

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECTIVITY AND
OBJECTIVITY IN THE SCIENCES WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE HERMENEUTICS

OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER



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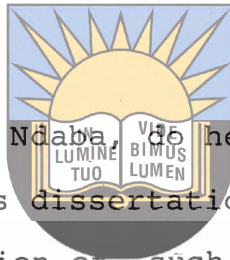
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DECLARATION



I, Walter Joseph Ndaba, do hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is entirely my own work, with the exception of such quotations or references which have been attributed to their authors or sources, and that all photographs, sketches, maps, plans, overlays, graphs and pictograms are made or drawn by me save where I have acknowledged that another is the author.

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If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
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perhaps it is because he hears a different
drummer. Let him step to the music he hears,
however measured or far away.

Thoreau

CONTENTS

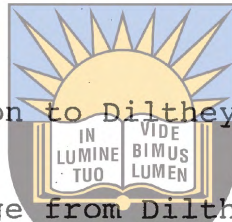
| | |
|--|-------|
| Acknowledgements | p. i |
| Declaration | p.ii |
| Positio Quaestionis (Introduction) | viii |
| Chapter 1 | |
| 1. The Problematic Character of Knowledge : Plato to Hegel | p. 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction | p. 1 |
| 1.2 Greek Philosophy : The Principle of Reason in Plato and Aristotle | p. 2 |
| 1.3 Thomas Aquinas : The Conception of Truth Subverted To a Function of Subjectivity | p.11 |
| 1.4 Descartes : Knowledge and the Search for Certainty | p.16 |
| 1.5 Rationalism and Empiricism: Two Competing Methods | p.20 |
| 1.6 Kant's Critical Philosophy and Its Limitations | p.31 |
| 1.7 Fichte, Schelling and Hegel: The Ideal of Individual Autonomy | p.37 |
| 1.8 Challenges to Hegel : Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche | p.42 |
| 1.9 Conclusion | p.47 |
| Chapter 2 | |
| The Origin and Development of Hermeneutics | p.51 |
| 2.1 Introduction | p.51 |
| 2.2 Derivation and Early Use of the Term "Hermeneutics" | p.52 |
| 2.3 Six Expressions of Hermeneutics | p.55 |
| 2.3.1 Hermeneutics as Biblical Exegesis | p.57 |
| 2.3.2 Hermeneutics as a Technique of Grammatical Analysis | p.62 |
| 2.3.3 Hermeneutics : Science of Understanding | p.69 |
| 2.3.4 Hermeneutics as the Foundation for the Human Sciences | p.74 |
| 2.3.5.1 Husserl's Phenomenology | p.80 |
| 2.3.5.2 Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology | p.85 |
| 2.3.5.3 Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics | p.94 |
| 2.3.5.4 Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Depth Hermeneutics | p.98 |
| 2.4 Conclusion | p.101 |

Chapter 3

| | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| 3. | Dilthey's Distinction between the Human and the Natural Sciences | p.103 |
| 3.1 | Introduction | p.103 |
| 3.2 | The Logic of Explanation | p.104 |
| 3.3 | The Philosophy Underlying Dilthey's Hermeneutics | p.109 |
| 3.4 | Dilthey's Theory of Understanding | p.114 |
| 3.5 | Dilthey's Distinction Between the Human and the Natural Sciences | p.117 |
| 3.6 | Conclusion | p.125 |

Chapter 4

| | | |
|------|---|-------|
| 4. | Gadamer's Reaction to Dilthey | p.126 |
| 4.1. | Introduction | p.126 |
| 4.2 | Gadamer's Heritage from Dilthey | p.126 |
| 4.3 | Gadamer's Correction of Dilthey | p.129 |
| 4.4 | The Revival of the Question of Artistic Truth | p.144 |
| 4.5 | The Autonomy of the Text | p.149 |
| 4.6 | Conclusion | p.153 |



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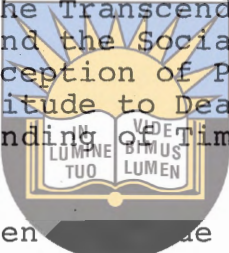
Chapter 5

| | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| 5. | Objectivity and Subjectivity in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics | p.155 |
| 5.1 | Introduction | p.155 |
| 5.2 | Gadamer's Critical Stand Against the Primacy of Subjectivity | p.156 |
| 5.3 | Tradition Dependence of Understanding | p.159 |
| 5.4 | The Logic of Question and Answer | p.165 |
| 5.5 | The Meaningful Question | p.167 |
| 5.6 | Effective Historical Consciousness - <u>Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein</u> | p.175 |
| 5.6 | The Linguisticity of Understanding | p.179 |
| 5.7 | Conclusion | p.187 |

Chapter 6

| | |
|----------|-------|
| Critique | p.189 |
|----------|-------|

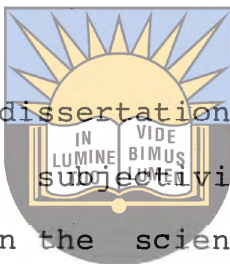
Chapter 7

| | | |
|-------|--|-------|
| 7. | Gadamer's Hermeneutical Philosophy and African Thought : Objectivity and Subjectivity in African Philosophy | p.219 |
| 7.1 | Introduction | p.219 |
| 7.2 | The Question of Objectivity and Subjectivity in African Philosophy | p.222 |
| 7.3 | Motivation | p.229 |
| 7.4 | A Comparison Between the Concept of <u>Phronesis</u> in Aristotle's Philosophy and African Wisdom | p.236 |
| 7.5 | African Theory of Knowledge | p.245 |
| 7.6 | Participation as the Transcending of Method | p.250 |
| 7.6.1 | Participation and the Social Ethic | p.253 |
| 7.6.2 | The African Conception of Personhood | p.255 |
| 7.6.3 | The African Attitude to Death | p.255 |
| 7.7 | Gadamer's Understanding of Time vs The African conception of Time | p.256 |
| 7.7.1 | Tradition | p.264 |
| 7.8 | Hermeneutics as Open  : Implications for South Africa | p.266 |
| 7.9 | Conclusion | p.271 |
| | University of Fort Hare | |
| | Summary <i>Together in Excellence</i> | p.274 |
| | Bibliography | p.280 |
| | Abbreviations | p.288 |

POSITIO QUAESTIONIS (INTRODUCTION)

AIM OF THE DISSERTATION

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity with regard to knowledge in the sciences with special reference to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer.



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CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS SUBJECT, SUBJECTIVITY, SUBJECTIVISM, OBJECT, OBJECTIVITY, OBJECTIVISM

Firstly, in philosophical discourse and epistemology or theory of knowledge in particular, the term "subject" is used to refer to the knower or person who knows, whereas the term "object" is used to refer to that which is known.

Secondly, there is the distinction between subject and object in the sense that "subject" refers to mind or spirit while "object" is used to refer to that which is

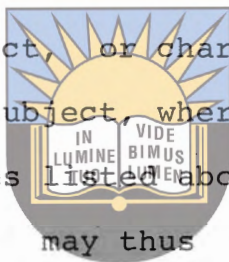
material or empirical. Thirdly, the notion of subject is distinguished from that of object in the sense of a person while object refers to that which stands outside or over against the person. In this third distinction, subject means person, agent or doer.



Matters are slightly complicated by a tradition from Logic: In logic it was believed that every statement or proposition can be broken up into a subject and a predicate, as in the flower is red where "The flower" is the subject or topic of discourse (called "object" in the discussion above) and "red" is the predicate or characterisation of the subject. It can be, but need not be confusing to say "The subject I am interested in, that is, the topic about which I want to talk, or the object I want to study or the phenomenon I wish to describe is the hermeneutics of Gadamer". In this sense "subject" and "object" are equivalent terms meaning "that at which one's attention is directed" or "object of interest" called the intentional object in phenomenology.¹ Usually, the context is so clear that the alternative use of "subject" or "object" for "topic of interest" or "that at which one's attention is directed" is not confusing at all.

¹ I. H. Spiegelberg : The Phenomenological Movement, p. 107.

Corresponding to the threefold distinction made above, the adjectival terms "subjective" and "objective" may be interpreted in three different ways. Firstly, a subjective statement, description, belief, evaluation or interpretation is then one that is related to a subject, or dependent on a subject, or characteristic of the subject, or derived from the subject, where the subject may have any one of the three uses listed above. An expression like "a subjective statement" may thus mean a statement derived from or coming from the subject as doer, or the subject as spirit or spiritual being, or the subject as doer or agent who can be held responsible for his actions.



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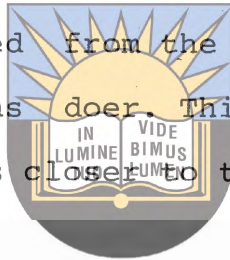
Correspondingly, an expression like "an objective statement, description, belief, evaluation or interpretation" may thus mean a statement, description, belief and so on, derived from or characteristic of the object as that which is known, or object as material or empirical entity, or object as focus of intention or will.

The entity that is described as subjective or objective is of special importance. A statement, description, belief, evaluation or interpretation may be evaluated or assessed

as true or false, according to various criteria. The terms "subjective" and "objective" are then used to evaluate whether these criteria are acceptable ("objective") or unacceptable ("subjective") to the person who evaluates. If a person should say "That is an objective description of the Battle of Blood river", then the speaker usually means that it is an acceptable description, one that every reasonable person could go along with, even if personal differences should emerge. But by calling it a "subjective" description, the evaluator means that the criteria for truth or acceptability do not pertain to the object, the Battle of Blood river, but are derived from, or are characteristic of the particular subject as spiritual being, meaning that the truth of the description is compromised by certain spiritual qualities characteristic of that person alone, like his personality, frame of mind, interests, experience, world-view, conception of life or Weltanschauung. "Subjective description" may lastly mean that the criteria for the description derive from or are characteristic of the subject as doer or agent, thereby meaning certain practical considerations characteristic of this doer, have compromised the description.

An expression like "X is a subjective statement, description, belief, evaluation or interpretation" is thus

without exception a negative evaluation of its truth value, and "X is an objective statement, description, belief, evaluation or interpretation, a positive evaluation of its truth value : the criteria for its truth are derived from the object, which is the common and public topic under discussion, that is, the criteria of assessment are not illegitimately derived from the subject as knower, or as spiritual being or as doer. This positive and evaluative use of "objective" is closer to the tradition of science.



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In general, in theory of science, advocates of objectivity defend the view that the scientific status of research results is based on the criterion of objectivity. Objectivity means that the researcher must remove himself from the object of research in order to create the distance considered necessary to make objectivity possible. Hence according to theoreticians of scientific objectivity, the scientist, the subject, is supposed to suspend his subjectivity by detaching or removing his influence or bias from the object of his research so that the data emerging from his research are in no way coloured by his personality, frame of mind, interests, experience, world view, conception of life or Weltanschauung.

FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

Gadamer criticises the isolation of the scientific object from the personal characteristics of the researcher as an objectivism which starts with the object to the neglect of the subject. This stance makes it necessary to rediscuss and reconceptualise the notion of the disinterested observer in the light of Gadamer's historical approach. The purpose of the present dissertation then is to delineate the mode of subjectivity and objectivity suggested in his hermeneutic philosophy.



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To place him in context, it should suffice to mention in passing, that his philosophy is mostly concerned with the interpretation of theory. The result of his efforts in his major work Truth and Method², yields a general theory of understanding. According to this theory, which he conceptualises as descriptive of understanding in the human sciences, Geisteswissenschaften in particular, and the natural sciences, Naturwissenschaften, in general, research in all the sciences, the human and the natural, is conducted from a given historical perspective which reflects the life-world or Lebenswelt of the researcher or

2. appeared in original as Wahrheit und Methode : Grundzuge eine philosophischen Hermeneutik, Tübingen, Mohr, 1960.

scientist. While research thinkers base the scientificness of their research findings on the criterion of objectivity, Gadamer insists that all knowledge is mediated by history. This historical orientation, challenges the long established assumption that scientific knowledge is neutral and objective.



He develops the idea of tradition from Heidegger's notion of pre-understanding guaranteed by authority. He follows Heidegger's view of tradition as an existentiale, a characteristic of man, rather than a method. He employs the concept of tradition as a spear point to wage an attack against scientism and historical objectivism both of which absolutise the importance of the object. Emphasising that human knowledge is determined by tradition, he claims that there is no situation or position outside a person's life-world or Lebenswelt from which he understands. Hence all grasping of meaning, understanding and interpreting, occur in the context of a person's life experience.

Gadamer stresses the primacy of man's tradition or man's history. Without it, no meaningful question is possible. He has followed Heidegger's hermeneutical statement that

We understand only that what we already know,
hear only what we read into it.³

Gadamer emphasises the fact human understanding and consciousness are rooted in and mediated by history. Gadamer's orientation in historical perspective does not lighten the task of clarifying his notion of objectivity, but complicates it. He uses the phenomenon of art as a model to show how understanding occurs in the human sciences. However, the effect of history in the course of the interpretative understanding of art, forces him to the conclusion that the critique of the work of art can never arrive at the artist's original intention.



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Gadamer's approach in historical perspective raises the traditional opposition between subjectivism and objectivism. Subjectivism overemphasises the primacy of the subject at the expense of the object while objectivism overemphasises the input of the object and minimises the input of the subject.⁴

3. E. Zahn "Gadamers Hermeneutik des Geschichtlichen Menschen", in *Die letzte Epoche der Philosophie*, p. 119. as quoted in G.A. Rauche : Knowledge and Experience - A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p 79.
4. D. D. Runes (ed) : Dictionary of Philosophy, p. 320.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN

Gadamer opposes the traditional empirical and positivist criterion of the disinterested observer as the sole basis of objectivity. He advocates a reconceptualisation of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. A study of his writings shows that all the sciences derive their knowledge from specific experiences or world views. In this sense the sciences are subjective. That is to say, the sciences form part of the spectrum of human activities as they emerge as a result of the meaningful questions from the Lebenswelt. As it is shown later, a problem always arises out of previous knowledge. Hence the sciences are objective because of the underlying reality or truth which becomes the presupposition for understanding or preunderstanding.

He supports the subjectivity deriving from a person's situation in history. A person's situation in history determines the meaningfulness of the questions he asks. This subjectivity does not necessarily rule out objectivity. Thus objectivity does not mean leaving the subject behind. Hence for Gadamer, a person's situation in history is not a variable to be isolated and

suppressed. On the contrary, a person's historicalness determines the meaningfulness of the questions he asks.

The contextuality or tradition dependence of knowledge means that the questions or problems become meaningful only against a background or milieu of the understanding subject. The subject is the starting point. The subjectivity of contextuality does not rule out objectivity. It precedes. Hence in the final analysis, the object determines the result.



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METHOD

To deal with the problem of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, the present dissertation adopts the historical method. This method demonstrates that certain prominent philosophical perspectives yield knowledge which emerges within and reflects the historical context and Lebenswelt (life-world) of the philosophers themselves. This historical method will be followed by a critical analysis of Gadamer's approach in historical perspective.

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SOURCES

The dissertation is mainly based on a thorough reading of Gadamer's published readings as translated, or in some cases in their original German. Special attention has been given to Wahrheit und Methode and Kleine Schriften.⁵ Where possible the German texts are rendered by English translations. In assessing his writings, use is made of numerous publications on Gadamer's work.

5. selections of Kleine Schriften appear as Philosophical Hermeneutics, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

DELINEATION OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One gives a historical overview of philosophical theories from Plato to Hegel. The object of the chapter is to show how man's understanding, as it emerges in philosophical perspectives, reflects the philosopher's Lebenswelt or lived-world. This historical or hermeneutical approach to philosophical thought is a prelude to the dissertation as a whole because for Gadamer, subjectivity and objectivity emerge in the context of history, life and the Lebenswelt (life-world).



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Chapter Two sketches the history of hermeneutics and seeks to place this history within the development of ideas and theories in politics, art and the sciences. Chapter Three gives Dilthey's distinction between the human sciences, Geisteswissenschaften, and the natural sciences, Naturwissenschaften.

In Chapter Four the writer explores how Gadamer takes issue with Dilthey's distinction between the human and the natural sciences along methodological lines. Gadamer shows that, actually, all the sciences form part of the spectrum of the human activities as they emerge from the meaningful

question, which is itself rooted in the researcher's life-world or Lebenswelt.

Chapter Five gives an account of Gadamer's conception of subjectivity and objectivity from the perspective of his foundational concepts of tradition, historicity, and prejudice. By cutting across the objectivistic bias of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, he succeeds to introduce a superior notion of objectivity in the orientation of the Geisteswissenschaften.



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Chapter Six mainly gives the writer's critical analysis of Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to the problem of knowledge in the sciences. The chapter also expounds on Gadamer's hermeneutics, by amplifying on criticisms of Gadamer in secondary sources.

Chapter Seven selects certain leading concepts in Gadamer's philosophy, like tradition, culture and history, and compares and contrasts these with corresponding ideas in African philosophy. The reason for comparing and contrasting Gadamer's ideas with African philosophy is that his use of the concepts of tradition and culture, somehow rehabilitates the lived world of the Africans, even though the African life-world is communal rather than individualistic.



CHAPTER ONE

1. THE PROBLEMATIC CHARACTER OF KNOWLEDGE : PLATO TO
HEGEL

1.1 INTRODUCTION



In the Positio Quaestio it was pointed out, that it is the express view of Heidegger, that man's life-world and life experience is the source of the knowledge which he creates in the sciences. As in the sciences, theories and systems in philosophy, should be understood as a function or result of man's cultural and historical experiences. In the light of this historical perspective, this chapter demonstrates that philosophical systems, emerging from the human search for knowledge and truth, reflect man's changing experience of life and reality. Because philosophy reflects man's experience, it can be said to exhibit an existential element, that is, it seeks to interpret man's Lebenswelt in the light of man's contingent or variable experience of reality. The hermeneutical and existential dimension of

philosophy, can be shown in respect of the philosophy of Plato.

1.2. GREEK PHILOSOPHY: THE PRINCIPLE OF REASON IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

In accordance with the tenets of Platonic philosophy, reason is the foundation of knowledge and truth. To grasp the meaning of an object in its true nature, it must be viewed objectively. In this process Greek philosophy states the distinction between the knower as subject, and what is known as the object. Under Platonic philosophy, knowledge of immutable realities lying beyond the world of change, is revealed in human reason. Human reason has the capacity and ability to uncover the nature of true reality hidden beneath the world of change.¹

The hermeneutical or existential aspect in Plato's philosophy is apparent from the fact that Plato's thinking is influenced by the basic experience of conflict between the intelligible realm of perfect

1. P. Edwards : The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 6, p. 321.

and eternal ideas or forms, and the sensible realm of concrete but changing and unreliable objects of nature. ² The highest form of knowledge is the knowledge of the Good which Plato explains theoretically in his doctrine of independent and absolute forms. Real knowledge depends on the rational grasp of the structure of the world. ³ This shows the existential nature of truth in Plato's system.



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Plato shows that the Greek polis is characterised by continuous in-fighting between the Athenian citizens who stand for a democratic society and those who advocate an aristocratic form of government. The situation of tension between these two competing factions causes him to seek a rational principle to explain the world and make life meaningful.

In search of such a principle Plato asks the fundamental question about the nature of truth, justice and goodness. In these circumstances he

2. G. A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, p. 30.
3. G. A. Rauche : The Choice, p. 19.

hammers out the theory of ideas as a foundation for the philosophical life marked by a conscious disdain of sensual pleasures in the service of the Good.⁴

In Plato's idealistic system, justice prevails theoretically following the harmony prevailing among the different classes in society. Such a just society is established on the strength of the natural capacity of every Athenian citizen to follow the Good. Plato also applies the tripartite structure of the human soul to the understanding of the structure of society. The productive forces who possess self control are placed under the direction of the ruling class whose virtue is wisdom or sophia. In the middle of the two classes appears the second class of warriors whose virtue is valour, fortitude and strength of mind.⁵

As indicated above, Plato's philosophy is a reaction to the crisis in Athenian life and civilisation. Hence his philosophy exhibits a historical and temporal

4. Funk & Wagnall : New Encyclopaedia, vol. 20, p. 355.

5. G. A. Rauche : The Choice, p. 20.

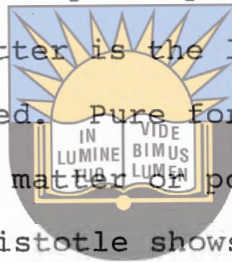
dimension. Aristotle's philosophy too owes much to Athenian culture and his predecessors Socrates and Plato.

Aristotle's quest for knowledge is carried out in a way that modifies Plato's idealism. For Plato the idea is universal and super-sensory. But Aristotle defends the view that it is the human perception that mirrors the world so that the mind can form ideas of concrete things.⁶ For Aristotle the universe realises itself through development in particulars. Hence reality is the individual developing from possibility to actuality.⁷

Aristotle's starting point is the perceptual fact. Accordingly, he develops the method of induction or observation of nature in contrast to Plato's deductive method. Although he criticises Plato's transcendent ideas, Aristotle does not overcome Plato's dualism.

