CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of study

The phenomenon of understanding is central to the search for knowledge and truth. Philosophers have devoted unquantifiable efforts towards establishing what knowledge and truth are. Others have stated the various processes of attaining knowledge and deciphering what the truth is. The history of philosophy however is made up of efforts by philosophers at establishing what knowledge is and how we can know or acquire knowledge and ascertain what truth is.

Aristotle defines man as a rational animal "*homo rationalis,*" and by this definition he made rationality a differentiating factor between man and other animals. With the natural endowment of rationality, man understands himself, his fellow humans and his environment. However, the question of how man knows in philosophy has remained an open-ended question as many theories abound on it.

Philosophy historically started with a presupposition that man can know and that was why the Ionian philosophers, instead of first asking the question, can man know? Or how can man know?, were rather interested to know what the ultimate reality is. They assumed that man can know; thus the question: what is the ultimate reality or the *urstoff*? This however was later corrected by the Sophists (Protogras, Gorgias and Thrasymachus), who raised issues about man's ability to know and even communicating what is known.

This, notwithstanding, man has continuously pursued knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge and truth has left man with many challenges. A critical look at what man calls common sense knowledge reveals some of the challenges. It must be recognized that there are many things we assumed to be true on the premise that they have become part of our daily life experiences even when we cannot explain how and why they are said to be true. A typical

example of this is what St. Augustine wrote concerning time. According to him "what is time? I know what it is. But if someone asks me what it is, I cannot explain."[1] Russell corroborates Augustine's position when he writes that:

> In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on a closer scrutiny, are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may believe. In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in some sense; no doubt, knowledge is to be derived from them. But any statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences make us know is very likely to be wrong.[2]

The challenge here is that some things that man claims to have known and to be true upon closer scrutiny may turn out to be false even when from our day to day experience they have been held to be true.

Furthermore, other epistemological problems are encapsulated in the following questions: can man know at all? How do we know and how do we know that we know? To the first question, man assumed he can know, and this is clearly seen in Aristotle's description of man as a rational being and one who always desires to know. According to him in the opening paragraph of his famous work, *Metaphysics:*

> All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.[3]

In addition, the earlier part of the history of philosophy attests to this fact when man busied himself trying to know what the ultimate reality is. Philosophy as recorded in history started with a metaphysical question, 'what is the reality.' Man wanted to know what the reality is without first finding out if he had the capacity to know what reality is. Philosophers of this era assumed that things exist; man can know what things exist and man can tell others about what exists. But one thing they failed to tell us was how man can know the things that exist.

Subsequently on the question of how we can know, Socrates posits that man knows through dialectics. Dialectics is defined as "ancient Greek conversation or back and forth movement. It refers to the use of reason to reveal truth and knowledge in any area of inquiry."[4] Dialectics as an epistemological method examines and discusses opposing ideas in order to find the truth.

For Plato, we know through the process of reminiscence. Reminiscence is a recall of a long forgotten experience or fact which in the case of Plato is carried out by the soul that found itself imprisoned in the body. Aristotle maintains that man knows through the process of abstraction. The word abstraction commonly means the act of obtaining or removing something from a source. It can also be said to be a process of separating the wanted from the unwanted. The views of Plato and Aristotle created two polarities. Nevertheless, their views shaped the epistemological journey of the medieval, modern and even contemporary philosophy.

These responses to how we can know were not aimed at objective knowledge but explaining how an individual can know. However the modern period of philosophy witnessed a great influence from the sciences especially in its pursuit of objectivity. Philosophers of this period, Rene Descartes, Leibnitz and Spinoza adopted the rational method while the British empiricists, John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume adopted the empirical method in their various philosophies all geared towards making philosophy objective as the natural sciences and mathematics.

One thing however common to all their theories as regards how man can know, especially as can be seen more conspicuously in the philosophy of Descartes, is that the knowing subject remained separated from the object that is known or the source of knowledge. For Descartes the subject is the foundation of all certainties, it is accessible immediately and certainly. According to him, the "subject" (the "ego", the "I", *res cogitans*") is something that thinks, i.e., something that represents, perceives, judges, agrees, disagrees,

loves, hates, strives, and likes. According to Heidegger, "Descartes calls all these modes of behaviour *cogitationes*."[5] Therefore, "ego" is something that possesses these cogitations and they belong to the "I", thus I judge, I represent, etc. Everything here is all about the "I", the knowing subject since the object that is known is separated from the subject that knows. The widening gap of the subject and object therefore becomes the source of egotism, individualism and very importantly, the superiority feelings man has over his fellowmen and his environment. In furtherance to this, because of man's pursuit of objective knowledge controlled by scientific method, man has become a domineering agent in the world who sees every other thing around him as objects that can and should be conquered.

1.2   Statement of Problem

Understanding is the key to human behaviours and the process by which we understand a thing determines what our behaviour towards it will be. Today, man wants knowledge that is devoid of prejudices. He has established methods, rules and principles that have kept him separated from any form of interaction, conversation or dialogue with the object of his knowledge. With the use of method man has alienated himself from the world and has ended up creating a schism between himself and others, self and the world, the past and the present and this is the foundation of subject/object dichotomy which is acknowledge in most philosophical traditions.

The social implications of the subject/object dichotomy which are the major concerns of this- research are: because the subject presides over knowledge man feels and acts as everything is all about him. Man has become so egoistic and individualistic in our contemporary world. He feels he is the only entity that matters as every other thing including the other person being studied is secondary and must be treated as such. He therefore has the feeling of superiority over others leading to master-slave relationship, a division between pure races and those that are not, developed nations and under developed ones. The challenge here

is not the unnecessary dichotomy between the subject and object of knowledge but that realities are treated based on whether they are subjects or objects.

This research therefore asks, can our knowledge be source-less? To what extent can understanding in the human/social sciences be devoid of historical and cultural realities? And to what extent can Gadamer's hermeneutics transform the knowing subject for a better co-existence of in the world? It is the position of this research that these challenges posed by these divisions can be minimized to a large extent if we adopt Gadamer's hermeneutics in our quest to understand realities in the social sciences because it is not about objective knowledge but understanding through a deep interaction between the past and the present, the subject and the object, leading to the understanding of why an object acts how it does and not limiting ourselves to how it acts.

1.3   Purpose of Study

This dissertation is aimed at appraising Gadamer's hermeneutics as a mode of understanding in the human sciences. This work is also aimed at determining some social values in Gadamer's hermeneutics that can impact positively on man's actions and reactions towards the other person and his society at large. This work further aimed at bridging the subject-object dichotomy with Gadamer's hermeneutics especially with his dialogic-dialectic mode of understanding. Also, the work aims at establishing the effects of mutual interaction as a mode of understanding between the subject and the object.

Furthermore, it is the purpose of this research to state in clear terms the conditions and factors necessary for understanding to occur through interpretation as discussed by Gadamer in his hermeneutics. The work also aims at appraising the roles of these necessary conditions and their implications to man and his society. Finally the research targets at redirecting man's way of acquiring knowledge from method/objective based to a more transformative process that will enhance man's relationship with his fellowmen and the larger society.

1.4   Scope of Study

The scope of this research work primarily is Gadamer's hermeneutics as contained in his 'magnus *opus'*, <u>Truth and Method</u> first published when Gadamer was sixty years old. This book is one of the very important works in this century on the philosophy of humanistic studies. *Truth and Method* is the comprehensive and integrated statement of Gadamer's rich and penetrating reflections on hermeneutics. Other works by Gadamer that will assist us in the scope of our research is his anthology titled *Philosophical Hermeneutics* published in 1976, translated and edited with an introduction by David E. Linge. This work presents carefully selected essays from Gadamer's *Kleine Schriften.* It contains Gadamer's discussion of hermeneutical reflection on the first part; it also deals with phenomenology, existential philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics on the second part. Another is *The Gadamer's Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings* edited by Richard E. Palmer. This book was first written in German in 1997 with the title *Gadamer Lesebuch*, compiled and edited by Jean Grodin. This work richly conveys the scope and depth of Gadamer's thought, including his work in hermeneutics, aesthetics and practical philosophy and his essays on Plato, Hegel and Heidegger.   All these works by Gadamer will enable us analyse and appraise his Gadamer's hermeneutics. Other secondary materials like the works of Richard E. Palmer, Joel C. Weinsheimer and Anthony C. Thiselton on Gadamer's hermeneutics will also be consulted for a better comprehension of our topic.

1.5   Significance of the Work

The significance of this work is that at the end of this research, man must have been redirected to a closer relationship with himself, his fellowmen and his environment in his search for knowledge, understanding and truth as a result of the interactions that will arise in his search to know an object of knowledge. Another significance of the work is that it is a

clarion call for man to begin to think of what happens over and above his wanting and doing and not just dwell at the level of wanting, willing and doing. The work is also significant because it will expose us to the productive nature of our prejudices in the process of understanding and quest for truth. Thus, the work will open up our horizon to another way of knowing reality different from the scientific objectivism of the modern era in the history of philosophy. This therefore gives man an alternative in his pursuit of knowledge and truth. Furthermore, this work is a call to a path that goes beyond the methodological thinking that resulted in actuated pragmatism, greed and the will to power. It asserts the claims of another being in the world, a way of human solidarity and inter human understanding. The work will therefore present to man a basic insight into what thinking and knowing mean for human beings in their practical life, even if one makes use of scientific methods.

Finally this research work is significant because it is a contribution to human knowledge in general and to existing literature on epistemology and hermeneutics specifically.

1.6   **Methodology**

This dissertation is library and archival-based. The work therefore adopts the philosophical method of analysis in its appraisal of Gadamer's hermeneutics. This method will enable us to separate Gadamer's hermeneutics into its constituent components or elements thereby determining the essential characteristics that define it. Analysis is both a critical and reductive process. It is reductive in that it reduces the phenomena or concepts to their most basic components and critical in the sense that the process is systematic, rigorous and rational. Critical also suggests that analysis tries in some sense to discover the truth about the phenomena or concept in question. The principal focus of philosophical analysis is on ideas and concepts. We will therefore use the analytic method to break down Gadamer's

concepts as used in his hermeneutics and also critically get to the sequence of his reasoning for a better understanding of the work and a more articulated solutions to the afore stated problems.

The work is further divided into Six Chapters. The Chapter One is titled general introduction as it introduces us to what the work is all about, the background to the work, the problem that the work wants to solve, the purpose, significance and method of the work. The Chapter Two is literature review. Here the works of other authors on Gadamer's hermeneutics are reviewed with particular interest in identifying the gap they created which our work will fill at the end of the research work. The Chapter Three is a general exposition of Gadamer's hermeneutics which we categorized into three main parts. This chapter besides dealing with the biography of Gadamer, influences on his hermeneutics, hermeneutics before him, it also discusses two of our categorization namely disclosure of truth in arts and disclosure of truth in history. The Chapter Four is centred on his disclosure of truth in language which is a major aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics. The penultimate chapter is our philosophical appraisal of Gadamer's hermeneutics. In the finally chapter is our evaluation of Gadamer's hermeneutics and the conclusion of the work.

1.7   **Definition of terms**

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics as described by *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* is the art or theory of interpretation, as well as a type of philosophy that starts with questions of interpretation. Hermeneutics was originally concerned more narrowly with interpreting sacred texts, however the term acquired a much broader significance in its historical development and finally became a philosophical position in the twentieth century German philosophy.[6]

The *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines hermeneutics as, the "study of the methodological principles of interpretation and explanation; specific: the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation."[7] Hermeneutics is seen by this definition as a method and it is in line with the views of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Heidegger and Gadamer however would have different opinions on this. The latter would ascribe to a definition that conceives hermeneutics as an ontological event, i.e. an activity of a living being or a mode of being and not just a method.

Etymologically, hermeneutics is rooted in the Greek verb, '*hermẽneuein'* which means 'to interpret' and the noun '*hermẽneia'* which means 'interpretation.' Etymologically then hermeneutics means an act of interpretation. This definition is linked to the wing-footed messenger-god, Hermes, from whose name the word is apparently derived from. From the ancient Greek history, Hermes was a messenger of Zeus. His function was to transmute what was beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence could grasp. No wonder the Greeks attributed to Hermes the discovery of language and writing.

In the modern times, the interpretative character of hermeneutics is retained but it has been progressively defined in six distinct ways which as noted by Palmer include: The theory of biblical exegesis; General philological methodology; The science of all linguistic understanding; The methodological foundation of *Geisteswissenchaften-* social sciences; Phenomenology of existence and existential understanding; The systems of interpretation both recollect and iconoclastic, used by man to reach the meaning behind myths and symbols.[8]

Conceptually hermeneutic inquiry uncovers "meanings and intentions that are, in a sense, hidden in the text."[9] Hermeneutics involves firstly accessing or creating texts about the phenomenon being interpreted. The term text is important here; in hermeneutics it can refer to any aspect of the phenomenological world being interpreted. In research these aspects might

be represented via written texts, oral and video recordings, interview texts, images, actions, and other modes of communication and recording that illustrate the phenomenon being investigated.

Hermeneutics from the above can be said to be an act of deciphering the human imprint on any work of man (in an inclusive sense), its meaning and its understanding. Gadamer however sees hermeneutics not as doctrine of methods for the humanities and social sciences (*Geisteswissenchaften*) but rather a basic insight into what thinking and knowing mean for human beings in their practical life, even if one makes use of scientific methods.[10]

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophical method was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). This method as it were deals with the method of acquiring knowledge. For Husserl certain prejudices and influences acquired by us in the past can become a clog to the acquisition of objective knowledge. Thus, to know a thing through investigation, Husserl will suggest we do what he calls 'phenomenological epoche' also known as bracketing or phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction consists in putting aside or in bracket ones prejudices or postulations about the object one is investigating. According to Joseph J. Kockelman's in the article "Phenomenology" "phenomenology is indeed the study of essences, but it also attempts to place essences back into existence. It is a transcendental philosophy interested only in what is "left behind" after the phenomenological reduction is performed, but it is also considers the world to be already there before reflection begins."[11]

Phenomenology as a philosophical movement consists in an analysis of and description of consciousness and that is why it is claimed to blend with existentialism. Some philosophers who belong to this movement conceive of phenomenology as a speculation on subjectivity, others sees it as a method of approaching concrete existence. On a clearer note

Kockelman affirms that "phenomenology is an attempt to give a direct description of our experience as it is in itself without taking into account its psychological origin and its causal explanation."[12] Some notable phenomenologists are Scheler (1874 – 1928), N. Hartmann (1882 – 1950), Heidegger (1889-1976), Sartre (1905 – 1980), and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961).

Endnotes

1.   Augustine in J.L. Mercier, *Epistemology and The Problem of Truth,* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2000), p.1.

2.   Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy,* (London: Oxford University press, 1974), p.1.

3.   Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* Book 1, Part 1.

4.   Gregory Pence, *A Dictionary of Common Philosophical Terms*, (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2000), p.14

5.   Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Trans. and Intr. by Albert Hofstadter. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.), p.126.

6.   Robert Audi, (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.323.

7.   see, P.E. Richard, *Hermeneutics:* (Evanston: North-Western University Press, 1969), p.4.

8.   Ibid; pp.34 – 44.

9.   Crotty M., *The Foundations of Social Science Research,* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p.91.

10.   H-G Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings,* R.E, Palmer, (ed.), (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 113.

11.   J.J. Kockelman, "Phenomenology" in R. Audi (ed.) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* p.578.

12.   Loc. Cit.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is titled Literature review and as the title goes our interest is to make a review of how authors after Gadamer adopted or criticized his theory as a process of knowing, deciphering the truth and understanding through the process of interpretation. Our mission is to bring to light the lacuna created by the authors that will be reviewed which this research work intends to fill. At the end of this we must have created a good background to discourse Gadamer's hermeneutics, exposing its importance to contemporary society, its strengths and weaknesses. But more importantly the gap which this work will be filling must have been exposed.

Due to the influence of Heidegger on Gadamer, it is imperative that we begin our literature review by briefly discussing Heidegger's famous work, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*). It was Heidegger who initiated the shift away from methodological hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. He shifted the epistemological questions and theories of interpretation to the ontology of being and understanding. According to him the one primary objective of this work remains the re-examination of the "question of being."[1] Heidegger states this principal task thus:

> If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being-the ways which have guided us ever since.[2]

Heidegger presents us a different dimension of being. For him being is 'being-in-the-world', this is the being of the everyday existence which must be understood through interpretation. Heidegger's ontology is therefore such that it must be understood through the hermeneutic

perspective. To understand Heidegger's meaning of being requires interpretation and unlike his predecessors, this hermeneutics is not as rules or methodologies. Heidegger's hermeneutics is such that understanding of being is as a mode of "being-in-the world", thus a questioning being. In Heidegger's hermeneutics, understanding is a mode of being-in-the world. This by implication is that Heidegger's hermeneutics is comprised of and engaged in interpretive understandings. Heidegger with this achievement elevates hermeneutics from methodology and epistemology, that is, from the logic and art of understanding texts to a philosophical level. Though he never engaged in traditional problems of hermeneutics but he invented a new perspective in hermeneutics which is the hermeneutics of lived experience. Thus no method is needed for one to interpret the events of his everydayness.

David E. Linge, the editor of Gadamer's anthology, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* in the introductory note states that: "The essays contained in this volume continue to develop the philosophical perspective that Gadamer originally set forth in his systematic work, *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode* 1960), a perspective he has called philosophical hermeneutics."[3] Linge in the above quotation opines that Gadamer refers to his perspective on hermeneutics as philosophical. No wonder he would further assert that the hermeneutics developed by Gadamer is not primarily concerned with hermeneutics as a method or skill of interpretation but beyond this "the task of philosophical hermeneutics therefore is ontological rather than methodological."[4] Philosophical hermeneutics according to Linge "seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific and non-scientific alike and that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not preside."[5] This text is pre-eminently an exposition on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Jean Grodin in the article "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding" examined Gadamer's threefold notion of understanding which for him is summed up in

Gadamer's notion of understanding as application as contained in Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*. First Grodin highlights that Gadamer discussed understanding as an intellectual grasp. This means that "to understand (*verstehen*) is in general, to grasp something (I get it), to see things clearer (say, when an obscure or ambiguous passage becomes clear), to be able to integrate a particular meaning into a larger frame"[6] This is the traditional notion of understanding from where Gadamer's conception of understanding as "the process by which an ambiguous or obscure passage (of scripture, for instance) was made intelligible"[7] was derived from. In the views of Grodin however, Gadamer did not accept in totality this view and that is why the question "whether a methodology is all that makes up the cogency of our understanding"[8] was asked.

Next the author examined understanding as a practical know-how. According to him, Heidegger had earlier argued that understanding as it were designates less a cognitive process than a know-how. This means that understanding is more of ability, a skill, a capacity and even a possibility of our existence. He notes that: "in this regard, one who "understands" something is not so much someone endowed with a specific knowledge, but he "knows" his trade, as the English locution puts it. This "knowing" is, of course, less cognitive than practical, like one "knows" how to swim."[9]

Gadamer adopts Heidegger's notion of understanding as practical know-how but further used it to shake up the epistemological notion that prevailed in Dilthey's tradition and the methodology of the human sciences. He claims that to understand is to be able to apply a certain meaning to ones situation. Thus to understand becomes for him to apply a certain meaning to ones situation.

Gadamer's notion of understanding as a practical know-how is linked to Aristotle's notion of practical understanding (*phronesis*). This type of understanding cannot do without

application because practice is all about action. In the view of Gadamer, Aristotle only recognized that the point of practical wisdom lies in its actualization, which always entails an element of self-knowledge because there "is always a possibility of myself that is involved in the situation of practice and where distance from this practice can induce a distortion."[10] Grodin however concludes in this section that Gadamer retains Heidegger's notion of reflectivity and application in order to better understand what understanding is all about.

The third form of understanding is tagged 'understanding as agreements.' To understand in German is '*sich verstehen*' which means also 'to agree', 'to come to an agreement', 'to concur'. He explains further that "this connotation can also be heard in English locution 'we understand each other', meaning that the partners in a conversation find themselves in a basic agreement, generally on this or that matter."[11] This notwithstanding, the greatest challenge here as noted by Grodin is what the similarities among the three various forms of understanding are. Secondly according to him, one will also ask why such a demarcation? Grodin noticed that there is a challenge of fitting Gadamer's three different notions of understanding together. He therefore proffers the following as reasons as to what he believes made Gadamer to take up such a position. First, according to him is to assert that Dilthey's notion of understanding as a reconstruction is not the only focus of understanding. The notion of understanding as agreement underscores the fact the reader or interpreter of a text shares a basic 'agreement' or understanding about the text. He further explains that "if Gadamer insists on this element of agreement, it is therefore to underline the point that understanding is primarily related to the issue at hand and not to the author's intention as such."[12]

Another reason presented by Grodin is that agreement occurs mostly through language, dialogue or conversation. This is in line with the linguistic nature of understanding

since "to understand is to put something into words, or to put it more prudently, to couch understanding in a potentially linguistic element."[13]

To cap it up as a way of summary, Grodin in this article under review discussed three important notions of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics and they are cognitive, practical and linguistic. All these are summed up in the notion of understanding as application which for Gadamer is very close to translation. It must be understood as an attempt on the part of the interpreter to come to grips with what needs to be understood however it can never be absolutely final.

Andrezej Wiercinski began his article titled "Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Truth of Hermeneutic Experience" by re-echoing that all truth claims are equal and that because hermeneutic truth cannot be separated from the interpretive process, it is not objective especially in the perspective of objectivity in sciences. He also recognized that Gadamer's hermeneutics made essential contributions in this. He further opines that: "hermeneutics then is not a method of interpretation, but is an investigation into the nature of understanding, which transcends the concept of method. The validity of scientific method is independent from the content of knowledge."[14] The implication of this is that the universal validity of the scientific method cannot be applied to the experience of truth and understanding. The author argues that since understanding is a mode of being in-the-world, and interpretation of what is understood is oriented towards the whole of human life, then "hermeneutic understanding is much closer to basic human experience than the ideal of a validity and certainty applied in the natural sciences."[15] Human sciences must be studied by hermeneutics and not by the scientific method. Gadamer confirms this position according to him when he argues that "hermeneutics is not a method of determining truth, but a practice of reading texts while trying to understand the conditions which make truth possible"[16] Truth cannot be defined by any particular or procedure of inquiry, truth rises above every methodological reasoning.

It is the assumption of the author that Gadamer opines that human understanding is contingent upon historical and cultural conditions. This being the case all universal knowledge is said to be acquired historically. He also notes that hermeneutic truth is inseparable from the interpretive process on the presupposition that the historicity of human experiences and the historicity of understanding belong to the ontological conditions of human existence.

Furthermore, the author notes that Gadamer's hermeneutic is deeply phenomenological. This means that understanding happens between description and interpretation. Understanding happens as an event. He also describes hermeneutics as a participation in meaning. Explicating further he notes that "hermeneutic understanding is not a process of construing a self-identical meaning of a text, but a continuous dialogue in which a mediation of meaning takes place."[17] The model of hermeneutic experience is dialogue and no longer propositional logic.

In addition to this, Wiercinski further affirms that Gadamer's hermeneutics is a philosophy of conversation. Because of the dialectics of question and answer that exists between the text under study and the subject that seeks understanding, both the text and the subject are subjected to questioning. This process enables the subject that seeks understanding to test his prejudgment or prejudice which he brings to the table of dialogue. This dialogue leads to fusion of horizon and it occurs in language after all the prejudice from subject that seeks understanding has been filtered off.

Feryal Cubuku in the article "Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics on Education" examines Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a referent for language learning concepts. In the work he explicates a descriptive set of principles based on Gadamer's hermeneutics that

has the potency of developing the needed disposition for understanding. He acknowledged that Gadamer did not write extensively on education, but he is

> Credited with developing a hermeneutics not as an attempt to prescribe a method or set of methods for understanding but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.[18]

To do justice to the topic Cubukcu discussed pertinent principles in Gadamer's hermeneutics in order to establish how they can be referents to language learning concepts. First principle discussed is fore-structures. This is gotten from Heidegger and it includes fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. This is also known as prejudice which the interpreter approaches the object of interpretation with. The art of understanding requires that the fore-structure should not be subjugated to the background but that there should be "a hermeneutic consciousness that remains open to the meaning of the other."[19] Thus the interpreter comes with his fore-structures or prejudices yet remains open minded to the meanings of the text which he must make efforts to situate in relation to the whole of our own meanings.

Another of the principles is historical horizons. Both the interpreter and the object of interpretation approach each other with and from different horizons. Understanding takes place when the two horizons are fused together consciously bringing out the tensions between them. He further contends that Gadamer's hermeneutics considers understanding as capable of being enlarged into different understandings, not necessarily superior or better than those inherited from the horizon of tradition.

Listening and dialogue is also a principle considered by Cubukcu. According to him hermeneutics for Gadamer simply means understanding, (das verstehen). All attempts at hermeneutic is geared towards understanding and this can only be achieved when the persons get involved in dialogue with each other with good will towards themselves. According to Gadamer, as quoted by Cubukcu "thus for a written conversation basically the same

fundamental condition obtains as for an oral exchange. Both partners must have the goodwill to try to understand one another"[20] Thus there must be a genuine listening and dialoguing between the interpreter and the object of interpretation. Interpretation of a text for Gadamer must be in the form of a dialogue or conversation between two speakers.

Other principle examined by this author is truth. He established that for Gadamer, truth is humanistic. According to him, Gadamer's concept of truth goes back to Plato where the truth is closely associated with right and beauty. He contends that Gadamer's concept of truth is "a truth that grows out of the social fabric of the tradition, a truth that one 'recognises' as true"[21]

The other is application. According to him, to understand for Gadamer is to grasp how it would apply today and in one's own personal life and understanding. A reader must be able to see the applicability of what is. Paraphrasing Palmer, he established the point clearer thus: to truly understand a text is to see its application, its context, and direction of meaning; it is to get the point.

Feryal in his findings concludes that establishing the principles of historical effect, temporal distance, prejudice, and fore-structures are integral to the development of a hermeneutic consciousness. These principles allow Gadamer to expound on series of topics such as the priority of the question, the meaning of experience and the idea of application even in the field of language learning. In language learning, it is indispensable for teachers to establish a good rapport with students as this will help them proceed from the already acquired experiences to the new ones.

Duška Dobrosavljev in the article titled "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" discusses how some key concepts in Gadamer's hermeneutics are interconnected with Aristotle's concept of practical philosophy on the first part of the work titled

'Hermeneutics and Praxis'. The second part of the work examines the universal requirements of the method of natural sciences. Our interest in this work will be on the first part of the work for want of space.

On the first part of the work the author identified that Aristotle's practical philosophy (praxis) includes ethics, politics and economy and they are "occupied with changeable, temporal issues that could be and could not be."[22] This aspect of philosophy depends on concrete situation and not on any universals. He notes that "the purpose of practical philosophy is not comprehension of the thing-in-itself, but learning how to relate to things as in Aristotle's ethics."[23]

Dobrosavljev further argues that in the field of praxis, the purpose is always immanent and the aim cannot be separated from the means. Analogically he notes "if a purpose is proper, that is to say, good action, the means by which we acquire it cannot be bad."[24] On this note he affirms Gadamer's position that hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of an older tradition of practical philosophy. And that the main question of hermeneutics, which is how is understanding possible, is completely situated within the horizon of praxis. According to him, Gadamer in his research discovered that one thing common to all understanding is its definitive and historical character. It is always temporary and belongs to the field of horizons.

