possible light. Only by seeking to learn from the "other", only by fully grasping its claims upon one can it be critically encountered. Critical engaged dialogue requires opening of oneself to the full power of what the "other" is saying.*

In this way, the environmental theme finds a path full of meanings and conflicts on the horizon of Gadamerian thought. At the same time, it emphasizes, especially the otherness character of the issue, already present in the effectiveness of social life. Indeed, this otherness can be contemplated by all living beings and the environment. But it is a hermeneutic task to point out this alternative possibility. As a primary relationship with the other, the vital dialogue can be a way to different ways of life, where care for others is a fundamental part of community engagement.

The hermeneutic trait of ecological analysis and speech, whether scientific or not, offers us, in general terms, two fundamental aspects to be considered: on the one hand, we seek to rethink ecology by questioning the structure of consolidated discourses that affirm or deny the issue in the sphere of the conventional and scientific environment, highlighting the historical elements that are at stake and that, in most cases, are disregarded. In a nutshell, the question 'what is ecology' emphasizes not only the instrumental structure of the area but the search for the nature or basic sense of ecology, which, in hermeneutic terms, indicates its most genuine meaning. The ecological issue also shows an opportunity to reconsider the relations inherent to the environment itself, envisioning possible paths for adequately treating the present environmental condition, the ecological crisis, and presents permanent and rising environmental damage.

Shortly, philosophical hermeneutics seeks, to a large extent, a productive return to the environment and not only to interpretations of the environment. Both aspects, considered ontologically, indicate a path towards the onto-ecological approach in terms of the extension of the hermeneutical attitude

beyond ecological texts and speeches, that is, towards the dialogue and transformation of and in the everyday environment itself, considering the various interactions with it. From this perspective, sustaining a hermeneutical approach to the environmental issue requires reconsidering the fundamental connections between the environment, human and non-human animals, and the other living beings participating in this commonplace. Such links occur at different levels and are also examined by the most diverse sciences as a point of start for the ecological dialogue.

However, from a hermeneutic perspective, a further step is needed, that is, to think about the very constitution of practical human life and its negative impacts on the environment, assuming the human relationship with the environment as the essential vital moment, not only in scientific terms but also in a practical (ethical-political) way. This is one of the meanings by which "hermeneutics is philosophy and, as philosophy, practical philosophy" (Gadamer, 1983, p. 76).

Expanding the eminently practical traits of hermeneutics into an environmental character means refunding ecology itself as eco-hermeneutics. This aspect would, therefore, indicate the interpretative nature not only in the scientific developments of ecology but also in its repercussions in the world of life as pre-theoretical comprehensive events that engaged all human beings in a kind of responsibility about all questions around the environment.

Therefore, thinking about ecology in hermeneutical understanding also emphasizes the citizenship character of the environmental issue. It is about not ignoring its scientific-biological character, but also highlighting the connections with other areas of human life. In ontological terms, it means to emphasize the practical character of environmental hermeneutics, dealing with the issues located here and now, marked by the practical demands of life in common, which, therefore, requires a reconsideration of current ethical-political limits, that profoundly mark relationships with the environment taken as something that everyone depends. In other words, the environment is the place of the practical happening of understanding.

### 3 Practical developments of hermeneutical ecology

The repercussion of philosophical hermeneutics in the work of many ecologists and environmentalists marks the recognition and relevance of the model of thinking in environmental studies as a sphere of a common question. And this question common to the international community of environmentalists, environmental engineers, architects, geographers, scientists, and journalists, among others, has been a realm of dialectical and interpretative discussion; but a more comprehensive and socially committed theoretical-practical approach in the search for an increasingly inclusive understanding, considering the complexity of the environmental issue.