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6. J. Hirschberger : A Short History of Western Philosophy, p. 28.
 7. H. E. Cushman : A Beginner's History of Philosophy, vol. 1, p. 179.

A formula that illustrates Aristotle's thinking is the statement: true reality is the individual. The individual consists of two aspects, conceptual being or form, and perceptual being or matter. To Aristotle everything is matter being formed. Development is the principle which unites form and matter. Pure matter is the lower limit which exists only to be formed. Pure form is God who excludes from himself all matter or possibility because He is perfect. Here Aristotle shows his dualism. In the same way in which Aristotle contrasts God and empty space, Aristotle contrasts God as pure form and matter as pure possibility.⁸



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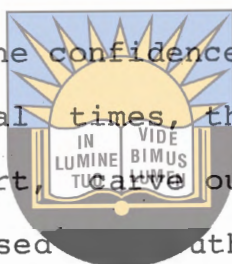
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In Plato's account of knowledge and Aristotle's opposition to it, the controversial nature of philosophical assertion is apparent. The real ground of the confrontation between philosophical expressions, for example, in Plato and Aristotle, is the dialogical relationship holding between their respective philosophical positions. Because of the problematic nature of human knowledge, there is disagreement between the claims of reason, as expressed in Plato's deductive approach, idealism,

8. J. Hirschberger : op. cit. pp 179-190.

and the claims of the senses as given in Aristotle's inductive approach, empiricism.

The differing and contradictory notions and definitions of truth had another side to it. They led to scepticism and nihilism. The confidence, long prevailing since Greek classical times, that man can by his own rational effort, carve out for himself an authentic existence, based on truth and knowledge of the real cause of the world, has faded. The feeling of scepticism and despondency in man goes back to the decline of classical Athenian culture.



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The results of the decline of the Greek classical culture centering around the polis are the following: The turmoil and upheaval as a result of the Macedonian invasions reflected themselves in philosophy. The 4th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D., saw a rapid succession of different and divergent philosophical systems, all designed to cope with man's experience of conflict, strife and suffering. Epicureanism, Stoicism, Scepticism and Neoplatonism all attempt to guide man to the question of the meaning of beauty, goodness, justice and happiness, in a world

that appears dangerous, unpredictable and evil.

All these philosophies seek an answer to the question of life, death and suffering. Each philosophy, in its own unique way, views the problem of existence from its historical circumstances. As a result of their limited and contingent view points, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Scepticism and Neoplatonism challenged each other. ⁹ In an age of cultural and political decline, Stoicism proposed an ethics of virtue for its own sake and calm acceptance of adversity. Such an attitude was canvassed in order to raise man above suffering, conflict and death.



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In opposition to the Stoics, Epicureanism espouses the view that pleasure is the highest good, the highest form of which is intellectual pleasure. The Sceptics in their turn, taught that greater happiness is achieved by the suspension of judgement. ¹⁰

⁹. G. A. Rauche : The Choice, p. 24.

¹⁰. G. A. Rauche : A Student's Key to Ancient Greek Thought, pp. 63-66.

In the face of such divergent and contingent systems of interpreting meaning in life, there were two tendencies: First in the 5th century A.D. Western philosophers turned away from the search for happiness and security achieved through man's own secular effort. Second, the awareness of impending death made man turn his attention away from secular ideas to salvation and everlasting life after death.



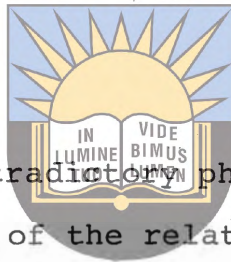
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Christianity introduced the concept of faith. To convince faithful believers that there is a logical basis for faith, the Christian thinkers adopted the thought and language of Greek philosophy including Aristotle's logic. However, the method of employing logic to defend matters of faith contained the seeds of the tension between faith and reason that in turn provided a source of debate in medieval thought.

In the 5th century A.D., Augustine developed a system that attempts to unify the Greek emphasis on reason with the Christian emphasis on faith. In regard to the respective weights to be put on reason and faith, both Augustine and Anselm regarded faith as

the presupposition for understanding the truth. Their formula, Credo ut intelligam, "I believe in order to understand" did not settle the issue. In opposition to Anselm's fideism which puts faith before understanding, Abelard defended the view that faith must be justified by reason. 11



Opposed and contradictory philosophical approaches to the question of the relationship between reason and faith continued to compete, especially in the 11th century. At this time the works of Plato and Aristotle became known in the West in translation by Arab scholars. In the 13th century Averroes attempted to bridge the gulf between Aristotelian philosophy and revealed religion. He proclaimed the superiority of philosophy to faith and theology.¹² However by distinguishing between the two separate systems of thought, Averroes introduced the double truth doctrine which proved to be a further source of controversy in philosophy.

11. F. Copleston : A History of Medieval Philosophy, pp. 72-3.

12. G. A. Rauche : The Choice, p. 26.

1.3 THOMAS AQUINAS: THE CONCEPTION OF TRUTH SUBVERTED TO A FUNCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

St. Thomas Aquinas tackles the task of overcoming the dual truth concept of the Arab Averroes. He seeks to restore the unity of truth by declaring that faith does not contradict truth but is a higher form of it because God's wisdom or knowledge is infinitely higher than man's understanding. Although he distinguishes between philosophy and theology, the two disciplines do not contradict each other. Theology goes beyond philosophy logically and is linked up with it to become the highest knowledge or science. Man's reason or lumen naturale is the gift of God's grace. By his unfailing grace or gracia irresistibilis, God bestows knowledge on man, who disposes of a lumen naturale, thus being able to grasp the truth as revealed in Holy Scripture as well as the distinction between good and evil.¹³

13. ibid. p. 27.

The principle of reason in Greek philosophy shifted into God's mind which in medieval philosophy becomes the ground of truth. On this new ground of truth the human subject systematises biblical truths logically as far as it is humanly possible to do so. Knowledge of existence is guaranteed because man, as a rational subject, is capable of thinking about God as an external objective reality.¹⁴ Philosophy thus becomes an ancilla to theology or ancilla theologiae whose role is to exercise rational insight into the revealed truth.¹⁵



In spite of St. Thomas Aquinas's claim that theological and philosophical doctrines complement each other, the perennial question of the real nature of God continued to be a problem. He asserted that revealed truth existed in tandem with the truth of natural reason or philosophy. Hence, the unity of the knowledge of God had of necessity to be divided into two types, resulting in the God of the believers, and a god of

14. P. Edwards : Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 8, p.111.

15. G. A. Rauche : The Philosophy of Actuality, p. 54.

the philosophers.¹⁶

By his formula, St. Thomas Aquinas thought he had overcome the problem of the knowledge of God, but there was a problem: Thomas Aquinas's principle of gratia irresistibilis, which enables man to rationally grasp the truth of God's revelation, was now interpreted as the sole product of the human mind.



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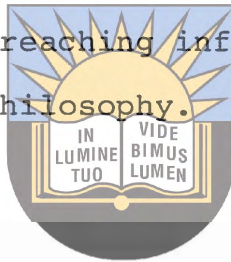
Spurred on by the principle of human reason, man was no longer dependent for the truth on the sole basis of divine light and revelation. He now looked for the ground of truth in his own unaided subjectivity.¹⁷ As a result of his newfound confidence in the power of reason, man took it for granted that the course of history is nowhere mediated by a transcendent and divine power, but is a manifestation of his own striving and initiative

16. D. Dumery : The Problem of God in Philosophy of Religion, p. 12.

17. To support this observation, Thomas Aquinas's famous phrase is veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus. Thus Thomas Aquinas distinguishes reality along mind, intellectus or the subjective, and things, rei or the objective.

to cope with the crisis of life and existence.¹⁸

In the 16th century, and particularly in the 17th, the researches of the scientists, Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo, as well as the growth of humanism, were to have a far-reaching influence on the subsequent development of philosophy.



The Copernican hypothesis that the sun revolves round the earth undermined the established theological world picture supporting religion.¹⁹ Also this new view of the structure of the universe, brought about a change in man's understanding of his place in the universe.

The researches carried out of the heavenly bodies by Brahe, Kepler and especially Galileo could not be ignored. When Kepler confirmed the mathematical structure of the universe, Galileo's findings gave impetus to man's scientific interpretation of the world independent of the earlier biblical world

18. M. S. Terry : Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 17.

19. B. Russell : Wisdom of the West, p. 186.

view.20

At the close of medieval times man increased his interest in art, discovered gun powder and invented the printing press. At the same time, the new learning of the Renaissance re-established the dignity of man. These secular developments weakened the theological world view even more.



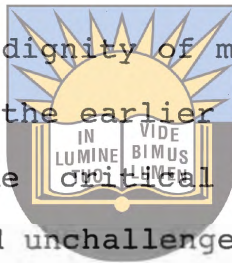
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A far-reaching development in the middle of the 17th century, was the work of Newton (1646-1723). Largely building on the pioneering work of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo, he inaugurated a new philosophy of nature and science, based on the mathematical expression of physical laws describing matter. In his Principia Mathematica he supplied what was missing: an overriding law of gravitation which explains all motion in the universe. With his discovery of the universal gravitation, the scientific revolution was complete. The universe could now be explained as matter in motion. But because Newton could not break with the Christian view of the cosmos, he could not bring himself to defend a mechanical world picture that

leaves no room for God. Hence he retains a central place for a providential deity operating constantly in the universe.

In addition, the humanistic freedom motive, with its emphasis on the dignity of man, fired man's imagination but undermined the earlier religious tradition. Man henceforth became critical of tradition. Nothing was allowed to stand unchallenged. This subjective attitude led to an extreme form of scepticism.²¹



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1.4 DESCARTES: KNOWLEDGE AND THE SEARCH FOR CERTAINTY

Descartes is the forerunner of the idealistic thinkers like Kant, Fichte and Hegel. He merits attention because of Gadamer's opposition to the abstract and unmediated self-consciousness of transcendental philosophy from Descartes to Fichte.

In the 17th century, Descartes developed a concept of knowledge derived from the certainty of mathematical axioms. To base knowledge on the model of mathematical

²¹. B. Russell : ibid, p. 172.

certainty, made Descartes the first modern thinker for whom truth was methodically acquired.

Descartes distinguished between mind or the res cogitans, capable of thinking, and matter or the res extensa, characterised by extension. In Descartes's philosophy, only man as a possessor of mind thinks and acts on the world. Because Descartes conceived man as a duality of mind and matter, two ontologically distinct entities, Descartes faced the difficulty of explaining how man as a ~~spiritual subject~~ knows or makes contact with the material world.²²

In contrast to the empirical methods of scientifically minded philosophers of the day, Descartes developed the rationalist method based on the deductive principle. Descartes's rationalism rests on the formula: Cogito, ergo sum, I think, therefore I am. For Descartes this statement is axiomatic and self-evident. From it, he believed that he could resolve all problems of the knowledge of God, physical things and all the details of philosophy.

22. ibid. p. 197.

Descartes began with methodical doubt. He doubted all his thoughts, but concluded that he could not doubt that he was doubting. When examining his mental contents, he found that they were made of clear and self-evident inborn ideas of which the clearest is the idea of God. 23



From Descartes's time, modern man rationally strove to separate himself from the objective constraints of his history. Hence in his philosophy, the real ground of truth shifted from the revealed and transcendent truth of Aquinas and other religious thinkers, to a subjective ground of reason.²⁴ The tendency towards rationalism reflected itself in theories of interpretation, as it will be seen in the next chapter.

As a result, Descartes's method of radical doubt inaugurates a reign of subjectivity in modern philosophy. In reaction against his blend of unmediated subjectivity, Gadamer questions any attempt by man to

23. G. A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, pp. 58-9.

24. G. A. Rauche : The Philosophy of Actuality, p. 64.

shake off his tradition.

For Gadamer, man's historical nature contradicts Descartes's claim to a personal inner state, disentangled from the environment. Man is not only a creator of tradition, but he is also a bearer of tradition. Therefore he is never with his ideas alone. Hence it can be argued that although Descartes advocates the discovery of clear and distinct ideas by the thinking subject, his rationalism is an act of self-transcendence by which he seeks, as it were, to place man upon the universe. The "cogito, ergo sum" is not only a methodical formula, but an existential guide in a time of conflict and uncertainty.

Descartes's philosophy reflects that he is a child of his time. In spite of his mechanistic outlook, he still accepts the traditional religious doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the reality of God. Thilly, the historian of ideas writes:

Descartes's philosophy is an attempt to harmonise the mechanical theory of science, which it was impossible to ignore, with the

spiritual theology and metaphysics which appeared with Christianity.²⁵

By setting up the mathematical method as the only guarantee of objective knowledge, Descartes goes to the extreme of absolutising the mathematical method and restricting valid knowledge to formulae which can be expressed in mathematical terms.²⁶



1.5 RATIONALISM AND EMPIRICISM: TWO COMPETING METHODS

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At the beginning of the Enlightenment the debate between Plato and Aristotle as to the effective method to reach true knowledge was again fought between the rationalists and empiricists. On the rationalist side, Descartes's mathematical method is reflected in the rationalist hermeneutics of Leibniz and Spinoza. All three defend the view that truth is derived from the intellect with very little contribution from experience. Like Descartes, Spinoza posits that the entire structure of nature is deducible from a few basic definitions and axioms similar to

25. F. Thilly : A History of Philosophy, p. 315 (Quoted in G.A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, p. 58.)

26. c/f J.R. Burr : op. cit. p. 403.

Euclidean geometry.

Spinoza shows himself to be a child of his time. In an age of the growing authority of science, Spinoza takes the geometrical model as the sole basis of the universe, which for Descartes is merely an ideal of rational proof. Further, Spinoza becoming more critical towards revealed truth, seeks to solve Descartes's mechanistic separation of religion and science by identifying God with the universe.²⁷ All this goes to demonstrate the historical and contingent nature of the philosophical construction of truth and reality.

Leibniz (1646-1716), the German philosopher, is the discoverer of the basic principles of the infinitesimal calculus. In his logical theory, he starts from the idea of Aristotelian subject-predicate logic. According to one of Leibniz's principles, of two contradictory statements, one must be true, and the other false. By the principle of contradiction, the statement "All metal coins are metallic" is true.²⁸

27. J. Hirschberger : op. cit. p. 108.

28. B. Russell: op. cit. p. 204.

In Leibniz's time, the microscope had already been invented. Hence Leibniz's metaphysics is influenced by the elementary observation of spermatozoa through the newly invented microscope. In his philosophy, expounded in the Monadology, the universe is composed of countless centres of spiritual forces or energies capable of perception. Leibniz deals with the problem of Descartes' mind-body dualism by postulating that a monad has no causal interaction with other monads because it is "windowless".²⁹



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Although the rationalists are in agreement about the "certainty" of mathematical proof, they differ in their conceptions of substance and in their explanation of the mind-body relation. Under the spell of the mathematical model, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz tend to absolutise the deductive mathematical element in knowledge. Once they take the method of deduction as the sole explanatory ground of the world, they think theological problems and the enigmas of man's existence will be solved by

29. W. T. Jones : A History of Western Philosophy, vol. 3, pp. 227-8.

simple "calculation".

Leibniz's rationalism is a case in point. Like other rationalists, he extends the a priori element of mathematics to other fields including metaphysics. Truth for Leibniz is constructed methodologically under the historical development of the microscope and Leibniz's own personal and contingent experience of the world as a mathematician.



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It can be asked whether a truth derived from a single experience, in this case the a priori element of mathematics, is not in fact merely a perspective that overreaches itself. The above observation shows that philosophical thinking reflects man's constant desire for absolute knowledge generated by man's awareness of the insecurity, finitude and periodicity of the human condition.³⁰ Leibniz's description of the universe as "the best of all possible worlds" was satirised as utopian by Voltaire in his novel Candide (1759).

30. G. A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, pp. 55-68.

A further example that demonstrates the dialogical relationship that holds between systems, is the opposition between empiricism in England, and rationalism in Europe. In England, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, in opposition to rationalism, supported the empirical view that all knowledge comes from experience.³¹ The real issue in the empirical standpoint is not the denial of the deductive moment in the collection of knowledge, but the weight to be given to the role of the senses.

Locke's views are in line with the science of his time, especially the corpuscular theories of Boyle and other scientists. Emphasising the importance of the senses, Locke goes back to the dictum of Aristotle and Aquinas that "There is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses". In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), he put forward the view that at birth the mind is a tabula rasa or a "blank table" on which experience makes its imprint.

³¹. W. T. Jones : op. cit. p. 243-4.

In this manner Locke opposes Descartes's doctrine of innate conceptions, and gives a more systematic exposition of Bacon's early 17th century empiricism by arguing that ideas are copies of the impressions the senses make of material objects. The objects affect the mind in such a way that the mind, originally a tabula rasa, is gradually filled with simple ideas.³² To the question of what makes human knowledge, Locke replies that ideas in the human subject make the content of human knowledge. Objects themselves are not known directly.³³



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Locke's second version of perception is based on the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He derives his concept of primary qualities from size, shape, figure, extension, etc. While these are properties of things themselves, secondary qualities are subjective in the sense that the saltiness of salt, or the sweetness of sugar, do not emanate from things themselves, but depend on man's sense organs. Thus Locke is not clear whether secondary qualities are subjective or objective. While his first version of perception suggests that they are objective, his second

32. ibid.

33. G. A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, p. 39.

version of perception suggests that they are subjective. Secondary qualities of an object are its vision (colour), its taste (sweetness, sourness etc), its touch or feeling (hardness, softness, etc), its sound or hearing (that is, whether it is loud, soft, low, or high, etc), its smell (sweet, foul, etc). In other words, secondary qualities are mediated by the five senses : vision, taste, touch (feeling) hearing and smell. 34



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Locke's two versions of perception show that he is not clear about the relationship between sense-impressions and things, or between subject and object. Locke's dualism of sense-impressions and things adds fuel to fresh argument in that his theory of perception can be interpreted in either a materialistic or an idealistic way. 35

Berkeley, the Irish philosopher, carried through Locke's new way of acquiring ideas. As a Christian Bishop he was little moved by the progress of the natural sciences that had influenced Locke's

34. ibid.

35 cf D.J. O'Connor : A Critical History of Western Philosophy, p. 211-12.

materialistic bias.

Berkeley is faced with two tasks. First he has to overcome Locke's sceptical conclusion that the world outside the mind cannot be proven with absolute certainty. Second, he has to overcome Locke's separation of objects in the world and sense impressions in the



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Berkeley thus postulates that the reality of material things consists in being perceived. Hence Esse est percipi: to be is to be perceived, is Berkeley's dictum. The only things that can be known to exist are those that are perceived. Berkeleyan empiricism thus presents a one-sided account of knowledge. Berkeley's ideas, given first in The Principles of Human Knowledge (1710), and later, recast in The Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous (1713), were not popularly received, because Esse est percipi rules out matter. By ruling out matter, Berkeley's empiricism refutes itself.³⁶

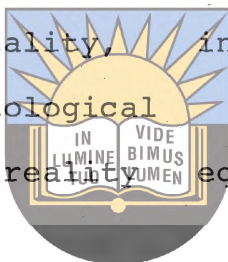
36. Funk and Wagnall : op. cit., vol. 3, p. 447, & vol. 20, p. 363.

Of the three empiricists, Hume carried the doctrine of empiricism to its logical conclusion. Our knowledge is of two types. The first is knowledge of "relationships between ideas". This is the knowledge of the meaning of terms and is analytic. A good example is mathematics which is confined to the verification of ideas and has nothing to do with the external world. The second is knowledge of "matters of fact" dependent on cause and effect. Such knowledge is synthetic and a posteriori. It has to do with relationships between objects or properties actually existing in nature. However there can be no certain science of "matters of fact".

The upshot of Hume's analysis of the origin of knowledge is that a thinker cannot, either by experience or by analysis, establish the certainty of such ideas as cause, relation, or substance. Mere habit tricks the mind into accepting that these notions accurately picture the world. Hence Hume's sceptical conclusion undermines the entire basis of empirical science. 37

37. ibid. vol 9, p. 326.

To the metaphysical question of what are the proper objects of human knowledge, Hume produces a completely sceptical answer. A person experiences only impressions. Reality, that is matter and causation studied by science, is not delivered directly to the senses. Since reality, including God and the human soul, has no ontological status, Hume draws the conclusion that reality equals ideas derived from impressions.