Substantiating his point that hermeneutics is a practical philosophy, Dobrosavljev examined the concepts of hermeneutical circle and prejudices in the work. Hermeneutical circle is founded on the old principle of interpretation which holds that 'the whole should be understood from the part, and the part should be understood from the whole.' In his views, the hermeneutical circle is ontologically positive; it allows a flow of time and meaning. In his words "it does not fix concepts eternally, but like practical philosophy, it develops them only in outline. They always remain elastic enough, so that their contents can support a certain

change."[25] Every understanding is finite and already in time. That understanding has a limit and temporary means that our preconceptions are limited and temporal. Preconceptions here are called and known as prejudices (*das vorurteil*).

The author further notes that 'hermeneutical circle is paradigmatic for any understanding and we can enter it only by virtue of our prejudices.' Understanding is not a mere subjective act and it unfolds within a circle. By means of prejudices at our disposals, we enter hermeneutical circle of understanding. Another justifying factor that Gadamer's hermeneutics is practical is the unbreakable unity between understanding, interpretation and application. Understanding is always interpretation but application is an integral part of understanding. According to Dobrosavljev, "the inclusion of application into understanding means that the hermeneutical situation is essentially practical: we cannot gain a general knowledge from which we would deduce singular cases."[26] In his view, it is through application that understanding is transformed into historical events. Understanding therefore remains a form of experience. He concludes the section in the following words:

> The integration of application into understanding indicates that knowledge and action are essentially interrelated and that subsequent application of principles to life is inadequate. What makes understanding possible is application, its interrelatedness with *Lebenswelt*.[27]

Thus the knowledge we acquire should be applied into real life situation. Our knowledge must not end at the level of speculation or metaphysics but we must always seek for a way of making it count in our personal or communal lives.

Scherto Gill in the paper titled "Holding Oneself Open in Conversation: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Ethics of Dialogue" draws out the implications of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for the ethics of dialogue. He examines key interconnected components in Gadamer's hermeneutics. He notes that central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is "the place of the other in dialogic interpretation and the process

of understanding."[28] He avouches that for Gadamer understanding is dialogic and therefore inter-subjective because it involves the relationship between oneself and the other. Gill recognizes that this view of Gadamer has been criticised by writers like Levinas, Habermas etc to be traditionalistic and relativistic, but even at that he argues that "philosophical hermeneutics offers a truly comprehensive theory encapsulating the central place of the other and otherness in dialogue and in human existence. Equally, hermeneutical applications call for ethical engagement in dialogue."[29] Dialogic ethics according to him refers to any argument that proposes desirable ways to engage in dialogic encounters.[30] He identified four ethical considerations derived from philosophical hermeneutics. These are (i) the place of otherness in dialogue – the ethics of alterity (ii) fusion of horizons – the ethics of self-cultivation, (iii) equality and active reciprocity in dialogue – the ethics of mutuality (iv) language and understanding – the ethics of solidarity.

Beyond this identified ethical considerations, Gill notes that he does not consider Gadamer's theory as a set of 'ought' towards the other since his concern was and is philosophic.[30] For him it is a radical departure from traditional ethics. For the fact that Gadamer did not detach dialogue from life itself in his theorisation, this points to ethics as being hermeneutical and thus practical. He affirms that Gadamer in his words asserts that dialogue is itself the practice of ethics by not merely recognizing the good, but demanding it as well.

He affirms that hermeneutics begins with an encounter with the other. The other here is something alien or foreign to us that creates awareness in us of "the situatedness of our understanding and knowing."[31] Because we are confronted with something alien whenever we try to understand a thing, the author advocates that we should be sensitive to otherness, that is, in the words of Gadamer "neither neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of ones self."[32] Explaining further he asserts that this "involves the interpreter's foregrounding and

fore-meaning, as well as an acceptance that the other person and his/her perspectives count in the dialogic deliberation."[33] Openness to otherness according to him as explained by Gadamer entails our capacity to attend to and listen to what addresses us in a text or conversation.

Gill arrives at the ethical essence of interpretation from Gadamer's insistence on the place of otherness in a dialogue. For him, hermeneutics followed Kant in conceiving the other as a means and not an end. He explains further that "the other and otherness are constituted in the moral worthiness of a person, which is an end itself. Equally, the other can equally command our own moral attitudes of respect, responsiveness and relationship."[34] He argues that dialogic understanding only takes place when the interpreter puts first the openness and attentiveness to the other and otherness. The end point of this will be care for what the other has to say, it will also encourage "care for, listen to, respond to, and thereby bond with the other."[35]

Furthermore, Gill opines that Gadamer proposes in his philosophical hermeneutics the central role of the other and otherness. He did not downplay the ethics of alterity as he may have been criticized. He supports this view with a direct quote from Kogler who expresses the Gadamarian alterity as meaning that "the other appears as a partner, a mutual co-self, another who is both different and close enough to be understood, to be taken seriously, to be taken into account."[36] Because of the role Gadamer has placed on the other and otherness which is hinged on openness and attentiveness to the other, Gill argues that this can be a basis for the ethics of alterity in which there is a mutual co-self between individuals who must make themselves open to each other and appear to each other as partners.

The next is what he calls fusion of horizons and in this Gill sees as a foundation for the ethics of self-cultivation. Gadamer had argued that understanding takes place when the two horizons trying to understand each other are able to leave their prejudgements, or prejudices

and are able to fuse together. Through the process of to-and-fro movement, from the part to the whole, we are able to escape our prejudices in order to fuse our horizons together. Fusion of horizon enables us to imagine the world of the other person by bringing ourselves to it. This is socio-ethical aspect of hermeneutics expressed thus by Gill:

> Hermeneutics promotes virtues such as humility by accepting the temporality and historicity of our being as we seek the opportunity to expand our horizons so that we rise to a 'higher truth, precisely because hermeneutics allows what is alien to become one's own, not by destroying it uncritically, but by explicating it within ones own horizons with one's own horizons with one's own concepts and thus giving it new velocity.[37]

Gill progressed by noting that Gadamer "equates the hermeneutical understanding to *bildung* – self –cultivation and self transcendence."[38] In this both partners in dialogue are elevated. He explains further that "self-cultivation depends on collaboration with the other in dialogue and so has an ethical dimension. It involves being 'dialogically sensitive' to the presence of the other and to the pivotal part that otherness plays in helping to expand our horizons and to deepen our self-understanding."[39] Through the dialogue that exists between the partners, they become elevated from where they are to a higher level thereby cultivating themselves as their horizons are expanded.

He calls the third consideration equality and active reciprocity in dialogue. This means that in dialogue "both interlocutors must be concerned with a common topic or a common question."[40] Dialogue generally requires two partners who are equally committed to understanding their subject matter. Because the dialogue partners are concerned with the same subject matter, they are equal and for the fact that they are provoked by it and they question further in the direction that it indicates, there is active reciprocity among them.

Nevertheless, as to whether hermeneutical ethics underestimates the place of power or domination as a social issue in modern societies, Gill writes:

> To respond, the ethos of mutuality does not undermine critical self-examination as it is neither an act of empathy, or assimilation, or of domination. This reciprocal engagement rests on a conception of the good which can give rise to ethical questions about dialogic understanding, rather than mere procedural concerns.[41]

The author notes further that the duality of equality and reciprocity may not solve the problems of political life, but he re-buttresses Gadamer's position that "it is precisely due to this limitation that dialogue must be carried away by the 'rule of the game' in order that the ethical conditions of equality and reciprocity are met."[41] Dialogue must be conducted according to the rule of the game.

Finally the author considers language and understanding as the ethics of solidarity. He notes that understanding is language-bound and language remains the real mark of our finitude. He identified three essential features of language as proposed by Gadamer and these are (a) self-forgetfulness (2) I-lessness (3) the university of language. Language for Gadamer as noted by Gill is properly itself when it is in dialogue and is only fully what it can be when it takes place in dialogue. It is therefore argued by Gill that solidarity amongst people occur in language. According to him "this conception of solidarity is that it is an expression of human bonds developed through a reciprocal engagement with one another in dialogue."[43] This solidarity is made possible when we perceive the I and the other as the 'we' not minding where we are coming from or the differences between us. When this is sustained amongst humans, then the community of life will be lived through solidarities.

Summarily, Gill in this article revisited some key concepts and arguments from Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and have examined their implications for dialogue ethics. In his findings he observed that philosophical hermeneutics has the potential to be applied to our social and political concerns. He proposes that dialogic understanding "comprises our being-in-the world and serves the ends of being and action."[44] The end

product of an individual who is involved in dialogic understanding is a transformation into a new self and a modified action in the world.

Paul Regan in the article "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Concepts of Reading, Understanding and Interpretation" discusses the concepts of pre-supposition; inter-subjectivity; authenticity; temporality; tradition and history in relation to reading, understanding and interpretation for health and social science researchers. According to him "Gadamer's key concepts are of particular concern for qualitative researchers' intending to use philosophical hermeneutics for interpreting research participant's narrative and findings."[45] He suggests that within the qualitative research process, certain concepts are significant because of the central interpretive relationships of the researcher. In this work, Regan uses the terms researcher and interpreter interchangeably. He also notes that "phenomenology underpins the philosophy of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics."[46] However not minding the aforesaid, Regan asserts that "what is significant about Gadamer's hermeneutics is his ontological focus (Being) and capacity to not only interpret human understanding but misunderstanding as a mechanism for effective communication."[47]

To have an effective communication, language must be understood. Hence to investigate Gadamer's concept of understanding, one must do this through logos (word). Language remains a key factor for understanding to take place through philosophical hermeneutics. He reaffirms Gadamer's position that "language delivers pointers to the truth concealed within word meaning and reveals that something exists in (hermeneutic) circle of ontological possibilities."[48] It is in line with this that Gadamer would suggest that hermeneutics is not a method but a set of guiding principles that aids us in the search for truth concealed in the forgetfulness of language. Corollary to this, Regan opines that "the analytic of Dasein means that research participants' narrative of their life experience, of say cancer care is in a sense not only their individual experience but also experience valued in relation to

the universality of the Dasein concept."[49] The interpreting researcher therefore in so doing will be analysing the universality of experience applied into Dasein's analytic of human beings.

Regan in this work also examines the roles of historicity, temporality and playing in Gadamer's hermeneutics. All these for him gear towards opening the horizons of both the interpreting subject and the interpreted subject for a better understanding to occur. He however calls on health and social care researchers to adopt Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics while interpreting research participants' narratives. He therefore concludes that from the interpreter's prejudice and uncertainties, notion of play and even fusion of horizons, the interpreter/researcher needs to work out any presuppositions they may have as the 'first, last and constant task' of the hermeneutic method.

Loren G. Agrey in the article "Philosophical Hermeneutics: A tradition with Promise" proposes that philosophical hermeneutics is an alternative to quantitative method of data collection and analysis especially as it regards human sciences in educational research. This approach according to him, is such that "the researcher becomes an actual part of the research itself enabling new meaning and understandings that may not be evident in the strict unbiased approach of quantitative research."[50] He examines the historical foundations of philosophical hermeneutics and also makes a comparative study of the forms of hermeneutical approach.

In the introduction of the work he concurs largely with Smith, D.G, who posits that hermeneutics deals with questions of what enables interpretation and understanding.[51] He further accepts Smith's description of hermeneutics activity as "simply the ordinary work of trying to make sense of things we don't understand, things that fall outside our taken for-granted assumptions about the nature of experience."[52] The hermeneutic thinkers according to him will not accept the idea that people understand a given as a result of regularity in

nature or conditions that are always and everywhere the same but for them understanding only takes place as a result of interpretation. While doing a historical overview of foundations and fundamental characteristics of hermeneutics his major focus remains on the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer.

For him Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a moderate hermeneutics and Gadamer did not believe "we can achieve a complete or objective interpretation since we are limited by our own language and historical situation."[53] He further corroborates Gadamer's rejection of the idea that truth can be arrived at through methods when he scribbles that "on the contrary, truth eludes the methodical person because the question of method cannot be separated from the idea of inquiry. It is impossible to establish a correct method before an encounter with what is being investigated."[54] This position is against the backdrop that hermeneutics maintains that the object of interpretation being investigated by the interpreter has some role to play on how it can be investigated and understood.

Philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, he affirms is not concerned with methods of interpretation and understanding but with the question of what enables understanding to occur. Gadamer's hermeneutics is not about the recovery of existing meanings rather is about "the creation of meaning itself and understanding is composed of both previous and new meanings.[55]

In addition, according to Agrey, one of the major achievements of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the repositioning of prejudice. He describes Gadamer's concept of prejudice as not constituting "a wilful blindness, which prevents us from grasping the truth, rather they are what we stand on to help launch our understanding. Indeed, it is this initial set of beliefs that allow us to interrogate the topic under discussion."[56] He equally affirms that effective-historical consciousness is one of the outstanding achievements of Gadamer. For

him this is what is responsible for the prejudice that guides our understanding. He highlights this position by rephrasing the views of Kerby when he notes that "sedimented history serves as the horizon in which our present acts take on meaning. It is with recollection that the past is actively appropriated to the self. But this appropriation is always an interpretation of the past and a selective and imaginative retelling of it from the perspective of the present."[57] In all of these Agrey notes that hermeneutics for Gadamer is not about locating or fixing truth. It is an ongoing process of understanding the conditions necessary for understanding to occur.

In his conclusion he opines that hermeneutics has allowed scholars to understand the world of which we live in more fully. Through it a richer meaning of the questions that emerge from honest inquiries into what is true is discovered. He admonishes that the hermeneutical approach should be weaved into a more complete narrative that will bring out the questions that would arise in human sciences.

Hans-Herbert Kogler precisely notes in the article "A Critique of Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics" that dialogue is at the centre of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. He describes dialogue as "the foundational phenomenon within which objects and themes, subjects and perspectives and common interest and shared understanding are grounded."[58] According to him Gadamer conceives of interpretive understanding as dialogue and this is a breakaway from methodological hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Gadamer's promotion of dialogue to the centre stage is founded on "a phenomenological analysis of the process of understanding and interpretation."[59] Kogler admonishes that we must not lose sight of the phenomenological origin of dialogue.

In addition, he notes that Gadamer modelled his analysis of the relation between an interpreter and a text after real conversation between two subjects. This according to him

"illuminates what goes into any real conversation between two actual agents: the dialogue between agents is itself based on a pre-understanding of each one with regard to the relevant subject matter ..."[60] He rightly attests that whenever a dialogue is successful, the end product always transcends the individual perspectives involved and it ends up enlarging the views of the individuals involved. According to him "dialogue thus emerges as an inter- and trans-subjective phenomenon that proceeds and transcends the individual agents and their perspectives by establishing a temporal process that lifts them onto the higher and still historically and culturally situated plane of mutual understanding."[61] Dialogue as the real agent of interpretation has a positive implication especially when seen from its phenomenological origin. This process of knowing according Kogler makes the knowing subject or reflexive agent realise that he approaches his object of understanding via his relation to it. He also realizes that he is defined by his culture and historical background yet in the midst of all these, he is actualised, enhanced and not reduced or eliminated by this process.[62] He also realises that he has no control over his situatedness in an effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and this realisation contributes to what the author terms 'epistemic humility.' The individual therefore becomes aware that his beliefs and assumptions are situated, limited and incomplete but always open for improvement. This is not the same as self-defeatism as the individual in this circumstance understands that this consciousness is part of a process that transcends its constrained and situated existence.

Furthermore, Kogler states that "dialogical event also mediates and thereby transcends the division between the subjective and the objective because the situated subjective view opens itself to what the other has to say, which for Gadamer again means the opening of oneself to the truth"[63] This alludes to the fact that there is a social transformation of our understanding of the subjective and objective by conceiving the encounter between the interpreter and the text or the object of interpretation as socially embedded.

After all the exposition on Gadamer's grounding of interpretation on dialogue, the author however notes that Gadamer failed to "articulate the intermediary ontological position of dialogue between metaphysics and experience."[64] He further argued that Gadamer's grounding of interpretation as dialogue in a hermeneutic ontology of language leads him to under-develop the dialectical relationship between the trans-subjective process of understanding and its individual embodiment in concrete reflexive agents.[65]

Furthermore, Kogler posits that Gadamer metaphysically grounded dialogue in language. Gadamer had concurred with Humboldt and Heidegger that "language is the master-medium of human experience because it creates a holistic web that is constantly open towards, and in interaction with, the world."[66] It is therefore not surprising when Gadamer asserts that "the being that can be understood is language."[67] Against this backdrop, Kogler adumbrates that "language is intrinsically dia-logical because it is intentionally oriented towards its content which it is and it is not at the same time."[68]

Not minding the successes achieved by Gadamer with language, Kogler notes that Gadamer's specific reflection on language leaves room for serious criticisms. Though Gadamer's ontology of language was aimed at overcoming the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, he ends up promoting language to the new master position. In the light of the above, he notes the following four challenges raised by Gadamer's ontology of language. These four challenges are (i) language between event and experience (ii) the metaphysical reification of language (iii) the social conditions of dialogue (iv) the dialectic between historical ground and individual agency.

On the first point above, Kogler notes that Gadamer in the roles he assigns to language throws away "the baby of a dialogically situated subjectivity with the Cartesian bathwater of a self-sustained pre-social subject."[69] He precisely observed that Gadamer's view on language

was strongly influenced by Heidegger. Heidegger sees language as a 'house of being', an event that surpasses intentional acts, expressions, or intra-worldly experiences. According to him, Gadamer overplayed "in Heidegger's fashion the role of language as trans-subjective happening (*Sprachgescheten*) versus the situated, reflexive, and intentional subjects as speakers and interpreters."[70] To his mind Gadamer ends up providing for his followers a wide construction site. But for Kogler, "the intentional and reflexive use of language by subjects against the backdrop of their holistic embeddeness in language and tradition requires reconstruction, not deconstruction."[71] He however advocates that we should go beyond seeing understanding as just the embodiment of tradition.

The next is the metaphysical reification of language. This means that Gadamer has metaphysically made language, which is an abstract reality, seem a concrete reality. In his explanations, "this means that we now thematise language as that which makes understanding possible, that which 'grounds' it and by so doing we create "a new transcendental signifier, a new super-noun, a master-concept grounding a new master narrative"[72] which is language. The implication of this is that Gadamer has left himself to be charged of linguistic idealism. According to Kogler "this would mean that the ultimate reality of anything that is, is its linguistic form."[73] Stretching this challenge further will end up in the wrong notion that all that is real is linguistic and whatever is not linguistic is not real.

Subsequently, Kogler examines the next challenge which still relates to linguistic idealism in dialogical ontology of language as it relates to social conditions of dialogue. He explicates further on this thus:

> Philosophical hermeneutics realises that all understanding involves interpretation, since it is necessarily perspectival, and all interpretation therefore involves application, because the meaning has to be related back to the concrete context in order to make sense. Yet if anyone seriously considers what application to real contexts must mean, the lacunae of a

conception of constraints and power that undermine the opening towards the claim of the other becomes apparent.[74]

He however argues following Habermas that the hermeneutic ontology of language is incomplete if it is not followed by some conception of the non-dialogical social context.

Finally he argues that Gadamer's conception of a tradition-based dialogical understanding does not disclose the dialectics between holistic background and individual agency. What it rather does according to him is to distort its dynamics "towards a one-sided master narrative of the tradition as subject."[75] He however disagrees with Gadamer's position that self-consciousness is an overrated concept when it comes to the power of history. According to him, Gadamer's hermeneutics failed to articulate the "individual, and the dialectic with which it is situated in the larger whole of tradition..."[76]

Jurgen Habermas in his work *Knowledge and Human Interest* posits that all knowledge is based upon human values. He criticizes the values which underlie the empirical sciences and affirms that hermeneutics provide a more appropriate basis for human sciences. He would however reject ordinary hermeneutics for its tendency to reify tradition and language, and to assume that subjects are aware of the meaning of their actions. He nevertheless proposes a critical theory aimed at the eradication of unnecessary oppression and the maximization of human emancipation as its value. He chooses psychoanalysis as the model for his project. Our interest in this review will be limited to his arguments against ordinary hermeneutics as that will enable us expose his opposition and criticisms against Hans- G Gadamer.

Habermas' practical intention for critical theory is human emancipation "from the constraints of unnecessary domination in all its forms."[77] In his opinion, for hermeneutics to be an explicit procedure of inquiry, hermeneutics must be able to delineate what is in the structure of ordinary language which enables it to communicate even indirectly what is ineffably human. For Habermas there are three spheres of knowledge that are ruled by what

he terms a knowledge-constitutive interest. These three spheres of knowledge and their corresponding knowledge-constitutive interest that rule them are: empirical analytic science ruled by technical cognitive interest; historical-hermeneutical sciences ruled by practical cognitive interest and critical reflection ruled by emancipation.

The three knowledge-constitutive interests correspond to three domains of social life: labour (empirical-analytical), language (historical-hermeneutic) and emancipation (critical reflection). Critical reflection is posited as the emancipator interest in overcoming authoritarian and dogmatic structures of thought and action. The interest of critical reflection is to recreate a completely uninhibited subjectivity. For him "this interest can only develop to the degree to which repressive force in the form of the normative exercise of power, presents itself permanently in structures of distorted communication – that is to the extent that domination is institutionalised."[78] Habermas further established a link between the emancipatory interest and the critical reflection. He however argues that critical reflection does not only unveils the concealed structures of distortion but distortion.

On the issue of language, Habermas actually criticizes Gadamer for his assertions that all understanding is rooted in tradition, all understanding and comprehension has a fundamentally linguistic nature and that language comprises tradition. For Habermas, this is divorcing linguistic tradition from non-linguistic tradition. He hence rejects the model of dialogue presented by Gadamer on the account that it is not adequate to the reality of communication since it denies the existence of power hierarchies. Habermas rejects the ontologizing of language as the experience of the world.

Labour and domination are also constraints that work behind the back of language and change as well as objects of interpretation. For example, changes in modes of production change the linguistic world view; coercion changes language and domination (power) thus

form, for Habermas a constantly interacting, tripartite framework that cannot be handled by the natural language philosophy of philosophical hermeneutics.

Analytically, David E. Linge in the introduction to Gadamer's work, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* tells us the aim of Gadamer's hermeneutics which is exposing the fundamental conditions underlying the phenomenon of understanding as an event that does not lie solely in the hands of the subject. Thus there is an interaction between the subject and the object. They both contribute something positive to understanding thereby bridging the gap between the subject and object dichotomy.

Jean Grodin in the paper titled "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding" presents a threefold understanding of understanding from Gadamer's perspective. These are: understanding as intellectual grasp, practical know-how and as agreements. All these are summed up as understanding as application. We agree with Grodin in his analysis of Gadamer's understanding, however, he left an opening in his discussion which is the implication of this mode of understanding on the knowing subject, or what we may call the transformative aspect of Gadamer's theory of understanding on the knowing subject and its impact on his relationship with his society.

Andrezej Wiercinski in the paper title "Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Truth of Hermeneutic Experience" discusses some important features of Gadamer's hermeneutics. He notes that hermeneutic truth cannot be separated from the interpretive process which means that it cannot be objective. He also notes that the hermeneutic understanding is closer to basic human experience than issues of validity and certainty in natural sciences. For him Gadamer's hermeneutics is phenomenological and participatory because it is dialogical, conversational and dialectical. All these enable the fusion of horizon. These are the basic features of Gadamer's hermeneutics but what could be the social impact of this process on the subject

that seeks for truth through interpretation and understanding? This is a gap that needs to be filled.

Feryal Cubuku in the paper "Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics on Education" adopts Gadamer's theory as a referent for language learning concepts. The work explored the principles in Gadamer's hermeneutics that could lead to better language learning. Thus for Feryal, Gadamer's hermeneutics is relevant to education especially in the aspect of language learning. This theory for him will lead to a good rapport between the teacher and the students. Though Gadamer is not a recognized philosopher of education but his hermeneutics when adopted into education can give the learning process a complete different view. It will influence how the teacher teaches, the teacher's relationship with his students and even how the students can pursue knowledge.

For Duska Dobrosavljev, Gadamer's hermeneutics is a practical philosophy in the paper title "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy." He argues that Gadamer's hermeneutics is interconnected to Aristotle's concept of practical philosophy. This is an obvious fact because hermeneutics is not anchored on the separation of the aim from the means. In hermeneutics of Gadamer there is a bond between understanding, interpretation and application. Whatever is understood or any knowledge acquired through interpretation should be applied to real life issues.

Scherto Gill applied Gadamer's hermeneutics to dialogic ethics in the paper "Holding Oneself Open in a Conversation." He did this on the grounds that Gadamer gave the 'other' a central place in his hermeneutics which takes place in a dialogic form. This author singled out one vital aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics which is dialogue and applied it to four areas of ethics namely, alterity, self-cultivation, mutuality and solidarity. This a giant stride in the

cause we are pursuing in as much as it is limited within the area of ethics however Gadamer's hermeneutics goes beyond ethics.

Paul Regan argues that Gadamer's key concepts are of particular concern for qualitative researchers in the paper "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Concepts of reading, understanding and interpretation." The key concepts according to him should be used to understand and interpret health and social sciences for they have the ability of opening the horizons of both the subject and object. He calls on health workers to adopt Gadamer's hermeneutics as they attempt understanding participants' narratives. For Regan adopting Gadamer's hermeneutics will lead to a better output by the researcher.

For Loren G. Agrey, philosophical hermeneutics should be considered an alternative method of research in human sciences and educational research. To us it should not just be an alternative but it should be the substantive method of research in human sciences and educational researches. The fact is that the objects of research in both human sciences and educational research are dynamic and therefore require a process that can accommodate its dynamism and yet bring out a better result that is a fruit of understanding through interpretation that will satisfy man's quest for the truth.

Hans-Herbert Kogler who concludes our review did a critique of dialogue in Gadamer's hermeneutics. As a critique he exposed both the merit and demerits of dialogue in the hermeneutics of Gadamer. His emphasis was purely on dialogue which he argues and we agree with him occupies a central place in Gadamer's hermeneutics. He however posited that Gadamer's dialogue could lead to linguistic idealism. Well the fact remains that our understanding takes place in language and even our thinking is done in language whether verbal or non-verbal as the case may be.

From the literature so far reviewed, Heidegger tells us that hermeneutics is a lived experience. David E. Linge, Jean Grodin and Andrezej Wiercinski upheld some great values in Gadamer's hermeneutics. For them Gadamer's hermeneutics is participatory, dialogical, conversational and dialectical. All these are values geared towards bridging the subject-object or source dichotomy. This came close to our thesis in this research however; our research will take a step further by highlighting some of the social implications of these values inherent in Gadamer's hermeneutics on both the knowing subject and the object that is known.

Feryal Cubuku, Paul Regan and Loren G. Aggrey see Gadamer's hermeneutics as an alternative method of research in the human, social and educational sciences. This is commendable but considering the dynamic nature of man and his society, we will rather advocate that it becomes the substantive mode of research in the human sciences.

Duska Dobrosavljev and Scherto Gill make a giant stride in the line of our thought by applying the values of dialogue as seen in Gadamer's hermeneutics to the area of ethics. This is ground breaking for us even though Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be limited to ethical dialogue alone. However arguing from the premise that if the man is right, the world is right, we therefore build on this in order to take Gadamer's hermeneutics to a more transformative level that will not only bridge the subject-source dichotomy, but will transform the knowing subject to the level of seeing the object of knowledge as a partner in the process of knowing and understanding.