The task of rethinking ecology in other terms, beyond its scientific explications, also takes into account the practical demands arising from the technical mastery of the world economic system and globalization, which, in some way, point to a decadent world order, which is less and less founded on the support and care of the shared environment. This scenario is accompanied by the continuous decline of the sense of citizenship in the different communities present in the current countries responsible for principal environmental impacts, giving new meaning to the sense of responsibility towards others and, consequently, towards the environment. Undoubtedly, the world's financial structure and its means of production have been one of the main vectors of degradation. Essentially, the way of dealing with the environment does not translate into actions that reflect sustainable care, but into destruction driven only by preserving the global capitalist system. Philosophical hermeneutics must address this aspect, as it means disregarding the exact configuration of life imposed by a financial plan based on the obliteration of the other. In this sense, thinking about the environmental issue means questioning certain economic narratives that make the fundamental relationships of community life invisible, where the relationship with the other is strictly

subject to current financial values. But how can we rethink the economy as sustainable if we don't question the very nature of the current capitalist economy concerning community life?

As a good and interesting example of work engaging critically and responsibly on hermeneutics questions on the horizon of environmental studies, there is *Interpreting Nature: the emerging field of Environmental Hermeneutics* (2013), an essential book organized by philosophers Brian Treanor, David Utsler, Forrest Clingerman, and Martin Drenthen. This work presents plenty of environmental directions, reflecting specific and urgent issues from different philosophical orientations, and not only from Gadamer's work. This book can be considered an original and inaugural contribution. It brings together researchers committed to hermeneutic praxis and presents several eco-hermeneutics positions engaged with conflict of interpretations and philosophical interventions in a familiar environment. As it is a cast of thinkers from different backgrounds in different areas (from engineering to theology, passing through geography, architecture, and urbanism), the work indicates a broad and interdisciplinary horizon of concern for the environment as a common ground, especially in the face of the effects of globalization and economic systems and the current and degraded stage of world capitalism.

Thus, hermeneutical ecology requires another level of reflection, essentially theoretical, into concrete environmental situations and problems, reinforcing the practical unfolding of the focus on the environment as part of the practical responsibility also exercised by the members of civil society. In the case of Brazil, hermeneutics studies have been focused on border studies between different areas of knowledge as a strategy to think differently, considering common questions not studied yet.

In this sense, one learns about the hermeneutical character of environmental studies from the fundamental nature of hermeneutics, i.e., its interdisciplinary trace, like a way of situating the common ground of question manifested in the environmental issues. "Environmental hermeneutics enables reports of different approaches from various disciplines to environments. Environmental hermeneutics, therefore, can be genuinely interdisciplinary" (Clingerman, et al., 2013, p. 4). In Gadamerian terms, this interdisciplinary aspect leads to the adequate formulation of the question.

The spread of environmental hermeneutics, as a way to rethink the environment itself, considering the connections between different interpretations that permeate it, finds an interesting practical perspective on dealing with the environment, always inserted in a broader context. In other words, the environment is always situated and marked by several layers of meaning beyond scientific knowledge. Therefore, from the hermeneutic perspective, the task of understanding it does not mean classifying or isolating the layers of meaning but rather seeking a holistic view manifested as a perspective of understanding the environment.

An important theme for hermeneutic ecology has been environmental tragedies. This is the case of the environmental crime that occurred in Brumadinho, in the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil, in January 2019, which turned into a devastating tragedy. The collapse of a mining waste dam belonging to one of Vale do Rio Doce's subsidiary companies caused several deaths, destruction of nature, especially the Rio Doce (Doce River), and an irreversible transformation of the region's landscape. Understanding such a situation requires elucidation of the different layers of meaning that permeate it. In this sense, it's important to consider not only the suffering of dealing with the losses of human beings, animals, and familiar places, in addition to material losses; but also in facing the explanations and resolutions as part of the company responsible for the dam, the speeches of the governments responsible for the region and the investigations that are being processed in the justice. Indeed, it is necessary to be in a clear position to engage with the communities devastated by the tragedy. It is an opportunity to think about the question practically, engaged with the possible regeneration of that landscape devastated by one of the consequences of the acting of instrumental rationality that overpowers all. In this way, environmental hermeneutics stands as an orientation of thought that seeks to address the community's question. As a philosophy, it wants to think about forms of engagement that translate into ways of life in each specific situation.