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Thus Hume makes Berkeley more consistent by cancelling out God and matter, and thus remains with ideas only. Hence the development of empiricism is one of the restriction of the field of knowledge. By cancelling God and casting radical doubt on the cause and effect relationship in nature, Hume's empiricism ends in a self refuting empirical idealism, quite the opposite of the intention of British empiricism. 38

38. H.E. Cushman: A Beginner's History of Philosophy, vol. 2., pp. 200-9.

The result is that empiricism is inadequate as an instrument for reaching truth because it overemphasises the empirical factor: "The sun rises in the east" but it lacks the absolute certainty and clearness of mathematical demonstration. Its truth is dependent on experience and is contingent. Even when the sun is not observed, it rises in the east. The regularity of the sun rising in the east is an empirical truth and not a necessary truth. Let empiricism overreach itself by claiming that observation is the only method of gaining truth.



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Rationalism also is inadequate as a method of reaching truth because it overemphasises the deductive element in knowledge. Hence the statement: "The interior angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles" lacks experiential content. While rationalism yields certain or necessary truth, it fails to increase man's knowledge of the real world because the proposition is not a description of real triangles in the material world. Hence it cannot go beyond giving the logical relations between concepts. By its lack of experiential content, rationalism tends to dissolve itself in dogmatism.

On the basis of this brief sketch of the history of philosophy, a preliminary conclusion can be made : Each of the different philosophers approaches the question of knowledge in his own unique way. Plato is concerned to make sense out of the confused world of Athenian life. Aristotle who follows him owes much to Athenian culture and the intellectual tradition of Socrates and Plato himself. But he opposes certain elements of Plato's idealistic philosophy. From the opposition between their theories, it can be seen that each philosophy exhibits a hermeneutical dimension, that is to say, again and again each philosophy seeks to interpret man's Lebenswelt in the light of man's contingent and ever changing experience of reality.

1.6 KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The scepticism of empiricism as embraced by Hume, and the dogmatism of rationalism, led Kant to hammer out his own transcendental philosophy between the two rival philosophical approaches to truth. Kant agrees with

Hume's classification of statements into analytic or a priori statements and synthetic or a posteriori statements. Analytic or a priori statements repeat in the predicate part what was given in the subject part, e.g., "all bodies are extended". Synthetic or a posteriori statements, e.g., "all bodies are heavy" are empirical statements, and hence do not rely on the principle of analysis of the subject term in the predicate part.



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Deviating from the tradition, Kant adds a third kind of proposition, the synthetic a priori proposition. These are propositions whose truth can be verified by reason alone without experience but which do not merely make explicit the meanings of the terms involved. Kant's example is the mathematical proposition $7 + 5 = 12$. Kant maintains that the proposition is synthetic because the notion of "12" does not analyse the notion of adding 7 and 5.³⁹

39. I. Kant : Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics (introd. L.W. Beck), p. 16-18.

To prove the validity of synthetic a priori statements, Kant distinguishes between things as they are in themselves, noumena, and things as they appear in human experience, phenomena. 40 In the Prolegomena Kant maintains that no knowledge is possible of things as they are in themselves independently of a priori or pure intellectual concepts of space and time as forms of human sensibility. There is knowledge of phenomena or things as they enter into human experience of space and time.



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Further it is by virtue of the basic categories of the mind: causality, quantity, quality and modality, among other categories of the human understanding, that an object is perceived as a phenomenon rather than a bundle of impressions in the Humean sense.⁴¹ In this manner Kant anticipates Heidegger's analysis of human consciousness as essentially interpretative.

40. I. Kant : Critique of Pure Reason (tr. N. K. Smith), p. 267-7.

41. I. Kant : Prolegomena ... Metaphysics, pp. 39-40.

Hence Kant effects a Copernican Revolution in philosophy by pointing out that knowledge is a matter of construction. Deviating from the traditional opposition between independently existing objects and passive subjects, Kant maintains that the object is given to the senses through the synthesising action of the mind.



The mind has laid down laws or categories that manipulate and order human experience in an intelligible way. Religion or metaphysics cannot be a science because its objects cannot enter the constructive or transcendental activity of the mind. Kant postulates that the human reason has a tendency to think there is God, freedom and the immortality of the soul but in reality theoretical reason ends in contradictions as soon as it aspires to make statements about God, freedom and the soul.

God freedom and the soul lie outside the scope or range of possible experience. As a result there is neither the thing in itself, God or Ding-an-sich. To avoid falling into scepticism, Kant posits that God is

unknowable rather than non-existent. He is a postulate since he can be thought but cannot be known. The reality of God, freedom and the soul is an object of faith, not knowledge.⁴²

Further, Kant's use of the idea of "transcendence" in a subjective way, in contrast to the old metaphysics which uses "transcendence" in an objective sense to refer to reality in its transcendence, merits some comments. Firstly, in Kant's critical philosophy the transcendental *Together in Excellence* anything to do with the objectivity of God as a transcendent reality, but refers to the mental functioning of the thinking subject and the understanding by which the subject imposes order on the objects in order to make sense of the world. The ground of truth is no longer to be searched for in something outside of, and greater than the human mind. In Kant's critical philosophy, truth becomes subjectively grounded in the categories which regulate the performance of mental acts.⁴³

42. I. Kant : Critique ... Reason, p. 29.

43. A. M. Olson : Transcendence and Hermeneutics, p. xii.

Secondly, Kant's denial that God could be proven or known, had a sequel in ethics and morality because it left Kant's individual struggling to live morally without support from a transcendent being. By denying man access to the Ding-an sich, Kant makes himself a philosopher of finitude. By this act Kant anticipates the 20th century description of the world as "broken" according to Marcel, or "ambiguous" in de Beauvoir, "dislocated" in Merleau-Ponty, or "absurd" according to Camus.⁴⁴



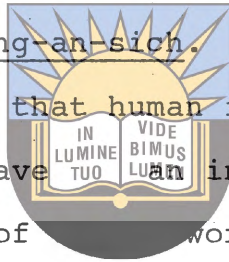
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Apart from the foregoing difficulties in Kant's critical philosophy, the dialectical nature of Kant's philosophy can be seen from the fact that the consistency of his philosophy is immediately open to question. Given the nature of the synthetic judgement a priori, after the a priori truth of Newtonian mechanics, Kant's transcendental philosophy is controversial. His attempt to synthesise the respective categories of understanding and sensibility, theory and practice, have invited criticism from Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

44. R. C. Solomon : Rationalism to Existentialism, p. ix.

1.7 FICHTE, SCHELLING AND HEGEL : THE IDEAL OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

Fichte accepts Kant's critical philosophy, but he challenges Kant's conclusion that man is unable to reach the Ding-an-sich. As a Romantic thinker, Fichte taught that human feeling rather than reason enables man to have an intuitive understanding of the true essence of the world including metaphysical reality.⁴⁵



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As an idealist, Fichte thought from the perspective that the world is a representation of consciousness. To encounter Kant's scepticism, Fichte based his views on the autonomy and freedom of the human subject. ⁴⁶

In his Wissenschaftslehre Fichte describes philosophy as the science of the ground of all experience. To deal with the division that Kant makes between

45. S. E. Stumpf : Socrates to Sartre : A History of Philosophy, pp. 327-8.

46. H. E. Cushman : A Beginner's History of Philosophy, vol 2, pp. 273-8

understanding and reason, subject and object, theory and practice, Fichte pairs the Ego as subject against the non-ego as object or world to make the representation of the world by human reason the ground of truth.



The absolute nature of Fichte's idealism is revealed by his view that the human world is a manifestation of the absolute ego grounded in the world. By absolutising human freedom as the ground of truth, Fichte bypasses the limits of human knowledge and turns the world upside down by making consciousness the ground of the world.

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Like Fichte before him Schelling attempts to base the knowledge of the world on the idea of the human subject. Schelling is certainly less subjective than Fichte and Kant. His philosophy of identity first expounded in his Vorlesungen uber die Methode des akademischen Studiums, posited that nature is mind and mind is nature. Thus it equates God with the objective world and is pantheistic. In terms of his philosophy of identity and early pantheism, identifying God with the world, Schelling is the philosopher of

objective idealism.⁴⁷

In his later phase, Schelling progresses beyond grounding the world in the principle of identity. He sees the true nature of objective reality as reflected in the self-consciousness of the aesthetic genius whose creative power outwits all reason in history and the world.⁴⁸



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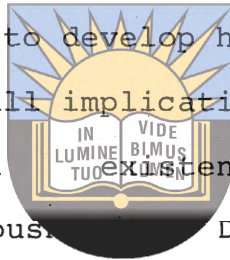
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Schelling's philosophy merits two critical comments. Firstly, by his philosophy of identity he seeks to span the unavoidable gulf between the absolute and the finite, being and beings. Secondly by maintaining that the ego is man's total awareness of himself as a free agent, Schelling thinks that his philosophy of a free subjectivity solves the enigma of human anxiety, suffering and pain. Yet his idealistic thinking solves man's longing for relief from the problem of anxiety, suffering and pain in theory only but not in practice. His vision that beauty fulfills the purpose of the world is not an original insight but a

47. P. Edwards : Encyclopaedia of Philosophy ., vol. 7, p. 308.
 48. G. A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, p. lll.

reaction against the materialism and positivism of the 19th century.

Hegel accepted Kant's conception of intuition, understanding and self-consciousness but reproves Kant's failure to develop his vision of the creative mind to its full implications. In Kant's view, the autonomy of human existence is grounded in the freedom of consciousness. Differing from Kant, Hegel holds that autonomy is not the freedom of individual man but of the Absolute Spirit. The finite human subject is only a limited moment of the Absolute Spirit.



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Hegel corrects the principle of transcendental reason which in Kant's philosophy has a formative influence on experience. To effect this correction, Hegel enlarges transcendental reason to represent the self-consciousness of world reason. In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel describes the movement of the spirit from subjective physical perceptions, via objective knowledge towards full and absolute knowledge when the Spirit attains complete absolute self-consciousness. Hence for Hegel, world reason

represents the dynamic self-emancipation of reason in contrast to Kant's subjective principle of individual rational striving.⁴⁹ Thus by denying the superiority of the human subjectivity in the creation of knowledge, Hegel may be regarded as a forerunner of Gadamer.



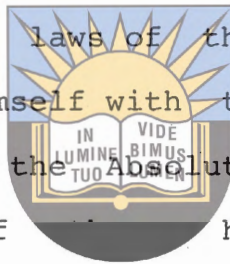
In Hegel's system, the spirit works itself dialectically in various institutions of society beginning from the subjective existence in man. In its second *dialectical* movement the Spirit is reflected in political, moral and economic institutions as objective reason. The natural sciences, the customs of the people, their political institutions and the laws issuing from the state are the external manifestation of absolute Spirit and reflect the dialectical movement of the Spirit.

Although Hegel is the first thinker to see the limitations of a start from human self-consciousness, Hegel's concept of Absolute Spirit represents an absolutisation of the human subject. As a result, his absolute subject alienates itself from reality: the

49. G. A. Rauche : The Abdication of Philosophy, p. 30.

changing conditions of life.

Similarly, the ethical aspect of universal reason in Hegel's philosophy is supposed to reflect itself in the state. Man attains complete moral goodness by being in step with the laws of the state. By the moral act man blends himself with the state, thus blending himself into the Absolute Spirit. Thus Hegel's absolutisation of human subject is an alienation from reality. Hence Hegel's philosophy remains in the clouds. His solution is thus one in theory only because in practice his total philosophy fails to come to grips with the reality of life's changing conditions.



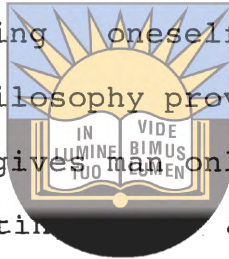
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1.8 CHALLENGES TO HEGEL: SCHOPENHAUER, KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

The first challenge to the positing of reason as the ground of the world as evidenced in Hegel's philosophy emerges in the irrationalism of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). For Schopenhauer the Absolute is not reason but a blind irrational will which asserts itself over all phenomena, including man. Although

the irrational will is the basis of all reality, it deceives humanity. Hence Schopenhauer sees the most effective escape in art.⁵⁰ Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will-to-live is reflected in his concept of art, especially music. This concept stills the restless will-to-live. But freedom from it is immersing oneself into Nirvana. Yet Schopenhauer's philosophy proves unreliable because his concept of art gives man only partial relief from the nothingness awaiting at death. In a sense Schopenhauer's concept of art is the opposite of Hegel's optimistic concept of beauty which finds expression in the aesthetic aspect of the Absolute Spirit or world reason.



Kierkegaard the Danish religious thinker deliberately placed himself in opposition to Hegel, especially in his concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846). Kierkegaard criticises Hegel's analysis in which man as a subject is alienated from man as a thinker. In Hegel's system, only the absolute mind has real existence in its infinite movement of thought while the finite human being has a place only as an

50. R. K. Gupta : "Freud and Schopenhauer", in Journal of the History of Ideas, vol. xxxvi, no 4, pp.721-8.

impersonal spectator. Hence in his evaluation of Hegel's philosophy, Kierkegaard criticises Hegel's universal idea which tends to swallow up man's uniqueness as an individual and make the existential subject indifferent and impersonal.⁵¹

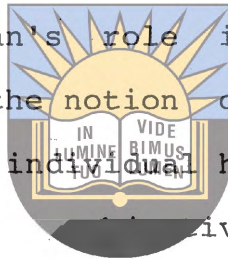


In Either/Or Kierkegaard emphasises that the notion of the individual who is placed as an impersonal spectator in the universe is not true to man's historical experience. Man creates his own nature by choosing to act. By ~~acting, man creates~~ subjective truth. For Kierkegaard the category of individuality and subjectivity is the ultimate measure of morality and value, being based on the primacy of the individual will. For him the real self is not merely the cognitive self, but the ethically existing self. Because human existence is finite and limited, what the individual does, depends not on what he understands but upon what he wills.

51. D. J. O'Connor : A Critical History of Western Philosophy, p. 512.

In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard sees human truth as no longer subjective but dependent on a right relationship between God and man, as a way of escape from man's experience of anxiety and despair.

Consequently, Kierkegaard substitutes Hegel's rational conception of man's role in the sciences and in history, for the notion of man as a creature of faith. Such an individual has to obey the command of God before his subjective rational reasons for compliance.



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In this way, Kierkegaard seeks man's escape from evil and the nothingness beyond death by seeing God as a redemptive principle which man must embrace as an objective truth. Kierkegaard thus subordinates man to God through faith in much the same way that Hegel's philosophy sacrifices human freedom to the principle of a universalised logos.

After Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche represents, in Western thought, the third reaction against the idealism of Hegel. Nietzsche sees all previous traditional ethical and religious systems

as a pretence to hide man's weakness and failure in the midst of the challenge of life.

Nietzsche's thought links up with Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will. Both thinkers emphasise the primacy of the will. Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche conceives that all human striving and consciousness give expression to the will-to-power.⁵² In the Birth of Tragedy, he contrasts two opposed tendencies, the Apollonian, representing beauty and harmony, and the Dionysian, representing ecstasy and freedom from moral values. Nietzsche sees life as alternating between these two tendencies.⁵³ In the celebrated phrase "God is dead" Nietzsche typifies his vision of man's will-to-power which makes man blind to the finitude and broken nature of the human condition. In a questing critical spirit, Nietzsche replaces the traditional God with his concept of the Übermensch or Superman who lives his own life and possesses everything of value through his will-to-power.

52. J. P. Stern : Nietzsche, p. 76.

53. P. Edwards : Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol 8., p. 507.

Although Nietzsche's thinking links up with Schopenhauer's notion of the primacy of life, in Schopenhauer's philosophy the notion of the will was conceived in a negative way. In Nietzsche's philosophy, however, the Superman is exactly the man who looks reality in the face and accepts his limitation, periodicity and historicity. In brief Nietzsche's superman faces his natural destiny or Moir as the Greeks called it. Hence Nietzsche writes:



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Destiny, I follow you willingly, for if I would not do so, I should have to do so all the same: but in tears.

CONCLUSION

The hermeneutical dimension in philosophical theories is apparent from the differing and contradictory philosophical approaches as evidenced in the opposition between the rationalism of Hegel and the irrationalism of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

The pattern of philosophical expression seen in Hegel's philosophising, on the one hand, and that of Nietzsche and his contemporaries on the other, can be said to reflect the hermeneutical dimension of philosophical theories. Philosophical theories have a hermeneutical dimension because they seek to constitute again and again man's Lebenswelt in the light of his contingent and changing experience of life.



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For example, Hegel interprets the ground of the world in the light of man's changed view of reality based on the authority of the Newtonian mechanical world picture. The differing experiences of man throughout the development of culture, science and civilisation, cause philosophers to constitute ever new theories of knowledge, which are only truth perspectives. As it has been shown, the proof of the on-going critical relationship between opposed philosophical approaches is evidenced in the opposition between Platonism and Aristotelianism, empiricism and rationalism, Hegel's rational theory and the irrationalism of Schopenhauer and his immediate followers.

In short, systems of philosophy are constituted from a specific human experience. Thus it is man's changing and variable experience which causes him to constitute ever new theories of knowledge. In turn, it is these theories which enter into a critical relationship with each other. In fact it is as a direct result of the critical relationship that emerges between theories, that the epistemological limit of philosophical approaches is manifested. It is the epistemological limit that bids reflective reason to enter into a critical and self-critical ongoing argument concerning the question of knowledge and truth. The conflicting and opposed theories, systems and approaches in philosophy spring from the dynamic process of question and answer, assertion and denial. Hence the argument on the nature of knowledge and the essence of truth is never settled, in philosophy, hermeneutics, and the sciences, but continues throughout all the ages of man's history.



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The systems of philosophy and theories based on them are not absolute truths but perspectives in the sense that they are constituted from a specific human experience. As a result, man cannot avoid weaving his past experience and the events happening around him into a meaningful pattern.



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CHAPTER TWO

2. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF HERMENEUTICS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

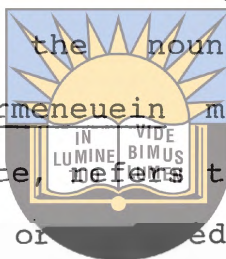


In Chapter One it was shown that theories in philosophy emerge from man's experience and that in turn, man's changing experience of reality constitutes a human life-world, which forms the background of man's ideas. As a result of man's life-world, which is constituted from man's contingent experience of reality, a hermeneutical element is built into philosophy theories.

The present chapter gives an account of the development of hermeneutic theories. It is argued however that, like all theories in philosophy, theories in hermeneutical thought too, reflect man's changing or contingent experience of life and reality.

2.2 DERIVATION AND EARLY USE OF THE TERM "HERMENEUTICS"

The roots of the term "hermeneutics" are found in two Greek words: the verb hermeneuein, meaning to interpret, and the noun hermeneia, meaning interpretation. Hermeneuein meaning also to express, explain or translate, refers to an object or text whose meaning is unclear or obscured.¹



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Hermeneutics or interpreting, as a deliberate effort to uncover hidden meanings, has its roots in early pre-Socratic Greece when man made his first efforts to reflect on the problematic character of human existence. Then men strove to unravel the mystery of human destiny by trying to understand the designs of the gods for man. Hence hermeneuein as a verb and hermeneia as a noun occur in religious texts. Heraclitus of the 5th century B.C. remarks:

¹ I. R. Palmer : Hermeneutics, pp. 12-13.

Nature loves to hide but the Lord
 whose oracle is at Delphi neither
 reveals nor conceals, but he
 indicates his meanings through
 hints.²



The association of hermeneutics with mythology also goes back to Hermes, the legendary messenger of the gods to man. The message of the oracle at Delphi was not always clear. The lack of clarity raised the need for interpretation.

From the above account of man's attempts at interpretation, it should be seen that man's conception of hermeneutics is indistinguishable from his religious and or mythical view of the world.

Later, when Plato inherited from Socrates the idea that the contents of philosophical thought are abstract concepts, he became the first thinker to use hermeneutike as a technical term. To

2. P. Edwards : Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 3, p. 480.

interpret in Plato's sense of the term is to engage in a skill or technique. Hence in Plato, techne hermeneias means the ability to clarify obscure communications or expressions.³

The need to clarify an expression arises whenever a speaker's message is not clear, particularly when people are not used to the speaker's language, customs or world-view. Techne hermeneias is a skill that removes the discrepancy between the speaker and his audience.⁴

Further there can be differences among hearers themselves, leading to conflicting interpretations. Then it is hard to decide which method or standard of interpretation should be adopted to judge competing versions of meaning. When hermeneutics was faced with these difficulties, the need arose to adopt common principles and methods of interpretation.⁵

3. M. S. Terry : Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 17.

4. L. Berkhof : Principles of Biblical Interpretation, p.11.

5. M. S. Terry : op. cit. pp. 20-31.

Hermeneutics quickly freed itself from its subservience to myth and dogma. Soon thereafter hermeneutics accepted that interpretation does not yield absolute unshakeable propositions since its meanings must be subjected to verification, revision and amendment.