We have in the following pages analysed, summarized as well as commented on the views of Heidegger; David E. Linge; Jean Grodin and Andrezej Wiercinski; Cubuku, Regan, Loren; Dobrosavljev and Gill in this work. While Linge, Grodin and Wiercinski had interest in the values in Gadamer's hermeneutics, Cubuku, Regan and Loren saw Gadamer's hermeneutics as an alternative method for human or social sciences. Dobrosavljev and Gill

argues that Gadamer's hermeneutics is practical as it can be a base for ethics of mutuality, equality and reciprocity. These authors however cannot be said to have said and wrote all that needs to be said about Gadamer's hermeneutics. They have resolved some issues with their works however none of them discussed Gadamer's hermeneutics as a solution to the effects of the method-based knowledge man has so much concentrated on and its attendant consequences on both man and his environment. This is a lacuna which our work intends to fill up.

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CHAPTER THREE

HERMENEUTICS IN HANS-GEORG GADAMER

3.0   Preamble

This chapter is a discussion about Gadamer's hermeneutics. We will in this chapter expose the hermeneutics of Gadamer in details to enable us understand his views better for a more appropriate appraisal of his work. However, to have a meaningful discussion on his hermeneutics, it will be proper to first and foremost understand what hermeneutics was like before Gadamer. This will enable us appreciate the contributions of the philosophers before him to the development of hermeneutics. Furthermore this will give us a proper background to his hermeneutics.

3.1   Life and Times of Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer was born in Marburg on February 11, 1900[1] in Germany to Johannes Gadamer, "a university researcher"[2] and Emma Karoline Johanna Geiese. Two years after his birth, his family moved to Breslau where his father took up a position of professor of pharmacological chemistry.[3] His father as a natural scientist wanted him to follow his footsteps. Gadamer describes how his father wanted to persuade him into the natural sciences in the following words:

> During my childhood he sought to interest me in the natural sciences in a variety of ways, and I must say he was very disappointed at his lack of success. The fact that I liked what those "chattering professors" (*schwatzprofessoren)* (as Dad called them) were saying was clear from the beginning. But he let me have my way, although for the rest of his life (he died in 1928) he remained unhappy about my choice[4]

In 1918, Gadamer began his studies at Breslau and later moved to Marburg. Here he studied with Richard Honigswald, who introduced him to neo-Kantianism, Nicolai Hartmann, whose brand of phenomenology gave a challenge to Honigswald, and the neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp. In 1922 he graduated with a thesis on *The Essence of Pleasure and Dialogue in Plato* with Paul Natorp. He wrote a second doctoral dissertation under Heidegger, and became

a *Privatdozent* at the University of Marburg. Gadamer once stated that he owned everything to Heidegger, his greatest influence. Heidegger's hermeneutical approach and his idea that philosophy is inseparable from historic and artistic culture, forms the basis of Gadamer's philosophy.

In 1937 Gadamer was elected a professor of philosophy in Marburg, and in 1939 he moved to a professorship at the University of Leipzig. He took a politically neutral position in the eyes of the occupying Soviet Army, and under the new communist state of East Germany in 1945 became the Rector of University of Leipzig. In 1947 he moved West to accept a position at the University of Frankfurt-am-Main. In 1949 he succeeded Karl Jaspers as Professor of Philosophy in Heidelberg, and became Professor Emeritus in 1968, continuing to teach there for over 50 years. He was a visiting professor to Universities around the world, enjoying a special relationship with Boston College in the United States of America. He was known as a sociable and vivacious personality, and remained active until the last year of his life.

Gadamer was influenced by Heidegger's phenomenological method and saw meaning as experience, a palpable event that takes place in time and between subjects. Gadamer started his academic life studying Plato and Aristotle and classical philology, which maintained its influence throughout his career. He felt that poets are the most capable of telling us about our contemporary cultural climate, and not political actors. He saw the value of culture in its ability to show truth as a possession, revealed by the voice of the other. Near the end of his life, Gadamer began to study religion attentively, hoping to imagine a way towards reconciliation between religions of the world and resistance to a mechanistic and alienated vision of human destiny.

It was not until after his retirement that he gained status as an international thinker and a philosopher in his own right. This influence was due to several reasons. First, important debates with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida served to distinguish philosophical hermeneutics as a serious contender against both the critique of ideology and deconstruction. Second, he spent nearly twenty years teaching and lecturing in the United States each fall semester. Finally, *Truth and Method* was published in English in 1975. He continued to teach and lecture internationally and in Germany into his one-hundredth year. Gadamer died on March 13, 2002 in Heidelberg, while recovering from heart surgery. Today he is recognized as the preeminent voice for philosophical hermeneutics. Four claims focus the significance and originality of his hermeneutics: 1) hermeneutic philosophy is fundamentally practical philosophy, 2) truth is not reducible to scientific method, 3) all knowing is historically situated, and 4) all understanding reflects the ubiquity of language.

Among Gadamer's works published in English are: *Truth and Method* (1960), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1967), *Dialogue and Dialectic* (1980) *Reason in the Age of Science* (1982), *The Relevance of the Beautiful and other Essays* (1986) *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations relating to the Philebus* (1991) *Literature and Philosophy in dialogue: essays in German literary theory* (1994); *The enigma of health: the art of healing in a scientific age* (1996).

3.1.1   Some Major Influences on Gadamer

Gadamer in his hermeneutics was influenced and inspired by some major philosophers of Greek thought and some modern philosophers too. Among the Greek philosophers that influenced his thoughts are Plato and Aristotle. Those of the modern philosophy are Hegel and Heidegger, his fellow German philosophers. We will in this section briefly discuss the areas these philosophers influenced our author in his hermeneutics.

Plato: Plato motivated and inspired Gadamer's hermeneutics even though he did not remain a 'traditional' Platonist. In his unpublished thesis on "The Nature of Pleasure according to Plato's Dialogues" Gadamer emphasized the unity of the one and the many, the forms, and the realm of sensuality. This work was done under the supervision of Paul Natorp, who himself is a prominent Plato scholar, a neo-kantian and a mystic. At this point too Gadamer belonged to the circle of the poet Stephan George, an esoteric. The mysticisms of Plato combined with those of Paul Natorp and Stefen George inspired the "recurrent challenge to scientism that pervades Gadamer's later, explicitly hermeneutic philosophy...."[5] Another way these mysticisms influenced Gadamer was in their gesturing towards the realm beyond being that exposes the limitations of human understanding.[6] For Gadamer, mysticisms has the propensity to insist on the finitude of human existence. He therefore advocates that we should acknowledge the beyond while at the same time insisting on our practical existence. Lauren Swayne Barthold in the article "Hans Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002)" published in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy explicates this thus when she writes:

> In other words, human thinking always requires an acknowledgment of what cannot be fully captured in language, yet at the same time language as part of Being that can be understood, functions to create our human world and funds meaning. These themes of the productivity of the luminal or 'horizonal' (for example, as developed by his notion of 'fusion of horizons'), and language's in-between status, were born out of his early "Platonism" and served to undergird his later hermeneutic philosophy.[7]

Gadamer on his part acknowledges "that Plato, far more than Hegel or any other German thinker motivated and inspired all his hermeneutics."[8] Furthermore, in Gadamer's dialectics we see a connection between Plato's dialectics and Socrates' dialogue as can be found in his hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizon and role of language in his hermeneutics.

Aristotle: Aristotle's practical philosophy known as phronesis was of a great influence on Gadamer. Phronesis is a skill but it also involves the ability to decide how to achieve a certain

end; it is also the ability to reflect upon and determine good ends consistent with the aim of living well.[9] In Gadamer's hermeneutics, phronesis is an esteemed key hermeneutic principle. Hence Gadamer will comment thus on Aristotle's phronesis:

> The old Aristotelian distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge is operative here – a distinction which cannot be reduced to that between the true and the probable. Practical knowledge, phronesis, is another kind of knowledge. Primarily, it means that it is directed towards the concrete situation. Thus it must grasp the 'circumstances' in concrete situation.[10]

This motivated and influenced Gadamer's interest in practical philosophy and its basis on human experience. It is the influence from Aristotle that makes Gadamer opines that our knowledge should stem out of and must return to praxis.

This influence on Gadamer manifests itself more in his discussions on *sensu communis* (communal knowledge) which he describes as reflective of hermeneutic understanding. For him the training in *sensu communis* is the most important thing in education but unfortunately according to him "this is not nourished on the true, but on the probable."[11] He writes further that:

> The main thing for our purpose is that sensus communis here obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men, but the sense that founds community. According to Vico what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract generality of reason, but the concrete generality that represents the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race. Hence the development of this sense of the community is of prime importance for living.[12]

Our knowledge should emerge from and returns to praxis. Gadamer therefore insists that hermeneutics is practical philosophy that is rooted in human existence; it is never individualistic but communal. This should make man realize that he exists with others and that he requires dialogue that comes out of humility and openness for inquiry.

Hegel: One major area Gadamer was influenced by Hegel was in the use of dialectics in his hermeneutics. Though Hegel cannot be said to be the originator of dialectics, he popularized

it. The dialectical movement from a lower stage to a higher universality is fundamental to Gadamer's discussions of the historicity of knowledge seeking subjects as well as the fusion of horizons. Hegel is of the conviction that knowledge is a dialectical process in which both the apprehending consciousness and its objects are altered. For him every new achievement of knowledge is a mediation of the past within a new and expanded context. Simply put, a thesis is countered by an anti-thesis and the outcome of the encounter is what he calls the synthesis. The dialectical method of Hegel is "arguing against the earlier, less sophisticated definitions or views and for the more sophisticated ones later."[13] This dynamic and self-transcending character of knowledge is at the center of Gadamer's concept of understanding as a concrete fusing of horizons. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer asserts that the event of understanding is "the elevation to a higher universality which overcomes not only ones own particularity but also that of the other person"[14]

Subsequently, David E. Linge notes that this higher universality remains finite and surpassable and is not to be equated with Hegel's absolute knowledge in concepts or even in history. Even though Gadamer was influenced by Hegel's dialectics, he never gave any room for absoluteness and objectivity. He rather limited himself to the phenomenological aspect of Hegel's thoughts. Gadamer therefore kept aside Hegel's pursuit of absoluteness and objectivity but retained his dialectics in his hermeneutics. Lauren attests to the fact that Gadamer did not accept in totality Hegel's dialectics thus:

> As we have seen, Gadamer distinguished between early platonic, later platonic and Hegelian dialectic and relies most heavily on the early platonic dialectic due to its reliance on Socratic dialogue. The later platonic and Hegelian dialectic he faults for their proposition and sentential reductionism. For Gadamer, dialectic instructs his own hermeneutics in so far as it suggests a productive tension that, contrary to Hegel's view, is never resolved.[15]

Lauren has made it abundantly clear here that in the real sense of it; Gadamer was drawn to the early platonic dialectic and not even that of Hegel. This notwithstanding dialectic still

instructed Gadamer's hermeneutics even though he takes it to a new and higher level where dialectics gets intertwined with dialogue.

Heidegger: Gadamer had his first encounter with Heidegger through Heidegger's written work on Aristotle which he read in 1921. During the summer of 1923 he pursued studies with Heidegger in Freiburg. When Heidegger was offered a position in Marburg University still in 1923, Gadamer followed him. Heidegger therefore remains a strong influence on Gadamer. Schmidt draws our attention to Heidegger's influence on Gadamer when he writes:

> Gadamer commences his analysis of understanding by quoting Heidegger's claim that the productive possibility of the hermeneutic circle occurs when we realize our constant task is not to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.[16]

Linge adding his voice to this writes that "Heidegger's discovery of the ontological significance of understanding is a major turning point in hermeneutical theory, and Gadamer's work can be conceived as an attempt to work out the implications of the new starting point Heidegger provides."[17] It is therefore obvious that the singular influence Heidegger had on Gadamer is Heidegger's position that understanding is ontological. There could be a two sided understanding to this: first, understanding is a basic constituent of the way humans encounter and discover the world of experience. Understanding is not simply a method for grasping psychological or historical meaning; it is the way that humans exist in the world. Gadamer corroborates this idea when he postulates that:

> But he is no longer dependent on the epistemological requirement that the return to life (Dilthey) and the transcendental reduction (Husserl's way of absolutely radical self-reflection) be based methodologically on the self-givenness of experience. On the contrary, all this became the object of Heidegger's critique. Under the rubric of a "hermeneutic of facticity", Heidegger confronted Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, as well as the distinction between fact and essence on which it depended, with a paradoxical demand. Phenomenology should be ontologically based on the facticity of Dasein, existence that cannot be based on or derived from anything else.[18]

The second understanding relates to the future; this is its projective character. It is a disclosure of one's concrete potentialities for being within the horizon of one's placement in the world. This is important for Gadamer in the sense that understanding as projective is intrinsically related to the future into which Dasein continually projects itself.

Gadamer was also inspired by Heidegger's ideas of temporality of understanding, fore-structure of understanding, circularity and fore-meanings. All these assisted Gadamer in the repositioning of prejudice, tradition/effective history and language as necessary conditions that lead to understanding through interpretation.

There is a close connection between Heidegger's work *Being and Time* and Gadamer's hermeneutics. however Linge notes that "it is nonetheless true that the decisive impact of Heidegger's thought on Gadamer comes with the *lehre* – the 'turn' that distinguishes the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* from the more explicit, even if often more enigmatic, reflection on being that is the dominant theme of Heidegger's later philosophy"[19]

Furthermore Heidegger maintains that the place of language is in the self constitution of being. However, he never discussed the usefulness of language within the hermeneutic context. Gadamer shares in Heidegger's position that language constitutes being but he takes this idea higher than Heidegger. For him the idea of the centrality of language in the constitution of being is the basis for the universalisation of the hermeneutic experience. He at this juncture departs from Heidegger. Another point of departure is noted by Shalin when he writes that:

> Hans-Georg Gadamer declined to follow Heidegger's existential paradigm that seeks to re-describe objective reality in experiential terms and recover the radical singularity of individual existence, but he remained faithful to *Being and Time*'s central premise according to which humans are saturated, and unstated, whose temporal imperatives they cannot evade.[20]

Gadamer insists that prejudices informing our perspectives must not be seen as blinding. These prejudices get filtered off as the legitimate ones are separated from the illegitimate ones. Our everydayness cannot therefore be equated to inauthenticity as tradition would always allow the researcher to shed new light on the past as well as enable him do a more critical reflection on the present. The question of objective knowledge should therefore be set aside as this is not possible with hermeneutics from Gadamer's perspective.

All along we have examined the ideas of some great philosophers who in one way or the other influenced our author. This is an affirmation of the common saying that no one speaks from nowhere. Gadamer was influenced in his philosophical hermeneutics by the thoughts of Plato from whom he learnt the importance of dialogue; Aristotle who exposed him to practical philosophy; Hegel the great dialectician and Heidegger's idea of ontological hermeneutics. In the following section, our task will turn to exposing hermeneutics before Gadamer.

3.2   Hermeneutics before Gadamer

Although the word hermeneutics is a derivative of the Greek word '*hermenia*' which was derived from the name of the messenger god, Hermes, the ancient Greek philosophers never had a systematic discussion on the topic. Hermes, the messenger god had the responsibility of interpreting what the gods would want to communicate to humankind. The responsibility requires that first Hermes understood what the gods said, and then would find the right words that would convey the intended meaning to humankind. It was therefore required of Hermes to interpret the message to the understanding of humankind to avoid any form of misunderstanding even while still retaining the original meaning of what was said by the gods. Beyond this, we can still find some traces of hermeneutics in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The Greek word '*hermeneia*' which means 'expression of thought' was significantly used by Plato in his dialogue *Statesman,* as could be seen in the following lines

"...refer not just to expression of a thought but also to the king's knowledge and to the herald's knowledge since words have the character of commanding or giving instruction about a matter"[21] Aristotle in his work *Peri Hermeneias* used the concept hermeneias from "a logical sense of an assertion being true or false."[22] Aristotle's interest was purely on the cognitive side of meaning especially with affirmative reasoning. The word hermeneutics however was first used systematically by Johann Conrad Dannhauer in the year 1654 when he published his work titled, *Hermeneutics Sacra Sive Methods, Exponendarium Sacrarum Litteraturum (Sacred Hermeneutics, or Method of Explicating-Sacred Scripture).*[23]

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) is regarded as the father of modern hermeneutics. He transformed the traditional Biblical hermeneutics into a general hermeneutics that incorporated texts of all kinds. Texts here refer to anything, not just written words alone but conversation, understanding etc. He opened up the problem of interpretation to a new world of understanding and explanation. Graham writing about Schleiermacher's hermeneutics notes that "what emerged was a methodology for various human sciences."[24]

Schleiermacher in his brand of hermeneutics which he saw as an art of interpretation emphasised on two aspects of interpretation: grammatical and psychological. The grammatical interpretation method involves the understanding of texts, which requires the comprehension of the words and common language. This involves examining the words in relation to the sentences, the sentences in the context of the paragraphs and so on, until one understands the text correctly. This is the hermeneutical circle from Schleiermacher's perspective and Stive explicates further on it thus "we cannot understand the meaning of the whole text apart from understanding the meaning of the individual sentences and even words, in the text. On the other hand, we cannot properly understand the individual parts apart from some grasp of the whole."[25] This position means that the more the interpreter moves back-and-forth within the text, the better he understands the text. Schleiermacher further notes that in grammatical interpretation, "the vocabulary and the history of an author's age together

form a whole from which his writings must be understood as a part."[26] Thus to understand a text through interpretation, the reader must beyond moving back-and-forth within the text, take note of the history and age of the author. This is geared towards understanding the intention of the author.

The other aspect of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is the psychological dimension. This involves the interpreter entering into the creative mind of the original author. This is known as 'authorial intent.' Schleiermacher with this calls on the interpreter to understand the author's individual aim for the composition of the text, and meaning intended by him. To actualize this, Schleiermacher employs the divinatory technique. This method enables the interpreter to recreate the personality and situation associated with the author. Schleiermacher explains that "by leading the interpreter to transform himself, so to speak, into the author, the divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual."[27] This technique may explain why certain words and sentences were used in the composition. The author must therefore be familiar with the author's life and times since it is a prerequisite for the psychological interpretation method.

Summarily, the principles of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics can be itemized thus:

a.   hermeneutics is strictly the art of understanding verbal communication,

b.   hermeneutics should be a universal discipline,

c.   interpretation is a much difficult task than is generally realized,

d.   before the proper interpretation of a text can even begin, the interpreter must acquire a good knowledge of the texts historical context,

e.   interpretation always has two sides: one linguistic, the other psychological.

f.   interpretation requires two methods: comparative and divinatory methods.[28]

Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) was a close associate of Schleiermacher. Because of the closeness of their friendship, "there is a serious question as to which of them can claim the greater credit for ideas which Schleiermacher eventually articulated in his hermeneutics

lectures."[29] Schlegel however is said to have made the following three important contributions to hermeneutics. The first is that texts sometimes express meanings and thoughts, not explicitly in any of their parts, but through their parts and the way in which these are put together to form a whole.[30] This means that the meaning of a text must be seen through the meaning of the individual parts that make up the text. And the parts must be seen as a whole as no individual part can claim to be the sole meaning of the text.

The second is that he opines that we must acknowledge the presence of confusion in texts when it occurs and when this happens, the interpreter must seek to understand and explain it. Schlegel as quoted by Forster asserts that:

> In order to understand someone, one must first of all be cleverer than he, then just as clever, and then also just as stupid. It is not enough that one understands the actual sense of a confused work better than the author understood it. One must also oneself be able to know, to characterize, and even construe the confusion even down to its very principles.[31]

The third contribution is on the role he assigns to unconscious meanings and thoughts in texts and this is why interpretation of them are required. The job of the interpreter therefore is to go beyond an author's conscious meanings and thoughts to include his unconscious ones as well. No wonder he will maintain that "every excellent work ... aims at more than it knows."[32] Thus to understand someone who has a partial understanding of himself would require that the interpreter understands him completely and not partially.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) presents to us hermeneutics as a method of understanding. He made significant contributions towards understanding of the scope of hermeneutics and its significance even though he was inspired by the works of Schleiermacher. He posits that scientific explanation of nature (*erklären*) must be completed with a theory of how the world is given to human beings through symbolically mediated practices. For him, man is a historical being and history according to him is "a series of world views."[33] Subsequently, man according to him only understands himself not through reflection or introspection but only through what "history can tell him ... never in objective

concepts but always only in the living experiences which springs up out of the depths of his own being."[34] He also emphasised on the "intrinsic temporality of all understanding which implies that man's understanding is dependent on past worldviews, interpretations and shared world."[35] Dilthey further corroborated Schleiermacher's process of interpretive inquiry called the hermeneutic circle. This for him is the recurring movement between the implicit and the explicit, the particular and the whole.

In addition, Dilthey is of the view that interpretation is the central task of the human sciences – (*Geisteswissenchaften*). This contrasts however with the natural sciences that focuses on explanation. Human sciences here include history, literary studies, classical scholarship, anthropology and history. He states that the intellectual need for interpretive narration is more fundamental than that for causal explanation.[36] He opines further that "the interpretive achievements of the disciplines in question can enrich our drab lives by acquainting us with types of mental experience that are very different from our own."[37]

Finally, Dilthey argues that hermeneutics should have the status of genuine sciences like the natural sciences. His idea here is that despite the difference in method, interpretation can still claim the status of a science on the account of the following reasons:

a.   its subject matter, the meaning of expression, is as objective as that dealt with by the natural sciences,

b.   due to the sorts of deep variations in concepts, beliefs, etc between different historical periods, cultures, and even individuals ... interpretations turns out to be a very challenging task, requiring very rigorous methods – just like natural sciences.[38]

Dilthey also admits that induction and hypotheses are involved in both the sciences and human sciences.[39] For Forster this furnishes us with a third reason for according interpretation the status of science alongside the natural sciences.[40] Thus hermeneutics is a method for the human sciences (*Gesiteswissenchaften*) for him since it also involves induction and hypothesis.

Martin Heidegger, (1889-1976) is a major influential figure of hermeneutics in the twentieth century. His major ideas on hermeneutics are contained in his famous work *Being and Time* (1927). While Schleiermacher conceived hermeneutics as an art of interpretation and Dilthey argued that it is a method of interpretation, Heidegger makes a shift from these perspectives and raised hermeneutics to the status of ontology. For him, hermeneutics is ontological, that is, it is a mode of being or a way of being.

His fundamental contribution to the course of hermeneutics is his conviction that meaning and thought are essentially dependent on language. He believes that understanding and interpretation constitute far broader phenomena than what was believed by the various historical manifestations of hermeneutics. Heidegger shifted the focus of hermeneutics from interpretation to existential understanding. Hermeneutics is a way of being in the world than merely as "a way of knowing."[41] This means that hermeneutics is a mode of Dasein, or man and since it is a mode of man, man does not require any method to interpret his object of knowledge. For example if I am in the office and some persons walk into the office, I do not require any method to interpret if what came into the office are human beings or not. Hermeneutics is part of man's everydayness. Thus, hermeneutic understanding proceeds to indicate some general formal characteristics of existence.

In addition, Heidegger maintains that the understanding of meanings and the possession of language are fundamental and pervasive modes of the existence of Dasein, or Man. Forster explains this further:

> Another of Heidegger's key ideas, found in the same paragraphs of *Being and Time* (paragraphs 31-34) develops an aspect of that first idea in a more specific way: fundamental and pervasive in Dasein, or Man, is a sort of "fore-understanding (*Vorverständnis*)" which essentially underpins explicit linguistic understanding, and which is involved for example even in cases of perceptual or active engagement with the world where explicit linguistic articulation is absent.[42]

The possession of language by Dasein or Man makes it natural for our understanding to be hermeneutical thereby making hermeneutics part of Man's existence.

Another major contribution of Heidegger to the development of hermeneutics is his discussions on the hermeneutic circle. Martin Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* moved to universalize the importance of the hermeneutic circle. For him, the nature of understanding is circular. The high point of his discussion on this matter is the claim that all interpretations arise from a previous understanding. His understanding of the hermeneutic circle is not methodological but ontological. It is against this background he maintains that the hermeneutical circle does not mean going back and forth between parts and whole in a text. Lonergan expresses this thus:

> Understanding and with it the hermeneutical circle, becomes a whole, only through the parts. At the same time, the parts are determined in their meaning by the whole which each part partially reveals. Such is the hermeneutical circle. Logically, it is a circle. But coming to understand is not a logical deduction. It is a self-correcting process of learning that spirals into the meaning of the whole by using each part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in reading the earlier parts.[43]

The ontological hermeneutics does not just describe the understanding of a text, but it has become a fundamental principle of man's understanding of his own nature and situation. According to Heidegger "what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. The circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein."[44]

With this Heidegger has taken hermeneutical circle above the relationship between whole and part as witnessed in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Ontologically the hermeneutic circle becomes the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein. John Macquarie in his commentary on Heidegger in his work *Martin Heidegger* notes that the hermeneutical circle (from Heidegger's perspective) "is not to be understood like the circular reasoning that begs the questions."[45] It is rather "a relatedness backward and forward that is present in every act of interpretation."[46] Hence, all interpretation must arise from a previous understanding no

matter how vague it may be and the goal is to lead to a new understanding which can then become the basis for further interpretation. Categorically for him, all interpretation is grounded in a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception.[47] Commenting on the above position of Heidegger, Randy in the work "Hermeneutic Circle – Vicious or Victorious" notes that:

> The purpose of interpretation is not to escape this preunderstanding but rather to explicate what is present there in an implicit or vague manner. Once interpretation has accomplished this, the circle does not cease to exist. Rather the new understanding becomes the pre-understanding of the following experience.[48]

Thus preunderstanding is a very vital tool in the process of understanding; it is the initiator of the process of understanding. However the interesting thing here is that it only initiates the process and it is not itself the process or the end result of the process.

The above serves as a background to our research work. Our interest is not just to establish how the views of Hans G. Gadamer differ from the views of all these philosophers of hermeneutics but to philosophically appraise his views with a keen interest in closing the gap between what man knows and what he does, since Socrates has made us to understand that there is a tight link between knowledge and action, thus to know the good should translate into doing the good.

3.3 Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Point of Departure

Gadamer's point of departure in his hermeneutics is his rejection/criticism of the methodological dominance of the human sciences by the natural sciences. He became dissatisfied with the fact that human sciences (*Geisteswissenchaften*) had adopted method in their studies like the natural sciences. According to him in the opening paragraph of his magnus opus *Truth and Method:*

The logical self-reflection which accompanied the development of the human sciences in the nineteenth century is wholly dominated by the model of the natural sciences. Just a glance at the history of the word *Geisteswissenchaft* shows this, although this word acquires the meaning that is familiar to us only in its plural form. The human sciences (*Geisteswisenchaften)* so obviously understand themselves from the analogy with the natural sciences that the idealistic echo that lies in the idea of Geist fades into the background.[49]

Gadamer shows his dissatisfaction with the fact that the human sciences have been subsumed by the methodological manipulations of the natural sciences. For him the inductive method of the experimental sciences should not have been used in studying the human sciences even though there was the assumption that it was the only valid method in the field. Although this has been the case, especially in the 19th century where the human sciences where studied with the same method as in the natural sciences, Gadamer however opines that:

But now the real problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not properly grasped the nature of the human sciences if one measures them by the yardstick of an increasing knowledge of regularity. The experience of the socio-historical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences.[50]

Predictions cannot be made in the field of the human sciences based on regularity. He further affirms that "the individual case does not serve only to corroborate a regularity from which predictions can in turn be made."[51] Thus instead of pursuing general knowledge based on the inductive method, man should strive towards understanding

the phenomena itself in its unique and historical concreteness. However much general experience is involved, the aim is not to confirm and expand these general experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law, e.g., how man, peoples and states evolve, but to understand how this man, this people or this state is what it has become – more generally, how has it happened that it is so.[52]

Objects of knowledge should therefore be studied on their merit base on the fact that they have their particular experiences that are unique to them and not based on any general theory or laws as may be the case in the natural sciences. Gadamer further insists that the social

sciences have nothing to do with method. He reiterates this point in his anthology, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* when he notes that:

> ... the *Geisteswissenchaften*, were the starting point of my analysis in *Truth and Method* precisely because they related to experiences that have nothing to do with method and sciences but lie beyond science – like the experience of art and the experience of culture that bears the imprint of its historical tradition.[53]

The social sciences according to him relate to experiences that have nothing to do with method and its studying must be done without a method that could lead to the alienation of truth in pursuance of objective knowledge.