One cannot leave aside the dramatic accounts of the survivors; some broadcast on television news, the humanitarian aid that mobilized the country, and the irreversible environmental impacts in that region, which are not yet fully calculated. A total strangeness concerning that place where that community had its life, given the painful impossibility of returning to their homes. The hermeneutical character that must be thought of appears not only in those different layers of meaning around environmental crime and the communities' tragedy but also in the very strangeness of the relationship with that once familiar environment.

This last example is presented, from a hermeneutic point of view, as a situation to be understood as a whole, not only by those who were involved, from the view of the broad environmental issue, but also from the perspective of the technicians who take care of the environment instrumentally. Considering the situation and verifying the extent of damage to families and communities; of the hope of recovery of places; of respect and care for the deceased people; of the recovery of the meaning lost by the devastating and fast transformation aggravated by the wave of toxic mud; and finally, of the environmental impacts on that community forever scarred by tragedy. In this context, understanding also operates in a practical and theoretical way, as an open, perennial, and continuous process extended to the surroundings of that place, from the whole of the shared environment now lost.

So, environmental hermeneutics has not only been extended to how thinkers investigate nature and the environment but also concerns those who participate and act in the environment as citizen actors. As a philosophy, it means differentiated looking at the environmental theme, which could only be adequately thought about with practical action. And it's not just about outstanding achievements but a daily and responsible engagement with the shared environment. What is at stake in this process, which also marks the hermeneutical character, is the dialogic encounters "again and again" with the environment in various forms of interactions, whether by a professional, such as an archeologist or geographer acting on his research, or even a simple farmer who knows how to labor on land. In those possible situations, one cultivates meaningful coexistence with the environment. Therefore, this dialogue with the environment (as an issue) does not only mean attention to the environment's performance but a posture of careful and responsible coexistence on the part of those who deal with it.

Eco-hermeneutics can also be extended to understanding the various literary works on nature and the environment, especially by authors who interpret nature or natural landscapes. The hermeneutic expansion of the very notion of literature, encompassing the most diverse texts, from scientific to religious texts, also makes it possible, on the part of environmental hermeneutics, to approach the most diverse discourses on the environment as ways of dealing with it. For this reason, Brazilian literary works, such as, for example, *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, by *Guimarães Rosa*, or *Sertões*, by *Euclides da Cunha*, could be an object of environmental thought. Alternatively, even a Papal Encyclical, as is the case of *Laudato Si*, by Pope Francis, participates in the broader path of approaches to the environmental issue, expanding the scope of philosophical interpretation of the environment and, for that reason, contributing, as a grand mosaic, to reflections about human actions and impacts on the environment. This reminds us that the environmental theme and its related issues are so broad and urgent that they can be covered both by a literary text and an eminently religious text, as well as in the technical reports of botanists, archaeologists, and geographers, or through the intervention of forestry engineers, agronomists, architects, urban planners or landscape designers. All this cited literature also claims practical philosophical positions from a Gadamerian perspective.

In its most diverse interpretations, we can still point out that the practical nature of the relationship with the environment requires the promotion of a hermeneutical-practical consciousness, fundamental for a critical and non-instrumental view of environmental issues. In addition to most different discourses, environmental hermeneutics is also interested in the significant problems accumulated over the years, such as the emission of polluting gasses, global warming, river pollution, deforestation, the water issue, the Anthropocene, pandemics, the search for sustainability, among others. Even when dealing with issues in the environmental setting, they cannot be addressed without taking into account the whole

of the environment, beyond a scientific-instrumental approach, without dispensing with a vision of the environment as a basic constitution of the practical scope. So, environmental consciousness requires more than a theoretical attitude, but a practical critical action against the unsustainable instrumental structure of the current society of discard.

Therefore, environmental hermeneutics not only deals with scientific positions but claims questions that go beyond them. In other words, environmental issues require a broader confrontation, considering their complexity, even if supported by the contributions of science. In this way, eco-hermeneutics does not assume a denialist posture but, on the contrary, intends to understand the problems in all their amplitude, aiming at an everyday awareness, crossing the different fields of human knowledge, from literature to physics, passing through theology and communication. Such a stance presents itself as an opportunity to reconsider the environmental issue in its broader connections without giving up on understanding the difficulties encountered in the current economic and social structure, especially in how it deals with environmental problems.