Historical accounts of the history of hermeneutics offer six stages of its critical and rational development.



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2.3 SIX EXPRESSIONS OF HERMENEUTICS

Historically hermeneutics was first the work of biblical exegesis or interpretation. In its second stage hermeneutics was extended beyond the interpretation of biblical texts into a system governing the reading and interpretation of ancient texts through the analysis of language. In a third development involving Schleiermacher, hermeneutics clarified the basic steps leading to understanding among people in a dialogue.

The fourth phase of hermeneutics involves Dilthey. He enlarged hermeneutics to the method of the human sciences. The fifth expression of hermeneutics occurs with Heidegger's analysis of human existence. In his analysis of human existence, understood as existential phenomenology, Heidegger demonstrates that hermeneutics is not an isolated activity of scholars but is the basic experience of human life. Gadamer develops the Heideggerian switch from existential phenomenology to ontology by giving it hermeneutical content.



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Ricoeur represents the sixth hermeneutical expression. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is linked to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics on the one hand and to critical hermeneutics on the other. He takes hermeneutics, which he sees as the exercise of understanding language with a double meaning, back to text interpretation.

All six phases of hermeneutics merit elaboration.

2.3.1 HERMENEUTICS AS BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

An objective of biblical exegesis is to make the Bible intelligible. To grasp biblical texts clearly, hermeneutics became the science of the method of scriptural interpretation. The construction of the truth of the Bible along methodological lines shows that hermeneutics was merely a secondary discipline to theology. As an ancillary discipline to theology, hermeneutics merely helps to show the interpreter or *Togata in Excellence* to decide on the more acceptable interpretation in texts and documents containing contradictory interpretations.⁶

The early debates about the real meaning of the Bible provide the first reflections on the problem of hermeneutics. Some thinkers wanted to retain the literal meaning of the Bible, while others preferred to adopt the figurative or the spiritual meaning. Hermeneutics soon found itself in difficulties because the two positions represent competing conceptions of biblical hermeneutics.

6. R. Palmer : op. cit. p. 27.

A further development within biblical hermeneutics was the humanistic movement in the 16th century. The weakening of the theocentric world picture that had heretofore characterised the medieval mind, encouraged the protestants to oppose the Roman Catholic Church's claim to be the definitive mouth piece of the meaning of the Bible. The Humanistic Movement emphasised the importance of the human personality, and was joined by the Reformation, led by Luther and other leaders of the Renaissance. All these movements opposed the Catholic Church's claim to be the authoritative interpretation of the Bible as the only valid and universal one.



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The leaders of the Reformation urged that the Bible must be understood from the perspective of the believer's conscience. Luther's slogan, "justification by faith alone", became one of the formulations of biblical hermeneutics. The Roman Catholic Church replied with the Counter Reformation. It lost no time in opposing the hermeneutical principle of "justification by faith alone". Encouraged by the position of the Council of Trent, the Counter Reformation insisted that the interpretation of the Bible must be accepted within the framework of the

church traditions.⁷ Protestant theologians replied with the historical critical method which advised readers to stay as close as possible to the letter of the text.⁸

The controversial nature of what constitutes truth emerges with biblical hermeneutics. On the one hand those advocating the adoption of a literal meaning of the Bible tended to regard hermeneutics as the only method leading to a single and unchanging meaning of the Bible. On the other hand, the exponents of the spiritual meaning of the Bible, tended to ignore the fact that the "spiritual" interpretation of the Bible is still not the word of God but a human view of the word of God. As a human perspective, the spiritual interpretation is just as fallible as the literal interpretation of the Bible.

In the face of ongoing controversies, scholars attempted to base the truth of the Bible in well defined rules of interpretation in the hope of finding

7. T. Okere : African Philosophy, pp. 19-21.

8. ibid.

a single meaning of the Bible. In spite of the attempt to ground the meaning of the scriptures on agreed rules of hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics failed to reach a single meaning of the Bible.

At about the time of the Reformation and Humanism, Bacon enlarged the idea of hermeneutics to include the objective investigation of nature. Influenced by the increasing application of the scientific method to the understanding of natural forces, Bacon introduced the idea that nature is like a book; the scientist must read using proper techniques.⁹



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In the Novum Organum Bacon advises researchers to avoid prejudices during experimental observation. This Baconian ideal shows that Bacon makes objectivity the condition for gaining truth. For him knowledge is to be purified of irrational elements like dogmas and perversions of the human subject. Bacon's disapproval of prejudices anticipates the Enlightenment reliance on reason alone and its disbelief in intuitive knowledge. Gadamer criticises Bacon's ideal of a prejudice-free understanding. Bacon's stand against prejudices shows

9. W. T. Jones : Hobbes to Hume, pp. 74-80.

that for him hermeneutics is put in the service of a different object, method and goal, compared to previous hermeneutics.

A further event in the history of hermeneutics occurred in the 16th century when Europe sought stimulation from other traditions. The Humanist Movement looked to the Greek and Roman classical thinkers for new directions and values. As the classical culture was available to the 16th century readers through copied texts of the classical period, and Humanistic scholars were not satisfied with copied versions of what classical thinkers said. These modern thinkers had to go back to the original texts to find out what the classical thinkers themselves thought and said. But there was a problem. The classical period differed from the 16th century in language, customs and time. This difference complicated the task of the scholars. To facilitate accurate understanding of all texts, the biblical and classical texts were brought together to form a general theory of interpretation for all texts.¹⁰

10. D. Polkinghorne : Methodology for the Human Sciences, p. 219.

2.3.2 HERMENEUTICS AS A TECHNIQUE OF GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

In its second expression hermeneutics became general. The idea that hermeneutics promotes the grasping of the meaning of the Bible shifted to the notion of hermeneutics as a collection of rules governing the interpreting or understanding of past documents by recourse to the grammar and composition of their language. Palmer, the biographer of the history of hermeneutics, observes that the growing reliance of hermeneutics on rationalism as a technique of grammatical analysis reflects the 18th century view of the material of interpretation as a rationally manipulable object.¹¹

Against the above observation, it is argued that the conception of hermeneutics as a technique is traceable to the western problematique of knowledge as a tool to manipulate, control and subjugate things in nature. In the West the quest of scientism to conquer and control things has become pitched to the level of an ideology. Gadamer opposes the uncritical

¹¹. R. E. Palmer : op. cit. p. 39.

transfer of scientism to hermeneutics. He argues that the ideology of manipulation and control in modern thought is underpinned by man's confidence in his power of reason.

As an upsurge, man's pride of reason or rationalism, also marked the history of the development of hermeneutics. In hermeneutics the main leaders of the spirit of rationalism were Friedrich Wolf and Friedrich Ast. Both followed the Enlightenment belief in reason. Wolf ~~proves that the~~ efficacy of reason should be the main method governing the interpretation of texts and documents. Hence he defines hermeneutics as the "science of the rules by which the meaning of signs is recognised".¹² He even suggests that there should be a different hermeneutic for history, poetry, religious and legal texts, in line with the varying objects of interpretation.¹³

Wolf's idea that hermeneutics is a science leads him to the notion of historical interpretation, interpretatio historica. Historical interpretation seeks the relevant

12. ibid. p. 38.

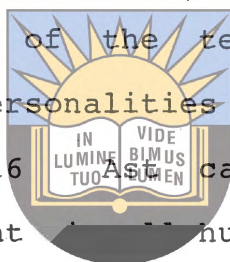
13. ibid. p. 81.

facts about the author's past experience so that the meaning of the author's written or spoken message is clear. By sharing the language of the author, the interpreter would be able to recover the author's meaning in toto.



Wolf's desire to attain meanings of the past prevents him from seeing that there is not only the author's objective meaning, but also the meaning embedded in history independently of the author's real intentions. In seeking to judge the mind of the author, Wolf does not take into account the mediating function of history. His historical interpretation sees the past as a negative distance to be spanned by techniques of interpretation. However since the interpreter's position in history prevents him from speaking precisely for the author, the interpreter is unable to reach a total understanding of the mind of the author. Hence for Gadamer, Wolf's interpretation theory is unacceptable because it rests on the distancing of the text from the interpreter to make the text totally transparent.

In a quest for historical objectivity similar to Wolf's, Ast specifies the aims of philological hermeneutics as the capturing of the spirit of classical times by studying the language, writings and the grammar of the texts.¹⁴ Consequently philological hermeneutics becomes the method of capturing the spiritual meaning of the text.¹⁵ Man is able to understand past personalities and documents because he possesses spirit.¹⁶ Ast calls the possession of spirit, evident in all human beings, the unity of spirit, because it is a universal human characteristic. *Together in Excellence*



Ast's idea of the unity of spirit, Einheit des Geistes, leads directly to the idea that one can understand the specific work or text against the total spiritual context of the author and his time. Ast is thus close to the idea of the hermeneutic circle of understanding the part by reference to the whole and vice versa.

14. F. Ast : Grundlinien der Grammatik, Hermeneutik und Kritik (tr. as Basic Elements of Grammar, Hermeneutics and Criticism) in R. E. Palmer : op. cit. p. 76.
 15. R. E. Palmer : op. cit. p. 76.
 16. W. Outhwaite : Understanding Social Life, p. 19.

The hermeneutic circle posits that the meaning of written or spoken communication is understood if the meaning of each word, sentence or book is grasped in relation to the total context of language in which it is used. Part and whole are mutually dependent such that a linguistic discourse is not understandable without analysing the elements comprising the discourse.¹⁷



The notion of the hermeneutic circle is an integral element in the occurrence of understanding. Gadamer remarks that understanding takes the form of the hermeneutic circle, a movement from the part to the whole, and from the whole to the part.¹⁸

The history of philosophy abounds with examples of the rationalist conception of hermeneutics. Hence it can be said that Ast and Wolf do not invent the hermeneutic use of reason. They adopt it from the Cartesian tradition which stretches to Spinoza and culminates in Hegel. At about the time when rationalism fought its

17. J. B. Thompson : Critical Hermeneutics, p. 37.

18. R. E. Palmer : op. cit. p. 81.

epistemological battle against empiricism, Spinoza produced his "Tractatus Theologico- Politicus" which stresses that the understanding of the Bible does not come from revelation. Man must derive it rationally from the historical events inspiring the Biblical author.¹⁹



Another example of a rationalist hermeneutics is Kant's treatise on "Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason". Here Kant insists that morality is not to be deduced from the Biblical injunction, but must derive from man's moral conscience, which is a rational conscience.²⁰ Because rationalism has as its underside man's rejection of objective constraints, Kant undervalues the moral act in response to God's command in favour of the ideal of man's rational autonomy. ²¹

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that hermeneutical theories emerge within the context of certain assumptions, world views or cultural frameworks, whether of a mythical, biblical or scientific nature. Hermeneutics thus is bound to man

19. T. Okere : op. cit. p. 21.

20. ibid.

21. ibid.

and his culture. It reflects man's changing experience of reality and outlook on life.

For an example, in Greek times hermeneutics developed against the background of a mythical quasi-religious world view. Biblical hermeneutics arose out of the need to preserve the dogmas and unshakeable truth of the church. During the Renaissance, philological hermeneutics emerged with the discovery of the literatures of ancient Greece and Rome. At that time humanistic scholars sought to recover the classical traditions through the method of grammatical analysis.

Closer to modern times, the advances made in the natural sciences, as a result of the breakthrough in method, inspired Descartes and Spinoza to stipulate the principle of reason as the absolute yardstick of knowledge. In short, throughout all its stages of development, transformations in hermeneutics have presupposed the culture, world view and mental framework of its users.

2.3.3 HERMENEUTICS AS THE SCIENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

From the 17th century hermeneutics became a method of text explication, a critical formulation of rules to ensure accurate understanding of texts. Extending this trend in the 18th century, Schleiermacher, a Lutheran theologian, realised that to understand texts, more is required than the mere solving of problems of language, style and translation. Schleiermacher thus changes the focus of hermeneutics from the study of language to the problem of history. ~~of the sciences~~ the subjectivity of the author rather than the objective elements of the text like language. Schleiermacher thus looks for a method to enable the historian or interpreter of the text to identify with the author, or group who have created the text or expression.²³

Schleiermacher's perception that man has the ability to understand others can be linked to his conception of hermeneutics as the general art of understanding. Schleiermacher thus regards the act of understanding as recollecting the unity of the author's life. The person

22. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 164.

23. R. J. Anderson, et al. : Philosophy and the Human Sciences, p. 68.

reading the text has to share the language of the text and know the assumptions underlying the author's thinking, his society's standards and norms. Since meanings are produced within the context of human living, a successful interpretation formulates and constructs the author's thought.²⁴ By this thinking Schleiermacher transforms hermeneutics from a complicated skill exercised by academics into a general and fundamental feature common to all human beings. He also sees it as related to the understanding of God.²⁵



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For the idea that an author's thought can be reconstructed, Schleiermacher is indebted to Fichte. Reconstruction enables the interpreter to arrive at meanings that were not clear to the writer of the text. In the act of recalling the writer's thought, the interpreter is urged to strive to understand the author better than the author understood himself.²⁶ To become scientific, hermeneutics has to pull together the methods of rhetoric and dogmatics.

24. J. Bleicher : Contemporary Hermeneutics, p. 14

25. ibid. p.16.

26. ibid. p.14.

Schleiermacher divides hermeneutics into two complementary parts, grammatical and psychological interpretation. Grammatical interpretation was inspired by Ast's idea of the hermeneutical circle, according to which a concept in a sentence has meaning in relation to the cluster of concepts occurring with it.



Wolf's interpretatio historica or historical interpretation provides Schleiermacher with the insight he needs for psychological interpretation. Psychological interpretation seeks to give meaning to the thinking of the author. Being psychological it is based on the subjectivity of the author and the interpreter. Unless an interpreter empathises or thinks as the author thought, he will not understand the author's text. To understand the text, it is necessary to interpret the situation of the author as a unique historical individual. 27 On reading a text, it is necessary to share the language of the text to enter the author's world.28 To break into the world of the author, Schleiermacher urges the interpreter to forget himself, or else he will fail to grasp the meaning conveyed.29

27. R. E. Palmer : op.cit.p. 86.

28. ibid. pp. 88-89.

29. H-G.Gadamer : TM, p. 170.

Schleiermacher has the distinction of having refined hermeneutics from being a rule governed analysis of literary texts to a "general hermeneutics" or a science of historical interpretation covering all kinds of writing.



His insight that man's ability to understand texts is based on man's ability to understand other human beings, anticipates Heidegger's conceptualisation of man as a being characterised by understanding himself and the nature of other entities in the world. However Schleiermacher's formulation of hermeneutics as the achieving of "correct understanding" touches on the main problem of the respective roles of subjectivity and objectivity in the gathering of knowledge.

Gadamer notes that the successes of physical science in the 17th century prompted Schleiermacher to conceive the aim of interpreting as the avoidance of "misunderstanding".³⁰ The likelihood that a person

30. ibid. p. 129.

might misunderstand a past document lies at the core of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Gadamer attributes the conception of hermeneutics as the reaching of objective meanings to the influence of Kant's emphasis on reason. Schleiermacher is a product of this rationalist "power of reason" which Gadamer criticises for its pride to hand over meanings. 31



For Gadamer, Schleiermacher's conviction that there is a fixed meaning that can be whittled away with an objective interpretation, ~~disse~~ ^{disse}eps the question of historical distance and tradition. Tradition wields its own influence during the transmission of knowledge. Hence the interpreter cannot simply claim to have spanned the distance separating him and the text.

Schleiermacher stresses that the factors which separate the interpreter from the author's meaning should be avoided. However, Gadamer detects a weakness in Schleiermacher's aim to reach objective meanings. Schleiermacher's failure to recognise the power of tradition to hand over meanings mediated by history shows, according to Gadamer, how Romantic

31. ibid. pp. 162-175.

hermeneutics misses the positive influence of the interpreter's history. Gadamer questions the methodological claim to transcend the interpreter's historical particularity and finitude.

2.3.4. HERMENEUTICS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE HUMAN SCIENCES.

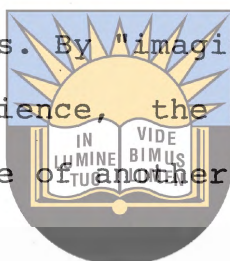


Dilthey extends the application of hermeneutics beyond its application to the understanding of texts to all studies concerned with human life. These studies are history, politics, law and literary works. He is convinced that there is a need for a philosophical method to throw light on the nature of the human studies as expressions of the inner life of man.³²

Following Schleiermacher, Dilthey sees the problem of hermeneutics from the point of view of man's psyche, that is, how the interpreter, himself a subject, understands the mental intentions of a past author or thinker. His basic problem is understanding itself, how life understands life, how man as a historical being can understand objectively.

³². R. J. Anderson, et al : op. cit. p.69.

Building on the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, particularly his idea of imaginative re-creation, Dilthey endorses Schleiermacher's thinking that the interpreter should aim at an objective reconstruction of past events. By "imaginatively re-creating" the author's experience, the interpreter thus captures a past experience of another subject.³³




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Schleiermacher's notion of "imaginatively re-creating" means that an interpreter can reconstruct the mental content of a past author by comparison with his own life. Dilthey goes further and posits that the author's world can be experienced because all human beings share a universal human nature. Dilthey clearly states that the ability to understand the mental structure or subjectivity of another person rests on the fact that the same mental structure or subjectivity is common to all human beings.³⁴ The interpreter could imaginatively re-create the mental disposition of a distant subject by comparison with his own mental life because, as a human being, the interpreter cannot disengage

33. *ibid.*

34. E.V. McKnight : Meaning in Texts, p. 28.

himself from entanglement in a human community. In a way Dilthey anticipates Gadamer's idea of "participation". As Gadamer formulates it, man's insertion in his community, both in the spatial, temporal and social sense is participatory. By virtue of participation, that is, being a sharer or partaker in an experience common to all human beings, the interpreter can understand what another subject has done, experienced or thought, because all human beings share in a collective life. Hence the interpreter understands the individuality of a work by rediscovering himself in the work because the thoughts and aspirations of the author emerge from a life that is common to all human beings. Dilthey writes:


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We understand individuals by virtue of their affinities with one another. That is to say in virtue of the characteristics common to them. This process presupposes a connection between general human nature and the individuation process which branches out from it into the manifold forms of mental existence. 35

35. W. Dilthey : "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Life-Expressions", in P. Gardiner : Theories of History, p 219.

Dilthey thus turns this identity, made up of the interpreter's participation in the common life shared by the author, the reason for making hermeneutics a method for grounding understanding in the historical sciences.



The phenomenon of sharing a common structure clarifies how the human sciences (literally translated from the German Geisteswissenschaften as "sciences of the spirit") mirror the life experience man has lived through. The notion of structure, in Dilthey's sense, means a common nature made up of ideas and forces that determine how a human subject becomes aware of meaning in life.

Positing that life, experience and history are the starting point in philosophy, Dilthey criticises Kant for treating reason in isolation from life. According to him, Kant goes astray in confining the "Critique of Pure Reason" to judgements of space, time and number and failing to consider how historical knowledge is possible.³⁶ Hence Dilthey's critique

36. H. P. Rickman : Dilthey : Selected Writings, pp. 207-8.

supplements Kant's critique by providing the categories of life and feeling as a starting point or orientation for the understanding of history. 37 The historian George Misch comments as follows on Dilthey's life philosophy:

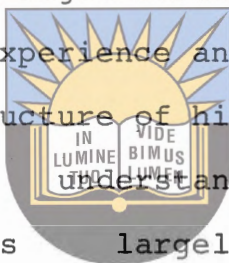


Dilthey regarded "life" as the starting point of philosophy: life actually lived and experienced or "objectified" in the spiritual world we live in. Life according to Dilthey, is a subject for scientific investigation in so far as history and "moral philosophy" or the "human sciences" (Geisteswissenschaften) deal with it, but our knowledge of life is, above all, contained in certain cultural or personal views of the world-Weltanschauungen- which play a prominent part in philosophy as well as in religion and poetry.38

37. R.E.Palmer : op. cit. pp. 113-118.

38. G.A. Rauche : The Philosophy of Actuality, p. 12.

Dilthey makes these Weltanschauungen the object of enquiry in the human sciences. Since the Weltanschauungen are rooted in the person as an ideal fact, knowledge of life expressions grows organically and cannot be controlled by the method of logical propositions and rigid formulae. Dilthey's insight that life, experience and history, make up the objective structure of historical Weltanschauungen, shows that the understanding of the content of the human sciences is largely determined by the input of the human



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Gadamer takes issue with Dilthey on the question of the nature of the categories as the objective structure of historical Weltanschauungen. Dilthey takes these objective categories as if they are constant, whereas man as a unitary whole is continuously responding to historical conditions and circumstances that are ever changing.