It is important to note here that Method as well as Truth remains the main subject of Gadamer's work *Truth and Method.* In this work, Gadamer was never interested in defining method; neither did he elaborate the implications of method. Weinsheimer observes that "that Gadamer leaves method undefined is typical of *Truth and Method* and itself embodies the suspicions about method that inform the book."[54] He however concludes that "definition is the foundation and fruition of methodic knowledge"[55] and since Gadamer is opposed to methodic knowledge, it will therefore be contradicting indulging in the definitions of method or elaborating its implications. Gadamer abandons the definition of method but "proceeds to the history of its humanistic alternatives that is in part because history is itself the alternative to method."[56] In the words of Weinsheimer, Gadamer's aim for not defining method is:

> ...to make sense of and legitimate certain ideas, but not to prove them. They cannot be proved, not because of their intrinsic irrationality, still less because they are false, but rather, precisely because they call into questions the belief that proof is our sole means of access to truth. As methodical proof calls a halt to history and obviates any further need to consult tradition as a source of knowledge, so also art, philosophy, history – tradition generally – challenge the universality and exhaustiveness of method as the exclusive means whereby knowledge worthy of being called true disclosed.[57]

Gadamer's primary concern remains to make legitimate certain ideas. And some of these ideas are that we can understand a thing by considering its history, tradition and language. He

was not interested in proving the ideas based on any given methodology but his interest remains to make known all the necessary conditions that can enable us ascertain the truth through understanding that comes from interpretation.

Gadamer's point of departure therefore remains the rejection of method as the sole source of truth. For him, method cannot guarantee truth, it can only lead to knowledge based on explanation. He conceives of method in the natural sciences as one and the same. According to him "what one calls method in modern science is everywhere one and the same, and only displays itself in an exemplary manner in the natural sciences"[58] Weinsheimer elaborates this better when he writes that "Gadamer's conception of method is abstract and essentially unhistorical, and that fact justifies the endeavour that follows to winnow it out from the dispersed passages of *Truth and Method* where it appears"[59] It is on the account of the abstract uniformity of method that Gadamer's contention that the human and natural sciences are distinct depends on because for him what is scientific about the human sciences derives from elsewhere than methodology.[60] Thus method cannot make the human sciences scientific since it derives its scientific nature from that which is above method.

3.3.2 Gadamer's Critique of the Epistemic Superiority of Natural Science

Gadamer was never of the opinion that the method of science cannot lead to knowledge but he objects to the fact that only scientific method can lead to knowledge. Though he accepts that it can lead to knowledge, but he rejects the position that the scientific method is the only source of objective truth when he writes that "the truth that science speaks to us is itself relative to a determinate behaviour toward the world and cannot at all claim to be the whole."[61] Science has always made a claim to superior knowledge over the human and social sciences. Sometime in the history of philosophy especially in the modern era of philosophy natural science had substantial influence on the methodic philosophies of

Descartes and Bacon. Weinsheimer shares in this opinion when he writes that, "the search for the foundations of knowledge – its possibility and legitimacy remained the dominant theme of philosophy from Descartes to Husserl."[62] Thus any brand of knowledge that fails to follow the scientific method was regarded as mere metaphysics which Hume suggests that books containing it and divinity should be set aflame since they contain nothing but sophistry.

However Gadamer in his hermeneutics made it clear that scientific method can lead to explanation of facts but cannot lead to the understanding of the facts. It can lead to knowledge but not objective truth as it claims. It is important to note that Gadamer has monolithic, homogeneous and fixed views of method and natural sciences. And that is why he would assert that "what one calls method in modern science is everywhere one and the same, and only displays itself in an especially exemplary manner in the natural sciences."[63] Against this backdrop, Gadamer only discusses method as a homogeneity.

Furthermore, Gadamer argues that method became the foundation of knowledge, its possibility and legitimacy during the modern period of philosophy because of what he calls *Fremdheit. Fremdheit* according to Weinsheimer is "the condition of being no longer at home in the world."[64] To be at home means to belong, "to live in surroundings that are familiar, self-evident, and unobtrusive, its contrary, *Fremdheit,* consists in the schism between past and present, I and others, self and world."[66] He also opines that method derives from this sense of living among objects to which one no longer belongs. Gadamer highlights more on this alienation when he writes:

> As the foreignness which the age of mechanics felt toward nature as the natural world has its epistemological expression in the concept of self-consciousness and in the methodologically developed rule of certainty, of 'clear and distinct perception', so also the human sciences of the nineteenth century felt a comparable foreignness with respect to the historical world. The spiritual creations of the past, art and history, no longer belong to the self-evident domain of the present but rather are objects relinquished to research data from which a past allows itself to be represented.[67]

From the point of view of Gadamer therefore, because man has alienated himself from the world, he needed method to fill in the gap created by this alienation. Because he no longer sees himself as belonging to his world, he sees himself as the subject while every other thing including his fellow men as objects and the only way he could get across to the objects is through the methods he has formulated. The method allows him to study these realities without getting personally involved with the realities. There is a sense of loss in the movement from being at home to *Fremdheit.* According to Weisheimer, this is "the movement in which one's world devolves into the material of knowledge."[68] Man feels he has lost his world and the only way to get it back is through method. Weisheimer would however note in line with Gadamer that "if natural science however rigorous its methods or extensive its research – will never comprehend the whole truth, that is ultimately because the whole truth does not and never will exit."[69] We must bear in mind here that Gadamer is of the perspective that truth happens as an event and this is continuous.

Gadamer following Immanuel Kant asks an all important question, "how is understanding possible? For our author, "this is a question which precedes any action of understanding on the part of subjectivity, including the methodical activity of the understanding sciences' *(verstehende Geisteswissenchaften)* and their norms and rules."[70] This question goes beyond the grasp of method as method cannot explain how understanding is possible. This can only be explained by hermeneutics according to Gadamer, understanding is a mode-of-being of Dasein as proposed by Heidegger. Gadamer uses the concept hermeneutics in the above sense and for him "it denotes the basic being-in-motion of There-being which constitutes its finiteness and historicity and hence includes the whole of its experience of the world."[71] Understanding is a mode of being of man and it happens as an event. It does not need and cannot be explained with the aid of the scientific method.

It should be re-echoed here that the fundamental challenge of method consists in its presumption that it exhausts the sphere of truth. However, Gadamer would consign the truth of beings to natural science and preserves the truth of being for hermeneutics. Even at this distinction, Gadamer's major worry with method and natural science is that for him "the concept of knowledge based on scientific procedures tolerates no restriction of its claim to universality."[72] While method claims to comprehend all that in truth is, hermeneutics seeks to understand what happened "beyond our willing and doing"[73] Bacon as quoted by Weisheimer writes that method has a singular ambition which is to "extend the empire of man over things, exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to the mind."[74] It is against the background of such thinking that Gadamer argues that "even the theoretical attitude of modern science does not direct its questions at nature for particular purpose. True, the manner of its questions and investigations is aimed at the domination of what exists and so must in itself be called practical."[75] The activities of natural science therefore according to him remain a wilful domination of existents.

Consequently Gadamer criticizes the superiority claim by natural science on the following fronts: First, "the truth that science speaks to us is itself relative to a determinate behaviour toward the world and cannot at all claim to be the whole."[76] Furthermore, he contests the supposition that being in itself is singular and, in particular, that being as science knows it comprehends all that in truth is"[77] The position of our author is that no matter how rigorous the method of science claims to be, it can never comprehend the whole truth because the whole truth does not exist. The implication of this is that no one, not even science with its inductive method can claim to be exhaustive on the grounds that truth keeps happening.

Other argument against method is that method is designed in such a way that it does not just manipulate the object of study, it further controls the researcher or the subject that knows. Thus with method both the object and subject are under control in the sense that what

is known about the object is what is allowed by method. For Gadamer the sole aim of all these control is to render tradition inert and eliminate the effects of prejudice.[78] Gadamer would however argue further that such elimination is not possible because our thinking of the world is pre-determined by our pre-understanding of the world. For him therefore, no method can pretend to be perfectly foundational or perfectly free of prejudice.[79]

As a way of summing up this section, it is important to recall here that for Gadamer, method remains a response to the alienation of self and world and it is also an attempt at overcoming the world. Accepted that hermeneutics is also a response to this same alienation, however, what distinguishes the two is that method responds to the said alienation with alienation. According to Weinsheimer:

> In objectifying the object by purifying the subject, method derives a wedge between them, and so itself prevents the reunion that is its goal. Instead of home coming from the condition of *Fremdheit*, method strives for dominion over the world. It aims not to understand the world but to change it, to recreate it in the image of consciousness.[80]

And since method responds to the perceived alienation with alienation, it cannot and should not claim epistemic superiority over human sciences. And that is why Gadamer would aver that "the hermeneutical experience as it is operative in all these cases is not in itself the object of methodical alienation but is directed against alienation. The hermeneutical experience is prior to all methodical alienation because it is the matrix out of which arise the questions that it then directs to science."[81] The hermeneutical experience is prior because our thought of the world around us is preceded by our understanding of part of the world. Thus we approach the world from a perspective which is already understood or presumed to be understood. We do not therefore start thinking with a *tabula raza* kind of mindset. Our thoughts are directed or initiated by our prejudices or biases that immanent as a result of our encounter with the world. In the section that follows we will discuss the nature of Gadamer's hermeneutics in detail.

3.4   The Nature of Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Gadamer in his discussions on his brand of hermeneutics refers to it as philosophical hermeneutics. Before now we have had hermeneutics as a psychological process and methodology of understanding as witnessed in the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey respectively. Heidegger called his ontological hermeneutics. Gadamer refers to his as philosophical as a way of showing his dissatisfaction with the idea of hermeneutics been regarded as a method of understanding. We have in the previous pages attest that Gadamer conceives method as limiting and cannot lead to truth. In his work *Truth and Method,* he argues that:

> From its historical origin, the problem of hermeneutics goes beyond the limits that the concept of method sets to modern science. The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but is obviously part of the total human experience of the world. The hermeneutical phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all.[82]

Inasmuch as science has claimed that method could lead to knowledge as well as truth, we are left with an unavoidable question which queries thus: "but what kind of insight and what kind of truth"[83] can it lead to that should be sought for? For Gadamer the kind of truth that must be sought for must be one that "transcends the sphere of the control of scientific method wherever it is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy."[84] The human sciences as it were, are modes of experience that cannot be ratified by the scientific method and therefore should not be limited by adopting the scientific method in studying them.

Furthermore, Gadamer opines that "the hermeneutics developed here is not, therefore, a methodology of the human sciences, but an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of the world."[85] It is therefore not surprising when he states that his real concern "was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what

happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."[86] This in clear terms states as well as highlights the nature of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, i.e. an attempt at deciphering what happens after our doing and willing. At this level, method seizes to function since it has gone beyond the empirical realm. Earlier, Schleiermacher and Dilthey followed the Cartesian and enlightenment ideal of the autonomous subject who successfully extricates himself from the immediate entanglements of history and the prejudices that comes with it. Gadamer however criticizes this position by asking, "is it the case that the knower can leave his immediate situation in the present merely by adopting an attitude."[87] Our historicity therefore is not accidental, it is ontological, thus "the knower's own present situation is already constitutively involved in any process of understanding."[88] For Gadamer, even though there is a temporal gulf separating the knower from his object, the knower is still bound to his present situation. This boundness to the present situation and the temporal gulf separating the knower from his object is the productive ground for understanding according to Gadamer.

Consequently, in his philosophical hermeneutics prejudice unlike the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey do not separate us from the past, "but initially open it up to us. They are positive enabling condition of historical understanding commensurate with human finitude."[89] Writing further he attests that, "the historicity of our existence entails the prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constituting the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world."[90] This is one of the three necessary conditions that enhance hermeneutic understanding according to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. For him it is not possible to do away with prejudice since we encounter our objects of knowledge first with the biases we have about them. In the process of interacting and encountering these objects, we are opened up better for proper dialogue with the objects. Through the process of dialogue and interaction with the objects the illegitimate prejudices are fizzled out while the legitimate prejudices will lead us to a fusion

of horizon with that of the object that eventually leads to a better understanding of the object. Gadamer here reinvents prejudice which was seen completely in the enlightenment era as negative. In his philosophical hermeneutics, prejudice assumes a positive role in the transmission of meaning. Efforts will be made further to elaborate on this condition in subsequent sections.

The next necessary condition that enables understanding to take place is effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). This has to do with the past, the history of a thing which in the case of Schleiermacher and Dilthey should be reproduced by the interpreter. For Gadamer it is effective history because it is what makes "possible the conversation between each new interpreter and the text or event he seeks to understand."[91] He further admonishes interpreters to be critically self conscious of effective history. According to him "reflection on a given pre-understanding brings before me something that otherwise happens 'behind my back.' Something-but not everything, for what I have called the consciousness of effective history is inescapably more being than consciousness, and being is never fully manifest."[92] In the course of understanding through interpretation, the interpreter does not just see his present situation as a privileged position; he must see it as he sees the past that has been overcome through the process of fusion of horizon with that of his object. It is at the point of the fusion of horizon that understanding is seen in its genuine productivity. Gadamer explains this position more when he writes:

> In truth, the horizon of the present is conceived in constant formation insofar as we must all constantly test our prejudices. The encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition out of which we have come is not the last factor in such testing. Hence the horizon of the present does not take shape at all without the past. There is just as little a horizon of the present in itself as there are historical horizons which one would have to attain. Rather, understanding is always a process of the fusing of such alleged horizons existing in themselves.... In the working of tradition such fusion occurs constantly. For the old and new grow together again and again in living value without the one or the other ever being removed explicitly.[93]

The above picture opens us up to what happens when meaning is transmitted. It has also shown us what the role of the interpreter is as well as what role the past plays in the process of understanding through interpretation.

The next and final but not the least necessary condition for understanding through interpretation is language. Language is a major condition that enables understanding to take place. It is the medium in which the past and present actually interpenetrate. The process of fusion of horizon is primarily linguistic. According to Gadamer there is no separation between language and reality and our understanding is limited by the limit of our common language. Our experience of the world is linguistic because we never had "an extra-linguistic contact with the world and then put this world into the instrumentation of language."[94] Any attempt at this according to Gadamer makes language an instrument. He therefore opines that:

> Language is by no means simply an instrument or a tool. For it belongs to the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service. That is not the same as when we take the words of a language, lying ready in the mouth, and with their use let them sink back into the general store of words over which we dispose. Such an analogy is false because we never find ourselves as consciousness over against the world and, as it were grasp after a tool of understanding in a wordless condition. Rather, in all our knowledge of the world, we are always already encompassed by the language which is our own.[95]

Gadamer in the above passage highlights that language and understanding are inseparable. The possession of language by man is the ontological condition for our understanding of the texts that address us.

Furthermore, Gadamer in his conception of language holds that language is unconscious of itself. This means that when one knows a particular language, it does not mean he knows the rules and structures of the language, but rather he has known how to make himself understood by others regarding the subject matter.[96] Commenting on this Linge writes that "language claims no autonomous being of its own, but instead has its being in its

disclosive power. It is on this level that language emerges as the universal medium of understanding."[97] Chapter four of this work elaborates more on Gadamer's discussions on language and the role it plays in interpretive knowledge.

3.5   Nature of Understanding in Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Understanding for Gadamer is an event that happens through the dialectical or dialogical process. Understanding does not involve a recovering or a reproduction of an author's worldview. It is an event that involves genuine questioning of the subject matter. This according to Linge "involves a laying open and holding open of possibilities that suspend the presumed finality of both the texts' and the reader's current opinions."[98] The dialectical nature of this process is that for one to understand the subject matter of a text, there is always the need to locate its questions and also allow the subject matter of the text to question the reader as well. Through the questions asked both by the reader and the subject matter of the text, the reader transcends the historical horizon of the text and fuses it with his own horizon. It is at the point of complete fusion of these horizons that we can now say that understanding has taken place.

In addition, imagination is a strong force in Gadamer's concept of understanding. It is very vital because it is that which enables one to see what is questionable in the subject matter and to formulate questions that will question the subject matter of the text further. As understanding occurs in a dialogical form, the interpreter does not stand over or beyond the subject matter. "In real understanding as in real dialogue, the interpreter is engaged by the subject matter."[99] Gadamer further contends that "the real event of understanding goes continually beyond what can be brought to understanding of the other person's words by methodological effort and critical self-control. It is true of every conversation that through it something different has come to be."[100]

Furthermore we also see Gadamer's notion of understanding in his analogy of play. The phenomenon of play holds that individual players are absorbed into the back-and-forth movement of the play. Players lose themselves in the game. The game is not an action of subjectivity but the subject of play is the game itself. Efforts will be made in the preceding sections to discuss in details Gadamer's analogy of play. But suffice it to say that the nature of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics is both dialectical and dialogical. It is an event that occurs and in it the interpreter does not solely in anyway determine how it occurs. He is a participant just like the text or his object of interpretation in the process of interpretation. At the end of the event of understanding, the new meanings made should supersede the views of both the interpreter and that of the text or object of interpretation.

It is also vital to note that understanding in Gadamer's perspective does not entail that one agrees with whatever or whomever one understands. Understanding means for Gadamer that one recognizes that the other person could be right in what he or she says or wants to say. It is not simply mastering something that stands opposite you whether it is the other person or the whole objective world in general. It is rather allowing the objects to disclose truth in their various forms as the case may be.

3.6   Disclosure of Truth in Arts

Gadamer is of the view that art works can disclose truth to us in the same manner as interpreters. He however compares the experience of hermeneutic truth in art to the experience of play in which when one plays a game, the player is not in control of the game but rather the game transcends the player. The implication of this is that we cannot control truth by some method. Truth is rather revealed to us and is unfolded in front of us through our everyday lives, and cannot be controlled.

3.6.1 Understanding the Work of Art through the Analogy of Play

Gadamer in his article tilted *Aesthetics and Hermeneutics* posits that the work of art speaks to us directly. It grips our entire being and each time we encounter it, we encounter ourselves. The work of art for him does not retain its historical origin within itself. The truth it expresses cannot be reduced to the original thoughts of the creator. The work of art communicates itself and not the thoughts of its creator or that of the beholder or interpreter who seeks to understand it through interpretation. He notes that:

> The work of art is the expression of a truth that cannot be reduced to what its creator actually thought in it. Whether we call it the unconscious creation of the genius or consider the conceptual inexhaustibility of every artistic expression from the point of view of the beholder, the aesthetic consciousness can appeal to the fact that the work of art communicates itself.[101]

To understand a work of art means understanding that which it communicates. In the light of the above, Gadamer affirms that a work of art occupies a timeless present. This means it cannot be confined to history. It is not understood historically but by "the application of a standard of appropriateness."[102] He however commends Kant who explained the standard of appropriateness as the universal validity required of the judgment of taste whose recognition cannot be compelled by reasons. In addition, he maintains that the work of art speaks to us and it is our responsibility to understand meaning of what it says to us and make it clear to ourselves and others. Though the work of art is non-linguistic it is within the province of the proper task of hermeneutics.

In continuation of the discussion on how understanding takes place in works of art, Gadamer analyses the concept of play as a clue to the ontological explanation of the ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutical experience. Thus the ontology of the work of art is explained here through the explanation of the concept of play. He began his discussion on the concept of play by highlighting what play is not. Play is not subjective, it is neither the

attitude nor the state of mind of the creator, not even is it the state of mind of those enjoying the play. Play for him is "the mode of being of the work of art itself"[103] This according to him is very important. Though the concept of play is regarded as not being serious however Aristotle as noted by Gadamer, posits that we play for the purpose of recreation. Against this background, Gadamer argues that "the player himself knows that play is only play and exists in a world which is determined by seriousness of purposes. But he does not know this in such a way that, as a player, he actually intends this relation to seriousness."[104] The purpose of play is fulfilled when the player loses himself in the play. What therefore makes play completely play is the seriousness of playing. Failure to take the game or play seriously, he argues, spoils the play. The nature of the mode of being of play does not allow the player to treat play as an object.

Relating the above view to the experience of the work of art, Gadamer opines that "the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it."[105] Just as play has its essence independent of those playing it; the essence of the work of art is the work itself and not the subjectivity of the person experiencing it. Furthermore, Gadamer vouches for the noteworthiness of the game over the players who are engaged in it. When a player is fully committed to the play, he enjoys the freedom of many possibilities. Nevertheless, this freedom goes with some form of danger. The danger is the risk of enjoying ones freedom of decision making in the play that could lead one to decisions that could limit the player. Gadamer explains further that:

> One can only play with serious possibilities. This means obviously that one may become so engrossed in them that they, as it were, outplay one and prevail over one. The attraction of the game, which it exercises on the player lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision, which at the same time is endangered and irremovably limited.[106]

For Gadamer, the real subject of a game is the game and not the players. It is the game that draws them to play and keeps them at playing. Every play is playing of something and requires a to-and-fro movement which determines the attitude of the game and also marks it off from other games. Every game presents to the individual who plays it with a task. This playing individual, Gadamer writes "cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out except by transforming the aims of his behaviour into mere tasks of the game."[107]

Subsequently, Gadamer examined play as self-representation. Play, according to him is limited by self-representation because the mode of being of play is self-representation. He further notes that "the self-representation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-representation by playing, i.e. representing something. Only because play is always representation is human play able to find the task of the game in representation itself."[108] The idea of self-representation of play is also applicable to the being of art. Plays according to him are not represented for anyone, i.e. they are not aimed at the audience but they are, like art, self representing. Thus, the true nature of play like that of art is self-representation. It is the playing of the play that speaks to the spectators through its representation and "this is in such a way that the spectator, despite the distance between it and himself, still belongs to it."[109]

Following this analogy of play, Gadamer upholds that the being of art cannot be determined as an object of an aesthetic awareness. The being of art is determined through the essential process of representation. Gadamer's thesis therefore is that:

> ... the work of art is play, i.e. that its actual being cannot be detached from its representation and that in the representation the unity and identity of a structure emerge. To be dependent on self-representation is part of its nature. This means that however much it may be changed and distorted in the representation, it still remains itself. This constitutes the validity of every representation, that it contains a relation to the structure itself and submits itself to the criterion of its correctness.[110]

Gadamer's notion of art as representational play has the purpose of being what it is, represent what it does, outside the subjectivity of its participants. Art is transformed into play through structure and cannot be compared with reality. It is not just a mimesis especially in the Platonic understanding which is a sort of copying. Art reveals what is essential, it is a realization and through it people can recognize how things are, i.e. reality which means within this context a thing that is not yet transformed. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer understands art as the raising up of reality to its truth.

3.7   Disclosure of Truth in History

This is the second disclosure of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics. In his views we cannot step outside of history and have a completely objective understanding. History he opines, prepares us for understanding. Understanding for Gadamer does not involve an examination of the author's historical situation as if it were a detached entity. Rather, we belong to history and scholarship entails being able to fuse the past horizon with the new horizon and this is imperative for all understanding.

3.7.1   The Hermeneutic Circle and the Problem of Prejudice

Gadamer began his discussion on the hermeneutical circle with a reflection on Heidegger's hermeneutical circle. He acknowledged that Heidegger delved into the problems of historical hermeneutics simply to develop the fore-structure of understanding. For Gadamer, Heidegger's description of the hermeneutic circle is not a vicious circle or even a circle that can merely be tolerated as the way in which interpretation through understanding is achieved. According to him "the point of Heidegger's hermeneutical thinking is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance. The description as such will be obvious to every interpreter who knows what he is about."[111] Gadamer therefore cautions that our interpretation must be on guard against

arbitrary fancies and limitations. That even though some distractions may emanate from the interpreter, he should fix his gaze on the object he is interpreting. He further notes that:

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again the later emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.[112]

Understanding achieves its full meaning potentially only when the fore-meanings it uses are not arbitrary and the interpreter must examine explicitly the legitimacy, i.e. the origin and validity of the fore-meanings present within him. These are the fundamental requirement of the procedure of understanding anything.

Next is how a text can be protected from misunderstanding? Gadamer admonishes first that we must not hold blindly to our own fore-meaning of the subject of the interpretation if we must understand the meaning of another. We are rather called to remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. This openness according to him "always includes our placing the other meaning in a relation with the whole of our meanings or ourselves in a relation to it."[113] Thus, a hermeneutically trained mind must from the start, be sensitive to the text's quality of newness. The text has something new to tell the reader cum researcher, and to get at this new meaning even when the reader cum researcher approaches it with his fore-knowledge, he must allow it to express itself to him. All that is required of the interpreter is to be aware of his prejudice for the text to assert its own truth against the interpreter's prejudices.

Furthermore, Gadamer commended Heidegger's recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice. In his view, prejudice during the enlightenment era lost its positive meaning. He writes that this period had one essential prejudice and this was the prejudice against prejudice itself. According to him, "historical analysis shows that it is not

until the enlightenment that the concept of prejudice acquires the negative aspect we are familiar with."[114] Gadamer further corroborates the common definition of prejudice as "a judgement that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined"[115] in his attempt at re-inventing the word 'prejudice'. Examining the concept from both its French and Latin roots, '*préjudice*' and '*praejudicium*' and German "*vorurteil*" respectively, which both mean 'adverse effect', 'disadvantage' and 'harm', Gadamer argues that this negative sense of the word is only a consecutive since they depend on the positive validity of the provisional decision as a prejudgement. Prejudice for him therefore does not mean a false judgement rather it is part of the idea that a judgement can have a positive and a negative value. He however maintains that because of the negative influence of the enlightenment period and the Cartesian methodological doubt, the modern science has no place for prejudice. He therefore took it upon himself to re-invent the word and give its proper place in the scheme of things.

3.7.2   Prejudice as a Condition of Understanding

Gadamer identifies that there are two sources of prejudice and these are authority and tradition. For him the understanding of prejudice must be rehabilitated having been destroyed by the enlightenment philosophers who only saw it as being negative. If we must do justice to man's finite and historical mode of being, then there is need to recognize the existence of legitimate prejudice, he opines. But this vital recognition cannot be successful if no solution is found for these two all-important epistemological questions; first, where is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? Secondly, what distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of the critical reason to overcome? Thus for him there are prejudices that are legitimate and those that are illegitimate. The task now is how to distinguish the two.