We believe that eco-hermeneutics demands an environmental hermeneutic awareness that could be translated into the exercise of citizenship that Gadamer points out as fundamental for facing current issues. Thus, hermeneutic-environmental citizenship, aware of the comprehensive process that also operates in the shared environment, could contribute to a new hermeneutic posture in dealing with environmental issues. As Gadamer states, "this is the purpose of philosophical hermeneutics: to correct the peculiar falsification of modern consciousness, the idolatry of the scientific method and the anonymous authority of the sciences, and to defend once again the noblest task of the decision-execution of the citizen according to his responsibility – instead of assigning such a task to the specialist" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 316, my emphasis). To exercise eco-hermeneutical citizenship suggests a citizen is taking responsibility, not only in the search for critical and challenging dialogue, seeking to do justice to the comprehensive demands of the environmental issue, but also affirms a critical posture to the technical and instrumental domain of the specialist who intends to solve all the problems, ignoring the practical level of the normal relations in the environment, in terms of solidarity. In this sense, in Gadamer's words,

*practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason. There is a saying of Heraclitus, the "weeping" philosopher: the logos is common to all, but people behave as if each had a private reason. Does this have to remain this way? (Gadamer, 1983, p. 87).*

## 4 Conclusion

Finally, one could still question, in an attempt to account for the notion of eco-hermeneutics: what is the ethical-political scope of hermeneutic-environmental citizenship? This question is placed in the way of practical questioning as a critical element in the attempt to rethink relations with the environment. It is essential to highlight, through the paths of investigation of environmental philosophy, as in cases of disasters or preservation, the structure of environmental thought strongly related to the praxis of life, especially highlighting the responsible and decisive relationship of the citizen, inserted in the environment shared with other beings in terms of ecological solidarity.

Hermeneutic environmental citizenship is a responsible consciousness of the practical character of the human being in the standard sphere of life, taken here as an environment. Such consciousness, so degraded as the environment, needs to cultivate another type of rationality, i.e., practical rationality claimed by Gadamer, exercised in the practical realm of social life. As this domain extends to natural environments, this level of consciousness emphasizes, like hermeneutics, the necessity to seek a practical balance between instrumental reason and responsibility in daily activities to preserve the environment

that we still have and that, therefore, makes life in ordinary possible. One can call this balance ecological solidarity so that it remains a practical and responsible position shared with others socially and, more fundamentally, in natural life.

For this reason, eco-hermeneutics cannot just be thought of as a qualitative method of analysis, in the examination of concrete cases of environmental relations. It is a responsible, practical attitude that guides an interpretive and solidary environmental theory based on the connection between places and environments. Interpretive analysis of environmental practices must constantly be confronted with the most diverse discourses, sensitizing communities to be solidarily responsible, i.e., to exercise their ecological citizenship as joint care for the environment (including the people), not limited to inhabited environments, but also promoting the preservation of the nature that we yet have, as is the emblematic case of the Amazonia<sup>1</sup>.

So, hermeneutical environmental citizenship could not fail to be concerned with the relationships between human beings, animals, and their places, at any level, and play a constructive and critical role, especially when treating the communitarian ethical-political issues that emerge from various situations, many the actual conflicting times, that are placed in the shared environment and requires a thorough understanding and questioning, on the part of the community in question. In this sense, the meaning of community can begin other kinds of relationships based on ecological solidarity.

Thus, hermeneutical environmental solidarity could not fail to be concerned with the relationships between human beings, animals, and their original and natural places, at any level, and play a constructive and critical role, especially when treating the communitarian ethical-political issues that emerge from various situations, many of the actual conflicting times, that are placed in the familiar environment and requires a special understanding and questioning, on the part of the communities in question. In this sense, the meaning of community can be the beginning of other kinds of relationships based on the ecological citizen as a new kind of social attitude shared with others seeking, in philosophical terms, a reflected and good life.

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the hermeneutical discussion about Amazonia, it is essential to consider, comparatively, the paper by John van Buren, *Critical Environmental Hermeneutics*, dedicated to the use of forests in the USA.

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