There is another side to Dilthey's idea of the Weltanschauungen. Dilthey introduces the idea that the self, persons and things form the objective categories of all world views. He puts this idea together with the

notion of the individual as an ideal fact in the service of bridging historical distance. Hence he sees the understanding of texts in the humanities as an "empathic" grasp of the author's subjectivity. Empathic understanding in the hands of Dilthey thus becomes an act transcending the relativity and finitude of historical knowledge. For Gadamer, Dilthey's ideal of achieving objectively valid historical knowledge, sidesteps a fundamental reality: that knowledge in the humanities is mediated tradition.



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2.3.5 HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY, HEIDEGGER'S HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AND GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS.

2.3.5.1 HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

Gadamer's exposition of hermeneutics in Truth and Method involves a lengthy tract on the history of hermeneutic theories. While giving his history of hermeneutics, Gadamer enters the debate with modern philosophers like Kant and Husserl. But he singles out Husserl's subjective idealism as the chief offender in hermeneutics.

Phenomenology simply means the doctrine, methodical knowledge or science of phenomena as they reveal themselves.³⁹ Husserl begins phenomenology as a method for providing a complete and unbiased description of basic experience. Phenomenon in English, phainomenon in Greek, is derived from the Greek verb "phainesthai" which means to reveal itself. Hence a phenomenon is literally that which reveals itself in itself.⁴⁰



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Husserl's motto in German is Zurück zu den Sachen selbst, translated in English as "Back to things themselves". With this motto Husserl means that the objects of experience must be seen as they are in themselves in their primary or fundamental essence. Phenomenology is a "rigorous science", a presuppositionless investigation of things. In this sense phenomenology is a return to concrete experience, a "return to things themselves". As a return to the things themselves, phenomenology is a science of experience, free from all presuppositions.

³⁹. H. Spiegelberg : The Phenomenological Movement, p. 77.
⁴⁰. J. Kockelmans : Phenomenology, p. 279.

As a critique of previous methods, phenomenology seeks to overcome the difficulties of past philosophies including empiricism and rationalism. With its expressed aim to provide a strategy for gaining indubitable knowledge, phenomenology aspires to become the philosophy of philosophies. Its guiding principle, zu den Sachen selbst, reveals its utopian nature. Husserl hopes to achieve a pure vision of things. He asserts that the subject must "bracket" the world to grasp its meaning in its real state. The act of "bracketing" should be achieved by suspending one's connections with one's culture and society.⁴¹

Husserl's strategy is in line with the neo-Kantian ambition to secure absolutely indubitable knowledge. While this ambition is understandable, it should be seen that from the epistemological point of view, Husserl thinks that his method bridges the rift between man and world, subject and object. Yet, Husserl's assumption that things can be understood in isolation from their connection with man's actions and feelings is problematic: He posits a worldless

⁴¹. H. Spiegelberg : op. cit. p. 77.

object in itself. Thus phenomenology ends with an isolated subject. It can be questioned if Husserl's idea of "bracketing" the world to reach a pure consciousness does not in reality demonstrate the hypothetical or assumptive nature of his programme. Husserl's subject is part of a universal consciousness, ein Bewusstsein Uberhaupt, which, according to Husserl, is supposed to grasp the structure of the world by and through itself.⁴²



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Further it is doubtful whether, by its utopian nature, Husserl's universal consciousness does not in practice lead to contradictions and abstractions. For instance, in conceiving of a pure consciousness, Husserl tends to undermine the mediating role of history in the creation of meaning and understanding. In his effort to overcome the subject-object division running through Western philosophy, Husserl ends with the opposed extremes of a subject-in-itself and an object-in-itself. The difficulties in Husserl's philosophy stem from his tendency to define phenomenology in terms of a program aimed at securing complete knowledge by an abstract

42. c/f G.A. Rauche : Knowledge and Experience - A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 10.

subject cut off from the world. Husserl's approach is a source of criticism by Gadamer.

Gadamer posits that man's understanding is influenced by history. Hence he criticises Husserl's way of achieving knowledge through the suspending of one's connection with the world. For Gadamer there is no worldless or timeless subject because all human consciousness is historical through and through.⁴³



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In his later period, Husserl corrects his notion of knowledge by introducing the idea of the life world or Lebenswelt. The principle of the life-world, incorporates the idea that human subjectivity is an element in the act of acquiring knowledge. The Lebenswelt is the mediating agent between subjectivity and objectivity. It merges man and world together. Every human interpretation, perception or understanding takes place against the background of the subject's life-world.

43. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 339.

Nevertheless Husserl's idea that human consciousness is directed towards the world is a positive contribution from the point of view of epistemology and existential phenomenology. Husserl's ideas of the intentional directedness of consciousness and the notion of the life-world, have influenced the development of philosophy since his time, especially the hermeneutic phenomenology as conceived by Martin Heidegger.



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2.3.5.2 HEIDEGGER'S HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Heidegger questions Husserl's and Dilthey's positivistic efforts to develop methods designed to gain objective knowledge untouched by the subjective element. As a result Heidegger corrects Husserl's philosophising which mistakes the nature and function of philosophy as the investigation of consciousness and human knowledge.

Heidegger is convinced that Husserl's philosophy approaches phenomenology from the point of view of the constitution of knowledge by a thinking subject.⁴⁴ Opposing Husserl, Heidegger develops Dilthey's insight about man's relation to his history. Hence the fundamental problem of philosophy is examining how human beings can gain access to the nature of truth. Phenomenology must demonstrate the need to think about man's relationship to his understanding of truth.⁴⁵



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Heidegger points out that Husserl's philosophy of the subject lacks concrete content because it ignores the defining characteristic of man conceived as in-der-Welt-sein or being-in-the-world. Hence Heidegger conceives the task of philosophy as examining the possibilities of man's access to thinking and meaning, and how human beings can provide an insight into the nature of Being or truth from the perspective of man's existence in the world.

44. M. Heidegger : Being and Time (tr. M. Macquarrie & E. Robinson), p. 45-6.

45. ibid. pp. 256-261.

In his presentation of the problem of the meaning of Being or truth, Heidegger argues that digging to the roots of Being or "to be" is the main task of philosophy.⁴⁶ He posits that man lives in total forgetfulness of Being or truth. In spite of experiencing the elusiveness and mystery of Being, man still fails to raise the proper questions about Being.⁴⁷



Pursuing **University of Fort Hare** *Together in Excellence* Heidegger maintains that ancient Greek thinkers contributed to the cause of the loss of the understanding of Being. Plato and Aristotle in antiquity, and Kant in modern times, enquire into the grounds of the knowledge of existence, but fail to examine the meaning of "to be".⁴⁸ This forgetfulness of Being, Seinsvergessenheit, together with the ontological difference, the loss of the distinction between things in being and Being itself, leads to the confusion between Being, Sein, and beings, Seiendes, in past philosophising.⁴⁹

46. M. Heidegger : Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 18.

47. ibid. p.35.

48. T. Ando : Metaphysics, p. 104.

49. W.J. Richardson : Heidegger, pp. 12-3.

Heidegger traces the materialism of Western culture to the fact that philosophy since Descartes has been sidetracked from thought about Being, to the study and technical exploitation of beings or material things. The knowledge of how to make things and the perfection of the means of producing them have become the main business of modern man. Under these conditions, spiritual values become secondary to man's desire for the possession and ownership of property.⁵⁰ Hence in proportion as modern man forgot Being, the idea of God taught in the Christian tradition, is pushed to the background in man's mind.



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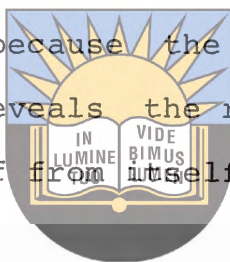
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To confront the malaise which Heidegger ascribes to modern man's neglect of Being, Heidegger's approach in Being and Time is the investigation of the meaning of Being by considering the nature of man conceived as Dasein, or human being-there. Because Dasein thinks about Being as a whole, Heidegger calls his enquiry ontological, concerned with examining the meaning of Being, and hermeneutical, concerned with interpreting Being because of the tendency of Being to hide itself⁵¹. First, the enquiry is concerned with the

50. M. Heidegger : Introduction to Metaphysics, pp. 46-7.

51. M. Heidegger : Being and Time, p. 36.

question of the meaning of Being in general. Second, the enquiry is hermeneutical because the analysis of the life and thought of Dasein shows that understanding in general is one of the basic characteristics of Dasein. The method of the interpretation or hermeneutic of Dasein is phenomenological because the description of the mode of Dasein reveals the reality of human existence as it shows itself from itself.⁵²



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By applying the phenomenological method to hermeneutics, Heidegger joins hermeneutics to existential phenomenology.⁵³ Gadamer admits that Heidegger's analysis of Dasein has influenced his thinking.⁵⁴

In Heidegger's analysis of Dasein, the relation between human existence and being takes the structure of understanding which Heidegger calls the hermeneutical circle. Dasein has a rough or approximate understanding of Being because of the influence of the hermeneutical circle. The prior

52. J. Macquarrie : Martin Heidegger, p. 10-11.

53. ibid.

54. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. xv.

understanding Dasein brings to every act of interpretation, is a result of the circular movement of Dasein's understanding. Heidegger calls the presuppositions at work in understanding the fore-structure of understanding.⁵⁵



The fore-structure of understanding constituted by Dasein's frame of reference facilitates the perception and conception of the world. Gadamer observes that with Heidegger all intentional acts like seeing, hearing and so on, are acts of interpretation.⁵⁶ As to the nature of interpretation itself, Heidegger offers the foundational insight that

An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.⁵⁷

At this point Heidegger anticipates Gadamer's assertion that

55. M. Heidegger : Being and Time, p. 194.

56. H-G. Gadamer : "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion", Man and World, vol. 17 (1984), p. 313-323.

57. M. Heidegger : Being and Time, pp. 191-192.

We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer.⁵⁸

For Heidegger, and Gadamer as well, questions do not emerge in a vacuum because the subject does not normally question, enquire or understand outside the framework of his life-world. Meaning and understanding are shaped by the interests that prompt the questions — give rise to the enquiry at hand. It is not until the insight that the foregoing insight that meaning and understanding are anticipated by the subject's interests, is adumbrated in Wolf's principle of the hermeneutical circle of understanding the whole by reference to the part and the part by reference to the whole. More significant, this particular hermeneutical circle of understanding is explicit in Heidegger's existential analysis that Dasein has a "preconceptual understanding of Being" (Vorbegriffliches Seinsverständnis) which forms a link between Dasein and the world. 59

58. H-G.Gadamer : TM, p. 333.

59. J.Kockelmans : Phenomenology, 281-2.

In his analysis of Dasein, Heidegger conceptualises Dasein as capable of projecting its possibilities. One of Dasein's possibilities is death. The exact moment of death is unknown but the future reality of death is certain. Dasein is therefore a being-towards death, ein Sein zum Tode. Death stands at the boundary between Dasein as being-in-the-world and Dasein as Nothing.⁶⁰ Hence for Heidegger death is not the reward of sin, but the coronation of life. In this sense, Heidegger's philosophy is constructed from a specific existential experience, which gives a pessimistic colour to his analysis of the possibilities of Dasein.

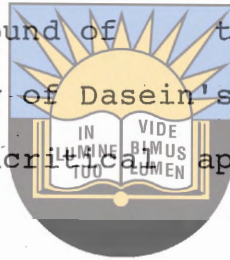


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It can be argued that Heidegger's experience derives from the aftermath of the first world war exacerbated by the functionalism of science and technology in the 20th century. In the wake of increased powers of destruction released by atomic energy, Heidegger sees humanity as being crushed between nothingness and death. Hence Heidegger enquires into the ground of the world by renewing the question of Being.

60. G.A. Rauche : "Existentialist Philosophy and the Unhousing and Rehousing of Man with Special Reference to the Thought of Martin Heidegger", The South African Journal of Philosophy, June 1964, pp. 58-81.

Some critics point out that Heidegger's approach to the question of authentic existence and truth from the perspective of Dasein, reveals an anthropological bias with respect to the infinite question, "What is Being?". Heidegger's attempt to constitute the ground of the world exclusively from the point of view of Dasein's understanding of the world shows an uncritical appraisal of the powers of Dasein.



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Heidegger conceives man's understanding of the ontological horizon of Being as the decisive moment, as the Kairos. Here the utopian nature of his metaphysical project is exposed in his attempt to explain Being, as the infinite ground of the world, through finite, historical and contingent Dasein.

In this sense Heidegger's metaphysics is just as controversial as any constructed system of philosophy before him. He fails to realise that as embedded in Being itself, Dasein cannot be a sufficient explanatory ground of Being.⁶¹ As a rationally constituted

⁶¹. G.A. Rauche : Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument, p. 78.

concept, Heidegger's Being is just as controversial as other rationally conceived projects.

2.3.5.3 GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, incorporates three moments in the history of philosophy, namely, the historicism of Dilthey, the phenomenology of Husserl, and the hermeneutic existential philosophy of Heidegger. But the most far-reaching influence on Gadamer is the fundamental historicity of Being understood in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein.

Following Heidegger who extends the scope of understanding to the universal character of man taken as being-there or Dasein, Gadamer affirms that understanding

is the mode of being of There-being itself.⁶²

62. H.G. Gadamer : TM, p. xviii.

Like Heidegger's conception of understanding, Gadamer breaks through the distinction of subject and object by seeing tradition or history as a precondition or moment of understanding. In the same manner as Heidegger, Gadamer's hermeneutics is not concerned with rules or a method for understanding a text, or a piece of art.⁶³ Hence with him hermeneutics takes a universal turn to mean the whole mode of being human.⁶⁴ To distinguish his position from the previous hermeneutic efforts, he designates his hermeneutic effort as a philosophy, or a "hermeneutic philosophy" rather than a theory of interpretation.⁶⁵



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It is Gadamer's new view of "understanding" as against objective understanding in the idealistic sense, which aimed at arriving at objective or intended meaning, that he dedicates the book, Wahrheit und Methode to Heidegger. In a foreword to his second edition of Wahrheit und Methode, Gadamer acknowledges his indebtedness to Heidegger's initial analysis of human existence. In the same foreword, he defends his position against critics who appear to have

63. ibid, p. xvi.

64. ibid. p. xviii.

65. ibid. p.xxiv.

misunderstood his position in his philosophical hermeneutics. He defends his position by reviving the term "hermeneutics".

My 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.⁶⁶



Dilthey's ~~historicism~~ ^{University of Fort Hare} ~~had insisted that the interpreter~~ ^{Together in Excellence} must endeavour to understand the past in terms of its own frame of reference and not attempt to impose his categories. This objective understanding would be achieved through the interpreter's empathic act of transporting himself into the past. Gadamer agrees with Dilthey that the past must be understood in its historical context. But Gadamer corrects what he regards as Dilthey's naive historicism by insisting that the historical context of the past includes the subjectivity or the horizon of the contemporary interpreter or researcher.⁶⁷ In addition Gadamer takes precautions to correct the impression that his position is a return to Dilthey's

66. ibid. p.xvi.

67. ibid. p. 8.

subjectivistic theory of empathic transportation of the interpreter into the past. For Gadamer, in contrast to Dilthey, understanding of the past is always of necessity from the horizon of the present.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer treats interpretative understanding as a mode of man's being. In dealing with Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between "Hermeneutics" and "hermeneutics": "Hermeneutics" capitalised, is a philosophical *Together in Excellence* "hermeneutics", uncapitalised, denotes a feature of human existence. Gadamer's philosophical Hermeneutics is oriented to hermeneutics. In his foreword to the second edition of Wahrheit und Methode, Gadamer clarifies:

I have therefore preserved the term "hermeneutics" which the early Heidegger used, not in the sense of a methodical art, but as a theory of the real experience that thinking is.⁶⁸

68. ibid, p. xxiv.

The development of hermeneutics is a steady growth which can be seen from Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer. Although the development of hermeneutics does not take the form of a strict linear progression, its development can be described as growing out of a dialogical confrontation of theory upon theory. Heidegger and Gadamer's ontological turn, their tendency to see meaning against the background of existence, is challenged by the hermeneutics of Ricoeur.



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2.3.5.4. RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AS A DEPTH HERMENEUTICS

Ricoeur's thinking is preoccupied with the pressing question of how man comes to know himself. Differing from Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur goes back to the focus on method and posits that the human subject does not know himself directly. Man knows himself and how he relates to the reality around him only by a series of detours.⁶⁹

69. D. Ihde : Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, pp. 3-4.

As Ricoeur views the issues in hermeneutics, he criticises Heidegger for ignoring the question of method, and entering directly into the description of Dasein. He argues that the ideal of a "self-transparent, autonomous subjectivity" promoted by Descartes's idealism of the thinking cogito is ultimately unreal. The human being does not have an automatic access to a pure, immediate understanding or knowledge of himself because he finds himself in a world whose meanings already challenge his freedom.⁷⁰



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While Heidegger views hermeneutic understanding as a way of being human, Ricoeur conceptualises hermeneutics as a method leading to understanding. Because all understanding is expressed in language, Ricoeur singles out particular expressions of multiple meaning conveyed in symbols uttered in dreams and in myths.⁷¹

As examples of symbolic expressions, Ricoeur mentions cosmic symbols expressing man's experience of evil such as those studied in the phenomenology of religion and

70. P. Kearney : Dialogue with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage, p. 15-16.

71. P. Ricoeur : Conflict of Interpretations, p xiv.

the symbols expressed in dreams as studied in psychoanalysis. By including the symbols of psychoanalysis, Ricoeur merges psychological thought with philosophy.

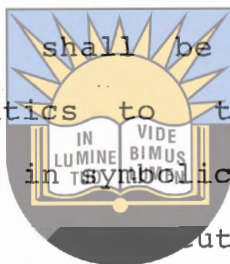
Compared to the straight-forward language philosophers use to describe reality, Ricoeur prefers symbolic expressions because the symbol contains a multiplicity of meanings which require interpretation. At the juncture of the opaqueness of symbolic language, there is a hermeneutic whenever the symbol hides while exposing and exposes while it hides.

In "Existence and Hermeneutics" Ricoeur defines the symbol as any structure of meaning in which a direct, primary and literal meaning points to another meaning that is indirect, secondary and figurative, but which can be grasped through the first. The task of hermeneutics then is that of deciphering this multiple meaning. Interpretation is the exercise of unfolding the layers implied in the literal meaning.

At this point Ricoeur's hermeneutics makes contact with the older tradition of the exegesis of texts because for Ricoeur, the language of double meaning is deciphered through interpretation, like the text.

Ricoeur writes:

Today I shall be less inclined to limit hermeneutics to the discovery of hidden meanings in symbolic language and would prefer to link hermeneutics to the more general problem of written language and text.⁷²



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CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter it was observed that philosophical systems are rooted in man's life-world or Lebenswelt. As seen by the respective thinkers, the conception of the life-world differs even among those thinkers who adopt the hermeneutic method. The human life world weaves itself into man's thinking and reflects itself in the theories man propounds. The point can be argued that

72. P. Ricoeur : From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language, p. 90.

the development of hermeneutics, as sketched in the chapter now being concluded, reveals the background of man's corresponding theories in religion, arts, literature, history and the sciences in general.



The insight that man's life-world provides the background of the theories in the sciences is not new. It is already implicit in Schleiermacher's hermeneutic principle of understanding the whole by reference to the part and vice versa. It is also presupposed in Dilthey's stand about understanding from out of life.

The foregoing observation on the relation between the human life-world and thought, life and theory, has implications for objectivity and subjectivity in the sciences. Before going into these implications in relation to Gadamer, the following chapter takes up the thought of Dilthey, who has had an influence on Gadamer, especially on the question of the distinction between the human and the natural sciences.

CHAPTER THREE

3. DILTHEY'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE
NATURAL SCIENCES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

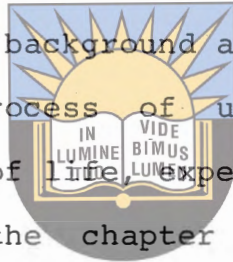


This chapter sketches the background against which Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and those who followed him make a distinction between the study of human events and the occurrence of phenomena in nature. Dilthey is the main figure of the historical tradition that assigns the understanding of texts in general to the foundation of the human sciences.

The main reason for giving prominence to Dilthey is that he is regarded as the father of historicism, and the founder of modern philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's disagreements with some of Dilthey's views on hermeneutics are discussed in chapter Four.

The first part of the chapter gives an account of the logic of explanation in science, since this influenced Dilthey to propose hermeneutic

understanding as a method for the Geisteswissenschaften. A brief account of Dilthey's metaphysical assumptions or constructions, demonstrates that for him the idea of a person's world-view or Weltanschauung, is rooted in the person as an ideal fact. These constructions constitute the background against which Dilthey conceives the process of understanding from the related notions of Life, experience and history. The main part of the chapter focuses on Dilthey's distinction between the human and the natural sciences.