Approaching this task of distinguishing the legitimate from the illegitimate prejudice, he notes that prejudice within the enlightenment period was seen as over-hastiness. Over-hastiness here implies prejudice in favour of the new. It is a predisposition to the overhasty rejection of truths simply because they are old and are attested to by authorities and tradition. Hence, new ideas received more acceptances over old ideas because the older ideas were seen as been supported by authorities and traditions. Consequently the enlightenment period subjected all authority to reason. It is therefore not surprising when Descartes says that prejudice is the source of all error in the use of reason. Gadamer attributes the division of prejudice into narrowness of view and over-hastiness as the causes of misunderstanding by Schleiermacher, as a sign of the fulfilment of the enlightenment. Writing further on Schleiermacher's position, he observes that:

> In fact, however, the decisive question is concealed behind the concept of narrowness, that the prejudices that determined what I think are due to my own narrowness of vision is a judgment that is made from the standpoint of their dissolution and illumination and holds only of unjustified prejudices. If, contrariwise, there are justified prejudices productive of knowledge, then we are back with the problem of authority. Hence, the radical consequences of the enlightenment, which are still contained in Schleiermacher's faith in method, are not tenable.[116]

In the above position of Gadamer, it is obvious that he refused to accept hermeneutic as a method which constituted majorly the philosophy of the enlightenment. However, he sees as legitimate the distinction the enlightenment drew between faith in authority and the use of one's reason. For him authority is a source of prejudice if it takes place of one's personal judgment. It can be a source of truth even though the enlightenment criticized this unfairly. According to him:

> In fact the denigration of authority is not the only prejudice of the enlightenment. Within the enlightenment, the very concept of authority becomes deformed. On the basis of its concept of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be seen as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom; to be, in fact, blind obedience. This is the meaning that we know, from the usage of their critics, within modern dictatorships.[117]

Because of the enlightenment's persistent insistence on reason and freedom, authority was no longer seen as a source of truth or prejudice. It was rather reduced to blind obedience.

Gadamer proceeds by clarifying what authority is and how it is acquired by the individual. Even though persons are said to have authority, for him, the authority of a person is based ultimately not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence. Authority is not actually bestowed on the individual but the individual acquires it. It rests on recognition and recognition in itself is an act of reasoning which manifests itself with one being aware of his limitations and accepts that the other person have better understanding of a particular thing. Hence authority has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command which was the understanding of the enlightenment rather it has a lot to do with knowledge.

When authority is recognised, it is seen in principle to be true. The essence of authority in his opinion belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the enlightenment. This point is highlighted with examples of the authority of teachers, experts and the superiors and the kind of knowledge they impart on others. Gadamer calls this objective prejudice as they bring about the same bias in favour of something that can come about through other means.

The other source of prejudice which Gadamer examines is tradition. For him, in agreement with the rationalists, anything sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority. Historically speaking, "the authority of what has been transmitted and not only what is clearly grounded has power over our attitudes and behaviour."[118] Tradition also play major role in education and that is why he notes that:

> All education depends on this, and even though, in the case of education, the educator loses his function when his charge comes of age and sets his

own insight and decisions in the place of the authority of the educator, this movement into maturity in his own life does not mean that a person becomes his own master in the sense that he becomes free of all tradition.[119]

Thus no matter how one becomes an authority in his area of specialization, he cannot claim a total freedom from the tradition that made him. Tradition on this account has justification outside the arguments of reason and in large measure it determines our institutions and our attitudes.

Furthermore tradition is an element of freedom and of history itself that needs to be affirmed, embraced and cultivated. It is essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical changes. When we do research then in human sciences we must always realize that we stand within tradition. Efforts should not be to distance ourselves from what has been transmitted. He explains this further when he writes:

> We stand always within tradition, and this is no objectifying process, i.e. we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or examplar, a recognition of ourselves which our later historical judgment would hardly see as a kind of knowledge, but as the simplest preservation of tradition.[120]

The good thing about human sciences is that it lets itself be addressed by tradition. Even when a researcher researching in the extreme case of objective historical research, must realise that the historical task is to determine anew the meaning of what is examined. But even in this extreme case, he must realise that what is examined is not completely new; it must have had other meanings in history which may not be in tandem with the present meaning it has.

Our author therefore admonishes hermeneuts to discard the difference between tradition and historical research, between history and knowledge, and allow the effect of a living tradition and the effect of historical study to constitute a unity that will reveal only a texture of reciprocal relationships. He opines that we have to recognise the element of tradition in the historical relation and enquire into its hermeneutical productivity.[121]

Other sources of prejudice worth mentioning beside the two highlighted above are our everyday experiences and unverified opinions of people about things. On our everyday experiences, it is obvious that as we experience a thing or come in contact with it, some opinions are formed in our minds about the thing. It is true that a book should not be judged by the cover, but experiential facts shows that the cover of a book also can be a point of attraction or repulsion to a reader because the encounter with the cover makes the reader develop some prejudices about it. And to understand the work, he must approach it with these initial prejudices that open up the reader to enter into dialogue with the text. Another is the opinions of other persons about the object of our study. These opinions, though unverified also enable us form prejudices about the object. And as one tries to understanding the work through interpretation, he comes along with these prejudices. In the process of fusion of the horizon, the unnecessary prejudices will be filtered off while the necessary ones will bring about a harmony between the interpreter's views and that of the object of study thereby leading to understanding which will transcend both the initial views of the interpreter and the object of interpretation.

3.7.3 Hermeneutic Circle and Temporal Distance

This is a discussion on a major condition for understanding as conceived by Gadamer. The hermeneutic condition of understanding is that it belongs to tradition and its rule is that "we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole."[122] This process of moving from whole to the part and back to the whole is governed by the expectation of meaning that follows from the context of what has gone before (history & tradition). The task of the hermeneuts according to Gadamer is "to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed."[123] Understanding takes place in line with the above position only

when there is a harmony between the parts and the whole and the inability of realising this harmony results in lack of understanding.

The circle of the hermeneutic circle according to Gadamer is not formal in nature, neither is it subjective nor objective. The circle "describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter."[124] Our understanding of a text proceeds from the communality that binds us to the tradition. This circle is not a methodological circle as was the case in Schleiermacher and Dilthey, it describes an ontological structural element in understanding. It is fundamental to all understanding as it leads to the unity of meaning of an object thereby making it intelligible. This is what our author calls "fore-conception of completion". Essentially, the fore- conception according to Schmidt "implies circularity of understanding and the circularity presupposes unity of meaning."[125] Thus, where harmony or unity of meaning cannot be constituted, then the object cannot be intelligible. Elaborating further Gadamer writes:

> So when we read a text we always follow this complete presupposition of completion, and only when it proves inadequate, i.e. the text and seek to discover in what way it can be remedied ... for the important thing to note is that their proper application cannot be detached from the understanding of the textual content.[126]

The anticipation of completion guides all our understanding in specific contents. The reader's understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning that proceeds from the relation of the truth of what is being said. When we read a transmitted text there is always this assumption in us that the writer is better informed than us with our previously formed meaning. However, when accepting what the author has written as true fails, efforts will be made to understand the text further either psychologically or historically as having another meaning. The fundamental hermeneutic requirement here is the fore- understanding of the interpreter. This determines the kind of unified meaning that will be realised.

Hermeneutics is based on polarity of familiarity and strangeness which is on what the interpreter already knows about a thing and on that which he seeks to know. Differently put, it depends on the fore-understanding the hermeneut has and the story that the text tells him. But in-between the familiarity and strangeness is "the intermediate place between being and historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition."[127] This is the home of hermeneutics and it is where the interpretation is made for a new meaning to emerge.

It is however good to note that the primary work of hermeneutics is to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place and not to develop a procedure or method of understanding. These conditions which the interpreter must bring to bear on the text must be given and not seen as procedures or methods. Hence the interpreter does not have the prejudices or fore-meaning he brings to interpretation at his disposal. And he does not even know which of the prejudices he has that will be productive and can lead to understanding and the ones that are unproductive that could lead to misunderstanding. The separation between the productive and unproductive prejudices takes place in understanding itself. How this happens is what Gadamer refers to as 'temporal distance.'

Reacting to the earlier definition of understanding as the reproduction of an original production, Gadamer asserts that this is possible because of the difference between the interpreter and the author created by historical distance. It is on this assertion we can say that the understanding of a reproduced work is superior to that of the original work. Nevertheless he advised that it is not proper to even talk of superior understanding whether in referring to superior knowledge because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority that the consciousness has over the unconsciousness of nature. According to him "it is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all."[128]

In line with Heidegger who in his ontological hermeneutics saw time as positive value, Gadamer opines that "time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground process in which the present is rooted."[129] The efforts of the interpreter should not be to overcome temporal distance but rather see it as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. We must realize that the distance is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition. The temporal distance lets the true meaning of the object to emerge. It should be noted here that the meaning of a text or any work of art is never finished. He calls this an infinite process because through it errors are excluded continuously and it keeps emerging as a new source of understanding. Temporal distance filters and reveals elements of new meaning and in itself continuous to undergo constant movement and extension. In this movement and extension it filters all illegitimate prejudices and allows the legitimate prejudices that can lead to understanding to emerge.

Again for Gadamer it is only temporal distance that can help us distinguish between false and true prejudices. While the false prejudices lead us to misunderstanding, the true prejudices lead to understanding. The logical structure that could lead us to this all-important distinction is the questions raised. Questions, because they open up and keep open possibilities. Through questioning our prejudices are opened up, the false prejudices are suspended and as this happens, our true or legitimate prejudices enable us reach the understanding of the text or work of art.

3.7.4 Effective History and the Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer maintains that a proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding. Any attempt at understanding a historical phenomenon from the historical distance which makes up the hermeneutical situation subjects the hermeneut to the effects of effective history. The effective history is that which determines

"in advance both what seems to us worth enquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there.[130] Effective history is at work in all our understanding and when its existence is ignored, there is always an actual deformation of knowledge. He also notes that the power of effective history does not depend on its being recognised. Even though there is a pressing demand that we should become conscious of this effective-history, it does not however mean it can be fulfilled in absolute way. He rather writes that "effective-historical consciousness is an element in the act of understanding itself and, as we shall see, is already operative in the choice of the right question to ask."[131]

Furthermore, effective-history is the consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. The hermeneutical situation means the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand. To effectively historically reflect on this situation is never completely achieved because of our essence as historical beings. In addition to this, he notes that "every finite present has its limitations and that an essential part of the concept of situation is horizon."[132] Horizon is defined as the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. It is on the account of horizon when it is applied to thinking mind that we can talk of narrowness of horizon, or the expansion of horizon. Thus he affirms that a person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within the horizon, as near or far, great or small. Also to achieve the right horizon of enquiry for the questions raised by our encounter with tradition means that we have worked out the hermeneutic situation.

Understanding through interpretation only takes place when there is a coming together of the horizons of the interpreter and that of the object being interpreted. The hermeneut must leave his contemporary criteria and prejudices and place himself in the situation of the other, i.e. the historical situation. When this occurs understanding will no longer be a mere

agreement but being in the situation of the past and acquiring the right historical horizon. Here, the meaning of what has been handed down will be understood even without any form of agreement. Getting at the historical situation of the object of study, the job of the interpreter should not be to reconstruct the historical horizon because when this happens "we have given up the claim to find in the past, any truth valid and intelligible for ourselves."[133] At this point of fusion, the interpreter must not see himself as passing into an alien horizon unconnected to him. It is expected of him to fuse his horizon with the horizon of the particular history and

> ... together they constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and, beyond the one frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. It is in fact, a single horizon that embraces everything contained in historical consciousness. Our own past, and that other past towards which our historical consciousness is directed, help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives, and which determines it as tradition.[134]

To understand the past therefore means placing oneself within a situation. This situation must be imagined and ourselves brought into it. Unless we are able to place ourselves in the position of others, we cannot understand them or become aware of their otherness and the indissoluble individuality of the other person.

It must be further noted that this is not the empathy an individual could have for another and it is not the application to another person of our own criteria. It involves "the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity, but also that of the other."[135] This is what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons. Understanding takes place here and that is why he posits that understanding "is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves."[136] This fusion is continuous and it is in it that the old and new ideas continue to grow together to make better ideas or meanings. The new horizon incorporates the past and the present but it is not static because prejudices are continually being adjusted based on past experiences, and are incorporated into the present

horizon. The implication of this is that one's own horizon is constantly in the process of formation. At the point of the fusion of horizon, "there is a birth and growth of something reducible to neither the interpreter, nor the text, nor their conjunction."[137] The product of the fusion of horizons is simply and completely something new, it is an independent horizon.

3.7.5 The Concept of Experience and the Essence of the Hermeneutic Experience

Gadamer examines the concept of experience here. For him it is a concept that is very important in analysing effective-historical consciousness. He also notes that experience also play important role in the natural sciences especially in its logic of induction. However, the challenge he has with this is that for him the natural sciences do not take "account of the inner historicity of experience."[138] This is so because science wants to objectify experience and the possible way of achieving this aim is by stripping off historical element from experience. How does the natural science do this? According to him "the scientific experiment does this by its methodical procedure"[139] and does it so because it wants to "guarantee, through the objectivity of their approach that these basic experiences can be repeated by anyone"[140]

Furthermore he examined the linguistic sense of the word 'experience'. For him when the word is considered linguistically, it has two different senses. The first sense is when we use it "to refer to the experiences that fit in with our expectation and confirm it."[141] The second sense is when we refer it to the real experience that we have. He calls this the real experience and for him this is always negative. Explaining further Gadamer writes:

> If we have an experience of an object, this means that we have not seen the thing correctly hitherto and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply a deception that we see through and hence make a correction, but a comprehensive knowledge that we acquire. It cannot, therefore, be an object chosen at random in regard to which we have an experience, but it must be of such a nature that we gain through it better knowledge, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before, i.e. of a universal. The Negation by means of which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience dialectical.[142]

The dialectical experience means that our experiences change our whole knowledge of a thing and we cannot have the same experience twice because of the dialectical nature of experience. The nature of experience then is that it is continually confirmed because it is continually repeated and confirmed. However, he argues that the repeated experience cannot stand for a new experience because by the virtue of experiencing a thing, we possess it. And by so doing we can predict what was previously unexpected. Here, the experiencing consciousness is said to be 'experienced' because of a new horizon he has acquired and within this new horizon, something becomes an experience for him.

The dialectics of experience opens up an experienced person for new experience. An experienced person according to Gadamer is a radically un-dogmatic person, who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them is better positioned to have new experiences and prepared to learn from them. Experience therefore is part of the historical nature of man. It involves inevitably many disappointments of one's expectations and it is through this that we acquire experiences. This may seem negative, but Gadamer however avers that "the historical nature of man contains as an essential element a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insights."[143] Experience then for Gadamer is experience of human finitude and that is why a truly experienced person is one who is aware of human finitude, knows he can never master time or the future. He is one who recognises reality as not only what is but also as what cannot be down away with.

To the issue of hermeneutic experience Gadamer affirms that it has been transmitted in tradition. It is equally described as what is to be experienced. Tradition however according to him is not a process, it is language because it expresses itself like a 'Thou'. A 'Thou', he opines "is not an object, but stands in a relationship with us."[144] It must not be seen as an object to be studied and abandoned but we must see it as being in a relationship with us. In his

hermeneutics, Gadamer calls this experience of the 'Thou' historical consciousness. This according to him "knows about the otherness, just as well as the understanding of the 'Thou' knows the 'Thou' as a person."[145] This seeks in the otherness of the past, something historical and not a general law.

In addition, Gadamer refers to another form of hermeneutic experience as the openness to tradition possessed by effective historical consciousness. This too has a correspondence with the experience of the 'Thou'. To experience the 'Thou' as a 'Thou' requires listening to what he has to say to us. There is therefore need for openness which is expected of both the speaker and the listener. This is the only factor that can guarantee a genuine human relationship. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer opines that "openness to the other, then, includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me."[146] Finally, Gadamer opines that tradition should be approached with the sense that it has something to say to us and not just acknowledging it as the past in its otherness. This is to enable a dialogue between us lead to the fusion of horizon.

3.8   The Hermeneutic Priority of the Questions

Questions are very important in the hermeneutic process. Questions are raised because man's imagination enables an interpreter to question the subject matter of the text or object of interpretation. This subtopic is discussed under two subheadings namely, the Platonic dialectic as a model and the logic of question and answer.

3.8.1   The Model of the Platonic Dialectic

It has earlier been argued that openness is one of the attributes of hermeneutic consciousness. Openness, as important as it may be, is consequent to the structure of questions. Gadamer holds that the structure of question is implicit in all experience, thus "we

cannot have experiences without asking questions."[147] This means that our encounter with anything begins with the questions that we are able to ask. The questions raised set the directive of the inquiry which turns out to become the basis of our experience. He articulates further that: "the recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought, obviously involves the question whether it was this or that. The openness that is part of experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question."[148] The structure of a question is made up of two parts: a logical form and the negativity part. Both parts find fulfilment in a radical negativity which Gadamer explains as "the knowledge of not knowing."[149] This for him is the famous Socratic *docta ignorantia* and what it does is to open up the way even in the midst of extreme negativity of doubt to the true superiority of questioning.

Furthermore, the essence of question according to Gadamer is to have sense which is to have direction. He elaborates further on this when he writes that "hence the sense of the question is the direction in which alone the answer can be given if it is to be meaningful. A question places that which is questioned within a particular perspective."[150] A question begets an answer in the sense of the question asked. A question opens up the being of the object and gives it a perspective. Relying on Plato's account of Socrates, Gadamer opines that it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. He also discovered that from Plato's dialogue the distinction between genuine discourse and false discourse could be made. When questions are asked by someone just to prove that he knows, for Gadamer is a false discourse. A genuine discourse is one in which the person asking the questions does so in order to know. According to him "in order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know."[151] This extols the humble nature of knowing because the more you know; the humbler you should be because there are many things you have not known that others had known. Knowledge therefore should make us humbler and not arrogant. In all

these Gadamer still asserts the priority of the question in all knowledge and discourse since the questions asked reveals something of an object which ordinarily would have remained hidden if not for the questions asked.

Additionally, to ask a question means to bring something to the open. The openness of a question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled, it is undetermined. It is also not boundless as it is limited by the horizon of the question. These are the two ingredients that make up a genuine question. These are opening up of the reality and having some limitations. Thus a question should be able to open up a reality to some extent and there must be some limitations to what it can open up about the reality. Even when it opens up a reality, this can only be to some limit and not everything about the particular reality being questioned. Any question that lacks these two basic ingredients Gadamer calls 'floating' question. Then there is another type of question which Gadamer calls 'false question.' This according to him is one "that does not reach the state of openness, but inhibits it by holding on to false presuppositions. It pretends to an openness and susceptibility to decision that it does not have."[152] Yet another he calls distorted questions. For him we are familiar with this in our everyday life. It arises when "what is undecided is not distinguished from those predispositions that are effectively held, then it is not brought into the open and nothing can be decided."[153] There cannot be any answers to such questions because they only lead apparently through the open state of indeterminacy. These are called distorted because there are questions behind them however the intended openness does not lie in the direction in which the distorted question is pointing. Gadamer clarifies further thus:

> We call it distorted rather than false because there is a question behind it, i.e. there is an openness intended, but it does not lie in the direction in which the distorted question is pointing. The word 'distorted', refers to something that has moved away from the right direction. The distortedness of a question consists in the fact that it does not have any real direction, and hence any answer to it is impossible.[154]

It should be recalled here that sense is the direction of the question and that the sense of what is correct must be in accordance with the direction taken by a question. Thus any question that does not have a sense cannot lead to a direction that can open up reality.

The openness of question makes it to include both negative and positive judgments. On this lies the basis of the relation between question and knowledge. Question decides the way of knowledge but the preponderance of reason decides the way of question. This is not full knowledge but counter-instances or if we like opinions in the mind. These counter-arguments are incorrect but get refined and corrected through dialectics. Knowledge for Gadamer is dialectical from ground up[155] and only a person who has questions can acquire knowledge. However, there is no method of learning to ask questions or to see what one needs to question. Following the Socratic dialectic, Gadamer affirms that "all questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know, so much as, indeed, that it is a particular lack of knowledge that leads to a particular question."[156]

Consequently, Gadamer avers that the art of questioning is a conscious art that is reserved for anyone who desires to know. By desiring to know, one already has questions to ask. The art of questioning is not any of the following: avoiding the pressure of opinion; it is not the Greek understanding of *techne*, a craft that can be taught and learned. It is also not the art of being able to win every argument. For Gadamer, the art of questioning is dialectical and this proves itself only because the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning. It also "involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness,"[157] it is the art of thinking. It is dialectical because it is the art of conducting a real conversation.

3.8.2 The Logic of Question and Answer

Gadamer argues that the logic of human sciences is one and the same thing with the logic of question. We can only make an historical text an object of interpretation when it asks

questions of the interpreter. Based on the fact that interpretation always involves a relation to the question asked of the interpreter, to understand a text therefore means to understand the question. He explains further that "... a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question if we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask question beyond what is said."[158] Understanding therefore requires the ability to discover what should be questioned, asking the right questions and these questions must go beyond what is said.

Subsequently, Gadamer commends Collingwood in his efforts to establish the logic of question and answer even though according to him, Collingwood's discussions were not systematic. He agrees with Collingwood on the position that:

> We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer. But since this question can be derived solely from the text and accordingly the appropriateness of the reply is the methodological presupposition for the reconstruction of the question, any criticism of this reply from some other quarter is pure mock-fighting.[159]

Gadamer picks Collingwood on the issue of reconstruction of the question. He sees his logic of question and answer as ambiguous by extrapolation because the meaning that an interpreter may discover of a text may not necessarily agree with what the author intended. According to him "just as the events of history do not in general manifest any agreement with the subjective ideas of the person who stands and acts within history, so the sense of a text in general reaches far beyond what its author originally intended."[160] For him the task of understanding is concerned first and famous with the meaning of the text itself and not really with the original intentions of the author. Gadamer sees the reconstruction of the ideas of an author as a different task and not hermeneutic task.

Furthermore, it is opined by Gadamer that we cannot just take the reconstruction of the question to which a given text is an answer simply as an achievement of historical method. We must look at the question presented to us and our response to the word handed down to us.

By so doing we are already allowing mediation between the present and the past or tradition. Gadamer argues that instead of reconstructing the original intentions of the author, we should reconstruct "the question to which the transmitted text is the answer."[161] This requires going beyond the historical horizon presented to us. Going beyond the historical horizon takes place within a process of questioning through which we seek the answer to the question that the text asks us. Hermeneutically, we must go beyond mere reconstruction. Our interest should be in those ideas or views that were unquestionably accepted by the author. These areas should be brought to the openness of the question. He emphasized that the understanding of the word of the tradition always requires that the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness, i.e. that it merge with the question that tradition is for us. Thus, to reconstruct the question from which we can understand the meaning of a text must pass through our own questioning. By so doing we make the text understood as an answer to a real question.

In addition, questioning is so important in the hermeneutic experience because questioning tests the many possibilities in an object. We can only understand the questionableness of a thing when we question it. Questioning in this context must be like in Plato's dialogue. Through questioning we do not recreate the author's meaning but "asking it opens up possibilities of meaning and thus, what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject."[162] Without asking the necessary questions, the possibilities of meaning will remain locked. Questions therefore open up the possibilities of meaning. Question therefore remains constitutively a significant element of the hermeneutic phenomenon which we cannot do without.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DISCLOSURE OF TRUTH IN LANGUAGE

4.0   Preamble

This is the third disclosure of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics. All understanding as will be exposed in this chapter of our work is rooted in language. It is in language that being shows itself and being becomes accessible only through language. This is a linguistic realization that moves us to ontology and makes Gadamer claim that his hermeneutics is philosophical. Gadamer's linguistic understanding can be seen as truth for being and it is the backbone to the universality of hermeneutics.

4.1   Gadamer's Conception of Language.

According to Gadamer, "the being that can be understood is language."[1] This affirmation forms one of the fundamental conclusions toward which the final part, and indeed the whole of his 'Magnus opus', *Truth and Method* is directed. Consequently, "the scope of understanding and of hermeneutics is co-extensive with the all-encompassing universality of language."[2] Since no one speaks from nowhere, Gadamer was influenced by the ontological understanding of language by Heidegger, he however re-echoed Schleiermacher's famous saying, "everything presupposed by hermeneutics is only language"[3] to buttress his point and stand on language.

Gadamer began by arguing that the primary meaning of 'logos' in Aristotle's philosophy is language instead of reason or thought as has been interpreted earlier in the Western tradition. He agrees with Aristotle, that, "the distinguishing feature of man, therefore, is his superiority over what is actually present, his sense of the future."[4] Man could make projections that go beyond the actual present situation into the future and this ability is what sets him apart from other animals. Man is able to do so because he is an individual that

has the logos. An individual having the logos means according to Gadamer, that he can think and he can speak. He explains further thus:

> He can make what is not present manifest through his speaking, so that another person sees it before him. He can communicate everything that he means. Indeed, even more than this, it is by virtue of the fact he can communicate in this way that there exists in man alone common meaning, that is, common concepts, especially those through which the common life of men is possible without murder and manslaughter- in the form of social life, a political constitution, an organized division of labor. All this is involved in the simple assertion that man is a being who possesses language.[5]

The possession of language by man has enabled him to dialogue with his fellow humans instead of fighting and killing themselves. The possession of language and its usage has enhanced man's coexistence on planet earth. Language has made man to be more organized in his social and economic life. Gadamer however rejects the 'sign' theory conception of language and the definition of language as either a tool or an instrument as held by some thinkers. In his opinion:

> …language is not one of the means by which consciousness is mediated with the world. It does not represent a third instrument alongside the sign and the tool, both of which are also certain distinctively human. Language is by no means simply an instrument, a tool. For it is in the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service.[6]

Language, therefore, does not have a separate existence from man; it is not an entity that man employs when he needs it and drops when it has completed its functions. Language is an integral part of man without which man's existence may be chaotic and incomplete.

Subsequently, our author argued further that before being conscious of our existence as individuals, language encompasses us and it is through language that we become aware of ourselves and of others as beings of the same origins. According to him "rather, in all our knowledge of ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, the language that is our own

always already encompasses us. We grow up, and we become acquainted with men and in the last analysis with ourselves when we learn to speak."[7] Language defines the being of man and the realization of man's being is in language. We become conscious of our existence as humans and also conscious of other human beings when we are able to speak or express ourselves in language. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer reacts furiously against the efforts of modern linguists who try to find out what the original language of humanity is by isolating children from the human society. He queries thus:

> What sort of folly it is to say that a child speaks a "first" word. What kind of madness is it to want to discover the original language of humanity by having children grow up in hermetic isolation from human speaking and then, from their first babbling of an articulate sort recognize an actual human language and accord it the honor of being the 'original' language of creation.[8]

Our reflection here is that, if we accept that man is a being-in-the-world, and that the society as a whole plays major roles in making us humans, then to what extend can a child who grows up in isolation or deprived of any encounter with the society and humanity be said to be truly human? If yes, then, what kind of human would the child be? If no, then can we comfortably accept their 'first babbling of an articulate sort' as the first language of human beings? Moreover, both the written and unwritten history of man maintains the social nature of man who lives in the company of other human beings.

Subsequently, Gadamer having rejected the idea of language as an instrument or tool, a symbolic sign or form, pointed out some peculiar characteristics of language. According to him, these are three and they are as follows: The first is that to language belongs an essential self-forgetfulness. This means that when one speaks a language one knows too well, one never makes conscious effort to reflect about the grammatical structure of that language. This becomes possible because "the actual operation of language lets grammar vanish entirely behind what is said in it at any given time."[9] Also, the more

language is a living operation, the less we are aware of it and the real being of self-forgetfulness consists in what is said in it, which constitutes our common world.

The second peculiarity of the being of language according to Gadamer is its "I-lessness". This simply put, means that whenever one speaks, one speaks to someone. To this extent, speaking according to Gadamer "does not belong in the sphere of 'I' rather it belongs to the sphere of the 'We'. At this sphere of the 'we', one enters into dialogue with another person and is carried along further by the dialogue. Here, it is no longer the will of the individuals that determines the discussion but the subject matter. In the words of Gadamer "the laws of the subject is at issue in the dialogue, elicits statement, counter statement, and in the end plays them into each other."[10] Thus it is not in the hands of speakers to determine the direction of the dialogue. The subject matter does that and plays the speakers into themselves.

Finally, the third essential peculiarity of language is what our author calls the "universality of language". Language is all-encompassing and that is why when human beings fall into dialogue, they can only break off the discussions not that they are done with it since language has the characteristics of opening other avenues and perspectives to the discussion. However, this break off has an intrinsic relation to the resumption of the dialogue. He further argues that, "nothing that is said has its truth simply in itself, but refers instead backward and forward to what is unsaid."[11] Thus, we cannot just get the truth of what is said from itself. We must relate it backward and forward to what is unsaid. This then calls for interpretation of what is said in reference to history in a backward and forward movement. This brings out clearly the importance of the hermeneutic circle[12] in the different theories of interpretation. For Gadamer therefore, a statement does not just have its truth while standing alone, but by referring backward and forward to what has not

been said. Gadamer however concludes that only when what is said is understood along side with what is not said does understanding occur.

Summarily, Gadamer's general conception of language is that language is an encompassing phenomenon like understanding itself. It can never be grasped as 'fact' or fully objectified; like understanding, language encompasses everything, all words and concepts, and like being and understanding, language is a medium and not a tool.[13] Having said this, we now begin our detailed search into the various ways language aids in hermeneutic understanding from the perspective of Gadamer.

4.2   Language as the Medium of Hermeneutic Experience.

Two forms of hermeneutic experience were identified by Gadamer; the first is verbal conversation while the second is better expressed thus; "an encounter between heritage in the form of a transmitted text and the horizon of the interpreter"[14] or written text. In as much as Gadamer had serious preference for text as the hermeneutic experience over and above conversation, he holds that conversation has a spirit of its own. He argues that it is not proper to say that we 'conduct' a conversation but that "we fall into conversation or that we become involved in it."[15] According to him, in a fundamental conversation, the language put into use leads the partners involved in the conversation to a conclusion and this reveals things that henceforth exist. The existence of this further reveals other things that will come to be. Language therefore, determines and sets the pace of the conversation.

Consequently, the aim of any of the forms of hermeneutic experience, verbal or text is to understand. To understand is to agree about the objects that exist and not to get inside another person and relive his experiences. This conception of understanding here is very similar to the correspondence theory of truth whereby the truth of what is said is determined

by its correspondence to reality. Gadamer therefore concludes that language at this sphere plays the function of "the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people."[16] It is the middle ground because; the agreement and understanding take place in it. As a middle ground, language discloses the 'life-world' of the partners and there can only be understanding when there is an agreement between these 'life-worlds'. He sums this up thus:

> A conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject.[17]

Our author further examines the second hermeneutic experience, which is the written text. He turned his attention from verbal conversation to translation of texts in which language remains the medium of understanding. Considering translation from one language to another, Gadamer argues that no translation whatsoever can be "a re-awakening of the original event in the mind of the writer."[18] Hence, we cannot arrive at the knowledge of the original event that motivated the author into doing the work. Every translation, which is an interpretation, is a re-creation of the text guided by the translator's understanding of what he reads in the work. Thus, interpretation is not a reproduction of the original work; however, through it a new light falls on the text. Nonetheless, the translator of a text must realize that his task is highlighting of areas that he understands quite well and must not let open things not clear to him since this can lead to ambiguous understanding of the original text.

In addition, what a translator tries to do is to get right inside his author but unfortunately, this attempt does not mean that there is a recreation yet. For there to be a re-

creation, the translator must respect the character of his own language; recognize the value of the foreign character of the text and its expression. Finally, he must bring into language the object that the text points to by "finding a language which is not only his, but also proportionate to the original."[19]

Furthermore, in text translation, the text is like a silent partner that speaks only through the interpreter. This situation, of course, can make for a very one-sided conversation. Texts are in fact helplessly vulnerable to impositions; and unless the interpreter holds himself open to what the text says, there will be no dialogue, but only monologue. Yet it remains true that in translation and interpretation generally, the interpreter must speak for the text. Its openness to imposition is a necessary consequence of its need for and openness to interpretation, and the interpreter who will fulfil his task cannot do otherwise than involve himself in the meaning of the text by speaking for it.

Nevertheless, we must state here that Gadamer is of the view that in the interpretation and understanding of a text, the intention of the author does not count in the meaning of an interpreted work. According to him, the translator should be concerned with the text as a 'given' and not with the motive or intention of the author. However, E.D Hirsch, a contemporary of Gadamer would take the opposite direction; according to him, the intention of the author is very necessary in the understanding of any text. We will explore more on this in the penultimate chapter of the work, however, before then, let us see what roles language play in textual interpretations.

4.3   Language as a Determinant of the Object of Understanding (Text)

The hermeneutic object is the object of understanding and Gadamer calls it the "linguistic tradition". According to him, the linguistic tradition may not necessarily be interpreted as a leftover from the past. He explicates more on this when he writes "…

tradition in the literal sense of the world, i.e., something handed down. It is not just something that has been left over, to be investigated and interpreted as a remnant of the past."[20] It is rather tradition in the form of language that is documented in the form of a written text. On another note he asserts that, non-linguistic tradition is interpretable as well insofar as it too can be understood as language. In writing, language is detached from its full realization and the non-immediacy of language is most realized since language "attains a purely intangible, ideal existence not dependent on any particular book or any of the particularities of any reader."[21]

Furthermore, the written tradition is not a fragment of a past world; neither is it a document coming from the past, i.e., the bearer of the past. It is rather part of our own world when acted upon by our memory. Thus Gadamer says, "where we have a written tradition, we are not just told an individual thing, but a past humanity itself becomes present to us, its general relation to the world."[22]

Subsequently, we abstract the written text from the immediacy of sound and voice, on which oral tradition depends. To understand the text therefore involves a transformation of the text back into language. This aims at establishing a relationship between what one means and what one says. In any case, to understand the text does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, rather it is to have a present involvement in what is said. According to Gadamer, "it is not really about a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but sharing in the communication that the text gives us."[23]

The role of language as determining the hermeneutic object is based on the obvious fact that the sign language of written texts refers back to the actual language of speech. Language, observes Gadamer, is capable of being written down because speech itself shares

in the pure ideality[24] of the meaning that communicates itself in it. A text however, Gadamer warns is "not to be understood as an expression of life, but in what it says."[25] Thus in order to understand a text, all its signs must be transformed back to speech.

This transformation however, is real hermeneutic task, in the sense that we state anew the meaning of what was said, simply on the account of the words passed on by means of the written signs. Again, Gadamer strongly holds that a text that is not transformed or interpreted is simply meaningless; it is only meaningful when it has been transformed into speech whereby new meanings are derived from what was said earlier. Weinsheimer expressed this thus:

> A text, of itself silent and dumb, needs the interpreter to speak for it; and he must speak in his language, the language of the present. Like the mirror, a text gives the interpreter the clearest possible image and does not exist unless he looks into the mirror- that is, interprets the text.[26]

We must observe here that in as much as through interpretation what is written is understood with a new meaning, the understanding must actually seek to strengthen what is said and not trivialize it. For this to be realized there must be a detachment from what Gadamer calls "contingent factors"[27] and what is said must be grasped in its full ideality in which alone there is validity. Due to the detachment of the authors' intention, "the written words make the reader, in this understanding of it, the arbiter of its claim to truth."[28] This affirmation is a clear rejection of Hegel's theory of the Absolute Truth or Knowledge. This position simply put, leads to relativism in which people could give different interpretations to a work. This notwithstanding, we will also examine later how E.D Hirsch tried to reply Gadamer on this. Even though language determines the hermeneutic object, i.e., the written text, has language any role in the act of understanding itself? We will consider this in the next section.

4.4 Language Determines Understanding

Gadamer, convinced that language is of great importance to man as a rational being, argues that not only does language determine the text; understanding in itself, which is the hermeneutic act, is equally determined by language. Understanding according to him is interpretation since it creates the hermeneutic horizon (limit) within which the meaning of a text is realized. The realization of this means that, it needs to be expressed by translating it into our own language. Using this as a résumé to the previous sections, let us now focus our attention on the linguistic nature of all understanding.

As interpretation, understanding consists in finding words and concepts to explain the meaning of a text or historical events. To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak to us. In the words of Gadamer, "interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak. There cannot therefore, be any one interpretation that is correct 'in itself', precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself."[29] In as much as the above assertion could give room to relativism, Gadamer was fast to add that every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs. Interpretation in its linguistic nature has the possibility of a relationship with others. Hence, no interpretation of a text should be carried in isolation; - reference must be made to other interpreters of that same text material.

Using the linguistic nature of interpretation, Gadamer tried to debunk the already created idea of relativism in his work. According to him:

> That the claim to truth of every interpretation is not in the least relativised is seen from the fact that all interpretation is essentially linguistic. The linguistic explicitness that the process of understanding gains through interpretation does not create a second sense apart from that which is understood and interpreted.[30]

Gadamer claims here that because interpretation is linguistic, then the relativistic tendency inherent in his hermeneutics has been overcome. This position of his would later become the bane of contention between him and scholars like Hirsch, Apel and Habermas who would pick out the challenges of relativism as well as absolutizing of language in his work.

One other basic character of the linguistic nature of interpretation is that the interpretative concepts that the interpreter uses to make the text speak, disappears behind what they bring into speech. Paradoxically, Gadamer argues that unless the concepts of the interpreter disappear, then we may not achieve any understanding.

Gadamer nevertheless, went ahead to examine what an interpretation should not do. According to him, interpretation as it were, should not seek to draw attention to itself by the poetic power of its own. In his view, every interpretation fundamentally is accidental, i.e. there is something accidental to both interpreting word and reproductive interpretation *ipso facto* it is motivated by the hermeneutic question which is the question of understanding. This, however, still drags us back to the already debunked idea of relativism.

Subsequently, against the common belief that language often seems ill suited to express what we feel; and against the opinion that in the face of the overwhelming presence of works of art, the task of expressing in words what they say to us seems like an infinite and hopeless understanding; Gadamer writes that:

> It seems like a critique of language that our desire and capacity to understand always go beyond any statement that we make. But this does not affect the fundamental priority of language. The possibilities of our knowledge seem to be far more individual than the possibilities of expression offered by language.[31]

He further notes "however, the critical superiority, which we claim over language is not concerned with the conventions of linguistic expressions, but with the conventions of meaning that have found their form in language.[32] Nevertheless, even when emphasis is laid on the

superiority of language, this does not in any case place language above reason; rather there is a close relationship between language and reason. Gadamer expresses this relationship thus; "language is the language of reason itself."[33] Hence reason can only express itself in and through language. However, this close tie between language and reason poses a challenge to the plurality of language in the world. If all have the same proximity to reason and to objects, then why do we have different languages? Anyway, trying to proffer answers to the question may end us up in another domain of human endeavour, i.e. theology. Gadamer however, stated that no matter how these difficulties may be, "the work of understanding and interpretation always remain meaningful."[34]

Still in the same line of thought, he confirms the superior universality with which reason rises above the limitations of any given language. The hermeneutic experience therefore, according to Gadamer "is the corrective means by which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself constituted linguistically."[35] With the intimate union of language and thought as an insight, he argues further that "despite the multifariousness of ways of speech we seek to hold on to the indissoluble unity of thought and language as we encounter it in the hermeneutical phenomenon, namely as the unity of understanding and interpretation."[36] We can now state that based on the affirmation that to understand is to interpret, and to interpret is to transform a written tradition into speech, language is the medium in which interpretation shows what understanding always is: an assimilation of what is said to the point that it becomes one's own. Language therefore becomes the indissoluble bond between understanding and interpretations even when what is interpreted is not linguistic in nature, i.e. is not a text, but is a statue or a musical composition. Having arrived at this point, we will turn our attention to the relationship between language and being in the next section of our work.

4.5   Language and Being

This section is an attempt at examining first, how language relates to the world. Next, we will examine how the speculative structure of language is the meeting ground for the subject that understands and the object that is understood. Finally, we will examine the universality of hermeneutics through the universal nature of language.

4.5.1   Linguistic Experience of the World.

Gadamer is of the view that language does not merely point at things but it discloses the "world". 'World' according to him is not our environmental scientific world or universe, but our 'life-word'. In agreement with Wilhelm Von Humboldt who had earlier opined that "language was human from its very beginning"[37] and that "every language presents its own world view"[38], Gadamer in addition, asserts that, the reason why man has a world is because he has language. According to him "language is not just one of man's possessions in the world but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. For man the world exists as world in a way that no other being in the world experiences. But this world is linguistic in nature."[39] Gadamer however agued further that the world is 'world' for man only insofar as it comes into language. Language on her part derives its being only in the fact that the world is re-presented within it.

Nevertheless, Gadamer's notion of 'world' differs from the ordinary understanding of it as habitat. It is only man according to him that has language. Man having a world also means:

> … to have an attitude towards it. To have an attitude towards the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one is able to present it to oneself as it is. This capacity is both the having of a 'world' and the having of language. Thus, the concept of 'world' or 'environment' (Welt) is in opposition to the concept of 'surrounding world' or habitat (Unwelt), as possessed by every living thing.[40]

Arguing further, our author opines that we can apply the concept of habitat, which is originally a social concept that seeks to express the dependence of the individual on the society, in a comprehensive sense to all living things. But, the concept 'world' is peculiar to man in as much as man has a relationship with the world. He is not just placed in his habitat like other creatures. It is also the case, Gadamer writes:

> Unlike all other living creatures, man's relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from habitat. This freedom includes the linguistic constitution of the world. Both belong together. To rise above the pressure of what comes to meet us from the world means to have language and to have 'world'.[41]

Thus, man can rise above the habitat, to what he called, "true environment". Man however does not just leave his habitat but "rather has another attitude towards it, a free, distanced attitude, which, is always realized in language."[42]

The realization of this is in language only when language is seen in its true being, i.e. in conversation, which is the exercise of understanding between people. This process of human communication is a living process in which a community of life is lived out in language and, through linguistic communication; the 'world' is disclosed. Gadamer describes the 'world' as "the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who speak with one another."[43] In language also, the reality beyond every individual consciousness becomes visible, thus, the inner part of the individual is laid open. It has the capacity to change as the society changes and through the changing of words, we can discover how customs and values change within any given society.

That language is able to disclose the 'world' is because it is not a creation of reflective thought, but rather language itself, helps to fashion our relations to the world. People do not gather on a round table to decide on a particular language to communicate with and whatever language one speaks, it helps one shape his views of the world. Language therefore for

Gadamer, as for Humboldt is not just one among the many human possessions, but rather it constitutes what it means to be human.

Language comprehends the entire real world, not just the real facts and objects verifiable by science but also real appearances. It does not only comprehend everything that can be an object but presents also what cannot be objectified. He elaborates further that "in language, the world presents itself. The linguistic experience of the world is "absolute". It transcends all relativities in the positing of being in itself, in whatever relationships (relativistic) it shows itself."[44] This 'absolute' linguistic experience, Gadamer explains, cannot be achieved by both the physical and human sciences since they all posit the world from a perspective. This can only be achieved, according to him, by hermeneutics as a human science that has understanding as a paradigm. As noted earlier, language makes understanding possible and it is the medium and focus of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, in respect to disclosing the world, it has a reciprocal relationship with the world. The 'world' becomes world only when it is made to speak in language and language itself realizes its existence when the world becomes presented in it. Gadamer however opines that just as our past traditions (effective history), in the form of texts are transformed into language, to enable them speak in our understanding and interpretations of them, so also is the world in general transformed into language. Hence, like traditions, the world too becomes speak- able and understandable.

4.6   **The Speculative Structure of Language**.

For Gadamer, language itself has an intrinsically speculative structure. It is not fixed and dogmatically certain, but because it is always in process as an event of disclosure, it is ever moving, shifting, fulfilling its mission of bringing a thing to understanding. Language according to him is the exact place where subject and object, thought and world meet. In

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other words, it is where the subject and object are at home prior to their being split asunder by conscious reflections. However, language and thought are finite because they are being formed and developed as they express their experience of the world; thus, they are "in constant process of development and are open to new experience."[45]

As stated above, man according to Gadamer, belongs to language and participates in it. Man does not possess and control language so much as he learns and conforms to the ways of language. When language is in operation, i.e. in communication, man rather conforms his thinking to that situation. Language is thus, not a prison but an open space in being that allows infinite expansion, depending on one's openness to tradition.

This phenomenon of belonging (*Zugegörigkeit*) to language, which is the ground for the possibility of encountering one's heritage in the tradition (text), is very significant to the hermeneutic experience. Thus, due to our belongingness to language and due to the belongingness of the text to language, a common horizon is possible. This 'fusion of horizon' that occurs linguistically, "becomes the basis for authentic historical consciousness."[46]

Subsequently Gadamer examines 'belongingness' from a metaphysical point of view when he writes "in metaphysics belongingness refers to the transcendental relationship between being and truth, which conceives knowledge as an element of being itself and not primarily as an attitude of the subject.[47]

He affirmed that metaphysics should begin with being and truth belonging together, but he rejected the earlier conception of truth initiated by Plato, which lasted until Hegel. This conception of truth holds that "truth consists in the complete revelation of the thing, its full presence to an infinite mind; and insofar as the human mind approaches this infinity, it knows the truth."[48]

Gadamer however accepted the view that through dialectics, the truth can be known, but he insist that this dialectics must take place in the spoken language and not in the 'logos' or 'thought'. Again, this does not take place in the opposition of statements and counter-statements but in the exchange of conversation and dialogue, in question and answer rather than in assertion. The fundamental difference between the linguistic dialectics and the metaphysical dialectics is that in the former, according to him, something happens; an event occurs. Understanding occurs and tradition is not only investigated but also furthered and re-created anew through the fusion of horizons. What is produced, however, is something not in any way reducible to either the interpreter nor the text and not even a conjunction of the two. It is a tradition standing on its own, which is subject to further interpretations and understanding.

The hermeneutic dialectics and the metaphysical dialectics have a common element and this element Gadamer calls "speculative element". The word 'speculative' here refers to the 'mirror relations'. He uses mirror here in a metaphorical sense in that it means more than – that, language is the mirror, the representation of things. What this expresses is "the disappearance of interpretative language, its invisibility in itself, and its dissolution into what it interprets."[49] Expatiating further he writes:

> The mirror image is essentially connected, through the medium of the observer, with the proper vision of the thing. It has no being of its own, it is like an 'appearance' that is not itself and yet causes the proper vision to appear as a mirror image. It is like a duplication that is still only the one thing. The actual mystery of a reflection is the intangibility of the picture, the unreal quality of sheer reproduction.[50]

However, Gadamer argues further, that language is speculative does not necessitate the subordination of language to statements and propositions. For him, this is what Plato and Hegel calls dialectics and he highlights more on this thus,

> What he (Hegel) calls and what Plato called dialectics depends, in fact on subordinating language to the 'statement'. The concept of the statement, the dialectical accentuation of it to the point of contradiction is, however, in extreme contrast of the nature of the hermeneutical experience and the linguistic nature of human experience of the world.[51]

Language, he accepts, has something speculative about it and this manifests itself as the realization of meaning, as the event of speech, of communication, and of understanding. This realization according to him is "speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are oriented towards the sense intended, as towards the infinite."[52] Thus a person who wants to say something simply looks for words that will make himself intelligible to the other person and not by making 'statements'. Statements according to him conceal the range of the meaning of what is said since it deals with methodological exactness.

The speculative nature of speech consists in the fact that, unlike the propositions and statements, it always reflects more than it says. The said reflects the unsaid; the part mirrors the whole- the whole truth that is virtually present in each act of speech. In speech the meaning of what is said cannot be grasped, determined, and encapsulated in statements. Speech is speculative in that the finite and occasional event of speech reflects virtually the infinity of the unspoken. This however enables it appeal to the further, thereby creating opportunity for further interpretations.

Gadamer now turned his attention to poetry. According to him, the speculative structure of language is very pronounced in poetic utterances. The words of poetry have the same quality as the saying that happens in daily life between people who understand each other. Hence, "the poetical assertion as such is speculative insofar as the linguistic happening of the poetic word on its side expresses its special relation to being.[53]

In addition, Gadamer sees all interpretations as being speculative, but this according to him, does not mean that every interpreter sees himself as speculative in his own mind.

Rather every interpretation is speculative base on how it is being practiced. Every interpretation is a new creation and all meaning is related to the "I". He explains more that; "this means, as far as the hermeneutical experience is concerned, that all the meaning of what is handed down to us finds its concretion, in which it is understood, in its relation to the understanding "I" – and not in the reconstruction of an "I" of the original meaning."[54] The interpretation of a text, then, is not passive openness but dialectical interaction with the text; it is not bald re-enactment but a new creation, a new event in understanding.

Speculativity, then, involves that movement, suspension, openness and will to let new possible relationships in being, speak to us and address our understanding. For the poet, it is openness to being coming to language; for the interpreter, it is openness to place one's horizon in the balance and be willing to subject it to modification, in the light of the new understanding of being that may emerge from an encounter with the meaning of the text.

4.7   Universality of Hermeneutics

From the previous sections, we noted that, "language is a central point where "I" and "World" meet or manifest their original unity."[55] Its speculative structure emerges not as a "reflection of something given, but the coming into language of a totality of meaning."[56] Also understanding like interpretation can neither be understood as an activity of the interpreting subject nor as a method in which the subject exacts control over himself in order to control an object. Now, in Gadamer's hermeneutics, the interpretation that yields truth consist rather in the movement of the thing to be understood. A correct interpretation, according to Gadamer, is an interpretation of the thing itself, its own interpretation, and its self-interpretation. "This activity of the thing itself is the real speculative movement that takes hold of the speaker"[57] and by so doing meanings are transformed into language. This, therefore "points to a universal ontological structure namely to the basic nature of everything to which

understanding can be directed."[58] Thus, "being that can be understood is language."[59] Every understanding is done by and in language.

The above affirmation according to Gadamer affirms that, "it is of such a nature that it offers to be understood."[60] To be expressed in language does not give rise to a second being but the way a thing presents itself in language is only part of its being. Hence being equally shares in the speculative structure of language. Even when it multiplies in the infinity of its historical reflections, the being retains its unity, for what is expressed in language does not acquire a second existence. "It only contains a distinction, that between its being and the way in which it presents itself, but this is a distinction that is not a distinction at all."[61] Any language and anything that can be interpreted and understood – contains a split between what it is and what it means. Gadamer precisely puts it thus:

> What comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself. But the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. It is there in its own physical being only in order to disappear into what is said. Again, that which comes into language is not something that is pre-given before language; rather it receives in the word its own definition.[62]

That whatever can be understood does not exist in itself but in the unity of its understandings, is very fundamental to Gadamer's aesthetic and historical hermeneutics. Thus, when a work of art is understood, it does not exist in itself, rather it exists as understood and the work cannot be divided into how it presents itself and how it is interpreted. Equally, historical traditions are understood as such, in which "the significance of an event or the meaning of a text, is not a fixed object that exists in itself, whose nature we have simply to establish."[63]

Hermeneutics as an aspect of philosophy however, derives its universality from the universality of language. Language is the universal medium of the mediation between the past and present; between the being of art and its reproduction and the contingency of its

appearance. Thus, "man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally linguistic in nature and hence intelligible."[64]

According to Gadamer, the universality of hermeneutics is formulated on the concept of language because "… not only to guard against a false methodologism that overcomes the concept of objectivity in the human sciences. We were also attempting to avoid the idealistic spiritualism of metaphysics of infinity in the Hegelian manner."[65] Thus it is built on language to guard against false methodologism and to avoid Hegel's idealistic spiritualism.

This however, allows for a sufficient emphasis on the finiteness of the linguistic event, in which understanding is constantly concretized. Thus, the language that things have "of whatever kind the things may be – is not the logos, ousias, and it does not attain its perfect form in the self- contemplation of an infinite intellect, but it is the language that our finite, historical nature apprehends."[66] Language for Gadamer is simply the language of our everydayness.

Language, therefore, is not the instrument of subjectivity, nor does language fulfil itself in the self-contemplation of an infinite intellect; it is instead finite and historical, a repository and a carrier of the experience of being which had come to language in the past. Language must lead one in understanding the text; and this is the major way to develop a truly historical hermeneutics.

In the very nature of all the beings lies speculativity, everything insofar as it tries to make itself "understood", divides itself from itself; the said from the unsaid; the past from the present. These characteristics are simply universals and Gadamer sees them as universal characteristics of being itself, which is the ground of hermeneutics. This universal characteristic of being, Gadamer explains, "extends as universally as does reason and language."[67] The universality of speculativity is the true ground in which Gadamer's

universality of hermeneutics is founded. In addition, that speculativity is universal is because the meaning of being is understood in language and language is not just speculative, it is universal also.

All along, we have tried to examine the different ways language relates to being generally. From what we have discussed so far, we can briefly assert that just as being realizes itself in language, language on its part will be meaningless if it expresses nothing. On this final note, we will in the next chapter critically evaluate our author's position concerning the topic of our discussion in line with some of his contemporaries and our personal critique of his work.

END NOTES

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, p. 432.
2. Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 213.
3. See Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*:, p. 214.
4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976,p.59.
5. Ibid; p.60.
6. Ibid; p.62.
7. Ibid; p. 63.
8. Loc. Cit.
9. Ibid; p.65.
10. Ibid; p.66.
11. Ibid; p.67.
12. Most of the hermeneutic philosophers hold that our understanding take place in a dialectic manner in which there is a constant back and forth movement.
13. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutic: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer,* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985, p. 204.
14. Ibid; p.207.
15. H.G, Gadamer*, Truth and Method*, p. 345
16. Ibid; p.346.
17. Ibid; p.347.
18. Loc. Cit.
19. Ibid; p. 349.
20. Ibid; p.351.
21. H.G. Gadamer*, Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 221.
22. H.G. Gadamer*, Truth and Method*, p. 352.
23. Ibid; p.353.
24. Ideality of the written word implies its absolute dependence on interpretation.
25. H. G. Gadamer*, Truth and Method*, p. 354.
26. J.C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 222.
27. The contingent factors here include author's intentions, poor expressions of ideas, etc.
28. H.G. Gadamer*, Truth and Method*, p. 356.
29. Ibid; p.358.
30. Ibid; p.359.
31. Ibid; p.362.
32. Loc. Cit.
33. Ibid; p.363.
34. Loc. Cit.
35. Loc. Cit.
36. Ibid; p.364.
37. Ibid; p.401.
38. Ibid; p.398.
39. Ibid; 401.
40. Ibid; p. 402.
41. Ibid; p. 402.
42. Ibid; p. 403.
43. Ibid; p.404.
44. Ibid; p.408.
45. J. C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 249.

46. R.E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* p.208.
47. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 416.
48. J.C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 250.
49. Ibid; p. 252.
50. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 423.
51. Ibid; p. 425.
52. Ibid., p.426.
53. Ibid.; p.427.
54. Ibid.; p. 430.
55. Ibid.; p. 431.
56. Loc. Cit.
57. Loc. Cit.
58. Ibid.; pp.431-432.
59. Loc. Cit.
60. Loc. Cit.
61. Loc. Cit.
62. Loc. Cit.
63. Loc. Cit.
64. Ibid; p.433.
65. Loc. Cit.
66. Loc. Cit.
67. Ibid; p. 434.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS

5.0   Recapitulation of Gadamer's Hermeneutics

In the previous chapters we have discussed in detail to a reasonable extent Gadamer's hermeneutics. This chapter is an appraisal of his brand of hermeneutics however, it is deemed necessary to begin the appraisal with a recapitulation of his views for a proper and enhanced appraisal of his work.