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3.2 THE LOGIC OF EXPLANATION

For a long time, the view that the natural sciences explain problematic events or occurrences, while the human sciences understand meaningful human expressions, was taken as the definitive difference between the natural and the human sciences. In the 19th century, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Windelband and Rickert, were some of the leading figures who supported this view.

In the middle of the 20th century, Hempel published his essay, "The Function of General Laws in History"¹ which can be regarded as part of the tradition of positivism which influenced Dilthey's thinking. According to Hempel, a puzzling or problematic event can be explained or clarified when it is shown to be an instance of a general law.²



For an example, if on a very cold morning in the extreme part of winter, the pipes in the basement of a house burst open, people will demand to have the unexpected and problematic event clarified or explained. The person explaining the isolated and unexpected event must know the general law that under normal atmospheric pressure, water will always freeze below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Once people know that

- a) the temperature dropped from 39 degrees Fahrenheit in the evening to 25 degrees Fahrenheit in the morning, and
- b) metals melt when heated and contract when cold,

1. C.G. Hempel : "The Function of General Laws in History", The Journal of Philosophy, (39), 1942, pp. 35-48.

2. ibid.

and

c) water expands when it freezes, 3

they will no longer find the bursting of the pipes puzzling and problematic.



First, in science, an explanation, as in the above case, takes the structure of a valid deductive argument because it supplies a law-like statement and initial conditions, from which a statement describing the event to be explained can be logically deduced. Explaining an event, means showing by deduction, that it had to occur, given the initial conditions that the temperature dropped at night, and the law of nature, that metals melt when heated and contract when cold.

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Second, a scientific explanation exhibits the functional scheme: if P then Q,

where P = law of nature plus initial conditions,
 and Q = event, result or occurrence to be explained,
 that is

3. J. Hospers : An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis,
 p. 161.

1. if metal pipes get too cold, then they contract
(law-like statement)

2. the temperature dropped below 32 degrees Fahrenheit at night, the pipes were laden with water (initial conditions)

3. the pipes burst at night.



The logical structure of an explanation is the same as that of a prediction, because scientific explanations use laws of nature which apply to all places and at all times. Because of their universal application, laws of nature extend into the future. As a result, they can be made a basis for prediction. Thus an explanation tells people what they should have expected.

Dilthey, Windelband and others, realising that natural laws do not occur in the Geisteswissenschaften, think that explanations are for the natural sciences because they require the use of laws. Once the distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences is couched in terms of explanation, the philosophers of

the Geisteswissenschaften look for a distinct method that will address the unique subject matter of the human sciences. Hence Droysen, the German historian and philosopher, conceives Verstehen, translated as understanding, as a special method designed to help the human sciences match the scientific and objective nature of the natural sciences.⁴



Gadamer criticises the approach of the Geisteswissenschaften followed by Dilthey and the historical school. For in the process of matching the human sciences with the explanatory model of the natural sciences, Dilthey, Windelband and others draw the distinction between the natural and the human sciences too widely. According to Gadamer, they overlook the interpretative and subjective element of science.

Dilthey, including Droysen and the philosophers of the historical school, assign "explanation" to the natural sciences because they think that the logic of scientific explanation is unique to the natural

4. R. J. Anderson et. al.: Philosophy and the Human Sciences, p. 65.

sciences. They make the Verstehen-Erklaren distinction against the background of positivism which absolutises the method of explanation of the natural sciences. However, by drawing sharp distinctions between the human and the natural sciences, separating the spheres of human knowledge along two different and divergent standards of rationality, the one scientific or explaining and the other hermeneutic or understanding, Dilthey and the thinkers after him, immerse the human sciences in a long running debate over method.⁵ *Together in Excellence*



3.3 THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERLYING DILTHEY'S HERMENEUTICS

Dilthey's main intention is to defend the objectivity of knowledge in morality, religion and philosophy, and to show that knowledge is not limited to external objects but can be extended to man's inner experience.⁶ He is heavily influenced by Hegel's idea of a law.⁷ According to Hegel, a law is not a generalisation from observation and experiments, but an unfolding of history which results in the revelation of purpose and meaning. Dilthey inherits

5. ibid. p. 71.

6. J. Bleicher : Contemporary Hermeneutics, p. 4.

7. G.H. von Wright : Explanation and Understanding, p. 8.

and adopts from Hegel the idea of history rather than world history.⁸ Unlike Hegel, Dilthey does not adopt the idea of history that embraces a universal purpose. Thus he is anti-Hegelian by refuting the idea of world reason in favour of the idea of human history embodying man's growing life experience.



Dilthey considers life the unifying factor.⁹ It is the first idea on which he seeks to base the knowledge of human nature. The category of life is paramount with the result that life is a realm lived and experienced by every human being. To study life is to make an exploration of man's experience.¹⁰ Because life comprises man's thoughts, feelings and will, life refers to man's inner experience. The human life world, the Lebenswelt, is also woven out of man's life experience. Since the inner life comprises feeling and will, the mechanistic and objectifying method of science is totally unsuited for breaking through to the inner life of a person.¹¹ In the human sciences,

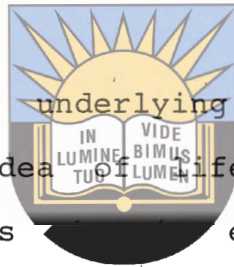
8. G.A. Rauche: Knowledge and Experience - A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 77-9.

9. I. M. Bochenski : Contemporary European Philosophy, p. 123.

10. ibid.

11. R. E. Palmer : Hermeneutics, p. 102.

understanding is possible because of the commonness, the life experience, binding together all mankind. This commonness enables the historical researcher to somehow feel or experience what other people have felt or experienced in the past.




The second idea underlying Dilthey's hermeneutic theory is his idea of life expression. By this notion, he means expressions expressed by a mind. To understand others, people must understand their expressions. ~~These expressions~~ are understandable because human beings make them in the course of living, which is a common factor linking a person with other people. Understanding is possible because in social life human beings share a world of meaning. In Dilthey's actual words:

this identity of mind in the Thou, in every subject of a community, in every system of a culture and finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, make successful co-operation between different processes in the human studies possible. The knowing subject

is here, one with its object which is the same at all stages of its objectification.¹²

The notion of intersubjective identity makes understanding possible. By the above mentioned idea Dilthey means that human beings are in a position to understand each other and an intimacy of understanding results whenever a life expression facilitates a communion between the speaker and the hearer, author of reader.¹³ Thus he writes :


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Understanding develops at first in response to the demands of practical life. Human beings are placed in contact with one another and they must make themselves mutually understood; each must know what the other wants.¹⁴

By his idea of the communal interdependence of human beings, Dilthey means that they share common meanings in virtue of belonging to the same structure of life. Individuals in a community can understand each other

12. H.P. Rickman : Dilthey : Selected Writings, p. 208.

13. W. Dilthey : "The Understanding of Other Persons", in P. Gardiner : Theories of History, p. 215.

14. ibid.

because their life expressions derive from a similar background of experience. The identity of life structure ensures objectivity because the interpreter can relate the other subject's experiences.

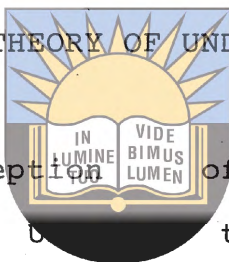


A third element in Dilthey's philosophy is the idea of objective spirit. At first he criticises Hegel because Dilthey does not see objective spirit as the manifestation of the dialectical unfolding of consciousness. He views objective spirit as the medium in which the understanding of other persons, including values and expectations takes place. The working of objective spirit is illustrated graphically in a growing child's mastery of language, social behaviours and customs. All these represent the objectification of man's spirit in society. Hence Dilthey argues that man does not take up a life expression as an isolated, distanced or atomic subject. Rather, he learns about life expressions in the course of living or against the common background of a shared human life-world.¹⁵ As Dilthey sees it, the human social background, as a continual process of interaction among human beings, leads to understanding because human beings possess

15. ibid. pp. 215-6.

the power of communication. Thus the individuality of human experience, perceptions and thoughts becomes shared in the social group and diffuses throughout the nation because historical understanding embraces human life and experience.¹⁶

3.4 DILTHEY'S THEORY OF UNDERSTANDING



Dilthey's conception of understanding is psychological. Under the influence of Schleiermacher, he views psychological understanding as the grasping of the meaning of a past thinker by penetrating or reconstructing the mind of the author or thinker. The historian, interpreter or social scientist achieves this through a naive and somehow mystical act of empathy.¹⁷

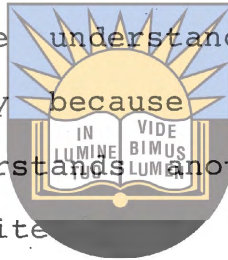
Dilthey's view of understanding as empathy is criticised by his contemporaries. Hence he redefines psychological understanding as putting oneself in the shoes, sich hineinversetzen, of the person who uses the expression or performs the act in order to

16. D. L. Sills (ed.) : International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 4, p. 185.

17. W. Outhwaite : Understanding Social Life, p 27.

imaginatively re-create the experience of another person, through reliving or Nacherleben.¹⁸

Dilthey's conception of understanding goes back to the Romantic ideal of individuality : The effect of history in the understanding of texts operates intersubjectively because when interpreting, the interpreter understands another subject, the author. Hence Dilthey writes



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Understanding is a re-discovery of

the I in the thou;¹⁹

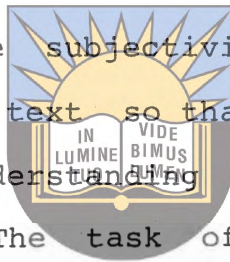
In this way, individuality influenced Romantic hermeneutics through the notion that understanding is reconstruction. Understanding is complete when the interpreter reconstructs the author's original meaning through an empathic re-creation of the author's thought. The interpreter identifies with the author's individuality, with the outcome that he can think as the author thought. The efficacy or success of a full understanding is dependent on understanding an author better than he understood

^{18.} ibid.

^{19.} H.P. Rickman : Dilthey : Selected Writings. p.208.

himself. Dilthey's idea of life philosophy, reflects the significance he attaches to the author's life and thought as conditions for objective text interpretation.

For Dilthey the subjectivity of the author is expressed in the text so that interpreting is the effort of understanding a past expression or Ausdruck.²⁰ The task of the humanities, the Geisteswissenschaften is to understand of the expressions of life from life itself. The content of the Geisteswissenschaften is historical. In other words, understanding in the domain of historical objects is focused on man and society. In consequence it is easier in the Geisteswissenschaften to understand this historical content, because the scientist is himself an historical being.²¹



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20. D.C. Hoy : The Critical Circle, p. 11.

21. H. P. Rickman : op. cit. p. 195.

3.5 DILTHEY'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES.

In general, Dilthey proposes text understanding as a model for the sciences dealing with cultural systems, society and philosophy. For him, the differences between the human and the natural sciences lie in the nature of the objects they study and in the mental disposition of the person who understands on the one hand, of explanations on the other.²²



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First Dilthey premises the uniqueness of the human sciences on the role of lived experience and world views on interpretation and understanding. He sees the human studies or Geisteswissenschaften as distinct from the natural sciences in that they involve a mental structure which points back to the researcher's life and the object under investigation. Hence he conceives the expressions found in the human sciences as objectifications of past human life.²³ He uses Schleiermacher's notion of

22. D. Polkinghorne : Methodology for the Human Sciences, p. 221.

23. W. Dilthey : Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding, p. 24.

the "community of life unities", to emphasise the fact that the subject who wants to understand historical objects cannot simply isolate himself but is affected by the object he is studying. As Dilthey sees it, the researcher's understanding is influenced by personal interests and the meanings the historical objects have for him. Dilthey concludes therefore that, in the human sciences, man's understanding of objects is self referential.²⁴



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By contrast, the natural sciences require that the observer or scientist must simply capture the data or the facts about the object he is studying. In this process of "mirroring" the facts, there is no effect on the researcher himself. ²⁵

Secondly Dilthey posits that the expressions comprising the human sciences, literature, art or social life are historical. The human sciences being historical, the understanding of their content is historical because the subject matter of the

24. R.J.Anderson et. al. : Philosophy and the Human Sciences, p. 70-1.

25. D. Linge : "Dilthey and Gadamer : Two Theories of Historical Understanding", Journal of the American Academy of Religion, vol 41, 1973, p 541.

human sciences undergoes change and development. The historical nature of understanding follows from the fact that the content of the human studies themselves are historical. 26

The interpreter could aspire to attain objectively valid knowledge of historical expressions. However, this objectivity does not mean that the interpreter goes back to re-experience irrepeatable individual experiences of the author. The interpreter could get objective knowledge of the text expressions, by re-creating the content of the expressions rather than the author's experience itself. In the process of re-creating, the interpreter could understand the author even better than the author understood himself.

Dilthey criticises the methods of natural science, but holds to the ideal of achieving objective knowledge in the historical sciences. The human studies can be called sciences because their limited objectivity is based on the common relation to life which the interpreter shares with the author. Dilthey here falls back on

26. D. Polkinghorne : op. cit. p. 223.

Schleiermacher's ideal of understanding an author better than he understood himself. Thus Gadamer regards Dilthey's tendency to equate the text of interpretation with the object of natural science as a manifestation of an objectionable assumption that an interpreter or historian can stand above history.²⁷



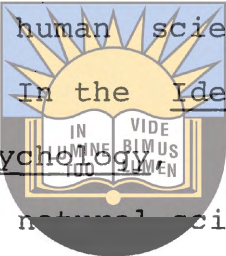
The existence of ~~is~~ between the interpreter and the author, between "I and Thou", the past and present, is ~~the basis of~~ the objectivity of hermeneutics, and by extension, the human sciences. However, in the natural sciences, objectivity is guaranteed by the application of laws relating to regular and repeatable events.

Against the background of Dilthey's second distinction between the human and the natural sciences, it should be seen that he highlights the distinction between the human and the natural sciences, on the basis of the levels or degrees of objectivity in the two fields of

27. H-G. Gadamer : TM, pp. 192-214.

enquiry. On this basis, the natural sciences are more objective than the human sciences.

The third distinction between the human and the natural sciences lies in the mode of cognition that obtains in the human sciences compared to the natural sciences. In the Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytical Psychology Dilthey amplifies the aphorism that the natural sciences explain nature, but the humanities understand life. He writes:


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We explain through purely intellectual processes, but we understand through the co-operation of all our psychic powers.²⁸

Thus Dilthey's distinction between understanding or Verstehen and explanation or Erklaren, does not exclusively rest on a contrast between subjectivity and objectivity. It also rests on the structure of cognition. Hence he views understanding in the humanities as a mental operation linked to a type of causal

28. W. Dilthey : "Ideas For A Descriptive Psychology", quoted in S. Glynn (ed.) : European Philosophy and the Human and the Social Sciences, p 3.

explanation. Both methods are complementary and can be employed in a systematic hermeneutics focused on the human studies.²⁹ Thus the human studies differ from the natural sciences, not just in subject matter only, but also in their epistemological grounding or method of apprehending its subject matter.



Fourth, the human sciences are distinguished from the natural sciences in that the expressions making the ~~human~~ ^{University of Fort Hare} ~~sciences~~ ^{Together in Excellence} human sciences are understood by reference of the part to the whole and vice versa. Dilthey elaborates:

There is here the relation of parts to the whole, in which parts receive meaning from the whole and the whole receives sense from the parts; these categories of interpretation have their correlate in the structural coherence of the organisation, by which it realises its goal teleologically. ³⁰

29. W. Outhwaite : op. cit., p 29.

30. D. Polkinghorne : Methodology for the Human Sciences, p. 221.

The whole and part structure of understanding means that every event in history is understood in context rather than as a single and isolated happening.

Similarly, every state, civilisation or institution studied in the human sciences is understood as a part in the ongoing and unfolding story of mankind.

Dilthey explains:



Every single expression... is

understandable because the person expressing himself ~~and the person~~ who understands him are connected by something they have in common.³¹

Dilthey bases the hermeneutical circle of understanding the part from the whole and vice versa on his insight about the Weltanschauungen. The Weltanschauung or world-view is a perspective integrating the interpreter and the author of the expression. 32

31. W. Dilthey : Gesammelte Schriften, vol vii. p iii.

32. W. Dilthey : "Types of World Views", quoted in S. Glynn: European Philosophy and the Social Sciences, pp. 8-9.

In his article "Life and World Views", Dilthey describes his conception of a world-view and explains how the life of each individual is woven around the individual's world-view of life relations, "seine eigene Welt von Lebensbezugen".³³ By constructing the notion of lived experience, Dilthey anticipates Husserl's notion of the life-world. In lived experience, objects and persons do not appear in causal relations but in meaningful life relations. In these life relations, the individual adopts a reflective rather than a theoretical or a ~~general science~~ ^{general science}.³⁴



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In the Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytical Psychology, Dilthey clarifies that the understanding of external objects in the natural sciences is not dependent on the fullness of lived experience as in the Geisteswissenschaften. In the natural sciences, the investigation relies on the isolation, observation and analysis of external physical phenomena. In Dilthey's maxim,

33. ibid.

34. ibid.

We explain nature, but we understand
psychic life.³⁵

CONCLUSION

Dilthey stands in history as the father of the debate over method. He opposes the monopoly of the historical sciences by the objective natural sciences. He holds that the study of the human sciences involves the context of human social experience. In this way he extends the debate over method into the philosophical issues of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in knowledge.


The following chapter shows how Gadamer challenges and modifies some of the controversial ideas in Dilthey's philosophy.

35. W. Dilthey : Gesammelte Schriften, vol v. p 144 (Quoted in S. Glynn : European Philosophy and the Human Sciences, p. 3.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. GADAMER'S REACTION TO DILTHEY

4.1 INTRODUCTION



The present chapter shows in what ways Gadamer's conceptualisations and formulations have emerged from Dilthey's thinking, and in some respects, even displace certain key ideas in Dilthey's hermeneutic theory. Gadamer resorts to his immediate predecessor Heidegger, to correct what he regards as Dilthey's uncritical dependence on the enlightenment tradition of methodically acquired knowledge.

4.2 GADAMER'S HERITAGE FROM DILTHEY

First, one of the areas of agreement between Dilthey and Gadamer, is Dilthey's emphasis on history as the way life objectifies or manifests itself. Dilthey's awareness of history influenced Gadamer's thought. In turn he sees in Dilthey's emphasis on history an opportunity to deepen his own understanding of history as a feature of human existence.

In retrospect, however, it is Hegel who raised the phenomenon of history to the level of philosophical reflection. He posits that reason is not to be conceived as an entity isolated from the flow of time. The effect of history in Hegel's idealism has implications for the status of finite reason. Against Hegel's conception of history, it is worth noting that the human understanding is not an abstract and isolated entity but is conditioned in accordance with man's ever changing historical circumstances.



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Dilthey follows ~~together in Excellence~~ about history. By embracing history as a formative element in man's understanding, Gadamer situates himself in the Hegelian and Diltheyan tradition without necessarily accepting all the theses of Hegel and Dilthey.

Second, Gadamer acknowledges Dilthey's differentiation between historical and scientific knowledge. Dilthey realised that historical understanding does not involve the method of explanation presupposed in natural scientific knowledge. In Gadamer's observation, Dilthey is the first thinker to oppose the scientific ambition of Neo-Kantianism.¹ In general Neo-Kantianism is a late

1. H-G. Gadamer: "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment", Philosophy Today, vol. xvi, no. 4/4, 1972, p 231

19th century reaction against speculative metaphysics. Although Gadamer writes collectively of the Neo-Kantian school, it must be understood that the real thrust of his criticism is aimed against the Marburg School led by Cohen rather than the Baden school represented by Windelband and Rickert. At Marburg, more than at any other centre of Neo-Kantianism, the focus on mathematical scientific method as an ideal of knowledge was greatest.



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Consequently ~~Gadamer~~ ~~in Excellence~~ Dilthey that the mere transference of the methods of the natural sciences distorts the understanding of human reality.

Realising that the Neo-Kantian philosophy of the Marburg school is exclusively oriented to scientific knowledge, Gadamer rethinks the task of philosophy with respect to life interests. 3

Third, Gadamer sides with Dilthey in criticising Husserl's ideal of a "pure" perception of concrete objects. For him the idea of a pure perception of objects is based on the questionable assumption that man's objective scientific observation of nature can be

2. J. Hirschberger : A Short History of Western Philosophy, p. 181.
3. H-G. Gadamer: "Philosophy and Hermeneutics", Philosophers on Their own Work, vol. 2, p. 34.

free of beliefs and judgements influenced by human experience and history. Gadamer argues that the quest for absolute knowledge places Western philosophy in a "dead end".⁴ He explains that the Neo-Kantian conception of knowledge fails to take into account the fact that man's present situation and past experience influence his perception and understanding of the world.⁵ In embracing the perspective of history, Dilthey and Gadamer reject the failure of the Marburg School to acknowledge the distinct historical nature of the human sciences.