In his famous work *Truth and Method*, his primary interest is to discuss hermeneutics philosophically and not treating it as a method of explicating texts. His philosophical discussion of hermeneutics is such that hermeneutics is seen as a process of historically conditioned understanding not only summarily represented in the encounter with art, but also a way of or mode of being in the world. This effort started in the part one of the book with the ontology of the experience of artworks, it continued in part two as an insistence on the historical character of understanding. The attempt ended in part three with the assertion of the centrality of language in all understanding.

Gadamer rejects Dilthey's methodological hermeneutics that terminates in an objectivistic concept of empathy that derives from Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics. He further rejects Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's concept of *verstehen* (understanding) as the reconstruction of a foreign meaning freed from any linkage to the interpreter's own history. Gadamer rejects this concept of *verstehen* (understanding) on the grounds that it has the effect of reducing the text to a mere expression of the inner life of its author rather than a claim to truth that addresses itself to the interpreter in the present. Mendelson in an article titled, "The Herbamas-Gadamer Debate" notes that:

> Gadamer wants to show that the genuine object of interpretation is the meaning of the text itself (or of the historical event), and that interpretation involves not the reconstruction of psychic states but the integration of the object into a totality which contains the interpreter as well and its application to the present. In this process of integration the

possibility that the text expresses a truth which still resonates in the present is maintained.[1]

Meaning of the text remains the primary interest of interpretation and this requires integrating the meaning in the text with what the ideas of the interpreter and the application of the new meaning to the present situation. Gadamer wants to free the hermeneutic world from the dominant influence of Dilthey, thus he adopts Heidegger's existential phenomenology wherein Heidegger universalized hermeneutics by analyzing *verstehen* within the framework of fundamental ontology and not epistemology. This means that "understanding was no longer seen as a method of the cultural sciences to be counter posed to natural scientific explanation, but as a fundamental structure of human existence, a mode of being more basic than scientific activity. In this context hermeneutics was seen not as a reflection on the methods of text interpretation but as the interpretation of the basic structure of *Dasein*.[2]

Gadamer did not stop at adopting Heidegger's ontological analysis of *verstehen*, he further analysed *verstehen* in the context of philosophical hermeneutics which is simply an ontological mode of inquiry. Gadamer's basic concern was not to actually defend any particular methodology of science but to describe what occurs in understanding and when we understand. Gadamer maintains that the hermeneutic phenomenon is universal, meaning that it embraces activities of understanding that permeate all our experiences. Gadamer's hermeneutics focuses on the fundamental and encompassing quality of understanding as a mode of human being.

The task of philosophical hermeneutics as noted by Linge is "to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific and non scientific alike, and that constitutes understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside."[3] In Gadamer's brand of hermeneutics, the event of understanding is not the sole prerogative of the interpreting subject since he is required to fuse his horizon with that of the object to be understood in order to come up with a

better understanding of the object or a new meaning from the object. Hence the hermeneutical phenomenon encompasses both the alien that we strive to understand and the familiar world that we already understood. The familiar world of the interpreter is his participation in traditions that are not themselves the object of understanding but the condition of its occurrence. The past therefore has a pervasive role in understanding from Gadamer's point of view. Prejudice, tradition and the past define the ground the interpreter occupies when he understands.

Gadamer's hermeneutics further develops a conception of understanding in which understanding becomes mediation rather than a reconstruction. The interpreter conveys the past into the present. Linge sums this up when he writes:

> Thus Gadamer's specification emphasis is not on the application of a method by a subject, but on the fundamental continuity of history as a medium encompassing every such subjective act and the objects it apprehends. Understanding is an event, a movement of history itself in which neither interpreter nor text can be thought of as autonomous parts.[4]

In the process of understanding as an event from the Gadamarian hermeneutics both the subject and object interact with one another on the level of mutual benefit. Each is dependable on the other and none is independent of the other. It is an inclusive mutuality which the past is transmitted into the present however; this is not as a way of recovering the past but what Gadamer calls an 'effective history' (*wirkungsgeschichte)*. It is the effective history that makes possible conversation between a new interpreter and the text. The conversation leads to the fusion of horizons in which the interpreter fuses his prejudices with that of the text. This finally leads to the growing together of the old and new "again and again in living value without the one or the other ever being removed explicitly"[5]

Furthermore Gadamer maintains that the job of an interpreter is not to re-enact or to recover the worldview of the author of the text but to recover the primary concern that motivates the text. This is to question the subject matter of the text and allow the subject to also in return question the interpreter. In the words of Linge "to locate the question of the text

is not simply to leave it, but to put it again, so that we, the questioners are ourselves questioned by the subject matter of the text."[6]

In a nutshell understanding is the object of inquiry in Gadamer's hermeneutics nonetheless Gadamer did not posit his hermeneutics as an art or technique of understanding as was the case in traditional theological hermeneutics. That is why Gadamer asserts that for philosophical hermeneutics, "the question is not what we do or what we should do, but what happens beyond our willing and doing."[7] For our author then the task of his hermeneutic is ontological rather than methodological. Thus, the theory searches into fundamental conditions that are beneath the phenomenon of understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside. These conditions for him are historicity, prejudices, tradition and language.

Historicity: this has to do with the past. The past for Gadamer is a pervasive power in the phenomenon of understanding and this was missed by philosophers who dominated the scene before Heidegger. The past defines the ground the interpreter occupies when he understands.

Prejudice: this has to do with our prejudgment about the object of our study. Gadamer sees our prejudices as positive enabling condition of historical understanding. According to him, "the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world."[8]

Tradition: this the continuity of heritage and for Gadamer it is a process of 'presencing', that is, of mediations through which the past already functions in and shapes the interpreter's present horizon.

Language: hermeneutics for Gadamer is a phenomenon of language. Language is the medium in which past and present actually interpenetrate. Gadamer affirms that language and the understanding of transmitted meaning are not two processes but are one and the same.

Understanding as mediation occurs as fusion of horizons in the medium of language. The horizons that fuse together are that of the interpreter and the object that is to be understood. This fusion can only occur when the interpreter allows himself to be elated by the object of his inquiry and it is at this condition that he can see what is questionable in the subject matter and to formulate questions that can question the subject matter further.

5.1   Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the transformation of the Knowing Subject

Having seen the views of the following authors, Heidegger; David E. Linge; Jean Grodin and Andrezej Wiercinski; Cubuku, Regan, Loren; Dobrosavljev and Gill on Gadamer and the identified gap which our work intends to fill in this work, we in this section philosophically appraise Gadamer's hermeneutics in order to actualize our purpose. Knowledge in its triad nature requires that the knowing subject is conscious of the object of his knowledge. The process of becoming conscious determines to a very large extent how active both the knowing subject and the object of knowledge become in the knowing process. One thing common to the major theories of knowledge such as rationalism and empiricism is that in their pursuit for objective knowledge, they followed the scientific mode of experiencing the world or acquiring knowledge that made the knowing subject the determining factor of what it knows about the object of experience or the experienced it. These theories render the object of knowledge passive in the process of knowing and the whole system seem to begin and end with the knowing subject.

Man wants a knowledge that is devoid of prejudices and he also wants to know the object of knowledge just as it presents itself, efforts have been made by him to establish methods, rules and principles that keep him from any form of interaction, conversation or dialogue with the object of his knowledge. Because the knowing subject is very active in the knowing process in the sense that he follows and obeys the laid down principles, rules and methods, he ends up dominating the object of knowledge. He has no room for any form of conversation with the object that is known. The object is considered as not having a story to

tell, no history, no culture and tradition. The object should be known and understood as it is. For Gadamer, this is possible because man is no longer at home. He has been estranged from the world and has created a schism between the I and others, self and world, the past and the present. This has led to the famous subject-object dichotomy.

Subject-object dichotomy is the distinction between thinkers and what they think about. The dichotomy is an inter-implicative distinction between thinkers and what they think about in which each presupposes the other. Subject-object dichotomy is acknowledged in most philosophical traditions, but emphasized especially in continental philosophy, beginning with Descartes and Kant.

Gadamer however in his hermeneutics gives us a new direction on what should be the role of both the knowing subject and the object that is known in the process of understanding. Unlike other theories of knowledge that were based on the scientific methodology whereby man would want to extend his empire over things and nature, Gadamer makes us to have a different view of what should be the roles of both the subject that knows and the object that is known. In his discussions on the fusion of horizons (*Fusion des Horizontes*) he made it clear that at the point of the fusion, "there is a birth and growth of something reducible to neither the interpreter, nor the text, nor their conjunction."[9] Again in Gadamer's hermeneutics the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside over understanding of the interpreted object.

In this new line of thought presented to us by Gadamer, in which the subject does not ultimately preside over understanding, the subject is an equal participant with the object to be understood in the process of understanding. The fusion of horizon furthermore bridges the subject-object dichotomy as both the subject and object come together to form a new understanding that cannot be equalled to the previous understanding of the subject or the object and not even a conjunction of both.

This has some social implications for man who in this context is the knowing subject. First this approach to understanding will surely make the subject not to see himself as the

dominating agent or the conquering warrior while trying to understand an object. As he fuses his fusion with that of the object of knowledge, he goes into an interaction and dialogue with the object. As he questions the object, he also allows the object to question him too. Furthermore, with the realization that he does not preside over understanding, he cannot but treat the object with mutual respect and reciprocity. Relating this to man's relationship with his fellowmen, Gadamer's hermeneutics especially on the aspect of fusion of horizon should make man treat his fellow men with a sense of dignity and respect. Gadamer's view bridges the subject-object dichotomy witnessed in the continental philosophy that made man to believe that knowledge and understanding revolves round him and every other person or thing is an object that must be treated as such. In Gadamer's hermeneutics both the experiencing subject and the experienced object are equal and mutual participants in the process of knowing.

Furthermore, Gadamer made it clear at the beginning of his work, *Truth and Method,* that his aim remains philosophic because his interest goes beyond our willing and doing. The pursuit of objective knowledge has not been able to take man beyond the level of willing and doing. It is all about the individual as the subject and what he can do and will. The dark side to this position is that it has made man to become very egoistic and individualistic as a willing and doing man. Man feels that the wheel of knowledge and understanding revolves round him. He is the only entity that matters as every other thing is secondary and must be treated as such.

The subject-object dichotomy is also responsible for some persons seeing themselves as superior while others are inferior. Because the other feels superior to the other, he automatically becomes the subject while the other the object. The relationship existing between them becomes superior-inferior relationship and not human to human relationship or person to person relationship that is based on the principles of equality, mutuality and reciprocity. The superior treats the inferior just as he would treat an object. This is also

likened to the master-slave relationship where the slave is treated as the master's property or mere tools. All these are possible because someone is the subject while the others are the objects.

In addition, the subject-object dichotomy is also seen as the I – It relationship. This relationship enables us to approach the world through experience. What happens in experience is that "man collects data, analyzes them, classifies them, and theorizes about them. The object of experience (the It) is viewed as a thing to be utilized, a thing to be known or put to some purpose."[10] Experience allows for a distance between the experiencing I and the experienced It because the experiencing I is expected to be an objective observer. No relationship whatsoever exists between the subject and the object as the subject cannot engage the objects in any form of interactions.

Gadamer however reinvented what the role of the experiencing I should be in the process of knowledge in his hermeneutics. He gives us what should make us better humans who will always consider the other as a being with history, tradition and language. For him to know a given object, you must enter into a relationship with the object. In this case the subject and object participate with one another and their participation ends up transforming them as they encounter each other. The subject encounters the object in its entirety and vice visa as they share in each other's tradition, culture and history. For Gadamer, the relationship between the subject and object should be the I – Thou relationship and not the I – It relationship where the "Thou" is seen not as an object but what is in a relationship with us. According to him "the object of experience has itself the character of a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon, as is the knowledge acquired through experience, the understanding of the other person."[11] The end result is a transformation of the knowing subject. He gets transformed to a better human person as he no longer sees the object of his knowledge as a mere object but as another being with tradition and history that should be treated with respect and dignity.

The transformative nature of Gadamer's hermeneutics is such that it will lead us to the fulfilment of Kant's categorical imperative which urges us not to treat others as means but always as ends in themselves. The positive aspect of this is that the experiencing subject can no longer see the object of experience as a tool that can be absolutely known and used. When we treat the 'Thou' as an end, we become very open to each other. Openness to each other becomes very necessary and the foundation for genuine human relationship. According to Gadamer:

> Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person "understands" the other, in the sense of surveying him. Similarly; to hear and obey someone does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person a slave. Openness to the other, then, includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me.[12]

The transformation of the individual here is such that you see the other as another you and you are open to him just as he is open to you. At this point you understand each not necessarily losing your individuality to one another but embracing each other as active participants in the process of understanding.

In summation of this sub-section, we make bold to state that Gadamer's hermeneutics which sees understanding as an event that occurs within time through the process of fusion of horizon (*fusion des horizontes*), is transformative in nature. The transformative nature makes the interpreter to look for what is meaningful now, not antiquarian in the object of knowledge. It also puts the present approaches of both the interpreter and the interpreted in question by its critique of our present horizon. Finally it transforms the basic way we see things. It is not something that supports a given point of view but one that can positively change a given point of view. Palmer calls this "the therapeutic dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics."[13] Gadamer's hermeneutics therefore does not just criticize, it offers an alternative to a present perspective and this is what makes it transformative.

5.2   The Principles of Mutuality and Reciprocity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics

The principle of mutuality is the mutual relationship that exists between the interpreting subject and the interpreted object. They both see themselves as partners in progress who come together with their past experiences and prejudices in order to have a better understanding of themselves. Both the interpreting subject and text or the interpreted text, are intimate by sharing some sentiments. While sharing mutual intimacy, they also agree to allow each other to have the same rights. They are also reciprocal to each other thereby enjoying mutual dependence, action or influence.

The principle of mutuality reflects in Gadamer's discussions on the fusion of horizons. Gadamer opines that understanding takes place when the interpreter fuses his horizons with the horizons of the text or the interpreted object. At the point of the fusion, the interpreter passes into an alien horizon unconnected to him. The object also does same and when both horizons are fused together mutually, they constitute one great horizon that moves from within and beyond the one frontiers of the present. This fact alludes to the fact that to understand the other, we need to place ourselves in the position of others and if we fail to do this, we cannot understand their otherness or the indissoluble individuality of the other person.

One very interesting thing about Gadamer's fusion of horizon is that in it the old and new ideas continue to grow together to make better ideas or meanings. If the old and new ideas are not mutual in their relationship with one another there is no how they can make better ideas or meanings. It is because they are intimate and mutual that they can come up with better ideas and meanings that are incorporations of the past and the present. Gadamer further states that at the point of the fusion of horizon, "there is a birth and growth of something reducible to neither the interpreter, nor the text, nor their conjunctions."[14] The mutual relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted object results to something completely new and an independent horizon.

Relating this to human relationships, we can see that humans need to take the principle of mutuality very seriously in our dealings with one another. If we see ourselves as mutual partners in progress then man's inhumanity to man will surely be a thing of the past. This principle when understood and applied by humans can enable us have better trust for each other and on the account of this, no one would want to treat the other person as a slave, or an object. Humans will have better respect for one another and will treat others with a sense of dignity bearing in mind that we all have something to contribute to the generality of humans. It will further make humans to treat others with a sense of equality.

All these are made possible because of another value in Gadamer's hermeneutic which is the value of dialogue. For Gadamer no meaningful interpretation can take place without dialogue and that is why he conceives of interpretive understanding as a dialogue between the interpreter and the text. Understanding therefore through interpretation is a dialogue. Dialogue we know is a conversation between two or more people. The practical relevance of dialogue cannot be over emphasised in our today's world. There is no gain saying that many wars that wiped off many lives could have been averted if and only if the war lords agreed to dialogue among themselves.

Some important positive effects of dialogue are tolerance, patriotism, and respect among human beings. Furthermore, through dialogue critical and analytical way of thinking is cultivated. We can tolerate each other when we must have heard the other's stories, understood why he did what he did and how he did it. It is through dialogue that our doubts are cleared as we open ourselves to the other and the other also opens himself to us. Dialogue enables us to clear our prejudices and also refine some of our previous conceptions about the object of interpretation. According to Kogler:

> Gadamer's analysis of the relation between an interpreter and a text is convincingly modelled after the real conversation between two subjects, because as in real dialogue we are aiming to understand what the other says by following his or her thoughts and to engage in an exchange that mutually adjusts and respects the two perspectives; our own and the one

of the other. Yet using the actual conversation with the other as a model for textual understanding also illuminates what goes into any real conversation between two actual agent: the dialogue between agents is itself based on a pre-understanding of each one with regard to the relevant subject matter; a successful dialogue will always transcend the individual perspectives involved and enlarge the views of each participant, whether it leads to a new shared view or whether it brings out irreconcilable differences, and a real dialogue is always an event that is based on prior background understandings that help actualise a process that is beyond the subjective control of each of the agents involved.[15]

Dialogue for Gadamer is very important; it is what accounts for anti-methodological thrust that defines Gadamer's hermeneutics. Dialogue as a process of understanding can only but contribute to epistemic humility because the subject here would realize that his beliefs and assumptions are situated, limited and even incomplete and needs to be improved upon. This confirms Bertrand Russell's assertion that the more he knows, the more he realizes that there are so many things out there that he has not known thereby making him humbler. Still in the same line of thought Ludwig Wittgenstein's description of philosophy as I know not what is also encapsulated in this fact of epistemic humility. Our knowledge or understanding of things around us should make us humble because our views about things are limited, situated and in most cases incomplete. Even in the case of objective realities like God, it is accepted that the existence of God is objective but the individual's perception of Him is limited, situated and in most cases incomplete. Thus man lacks absolute knowledge of things and that is why our knowledge should make us humble and with that sense of humility, we approach the object of understanding. We must therefore be humble enough to listen to the other person whether in form of verbal conversation or trying to understand a text.

Furthermore, in Gadamer's hermeneutics there is another principle that is worth mentioning here. It is the principle of reciprocity. Actually we cannot have mutuality without reciprocity. There is mutuality between the interpreting subject and the interpreted object because they are both reciprocal in their dialogue with each other. Gadamer notes that

> ... the experience of the 'Thou' and of understanding it is that the 'Thou' is acknowledged as a person, but that despite the involvement of the 'Thou', the understanding of the letter is still a form of self-relatedness. This proceeds from the dialectical appearance that the dialect of the 'I-Thou' relation brings with it. This relation is not immediate, but reflective. To every claim there is a counter-claim.[16]

The relationship between the 'I-Thou' is on the grounds of mutual dialectics, a to and fro movement of ideas that enables each to question freely the claims of the other and allow the other to also question his claims. As the ideas and claims are questioned by the other reflectively, the negative aspects of the claims are dropped as better understanding is reached by both parties. For Gadamer, in the real sense of the 'I-Thou' relationship there is a dialectic of reciprocity that governs such even though it is hidden from the minds of the individuals. When our relationships are based on the principle of dialectic reciprocity, we cannot see the other person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used. Anyone who claims that he can absolutely know the other person or use him as a tool has only reflected "himself out of the mutuality of such a relation, changes himself out of a living relationship bond."[17] To experience the 'Thou' as truly a 'Thou' there is need for openness. The openness here is for both parties who have recognized themselves as partners in progress. Gadamer explains in clear terms what it means to be open to one another as a way of understanding each other thus: "openness to the other, then, includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me."[18]

Still within the confines of mutuality, reciprocity and dialogue, it must be stated here that Gadamer's adoption of the Socratic dialectics makes his work stand out. The Socratic question and answer method basically is a conversation between the 'I' and 'Thou' in which they seek for understanding in language. As they go into the question and answer process they both ask questions they feel relevant to each other in order to get their illegitimate prejudices dropped while retaining only the legitimate prejudices that will fuse with the other's legitimate prejudices.

5.3   Understanding as Application

Another success of Gadamer's hermeneutics is seen in his integration of application to understanding. Our understanding of an object of knowledge should be seen in the application of knowledge acquired. Thus understanding should and must go beyond the level of theory to a more practical level. Traditionally hermeneutics was divided into three distinct parts namely *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding), *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation) and *subtilitas applicandi* (application). Gadamer's innovation here however is in his conceiving of hermeneutics as a unified process made up of three integral parts. These integral parts are understanding, interpretation and application. According to him "we consider application to be as integral a part of the hermeneutical act as are understanding and interpretation."[19] In the words of Weinsheimer, Gadamer's position is "that hermeneutics is best understood as the triunion of understanding and interpretation with application in one integral unit."[20] Gadamer would assert further that the task of the interpreter today "is not simply to reproduce what is said by one of the partners in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in the way that seems necessary to him considering the real situation of the dialogue, which only he knows since only he knows both languages being used in the discussion."[21] Essentially then Gadamer's hermeneutics is a call to the realization that hermeneutics is incomplete and insufficient as a theory, because we don't engage in hermeneutics until we live hermeneutically. It is the nature of man as a being-in-the world to find meanings in the world we encounter, continually interpreting and even revising our understanding in response to our encounter with our environment. We should also recall that understanding for Gadamer is "a particular case of application of something universal to a particular situation."[22] Through interpretation, knowledge is acquired by understanding what is interpreted, then this knowledge is applied to a particular situation.

Gadamer further takes leverage on Aristotle's ethics especially the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* which for Aristotle is practical wisdom. Gadamer interprets this however

as a kind of wisdom that requires an understanding of one's situation and the context that becomes manifested only in virtuous living. His interest in Aristotle's ethics is based on Aristotle's concern with reason and knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming. Aristotle had earlier argued according to Gadamer that the basis for moral knowledge in man is a striving that is expected to develop into a fixed attitude. Aristotle's ethics therefore remains practical and not just speculative. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer argues that any knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring the demands that the situation makes. In Aristotle's *phronesis*, we see that for a person to make moral decisions, he must have learnt something on morality generally either by education or customs. At least he must have learnt what in general is right. However, the task of making a moral decision is that of doing the right thing in a particular situation that is, seeing what is right within a given situation and laying hold of it.

Gadamer concludes by re-attesting that application is neither a subsequent nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning."[23] When an interpreter by implication is given a traditional text, he must seek to understand what the piece of tradition says, what constitutes the meaning and importance of the text. But in order to understand the text, the interpreter must seek to regard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation and relate the text to his hermeneutical situation.

Gadamer demonstrates how integral understanding is with application when he discussed legal and theological hermeneutics. Understanding of law and scripture is complete when it is applied to concrete life situations. To understand the law and even the scriptures would mean that they are understood in relation to the present, "for one has not yet understood them until they can be applied to the situation at hand. In legal and theological hermeneutics, it is clearest that application is integral with, and indivisible from, interpretive understanding."[24]

Furthermore, it is pertinent to also highlight that Gadamer's concept of application is much more akin to that of translation which plays relevant role in his hermeneutics. Hence, the meaning of an event, person, a text or an artwork that needs to be understood always needs to be translated. Grondin throws more light on this when he writes that:

> What I seek to translate (understand, apply) is always something that is at first foreign to me, but that is in some way binding for my interpretation: I seek to understand Plato, Schubert, a scientific theory, etc. I cannot say whatever I want, but I can only unfold my understanding in terms that I can follow and hope to communicate. Understanding as an application, is thus always a challenge, but I can only raise up to it if I succeed in finding words for what needs and cries to be understood.[25]

Our understanding of anything is made possible when we apply it to a language that is familiar to us. To understand Plato's work in this contemporary epoch would be more meaningful if I read translations or interpretations done in recent times because the recent works will be rendered in terms that are present and give me a sense of otherness. My choice of recent works on Plato does not by any means mean that the recent authors understood Plato better than authors before them. It simply means that the recent authors are expected to interpret him by applying his views to things that are relevant to us today. To be able to do this, application will be required. It is a fact that the necessity of application to given situations makes the interpretation tentative because it is an attempt to come to grips with what needs to be understood but which can never be absolutely final. Thus the next interpreter of an event, people, or any object of interpretation, can always find better words for what needs to be understood and even more suited. Thus, no interpretation can be absolutely final.

5.4   Gadamer's Reinvention of Prejudice

The concept of prejudice had a negative connotation before Gadamer, especially within the enlightenment period. Prejudices was seen as leading to misunderstanding therefore should not be considered when issues of knowledge and understanding are

discussed. No wonder so much emphasis was placed on method as a way of eliminating prejudice and its negative consequences for human knowledge.

The word 'prejudice' is derived from two Latin words, *pre* and *judice* which literally mean pre-judgment. It is also seen as an unreflective judgement or over-hasty reasoning that could result from narrow-mindedness of basically subjective opinion. Prejudice could be described as when judgements are made possible not by critical thinking or the following of scientific methods, but from a set of pre-reflective involvements with the world. Among the enlightenment philosophers and Descartes, prejudice is behind every error in human knowledge.

This notwithstanding, Gadamer made frantic efforts to rehabilitate the concept and gave it some positive role in human understanding and interpretation. For Gadamer, prejudice is prejudgement and it is the function of subject's particularity, historicity, finitude and situatedness. It refers to those presuppositions with which subjects apprehend reality and which structures out the picture of reality that a subject eventually builds.

This concept literally was lost in the modern era of philosophy all in an attempt to achieve an objective (prejudice free) description of the world and with its attendant mechanistic understanding of the world. Gadamer reinvented this concept when he asserts that it is the prejudice we have about a thing that opens us up into dialogue with the thing. We must recall that for Gadamer understand occurs as a result of the fusion of horizons and this fusion can only happen when we dialogue with the object by questioning it and allowing it to question us. Through this dialogical relationship, our illegitimate prejudices are filtered off while the legitimate ones are fused with the legitimate horizon of the object leading to understanding not determined by the knowing subject or the object of knowledge. For Gadamer, to do justice to man's finite and historical mode of being, there is need to recognise the existence of legitimate prejudice which serves as the familiar world we stand on in order to grasp the meaning of the strange world. Thus we cannot understand the strange world if we

do not approach it from the world that is familiar to us. This is clear manifestation of the saying that no one speaks from nowhere. To understand what you don't know, you approach it with what you know. Through the process of dialogue between the familiar and the strange worlds, ideas that are illegitimate in both are filtered off through the process of dialectics which allows both parties to question and be questioned. According to Linge,

> the familiar horizons of the interpreter's world, though perhaps more difficult to grasp thematically, are as integral a part of the event of understanding as are the explicit procedures by which he assimilates the alien object. Such horizons constitute the interpreter's own immediate participation in traditions that are not themselves the object of understanding but the condition of its occurrence.[26]

The familiar horizon is the interpreter's present situation and it is what is expected of the interpreter to bring to the table of dialogue with the text.

Nevertheless in the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the interpreter's present situation only has a negative value. These encouraged the interpreter to transcend his present situation as it is a source of prejudice, distortions that block valid understanding. In Schleiermacher and Dilthey we see a replay of the Cartesian enlightenment ideal of the autonomous subject who must successfully free himself from the immediate entanglements of history and the prejudices that come with it.