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4.3 GADAMER'S CORRECTION OF DILTHEY

When Dilthey separates the human sciences from the natural sciences along the Verstehen-Erklären dichotomy, Gadamer sees this separation of the two fields of enquiry as revealing the mood of the Enlightenment belief in reason.⁶

For Gadamer hermeneutics is more than just the method of the human sciences. He argues that:-

4. H-G. Gadamer: "Philosophy and Literature", Man and World, vol. 18, no. 3 1985, p.241.
5. H-G. Gadamer: "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment", Philosophy Today, vol. xvi. no. 4/4, 1972, p. 231.
6. H-G. Gadamer: "The Power of Reason", Man and World, vol. 3, 1970, pp.5-15.

... the hermeneutic methodology that the Romantic interest subsumed under the scientific auspices was constantly compared with the methodology of the natural sciences. Its objects, the transmitted texts, were to be treated like the observational data in the scientific investigation of nature.⁷



Gadamer clarifies that the title of his major book, Truth and Method, is not intended to exaggerate the opposition between the Geisteswissenschaften and the natural sciences because the Geisteswissenschaften also are "sciences".⁸ The scientific nature of the Geisteswissenschaften is Gadamer's starting point. Hence he states that it is not his intention to tell the sciences what they should do. Rather he merely reminds them what they are. The abovementioned point about the scientific nature of the Geisteswissenschaften, leads him to point out that they cannot escape the methodical separation between subject and object. Further he warns them not to aim for an artificial or formalistic technique of understanding in the manner outlined in Dilthey's system.

7. H-G. Gadamer: RS, p. 99.

8. H-G. Gadamer: TM. p. xvii.

By this criticism Gadamer joins Heidegger's stricture against the subject-object polarity characterising Western philosophy. He concludes that the methodical alienation which is the basis of modern science pervades the Geisteswissenschaften as well. That is Gadamer's criticism of Dilthey on the one hand. On the other hand, his standpoint is that the natural sciences too form part of the spectrum of the cultural activities. Defining this standpoint, Gadamer writes:-



I leave out of account the fact that the scholar ~~the~~ ^{University of Fort Hare} natural scientist - is perhaps not completely free of custom and society.⁹

In Gadamer's view therefore, the human sciences as well as the natural sciences are man-made because they are embedded in man's theoretical and practical interests, and are methodically constituted as theories. 10

Gadamer criticises Dilthey's positivism. He reminds him that the real power of hermeneutical consciousness is the recognition of what is questionable. Yet the

9. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.13.

10. G.A. Rauche: Knowledge and Experience - A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Experience p.78.

concern to be scientific demands an artificial methodological neutrality which tends to conceal or blur the hermeneutical element of science. Gadamer posits that:-

No assertion is possible that cannot be understood as an answer to a question ... (this) does not impair the impressive methodology of modern science in the least. 11



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Gadamer supports the scientific studies are hermeneutical by referring to the experience of statistics:

What is established by statistics seems to be a language of facts, but which questions these facts answer and which facts would begin to speak if other questions were asked are hermeneutical questions.12

In this way, Gadamer underlines the hermeneutical element of the natural sciences, in opposition to Dilthey's one-sided quest for scientific objectivity. His example from statistics shows his recognition of

11. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.11.

12. ibid.

the interpretive component of science. Hence according to him, it is not the bare facts that determine advances in scientific research but the questions which prompt the search for the data.¹³

Dilthey advocates that the researcher should start from a neutral position, otherwise he will not succeed to secure objectively valid historical knowledge. However he fails, in Gadamer's view, to explore fully the implications of human contextuality. Human contextuality means that the social as well as the natural scientist lives in a context of life which influences the preconceptions and assumptions underlying the initial questions that prompt their investigations. ¹⁴

Dilthey posits that the researcher can achieve historical understanding provided he overcomes the distance between the past and the present, subject and object. But Gadamer challenges this position because he sees Dilthey as steeped in the ideal of objectively "valid" knowledge. He remarks that there is no

13. ibid. pp. 12-13.

14. D.Linge: "Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Interpretation", Journal of the American Academy of Religion, vol. 41, 1973, p.544.

standpoint from which the subject can gain absolute knowledge of history.¹⁵

Gadamer sees Dilthey as being under the spell of the contemplative side of Hegel's idealism. He takes this anti-Diltheyan position because, in Dilthey's notion of understanding, he detects a desire to achieve a normative or methodological transcending of prejudices to make way for a prejudiceless and absolute understanding.



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Thus Gadamer sees Dilthey as a philosopher of historicism who is however unable to follow through the implications of his historicism for scientific and historical knowledge. It is from the perspective of correcting Dilthey's methodological orientation, that he sees the existence of the question as a model for correcting the naivete or fallacy of reason.

Hence Gadamer asserts that the existence of the question, even in the natural sciences, has a positive value because questions determine how scientists formulate their theories. To have the question is already an advance along the process of scientific enquiry. A researcher who has no question or problem cannot begin to investigate

15. H-G. Gadamer: WM, p. 269.

because he does not know what to look for. The existence of the question determines which facts will be selected.

The natural sciences as well as the human sciences are able to carry out their research activities precisely because they have a starting point, an assumption, something which the scientist takes for granted to launch the prior question. The tendency to take something for granted is conveyed in Gadamer's foundational statement that:



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No assertion is possible that cannot be understood as an answer to a question. 16

In so far as the natural sciences too take the existence of the question as their starting point, they are hermeneutical. Hence Gadamer writes that:-

... what is called "method" in modern science, remains everywhere the same and is seen only in an especially exemplary form in the natural sciences. The human sciences have no special method. 17



Gadamer's position is a critique against Dilthey's failure to work out the implications of the questionable for hermeneutics. Understanding is impossible without the ~~of~~ ^{University of Fort Hare} ~~of~~ ^{Together in Excellence} of what is questioned. Thus the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon is constituted by the questions the enquiring subject puts to the object. An insight of Gadamer's hermeneutical thought is demonstrated in his statement that what defines the hermeneutical process is

... not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us, over and above our wanting and doing.18

One of Gadamer's criticisms of the history philosophy from Plato to Husserl is the importance this philosophical tradition gives to subjectivity. It is with the specific intention to overcome the tendency or

17. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.9.

18. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p. xvi.

illusion of self-consciousness that he begins Truth and Method with the exposition of the problem of truth in the experience of art. 19 Consistent with his stand against the primacy of subjectivity, he challenges the claim implicit in the concept of a pure sense-perception. Thus he posits that human beings live in expectations and act according to interests.²⁰ By this formulation, Gadamer underlines the limitations of a sharp subject-object distinction presupposed in Dilthey's methodological presentation.



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Arguing against Dilthey, Gadamer posits that the idea of a method that delivers pure facts is naive because the subjectivity of the historian or the interpreter intrudes into the understanding of the object under his investigation. For instance, if the subject under examination is history, the data will not be closed and finished historical facts. Rather those "facts" will bear the mark of the "mode of being" of the historical researcher himself.²¹

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19. H-G. Gadamer: "Philosophie und Hermeneutik", in Philosophers on Their Own Work, p.37.
 20. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.121.
 21. H-G. Gadamer: "The Continuity of History and the Happening of Tradition", Philosophy Today, vol. xvi, No. 4/4 Winter 1972.

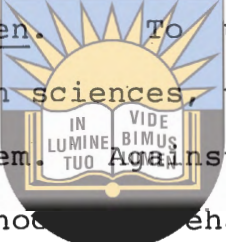
The impact of Gadamer's defence and use of the principle of historicity, that is, that man's experience unconsciously colours his perception and interpretation of reality results in a diminishing of the sharp distinction between the understanding that goes on in the Geisteswissenschaften and the general understanding that takes place in the everyday world of lived experience.



I maintain that the hermeneutical problem *Together in Excellence* and basic for all interhuman experience, both of history and of the present, precisely because meaning can be experienced even where it is not actually intended.²²

What differentiates the objects studied in the Geisteswissenschaften from those of the natural sciences is that as a rule the objects of the Geisteswissenschaften, do not allow the observer to stand at a critical distance from them. Gadamer takes the view that the understanding taking place in the Geisteswissenschaften may be likened to the structure

of "Question and answer" found in the process of dialogue. 23

Opposing Dilthey, Gadamer emphasises the objectivity of human contextuality operating in the Geisteswissenschaften. To understand the objects studied in the human sciences, the observer enters into a dialogue with them.  Against the claims made by Dilthey and his school on behalf of critical self-control demanded by methodological self-consciousness, Gadamer substitutes the truth that comes out of the dialogue. For Gadamer, the truth that breaks out of the dialogical mode of enquiry is not available to the scientific method. 24

Applied to the understanding of texts, the model of dialogue means that the interpreter who understands a text from the past or from an unfamiliar culture, consequently broadens his understanding. His study of a text from the past, or a work of art from a culture different from his own will result in a form of self-examination. This is the context in which Gadamer counteracts Romantic hermeneutics and its methodology by positing that

23. H-G. Gadamer: RS, p. 47.

24. H-G. Gadamer: ibid.

In the final analysis, all understanding is self-understanding.²⁵

Gadamer's concept of application provides another point of difference between him and Dilthey. He points out that understanding involves application. The concept of application means that understanding the text is in terms of the situation of the interpreter. ²⁶

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Gadamer argues that to understand the text, the interpreter must respond to the questions posed by the text. The meaning of the text does not emerge by the "distance of understanding" but by the subject's situatedness and participation in the context of historical events. In this way he criticises Dilthey's conception of history as a "critical science" that can separate itself from the ongoing "traditions".²⁷ Dilthey had proposed that a historical researcher must transpose himself into the original situation of the author.

25. H.G. Gadamer: PH, p. 55.
26. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.275.
27. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.28.

A further feature by which Dilthey alienates himself from Gadamer is the tendency to show an Hegelian influence by retaining elements of "objective mind". Gadamer thus criticises the Hegelian aspect in Dilthey's thinking. He says that it leads to a "false objectification".²⁸ He recognises abstract elements in Dilthey's failure to purify his philosophy of metaphysical categories. But it can be asked if Gadamer succeeds to free his own thinking of the prereflective knowledge of "being" or "truth" which emerges from the dialogue.



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Another concept by which Gadamer differs from Dilthey is understanding. For Gadamer, following Heidegger, understanding is part of the structure of human existence.²⁹ Whereas Dilthey sees understanding in the context of an intellectual activity leading to theoretical or scientific knowledge, Gadamer takes his orientation from Heidegger's basic assumption that understanding is not an act of self-consciousness which a subject engages in at will. Rather the whole manner of human existence is understanding.

28. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.280.

29. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.230.

Gadamer sees Dilthey's ambition to achieve objective historical knowledge as betraying a suppression of the implications of Dilthey's life philosophy. Thus Gadamer criticises Dilthey's theory of knowledge which he recognises as resting on the certainty of self-consciousness. Ultimately, Gadamer advises philosophers not to conceive the mode of being of "life" in terms of self-consciousness, otherwise they will not break out of the spell of idealistic speculation.³⁰



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Dilthey's scientific objectivity, which Gadamer questions, leads Dilthey to base his concept of understanding on the goal of "reliving". For Gadamer the ambition to re-experience or Nacherleben is inspired by the model of repetition in empirical observation. The counterpart of repetition in interpretation is reconstruction. For Gadamer real text understanding is not reconstruction. Instead Gadamer's position is that understanding is not simply a way of knowing which treats texts from the past like the observational data found in the scientific investigation of nature.

Following Heidegger he writes that

^{30.} ibid, p. 233.

Understanding too cannot be grasped as a simple activity of the consciousness that understands, but is itself a mode of the event of being.³¹

To distance himself from Dilthey's methodologically based concept of Verstehen, Gadamer provides a rider to his idea of understanding. It is ontological and historical. Being ontological, it is itself a mode of the event of being. Its historical essence means that the one who understands does not claim priority for his subjectivity but will place himself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused.



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Whereas Dilthey bases understanding on the unmediated experience of the interpreter, Gadamer routes understanding via history and tradition. Against the claims made by Dilthey and others on behalf of methodological self-consciousness and critical self-control, Gadamer enquires into the status of both the interpreter and the text.

Gadamer's response is that understanding is not through and through reflection but involves a factor that transcends the subject's self-understanding. The

³¹. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.50.

trans-subjective factor operative in the act of understanding is underscored by Gadamer in the hermeneutic philosophy he expounds in his Truth and Method. He elaborates his theories in reply to Dilthey's theory of interpretation.³² In opposition to Dilthey, Gadamer defends the position that knowledge in the human sciences is determined as much by the object as by the complex of beliefs and judgements embedded in history simply because the understanding of the Geisteswissenschaften cannot escape the influence of the historical tradition.



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4.4 THE REVIVAL OF THE QUESTION OF ARTISTIC TRUTH

Gadamer traces the tradition of science in the West to Descartes's principle of the self-certainty of reason and to Galilei's method of precision. To substantiate his reasons he goes back in time to the tradition of scientific rationality expressed in Kant's principle of the autonomy of reason and Hegel's idealism. He is convinced that Dilthey's advocacy of understanding as a special method applicable to historical reality is merely the culmination of a long and persistent influence of rationalism and idealism.

32. H-G. ibid.

To correct Dilthey, Gadamer contrasts the knowledge based on "scientific procedure" with the knowledge that occurs beyond the will and doing of a human subject. In his account of the aesthetic consciousness in the first part of Truth and Method, he criticises Kant's theoretical subjectivity which leads Kant to regard aesthetics as if it were another variant of a theory of knowledge. To offset the way in which modern aesthetics "distorts" the truth of art, Gadamer introduces the ~~truth~~ truth that does not depend on the priority of an active subject with its correlate of a passive subject. His overall objective in the section on aesthetic consciousness is to demonstrate that the truth aestheticians derive from the experience of art is not inferior to science, even though it may be different from the truth of science.³³

Gadamer affirms repeatedly that the uncritical adoption of methodical self-control in the understanding of cultural reality leads to alienation. He thus extends the experience of art to the understanding of the human sciences.

33. H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.88.

... the Geisteswissenschaften 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 science but lie beyond science - like the experience of art and the experience of culture that bears the imprint of its historical tradition. The hermeneutical experience as hermeneutical operative in all these cases is not in itself the object of methodical alienation but is directed against alienation. 34

In terms of the artistic experience, there is alienation when the one experiencing the work of art has the freedom to push the work of art at will, either accepting it or rejecting it on his own terms. There is alienation also when the work of art cannot create a world of its own. For Gadamer the significance of the work of art lies in the manner in which it subjects the aesthetic consciousness to it. The subject of Kant's aesthetic theory cannot claim to dominate the aesthetic object because it is master. 35

34. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p.26.

35. H-G. Gadamer: TM, pp. 87-90.

To resist Dilthey's tendency to absolutise the truth arrived at by method, Gadamer posits the truth that is revealed in the aesthetic experience. Just as according to Gadamer, the text speaks to the interpreter, the work of art speaks to the subject experiencing it. The truth that emerges from the work of art, challenges the objective truth of methodical procedure even though this truth is not conveyed in empirical, verifiable and propositional judgements.



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A further point which is ignored by Dilthey is the dialogical nature of understanding.

In contrast to objective facts and reasoned conclusions, real understanding leads to self-discovery and instruction. The experience of self-discovery that is the achievement of true understanding is like an act of faith which is an act of grace rather than the initiative of one's will.³⁶

To distance himself from Dilthey, Gadamer launches his hermeneutic re-thinking of understanding by elevating the text to the level of a revered speaker.

³⁶. H-G. Gadamer: PH, p. 45.

He does this by his concept of the Sache, the message conveyed by the text.

Gadamer's formulation that understanding is self-understanding gives rise to two issues that demand elaboration. First, his theory of effective history, as illustrated in its application to the understanding of the work of art, is too overladen with Gadamer's own ontological bias. His ontological conception that a work of art reflects reality or Being as such, prevents him from seeing that the artist constitutes the work of art contextually. Consequently the artist's existential situation will be reflected in the work of art.

Secondly, the work of art will thus no longer be some ahistorical, subjectless primordial object, but will reflect the imprint of the artist's own existential horizon, made up of his prejudices and aspirations. By the same token, meaning and self-understanding emerging from the text, reflect the author's experience, needs and aspirations.

Positively speaking, Gadamer realises that the various types of knowledge in art, the humanities and the

natural sciences are subjective because they are constituted from man's life experience. But his ontological bias prevents him from realising the full impact of the effect of history. That is to say, in his hermeneutical philosophy, the historical dimension of understanding still tends to be overshadowed by an overarching ontological element. Gadamer outpaces Dilthey by acknowledging the effect of "something of the historicity of the historian's own understanding" whenever he is at work. But he stops there. Had the historical feature of man's cognition been worked out fully in Gadamer's philosophy, he would lose no time to point out that generally or in the main, works of art and scientific theories are all built from man's contingent experience of reality. 38



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4.5 THE AUTONOMY OF THE TEXT

To modify the traditional subject-object structure of Western philosophy which always places the subject in the fore-front, Gadamer invents the concept of the thing, the Sache. The Sache acts as a counterpoint to the object found in the traditional subject-object

37. H-G. Gadamer: op. cit. p. 48.

38. G.A. Rauche : Knowledge and Experience : A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p 175.

pattern because for him, meaning is seen from the perspective of the text. The Sache refers to the meaning that emerges during the understanding of the text.

Hence what emerges when the interpreter communicates with the text does not allow him to dominate it. This dependence of the interpreter on the meaning on the way to him from the text is what Gadamer means by the ideal of the autonomy of the text.³⁹ Gadamer's idea of the independence of the text is echoed in his statement that to interpret is:-

to let what seems to be far and alienated speak again - not only in a new voice but in a clearer voice.⁴⁰

The metaphysical structure revealed in the relation of the thing said and the interpreter, is not a subject-object relation. The thing said in the text is not the interpreter's cognitive act of objectivity which he represents as his idea.

39. H-G. Gadamer: "The Problem of Language in Schleiermacher's Hermeneutic" trans. by D.E. Linge, Journal for Theology and the Church, vol. 7, p. 93.

40. H-G. Gadamer: "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences", Research in Phenomenology, vol. ix, 1979, p.83.

Rather the true understanding that comes out of the text takes the form of a conversation of the text with the interpreter. Gadamer then offers the concept of Spiel or the game to show how Dilthey falls in the group of those philosophers who want to understand the text within the framework of an object of the natural sciences.



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Differing from Dilthey, Gadamer posits that the structure of the conversation that reflects itself in interpretation, resembles the structure of a game.

Although the phenomenon of the game is an activity, it is not the player's subjective activity. The mode of being of the game does not allow the player to manipulate it according to his will as if it was an object. While it is being played the game imposes its own demands and becomes master. In the process of the game the autonomy of the player is risked in the to and fro of the game.⁴¹

Gadamer's analysis of the mode of being of the game demonstrates how he rethinks the nature and role of

⁴¹. H-G. Gadamer: TM, pp.91-5.

subjectivity in interpretation. Extending from Gadamer's analysis of the game, interpretation can be described as a game of speaking to another person. In conversation the direction of the conversation acquires its own peculiar freedom. Transferred to text interpretation, to interpret no longer means to control the meaning in advance. Instead of anticipating the textual meaning subjectively, the interpreter is always at the disposal of the objective meaning of the text. The interpreter's intentions come second to the objective content of the text.



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Gadamer's application of the experience of the game shows his critical stand against Dilthey's failure to see that the interpreter brings his own contextual needs into the text he is interpreting. In the same manner, the player too infuses his character into the play and puts his stamp to it.

Elsewhere Gadamer elaborates that:-

self reflection and autobiography -
 Dilthey's starting points - are not primary
 and are not an adequate basis for the

hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private once more.⁴²

Ultimately, it can be concluded that Gadamer's model of the structure of the game is a critique against all interpretation theories that conceive the act of interpretation as insulated from the sway of the interpreter's effective history or Wirkungsgeschichte, reflected in the questions the interpreter puts to the text before him.



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The effect of the working of history, or Wirkungsgeschichte, is that understanding is a "happening". And against Dilthey's uncritical historicism, Gadamer sees the event of understanding as involving a moment of "loss of self".⁴³

4.6 CONCLUSION

In the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Gadamer are encapsulated two theories of human understanding which share the same metaphysical roots in terms of man's historical nature. At the same time these thinkers

⁴². H-G. Gadamer: TM, p.245.

⁴³. H-G Gadamer: PH, p. 51.

part company in terms of their opposed methodological bases.

Whilst Gadamer agrees with Dilthey on the historicity of human understanding, he opposes Dilthey's historical objectivity which Dilthey locates in critical self-control. Rejecting Dilthey's aspiration to objectivity, Gadamer takes issue with Dilthey's idea that understanding is to re-live or to re-create an author's original meaning. The differences between the two thinkers anticipate the debate about the relevance of objectivity and subjectivity in human sciences.