Gadamer reacts to the above position by asking if the knower can truly leave his immediate situation in the present by merely adopting an attitude. He sees any attempt at asking the interpreter to overcome his present situation as an accidental factor. For him it is ontological that the knower's present situation is constitutively involved in any process of understanding. Following this position Gadamer, according to Linge "takes the knower's boundness to his present horizons and the temporal gulf separating him from his object to be the productive ground of all understanding rather than negative factors or impediments to be overcome"[27] For him, our prejudices are positive and not negative as they are the enabling conditions that initially opens us up to dialogue with object. He maintains that "the historicity

of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the world, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world."[28] Without prejudice therefore, we cannot initiate any form of communication with the object. We cannot question it and it cannot question us as we will all remain closed to each other.

Though Gadamer's concept of prejudice has been very controversial, but it has shown his determination to acknowledge the unsuspendable finitude and historicity of understanding and to exhibit the positive role they actually play in every human transmission of meaning. Gadamer elevated the past and made it very strong in the phenomenon of understanding. He argues that the elimination of prejudice will be tantamount to the elimination of history because the historians cannot do without prejudice. Prejudice like the past defines the ground the interpreter occupies when he understands. Prejudice for him is productive and that is why Gadamer's hermeneutics is productive rather than reproductive or duplicative. Understanding is a productive activity because coming to an understanding involves mediation, integration, assimilation and application. That is Gadamer's hermeneutics; understanding is productive because of historical difference. The historical difference according to him is the temporal distance which is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, the ground of our projections and prejudices. Temporal distance remains the ground of the productivity of understanding without which understanding will not happen. The temporal distance lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully even though the meaning of a text or any work of art is never finished. This is an infinite process because through it errors are excluded continuously and it keeps emerging as a new source of understanding. Temporal distance filters and reveals elements of new meaning and in itself continuous to undergo constant movement and extension. In this movement and extension it filters all illegitimate prejudices and allows the legitimate prejudices that can lead to understanding.

In the above pages we have succinctly appraised philosophically some of the values inherent in the hermeneutics of Gadamer that we feel can transform man to a better person in his relationship with his fellow men and his environment. First we discussed a value that the whole world is in dare need of today as we leave in the world where everyone wants to speak and no one wants to listen. The value of dialogue is urgently needed for humans to build a more accommodating community. We must learn to dialogue with one another by asking relevant questions and allowing others to question us. The fruit of the dialogue will always be a better understanding and a more refined understanding that cannot be said to be a product of one of the speakers. Furthermore, dialogue is a foundation for mutual equality and reciprocity which will amount to respect for ones fellow humans. When we understand that we are equal, we can easily go into dialogue with others by questioning their views and allowing them to question our views also in order to achieve a better understanding of the object. When man becomes mutual in his relationship with others, he will no longer see another person as tool or instrument to be used and abandoned. He will also not treat him as nobody who has nothing to contribute to the generality of mankind and will automatically seize to be a wolf unto his fellow men. When we realize that each and every one of us has a history, a tradition and a story to tell, then we will pay attention to them to narrate their stories as we expect them to also pay attention to us when we narrate our own stories. Gadamer's hermeneutics practically speaking when adopted as another source of knowing cannot but make man humbler yet because it has the capacity of opening us up to others and opening others up to us. The practical implication of this is that man who is the knowing subject will come to the realization that he is a partner in progress just like the object that is known and not just a domineering agent who is out to take dominion over everything.

Another value Gadamer extolled in his hermeneutics is his integration of understanding with application. Thus we understand better when we apply what we claim to

have understood to situations around us. This is where the big issue is. Today our educational system is more of theoretical; even the so-called practical courses end up becoming theoretical. And that is why some, after reading some of the perceived practical courses remain at the level of theories with nothing practical to show. Nigerian education from its inception was more grammatically inclined than practical and this is one of the reasons we had more of grammar schools in those days to the benefit of the missionaries who needed translators. That was the foundation but the unfortunate thing here is that we have not moved too far from it. Today we have moved from grammar acquisition to certificate acquisition leaving aside knowledge acquisition and this is one of the major reasons why the nation is failing developmentally. We cannot claim to have understood when we cannot apply what we have understood. Our ability to apply what we have understood means we are able to bring what is in the past into the future even though the meaning may change but we are making it meaningful within our given situation. Furthermore, when we talk of understanding as an application it also points to the fact that our knowledge should be problem solving. This is to say that we should use the knowledge acquired to solve our everyday problems but because we fail to acquire the knowledge, we cannot even identify the problems that are around us. This is the gap between Nigeria's present state of development and where we are suppose to be developmentally as a nation.

We equally discussed Gadamer's reinvention of prejudice. The general conception before him is that prejudice is responsible for errors in understanding. In order to eliminate it the emphasis became the use of methods as a way of achieving an objective knowledge free from all forms of prejudice. Our query here however is if truly we can have a prejudice-less knowledge especially among the social sciences? Is it possible to do a research that the researcher does not in any form influence the outcome of the results among social science? The fact remains that Gadamer in his hermeneutics discussed prejudice as an important

component of understanding. Prejudice remains from his perspective the initiator of understanding or differently put the motivating factor that enables our quest to know a particular thing. This actually could lead to relativism but one fact we cannot deny is that we all see things from different points of view. Even in issues of objective reality such as the sun shining, yes it shines at a particular temperature but people express their feelings of it differently. We all know that that there is a being greater than man that exists but our perception of this being differs. The facts are there but our perception about the facts differs in most cases. This does not make the fact less what it is but what differs is just our perception of it. It is on this basis that we want to affirm that man cannot completely do away with prejudices. We all have our different histories, natures, nurtures and even traditions. All these in one way or the other constitute what the French philosopher, Henri Bergson describes as baggage of the past that we carry from where we make projections into the future that determines as well as affect our present existence.

5.5   Beyond Prejudices: The Principles of Mutuality and Reciprocity in Resolution of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa

In the previous section we discussed Gadamer's reinvention of prejudice and the fundamental role it plays in the process of knowing and understanding. This section of our research recognizes that even though prejudice plays positive roles in the process of understanding as the initiator of dialogue that exists between the interpreter and the text or whatever that is interpreted, there is need to take a step beyond prejudice in our bid to resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa in general. It is a known fact that we encounter others from the background of what we may have heard and thought about them. This actually is suppose to initiate a dialogue between the individuals, however in most cases we do not go beyond the level of prejudice which is expected to take us to the level of fusion of horizons where we are expected to have a new understanding. Most times we base our relationship

with others on the grounds of the prejudices. This happens not only among individuals but even among ethnic groups.

There are the tendencies among the ethnic groups to always think of themselves as being better than the others. And being engrossed by this feeling, they treat the others as second class citizens. Whereby there is some form of resistance from the other side, the end result is always ethnic crises or conflicts. It is therefore not out of place to argue here that our prejudices have the tendencies to lead to ethnic conflicts especially in situations where the ethnic groups fail to go beyond their prejudices. Using Nigeria as an example, there is no gain saying that the various ethnic groups as well as the religious and political groups are prejudiced against each other. The Hausa ethnic group has so many prejudices against the Igbo ethnic group just as the Igbo ethnic group has against Hausas. The same is applicable to the Yorubas and the Hausas or the Igbos. The major ethnic groups are prejudiced against the minority groups in the same way the minorities are against the majorities. Consequently, no trust for one another and the absence of trust hampers genuine dialogue. Thus, fusion of horizons becomes practically impossible. When the necessary harmony needed is not attained, then understanding will surely fail and misunderstanding and conflicts become inevitable.

It is therefore our theses here that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole could be likened to the fact that the ethnic groups have not made themselves open to each other. We have refused to question the prejudices we grew up with about the other groups and have also refused to go into conversation with others in order to affirm or deny the prejudices we have about them or they have about us. We have so much attached ourselves to the prejudices we have about each other and have also refused to let these prejudices open us up in order to lead us to a dialogue with one another. We therefore at this juncture posit that in order for ethnic conflicts in Nigeria and Africa to be resolved we must go beyond prejudices and pay more attention to the principles of mutuality, reciprocity and equality.

Gadamer made it very clear that the event of understanding is not the sole prerogative of the interpreting subject but an event that requires mutual participation by both the subject and the object. It therefore calls for not only mutuality but a sense of equality and reciprocity. Resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa therefore would necessitate that ethnic groups begin to see themselves fundamentally as equal participants in the world. They must approach each other with a sense of mutuality, seeing themselves as partners in progress and not enemies to be conquered and defeated. By this fact the various ethnic groups will realize that even though your culture and history may be different from the mine and my different from yours, we are not opposed to each other rather we are complementary to one another. The variances we see in each other should unite us instead of dividing us. These differences should be seen as shared sentiments. As the ethnic groups share mutual intimacy, they should allow others to have the rights due them.

Mutuality furthermore, should enable us to put aside our prejudices and place ourselves in the position of others. Mutuality naturally breeds respect for one another. Even when the other ethnic groups do things different from the way and manner my ethnic group does, we should be able to respect the opinions and views of the other persons or groups. Gadamer had earlier stated that at the point of fusion of horizons "there is a birth and growth of something reducible to neither the interpreter nor the text, nor their conjunction."[29] This new birth will not happen if we remain at the level of our prejudices thereby arrogating to ourselves the sole prerogative of understanding.

Furthermore, going beyond prejudice as a means of resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa will necessitate that the ethnic groups reciprocate the others good wishes. Thus when my opinions and views are questioned by the other, I should avail him the opportunity of giving an answer. While giving the answer, I must bear in mind that the other must not accept all my claims. I should be ready for counter claims and that is why Gadamer will reiterate that:

> ... the experience of the 'Thou' and of understanding it is that the 'Thou' is acknowledged as a person, but that despite the involvement of the 'Thou', the understanding of the letter is still a form of self-relatedness. This proceeds from the dialectical appearance that the dialect of the 'I-thou' relation brings with it. This relation is not immediate, but reflective. To every claim there is a counter-claim.[30]

The fundamental solution to ethnic conflicts all over the world has remained dialogue. Africans must not shy away from dialogue. It is through dialogue especially genuine dialogue conducted with a sense of humility, mutuality, equality and reciprocity. The end result of this form of dialogue may not be immediate, but it must be reflective. The parties involved must be very reflective of their position and that of the other. It should be done with open-mindedness knowing very well that no one is trying to out smart the other. They must be open to a counter claims to their various claims. They must allow their ideas to be questioned thoroughly and must remain open-minded to accept any counter-claim to their ideas that are better more reasonable and for the peace and development of their people. This is what Gadamer would call the dialectic reciprocity and simply calls for openness.

This dissertation therefore calls on African leaders to always go beyond prejudice in their search for solutions to ethnic conflicts in Africa. We therefore recommend that the principle of mutuality and reciprocity founded on dialogue is a panacea for ethnic conflict resolution in Africa. Use of guns and other dangerous weapons against each other in Africa as a way of resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa will continue to fail us. As rational creatures we must go beyond our individual and collective prejudices and adopt these simple but very effective principles of mutuality and reciprocity in the resolution of ethnic conflicts in Africa bearing in mind that most of these conflicts are products of our prejudices.

One thing that is very certain is that reaching of agreement is at the heart of resolving conflict for Gadamer. Hermeneutics therefore remains the necessary course that gives us the opportunity to see not what the other persons views are but why somebody has arrived at that

view. Hermeneutics has the capacity to take us beyond prejudice in conflict resolution in Africa because it teaches us respect for each other, tolerance and the ability to listen to each other. When these important factors are put into considerations then we may not even have reasons to go into ethnic crises but even if it does happen then the mechanism to resolve it will be allowing ourselves to go beyond prejudice and embrace mutual respect, tolerance and dialogue with each other.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

6.1   Evaluation

It is pertinent to begin this section with the affirmation that Gadamer's works in historical hermeneutics laid the groundwork for a movement in hermeneutics generally and the social sciences specifically which differed from the earlier subject/object separation of the natural sciences, towards a more inter-subjective approach to human knowledge and understanding. The researcher of a work or event affects and is affected by the event under study. Thus, the image of the interpreter as separate from and watching over the object of study is replaced by a dialogical understanding of past texts and events. Subsequently in trying to connect hermeneutic with other forms of analysis in social sciences, Apel and Habermas made considerable use of Gadamer's work. They accepted that interpretation is very important to all forms of inquiry, but upheld that not every study of human activity in the society is purely hermeneutic.

Jürgen Habermas, the recent heir to the Frankfurt School of critical theory, shares in Gadamer's disdain for positivism. Habermas however, claims to develop an emancipatory knowledge that will allow for the role of human action as opposed to natural laws in the historical development of society. An emancipatory knowledge, which is the objective of his "critical theory", is one "in which distortions in the intersubjective communication, furthered by the scientific method, are exposed for their part in the alienation of persons from themselves and their part."[1] Nevertheless, even when Habermas endorsed Gadamer's attack on positivism and rationalism, he was unwilling to accept that the world is constituted by language reflecting upon itself. For him, a Marxist social philosopher, labour and domination are also constitutive ontological elements that Gadamer failed to take into cognisance in his hermeneutics. Though he applied the hermeneutic approach to the social sciences, he resisted what he calls Gadamer's idealism of language. Gadamer had earlier argued that the thing to

be understood is language, however Habermas counters this premise by arguing that language as adopted by Gadamer "is not only a bearer of cultural traditions and the medium of inter-subjective communication, it is also a medium of domination and power in relations between people."[2] For Habermas then language can become an instrument of domination in the hands of some few individuals and it can also serve as a bearer among cultural traditions.

We consent to Habermas' position because there are obvious cases when language could turn to instrument of dominations and power. For instance when a people are made to abandon their native language for a foreign one, or even prefer a foreign language to their mother tongue, mentally they are already conquered as they are compelled to learn and reason in their second language. Britain and the United States of America have so much dominated the greater part of the world today through their language (English) such that anyone who does not speak the language of the two great nations may be left with some inferior feelings within. We are left to express ourselves in foreign languages that may not have names for some of the realities in our culture and tradition. Furthermore speaking a foreign language has a way of inhibiting originality of thought because one is compelled to express oneself in concepts and categories that are not original to him.

Emilio Betti and Karl-Otto Apel also attacked Gadamer for surrendering the notion of objectivity. Apel approved of Gadamer's emphasis on inter-subjectivity, but argued that he had compromised and relativised what is left of the notion of rationality. Apel writes:

> The strength of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics lies in his critique of the objectivistic methodological ideal of historicism, but he goes too far when he disputes the meaning of the methodological hermeneutic abstraction from the question of truth and equates the model of the judge or director with that of the interpreter.[3]

One obvious fact in Gadamer's hermeneutics is his insistence on the productive roles of prejudice in the process of understanding. Any form of criticism against prejudice in the process of understanding is a prejudice against prejudice. Gadamer therefore never believed in

objective knowledge and he maintains that the insistence and adoption of method cannot lead to truth. However what Gadamer failed to let us know is what truth is and where truth can be found. Apel further agrees with Gadamer that the problem of "understanding" is universal, but he argues that hermeneutics entail an expanded understanding of rationality rather than one that moves in the direction of relativity.

Richard Rorty, on the other hand evaluates Gadamer from a different angle. He agrees with Gadamer on the role of 'pre-judgment', 'tradition', 'effective-history' and the relativity of radical 'historical finitude'. Rorty however argues that 'truth' should be expressed in terms that are more pragmatic. He sees hermeneutics as "an expression of the hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled."[4] In his essay "Solidarity or Subjectivity", Rorty argues that giving judgments between 'traditions' can be carried out only on a pragmatic basis, since all norms, whether ethical or rational, remain relative to the traditions themselves.[5] Thus, the best tradition should be the one that works better for any particular community in solving her peculiar problems as humans in the same society.

Meaning in Gadamer's views is not something to be determined objectively; rather, it is a subjective element arrived at through a circular experience of the interpreter with the text. Nevertheless, Gadamer argues that the intention of the interpreter or that of the author or a conjunction of the two cannot determine the meaning of an interpreted work. Emilio Betti affirmed Gadamer's hermeneutics in that it can guarantee the internal unity of interpretative materials, of say, a work of literature or of actions of men in another historical period or alien culture. Betti noted that there are four hermeneutic premises of which according to him, Gadamer treated only three, and these are; the object has to be understood in its own term, i.e. as a subject (hermeneutic autonomy). It has to be understood in context ('meaning coherence). It has to conform to what he calls the "actuality" of the experience of the interpreter ('pre-judgment'). The fourth element, which according to him underpins the other

three, did not appear in Gadamer's work. This he called 'meaning equivalence', which means, "the interpretation of a human product or action is adequate in relation to the intentions of its originator."[6] In his opinion, the meaning of an interpreted text unlike in Gadamer, cannot be said to be different from intentions of its originator(s). Thus to get at the meaning of a product of man or his actions, the interpreter is to seek for the originator's intention for doing that.

Betti's meaning equivalence gives leverage to Eric D. Hirsch who took off from the presupposition that only authorial intent supplies a valid criterion for meaning. According to Dwight Poggemiller in his article "Hermeneutics and Epistemology: Hirsch's Author Centered Meaning; Radical Historicism and Gadamer's Truth and Method" observed that for Hirsch, "the authors intention is not the authors mental process at a time of writing. Neither should it be equated with his plans in writing his text."[7] Hirsch as well as P.D Juhl argues that many acts are intended but few are actually planned out.

For Hirsch, the author centered meaning is an intention between individual consciousness (the author) and the language in which he express himself. He asserts that "a word sequence means nothing until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it."[8] Burhanettin Tatar expresses this better in the following words, "since the conventions of language can sponsor different meanings from the same sequence of words, language cannot be the determiner of meaning of a text itself.[9] Hirsch nevertheless accepts that all meaning communicated by texts is to some extent bound by language. However, meaning as a personal entity for him, cannot exist apart from an intentional being. "There is no way to have meaning without the presence of the author."[10] Hirsch, in making this claim firmly anchored the meaning of the text in the intention of the author, and the author is the only one with only legitimate claim to initiate its meaning. The author's intention or consciousness here becomes the standard for meaning. It is Hirsch's opinion that

if we take the reader's consciousness as our standard for meaning of a text, we will sacrifice any yardstick for measuring validity, since there are invariably many readers for every text. Hirsch's strongest defence of authorial intent therefore rests on the simple fact that it alone offers us a genuinely discriminating norm against which to compare various interpretations.

Consequently, Hirsch raises the following question against the critics of authorial intention of which Gadamer is at the forefront. He writes:

> The question I always want to ask critics who dismiss authorial intention, as their norm is one that could be transposed into the categorical imperative or simply into the golden-rule. I want to ask them thus: When you write a piece of criticism, do you want me to disregard your intention and the original meaning? Why do you say to me 'that is not what I meant at all'? Why do you ask me to honor the ethics of language for your writings when you do not honor them for the writings of others? [11]

On another note, Elliot Johnson in agreement with Hirsch opined that verbal communication is the expression of a message by an author to an audience. Therefore, to banish the author's intention from the text is to redefine communication.[12]

Our observation here is that Gadamer's denial that truth or meaning of a text does not reside in the authorial intention is actually a rejection of 'philosophical foundationalism'. However, it could be asked, how successful was he in this project? Though, he rejected that, but his clear emphasis on the role of tradition, history and language proposes that Gadamer is not free from the 'philosophical foundationalism' which he tried to reject. It could be said that in his attempt to reject one he ended up building another.

Beside all these there is still need for commending the efforts of Gadamer in his well argued and articulated work, *Truth and Method* that has sustained and kept alive recent discussions in hermeneutics. David E. Klemm observed that, "Hans-Georg Gadamer, more than anyone else is responsible for intensifying and enlivening hermeneutical discussions since 1960."[13] Gadamer's hermeneutics can be seen as constituting a great paradigm shift in

the history of hermeneutics. Like Dilthey, Gadamer regarded understanding as different from 'explanation' of events of nature but he rejects the Dilthean view of understanding as depending "upon a psychological "re-enactment" of the experience of those the 'meaning of whose actions is understood."[14] This shift by Gadamer can be summarized thus:

In contrast to the traditions since at least the Enlightenment, hermeneutics no longer concerns itself exclusively with the understanding and interpretation of written documents or speech alone.

Unlike in Romantic hermeneutic theory from Schleiermacher, to Wilhelm Dilthey, the aim of understanding is not focused on the communication with or the psychology of another person. Rather it is focused "upon the interchange between two frames of reference or different cultural frames"[15] and this occurs in language.

The hermeneutics of Gadamer explores a realm that is prior to or more fundamental than Dilthey's separation of the natural sciences from the human sciences. His hermeneutics is a movement into the area of 'fundamental ontology' in which understanding is grasped as our way of being-in-the-world.

Another aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics worth commending is his summation of the hermeneutic problems in language. There is an appreciation of the nature of language and its significance both in our intellectual and social lives. Language is raised to a height in which man realizes that his 'life-world' (*lebenswelt*) i.e. his world of personal experience and desires becomes meaningful only through language. Language as the medium of understanding therefore determines everything we know. Through language, we are able to open up our "world" to one another and in language; our different "worlds" merge before understanding can take place.

Nevertheless, some form of absolutism is found in Gadamer's thoughts. Gadamer's assertion, "the being to be understood is language", makes language the only reality that should be of concern to hermeneuts. Again, in Gadamer, we see language possessing man and not the other way round, but we want to ask here, can language, especially the verbal form of it, have a separate existence from man? Can language speak itself without man speaking it? Furthermore, Gadamer did not make any provision for 'reason' in his hermeneutics in clear terms. What we see in his work is language being played high and reason played down. Can we have 'fusion of horizons' without the subject reasoning about the objects under study? Can the hermeneutic dialogue which is very necessary in Gadamer's hermeneutics ever get started without the subject first raising some questions on the object to be understood? Gadamer however, seems to be silent over the relationship between language and thought which is still a contemporary issue. He simply assumed that language determines the object of understanding, understanding itself, and even possesses the subject that understands. The question Gadamer is yet to deal with is, what the role of the interpreter is in the philosophical hermeneutics? Is the interpreter passively waiting to be used by language or what? In addition, how does the operation of language in understanding take into account the functions of will and desires in man.

Finally, Gadamer's denial of author centered meaning has a very pertinent epistemological shortcoming. If we must fuse our horizon with that of the 'effective history' of the text or event, then, how do we determine whether a tradition is trustworthy in order to conduct the interpretative process? Gadamer however failed to give a standard for evaluating the meaning arrived at through the process of fusion of horizons.

Furthermore, from the perspective of dialogue that should exist between the interpreter and the interpreted especially when the interpreted is unable to react or even defend itself against the prejudicial views of an ideological reader. Jean L. Mercier argues

that "readers can approach the text with the hidden or expressed intention to project their own pre-understandings. Even more, they may select those texts that seem to agree with their prejudices and omit those that would unsettle them."[16] The fact remains that there is no balanced dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted. While the interpreter by virtue of being a living entity even though he has some prejudices, can defend his prejudices, the interpreted cannot. Thus it is difficult to have a very transparent dialogue between the interpreter and the text or event that cannot defend itself.

Another challenge witnessed in Gadamer's hermeneutics is determining and confronting the difficulty posed by the past of the author of a text. This challenge springs from the assertion of Gadamer that the meaning of a text always goes beyond its author so that understanding can never mean mere reproduction, but production as well. The question here is to what extent can the meaning of a text be a production? How much of the meaning of the text can be production and how much reproduction? This confronts us with a more serious challenge of determining what is more important in interpretation. We are left wondering what could be more important in the act of understanding; is it the past or the present, the text or the reader, the old or the new? And even when we would want to join all together, how do we harmonize them?

On the question of truth, Gadamer's hermeneutics did not tell us what truth is. Besides giving us the analysis of the dialectics between reader and text, Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to tell us what is true and where truth can be found. Despite telling us that method cannot guarantee truth, he never made us understand what truth is and where it can be found. By not telling us what truth is and where it can be found, Gadamer left us with the problem of linguistic relativism. His dialogical model in communication is such that truth will be relative to individuals. The issue of relativism raises the further challenge of "whether there can be objectivity in communication. Can our interpretative practices exhibit any degree of

objectivity?"[17] It is obvious that Gadamer's hermeneutics was fundamentally anti-objectivity with his rejection of method as a way of understanding. However the sciences would insist on method as a way of actualizing an objective knowledge and truth. But we must not forget the fact even in the midst of this man would naturally view things from their given perspectives. No one can denial the existence of some objective realities such as God, the universe, the sky, the earth we walk on etc but the perception of these realities are subjective to the experience of the particular individual who perceives them. Though Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be denied of relativism, but his efforts are channelled towards the rejection of absolute objectivity seen in the natural sciences.

6.2   Conclusion

So far in this dissertation we have exposed, analysed, and evaluated Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer's hermeneutics was a shift from what was before him. He moved away from a hermeneutics that was methodological and psychological to a hermeneutics that is part of our everyday life. A hermeneutic that is part of our human existence on planet earth. His primary focus being to give an account of what happens when we understand. For him understanding is not just limited to our willing and doing but also extends to what happens after our willing and doing and this was a major springboard for his hermeneutics.

In his account of what happens when we understand, he rejects in its entirety method as a way of understanding or truth. For him methods are limiting in nature, they only lead to explanation and not understanding, thus the title of his work *Truth and Method*. Though he never defined method or truth but he insists that method as adopted by the natural sciences and scientists cannot lead to truth especially when what is studied is in the field of the social sciences, the *Gesteswissenschaften*. For him to search for understanding in the human sciences, social scientists need to adopt interpretation and not methods. He conceives of

methods as been sterile because they do not give room for imagination while genuine understanding through interpretation is made possible because man is endowed by the power of imagination.

Gadamer's hermeneutics generally from our perspective is transformative in nature because it gives room for dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted. The dialogical nature of his hermeneutics involves equality and active reciprocity. These two qualities are not just needed in our world today but urgently needed. Equality and active reciprocity can break any form of social barriers among peoples and nations. The equality is such that when an interpreter questions the object of his interpretation, he should also allow the object to question him. In this dialogical relationship, illegitimate prejudices will be overcome and a fusion of horizons will take place between the interpreter and the interpreted leading to a more refined knowledge and understanding which does not allow the interpreter to stand beyond the interpreted. Gadamer's hermeneutics therefore has a lot to do with man in his relationship with his fellow humans and his society at large. Very importantly, his view teaches man to be humble and transparent in his relationship with others. An arrogant person cannot stand been questioned by his subordinates. It entails that in the case of understanding both the interpreter and the interpreted needs to allow themselves to be opened up by each other.

The work also teaches man the value of active reciprocity. This can also be understood as doing to others what you would want then do to you. Both the interpreter and the interpreted must be actively reciprocal in their dealings with each other. Thus everyone is important and a partner in progress and should be treated as such.

In essence therefore, even though we have noticed some challenges in Gadamer's hermeneutics, but the point remains that by insisting on dialogue and extolling the values of

reciprocal questioning, Gadamer did not just bridge the gap between the subject and object, he has presented to us very important transformative values that we all need today in our world. Today proper dialogue is key to sustainable existence of man in his society and the world at large. Take away dialogue and we will be heading to the Hobbesian state of nature where live would be short, nasty and brutish.

Also, the knowledge that our understandings take place in language tells us that language occupies a very fundamental place in human life as rational beings. If this is so then we want to point out here that any misuse of language will surely lead to misunderstanding of what is communicated. Thus, we are encouraged to properly use our language if we must have true meaning of what we communicate or intend to communicate to others.

Finally since we leave in a pluralist society and the differences between us have remained part of our everyday world, the great value of this dissertation is that it will not only help us see what the other view is but why somebody has arrived at it. The work therefore teaches us to be tolerant with each other, respect others views and to listen to each other. With these three cardinal points, we will have a more sustainable relationship with others in the world.

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