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CHAPTER 5

5. OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

5.1 INTRODUCTION



This chapter examines Gadamer's related notions of subjectivity and objectivity. In the main, he defends the view that ~~objectivity is~~ based on historicity, tradition and language.

Gadamer's attack against subjectivity is along the level of human historicity. By saying that man is historical he means that man belongs to history first, long before he begins to use his subjective judgement. However method obscures man's primordial relation to history.

5.2 GADAMER'S CRITICAL STAND AGAINST THE PRIMACY OF SUBJECTIVITY

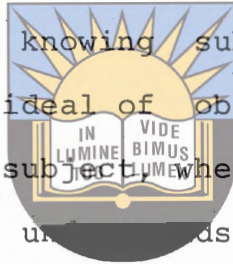
Gadamer's criticism against method is that methodical hermeneutics prescribes a critical distance between the interpreter and the object of interpretation. The result is alienation which occurs whenever the hermeneutical sciences objectify, manipulate and control the object through standardised techniques.

Under the influence of the enlightenment ideal of objective knowledge, the human sciences demand a distance between the researcher and his object.

Gadamer wields the notion of tradition to correct the alienation that results from this distancing.¹ The demand that the researcher should distance himself breaks his primary relation with tradition. Hence, Gadamer substitutes the attitude of distancing oneself with the notion of participating which is the opposite of objectifying.

1. cf J. Bleicher ; Contemporary Hermeneutics, pp. 108-115

Gadamer posits that the exclusive desire to achieve objective knowledge deteriorates into an objectivism. This view of objectivism, which he slams, accepts as real knowledge only the knowledge that is confined to facts whose correctness about the object must be capable of being checked independently of the condition of the knowing subject. Hence, for Gadamer, the absolutised ideal of objectivity obscures the reality that the subject, whether interpreter or social scientist, always understands from within the tradition he belongs to and participates in.



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With regard to historical consciousness, Gadamer argues that there is never a neutral position from which the interpreter understands:

Even a master of the historical method is not able to keep himself entirely free from the prejudices of his time, his social environment and his national situation etc.²

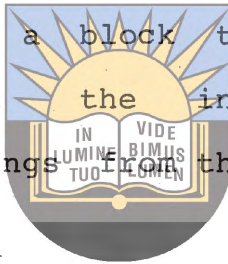
This historicist thesis or theory in historical perspective, that man's experience colours his

2. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 465.

perception of reality, is summarised by Gadamer in his idea that there is no position outside history from which the interpreter understands. He writes:

We have always stood in the middle of history.³

Far from being a block to understanding, history guarantees that the interpreter or historian understands meanings from the past.



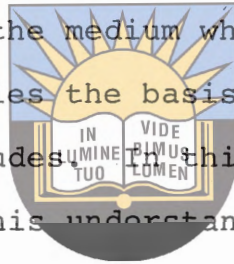
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Having pointed ~~Together in Excellence~~ foundational statements about the function of history, it may be concluded that the historical text cannot speak to the interpreter exclusively because the interpreter cannot understand outside the contextual web of history. He reads himself into the text because of the unavoidable influence of history.

3. H-G. Gadamer : "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment" in Philosophy Today, vol. xvi 4/4 1972 p.238.

5.3 TRADITION DEPENDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

Gadamer revives the idea of tradition as an element in the process of understanding. Tradition provides the foreground or the medium which makes things explicit, and which supplies the basis for the interpretation of ideas and attitudes. In this way, tradition helps man to explicitate his understanding of himself and the world.



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Following Heidegger's ontological exposition of preunderstanding, Gadamer continually criticises reflexive reason. His contention is that the hermeneutical object, for example, the text, is primary to man's subjectivity. Hence he writes that:

Understanding too cannot be grasped as a simple activity of the consciousness that understands, but is itself a mode of the event of being ...4

4. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p.50.

The idea of absolute reason does not take into account that reason can only be rooted in historical conditions. Tradition provides the foreground which renders implicit meanings explicit.

Further, Gadamer conceptualises the tradition dependence of understanding in his example of the text and the interpreter. An interpreter trying to understand a text of himself to it so that it may tell him something. This is the reason why a hermeneutically ~~oriented mind must~~ be sensitive to the text's newness from the start. The objectivity and independence of written texts and works of art ensure that artifacts from the past continue to address man even in the present.

This sensitivity involves neither neutrality in the matter of the subject nor the methodical suppression of oneself but the conscious assimilation of one's foremeanings and prejudices. Therefore the historical text cannot speak to the interpreter exclusively because the interpreter cannot understand outside the contextual web of history. Hence the interpreter reads himself into the text. This merging of oneself

with the text is an inevitable and integral aspect of historical understanding. It follows that historical understanding includes, not excludes, the subject's needs, aspirations and perspectives, as developed from the specific historical situation of his time.



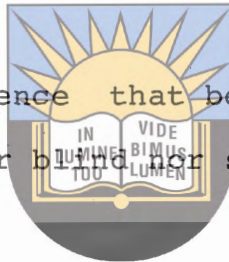
For Gadamer the interpreter must be aware of his biases so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against his prejudices or preconceptions. Gadamer utilises his concepts of authority and tradition to negate the claim that method and absolute reason are the sole bases of truth.

Gadamer links the notion of tradition to that of prejudice. The concept of prejudice had negative connotations in the enlightenment. The philosophers of the enlightenment rejected prejudice because they thought it stood in the way of objective knowledge. According to the enlightenment thinkers objective knowledge would be achieved by the adoption of strict rules which demand the suppression of prejudice. Thus Gadamer characterises the enlightenment rejection of

prejudice as a prejudice against prejudice which deprives tradition of its power.⁵

To support his concepts of prejudice and tradition, he states that:

The obedience that belongs to true authority is neither blind nor slavish.⁶



Furthermore, in Gadamer's thought, the concept of prejudice does not in the negative sense it carries in modern popular usage. Prejudice translated from the German Vorurteil means literally a "prejudgement". The prefix "vor" brings the idea of prejudice closer to the English phrase "prior understanding," which is Vorverständnis in German or the English word "anticipations," which is Vorgriff in German or the English word, "preconceptions," which is Vorbegriffe in German. ⁷ All the given "vor-" prefixes underline the inescapability of history. Gadamer argues that

5. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p.239-240.

6. H-G. Gadamer : PH. p. 34.

7. H-G. Gadamer : KS, vol. III, p.158.

We cannot extricate ourselves from historical becoming or place ourselves at a distance from it, in order that the past might become an object for us.⁸

Gadamer's central argument is that preunderstanding is fundamental to hermeneutic understanding. Far from being an obstruction to the creation of knowledge, prejudices speed up the process of understanding.



Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. ~~Together in Excellence~~ conditions whereby we experience something - whereby what we encounter says something to us. ^{University of Fort Hare} 9

The foregoing statement supports the idea that people are able to understand the beliefs and values of other people because they themselves have values and beliefs. To understand or appreciate the values of other people, it is not necessary to discard one's own values and beliefs as the enlightenment thinkers maintained.

8. ibid

9. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p.9

The question could be asked how the interpreter distinguishes constructive and helpful prejudices from those that are destructive and distorting. Gadamer employs the concept of "the continuity of tradition" to discharge this question. The continuity of tradition allows those preunderstandings and prejudices that are of a limiting nature to die away but enables those that are genuine and "legitimate" to emerge. The process of understanding involves thus a sifting of prejudices through the interplay between tradition and the object.



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The working of history during understanding corrects the scientific historical method which prescribes a distance between the present and the past in the interest of securing some supposed objective knowledge. Unlike the historical scientific method, Gadamer's hermeneutics sees the past and the present as a continuous process bridged by tradition. Tradition is a vital element providing the interpreter with a new potential for knowledge. In demonstrating the influence of factors of tradition on the understanding, Gadamer notes that the historian is not "a free floating" subjectivity. As a result the historian brings into the understanding situation his contextual needs, aspirations and preferences. Thus the needs and

aspirations of the historian or interpreter are not eliminated by taking recourse to the text of tradition but through the Socratic dialogue.

5.4 THE LOGIC OF QUESTION AND ANSWER



Gadamer contrasts the truth that comes out of the dialogue with the knowledge of the sciences, both the natural and the human sciences. Unlike methodically constituted factual knowledge, the truth of the dialogue does not emerge by the use of method. Instead of method, the dialogue proceeds by the logic of question and answer. 10

The logic of question and answer means that one understands the question in the dialogue as an answer to a prior question. The logic of question and answer transcends method which demands the interpreter or scientist to abandon his connection with the past. 11 But for Gadamer to do away with presuppositions, interests and aspirations is to slip back to self-

10. H-G. Gadamer : RS, p.46-7.

11. H-G. Gadamer : WM, pp.427-32; cf also TM, p. 326.

consciousness as a starting point. He is opposed to the thesis of self-consciousness as a starting point.

His standpoint that the meaning of the text always goes beyond what the author intended, prompts him to point out that



understanding is not to be thought of so much as an active process's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition.

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Gadamer's opposition to a start with subjectivity explains why he emphasises the primacy of the text. He says that the text represents more than the author intended. It is also understood differently under different epochs and circumstances. The continuity of tradition makes the problem of understanding universal and basic for every human experience in the past and the present. He even maintains that

meaning can be experienced even where it is not actually intended.¹³

To the objectivists, Gadamer's theory of "understanding differently" is problematic because it makes it difficult to imagine how the interpreter understands fully the texts coming from a past age or an alien culture without the influence of his own epoch or society.



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5.5 THE MEANING OF EXCELLENCE

Gadamer's device of the logic of question and answer derives from Heidegger's notion of the hermeneutical circle of pre-understanding. For Gadamer as well, human beings can never escape the hermeneutical circle of pre-understanding because they are inserted in tradition. At the same time, they embrace a Weltanschauung. Often these two characteristics are held together by language. Hence linguisticity, man's capacity to understand through language, is an ontological characteristic of the human being rather than a rational capacity of subjectivity.

¹³. ibid. p. 30.

Gadamer grafts Heidegger's hermeneutical circle of Dasein's ontological pre-understanding of being onto his notion of prejudice, tradition and authority. These ontological structures of understanding accompany and open up the possibility of the meaningful question. There can be no experience or knowledge of anything in the world without the biases of tradition and authority.



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Heidegger had already pointed out that

Every quest is a search. Every search has already an orientation pre-ordained by the object being sought.¹⁴

In like manner, Gadamer goes back to Heidegger's statement that

We understand only that which we already know.¹⁵

14. M. Heidegger: SZ, p. 5, quoted in T. Okere, op. cit. p. 61.
15. M. Heidegger: quoted in G A Rauche: Knowledge and Experience- A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 81.

Gadamer too emphasises that

We understand only what we already know. We get out of a thing only what we read into it.¹⁶

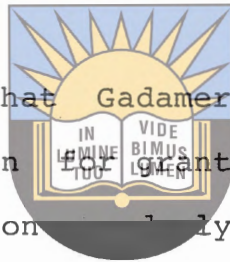


The fact that every instance of understanding is always already anticipated and surpassed by the meaningful question is not a ~~problem~~. The meaningful question is grounded in the pre-understanding because of the effect of tradition and the horizon of prejudice. Gadamer clarifies that the hermeneutical circle of pre-understanding is ontological. It is an ontological structure in the event of understanding, ein ontologisches Strukturmoment des Verstehens.¹⁷

By stating that understanding contains an ontological element of pre-understanding, Gadamer hopes to neutralise criticisms oriented to the logic of the empirical scientific method. He denies that method grounds the hermeneutical circle of pre-understanding. Thus he searches for the ground of the hermeneutical

¹⁶. H-G. Gadamer: quoted in M. Okere, op. cit.p. 32
¹⁷. H-G. Gadamer: WM, p. 277.

circle of pre-understanding in an assumed overarching ontological realm. A weakness in his ontological focus shows itself in his inability to spell out the real ground of the pre-understanding shaping the meaningful question.



It would appear that Gadamer takes the ground of the meaningful question for granted. He presupposes the meaningful question underlying man's search for knowledge in the humanities, the natural sciences and the arts. But ~~Together in Excellence~~ at it is the rational capacity of the human mind which constitutes man's understanding methodologically from man's contingent experience of reality, thus rendering the human experiences meaningful but also at the same time controversial.¹⁸

From this angle, the subjective aspects of various human truths, theories and perspectives become obvious. Gadamer realises the cultural dimension, or the human madeness of the scientific theories too, as long as they are constituted from man's life experience. ¹⁹

18. cf G.A. Rauche : Knowledge and Experience- A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 81.

19. ibid. p. 180.

What remains to be explained in Gadamer's philosophy is the controversial element of truth-perspectives and theories in the sciences. Because Gadamer does not explain, he stops short of examining why opinions, theories, systems of thought, ideologies and world-views stand in a critical relationship to each other. He takes it for granted that the text transmits different messages. He argues:



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~~It states that~~ *Together in Excellence* that one understands differently when one understands at all.20

Gadamer's idea of "understanding differently" is riveted to the historicity of the interpreter or critic. It makes sense to say that the temporal gulf separating the text of the past and the understanding of it by people living in the present is never a full appropriation of its original meaning. Thus human perceptions, viewpoints and truths tend to differ because of variations in temporal horizons. Gadamer accepts that people understand differently. But he does not proceed to explain that the different meanings

relative to the different epochs derive from the life-worlds embraced by people in different epochs. ²¹ His notion that an interpreter understands differently summarises his theory of historicity and shows his heavy reliance on Heidegger's ontological conception of understanding. But it is nonetheless problematic. Gadamer's real intention is to move against Dilthey by shutting out objectivism in textual interpretation.



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Although Gadamer emphasises the primacy of the text, it is the historicity of understanding, the unavoidable historical insertedness of the understanding subject that distinguishes his hermeneutics from his immediate predecessors. It is the ontological structure of the hermeneutical circle in his theory, that is to say, the meaningful question, that points to an underlying Being or truth. The historical consciousness at work in all processes of understanding means that the historian or interpreter is necessarily alienated from his object. But Gadamer's assumption of an underlying universal and objective Being saves his historical understanding from a relativism.

21. G.A. Rauche : op. cit. p 180.

But like Heidegger's Being, Gadamer's underlying Being is a mere assumption. Thus it is the metaphysical assumption in his philosophy, in other words, the ontological metaphysics in terms of which he reads the history of Western philosophy, that lends objectivity to his hermeneutics. His ontological metaphysics, showing the influence of Heidegger, permeates all fields of human activities including the sciences and the arts.



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In Gadamer's theory of interpretation, unlike that of Dilthey, the idea of question and answer means that the relationship between the text and the interpreter is dialogical. The term dialogical refers to a relationship that involves the structure of "I and Thou". Because for Gadamer understanding takes this overarching intersubjectivity, he opposes the antithesis between tradition and reason, history and knowledge. 22

As a moment of interpretation, Socratic dialogue implies a reciprocal relationship between the questions

22. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 251.

put to the text by the interpreter, and the truth that comes out of the interpreter's confrontation with the text. Gadamer's thought limits the claims of subjective understanding by conceptualising interpretation as an instance of Socratic dialogue. As a result, in hermeneutic understanding, as in Socratic dialogue, speakers are not concerned with securing a single, unshakeable dogmatic truth.



Gadamer's concept of interpretation does not cater for the reproduction of meaning. His view of understanding is influenced by the dialectic of question and answer. The dialectical relationship of question and answer explains the existence of an ongoing dialogue between the interpreter and the text. He defends his position thus:

Precisely through our finitude, the particularity of our being, which is evident even in the variety of languages, the infinite dialogue is opened in the direction of the truth that we are.²³

23. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p.16.

Hence the methodical certainty demanded by philosophers of uncritical historicism has no place in his hermeneutics. The dialectic of question and answer enables him to reject the standpoint of historicism which reduces the whole of reality to a single absolutised historical element. The ongoing dialectic of question and answer, leads him to the idea of effective-historical-consciousness or Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein.



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5.5 EFFECTIVE *Together in Excellence* CONSCIOUSNESS OR
WIRKUNGSGESCHICHLICHES BEWUSSTSEIN

Gadamer's notion of effective historical consciousness represents the climax of understanding on the objective level. Within effective historical consciousness, the subject is able to see himself, through his own tradition by means of the prejudices provided by the tradition. Effective historical consciousness helps the interpreter to arrive at the truth. Hence his Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein defines the context-dependence of human understanding. Gadamer writes that no person ever transcends his horizon:

....consciousness is determined by a real historical becoming. 24

The truth that is mediated by the effective historical consciousness is not subjective but is objective. Objectivity is possible because the human subject merges with history. Man is not a master or manipulator of history. Rather, he experiences history implicitly in an existential way in the family and in society.25



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Gadamer points ~~Together in Excellence~~ exclusive focus on subjectivity distorts the truth. Consequently he exposes and slams what he calls the abstract judgement assumed in German idealism. Rational consciousness may aspire to a position outside history, but such an aspiration is superficial because reason works in a reciprocal way with its circumstances. Meaning emerges through the mediation of tradition rather than through a purely rational act of self-determination. Hence Gadamer concludes that not only does understanding go beyond the meaning intended by the author, but it necessarily always goes beyond what the author intended.26

24. H-G. Gadamer : KS III, p158.

25. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p.245-6.

26. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p.122.

Gadamer's concept of tradition has an ambiguous ring. It is difficult to see how it bridges differences across various traditions, ideologies, histories and cultures. Especially in the 20th century, space technology has closed the gulf separating peoples of varying traditions, thus highlighting the need for cross-cultural understanding.



Gadamer sees the understanding between the reader and the text or the relationship between communities as a "fusion of horizons". By this concept he hopes to bridge the gap between subject and object, particularity and universality. Understanding is a blending between the universal, the text, and the particular, the interpreter. The blending is complete when there is communication between the text and the interpreter. Gadamer calls this blending "a fusion of horizons".²⁷

Gadamer's metaphor of a fusion of horizons goes back to the phenomenological idea of the intentionality of consciousness. In his account, understanding is a

27. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 273.

blending of standpoints or intentionalities. Every understanding thus presupposes a standpoint.

The thesis of effective history is of course not original with Gadamer but is Heideggerian. Heidegger realised that it is impossible to understand a novel or poem or to appreciate a work of art without the orienting role of the prejudices provided by a person's background or tradition.



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The recognition that all understanding is dependent on the mediation of prejudices gives the hermeneutical phenomenon a distinctly objective quality. When a person listens to someone or a scholar reads a book, he does not need to forget his prejudices, foremeanings and ideas. On the contrary, the text presents its own truth against his prejudices or biases. He states that the interpreter must be open to the experience of history.²⁸ He qualifies his position by stating that this openness involves neither neutrality towards the object nor the suppression of the interpreter's subjectivity. Openness thus means the conscious merging of the interpreter's horizon with the horizon

28. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 238.

of the text. 29 Therefore understanding is an infinite process because the interpreter is continually modifying his prejudices in terms of the horizon of the text he is reading.

5.6 THE LINGUISTICALITY OF UNDERSTANDING



Gadamer develops ~~historical~~ hermeneutics by stressing the primacy of language over against the subjective play of "linguistic games" found in positivistic and analytic philosophy. He questions the focus on the intentional act of a speaking subject. Similarly he places a limit on the referential theory of language as it is championed by empirical and analytical thinkers. Such a theory takes language as an instrument that refers to objects or views language as a system of signs that point to things spatially placed in the world. According to Gadamer this view rests on the notion of a speaker who is the manipulator of objects through language. 30

29. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 273.

30. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 404-5.

For him the reality of language is experienced in the manner in which understanding is achieved and entails what he calls a "pre-hermeneutic consciousness".³¹ This view of language underlines his perspective that hermeneutics is neither an auxiliary or philological discipline that facilitates understanding. On the contrary, hermeneutics is itself bound up with the historical movement of the object that is understood. Hence he maintains that understanding and language are related. Understanding through language:



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Language *Together in Excellence* is the fundamental mode of operation of our being in the world and the all embracing form of the constitution of the world. ³²

As a critic of the reflective reason, he regards language as a medium that comes before the thinking subject. Before man exercises his reflective judgement, he is already in-the-world prereflexively and linguistically. Gadamer writes:

For language is not only an object in our hands, it

31. *ibid*, p xxii.

32. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p. 3.

is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world.

33

Understanding takes place within language. For Gadamer, as indeed it is for Heidegger, understanding is not just a way of knowing, or even a way of seeing things out there in the world. Understanding is a fundamental characteristic of being-in-the-world. It is an ontological feature of man's being-in-the-world.



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34 Echoing Heidegger and going beyond him, he writes:

Being that can be understood is language.³⁵

The implication of the above view, which is Gadamer's often quoted statement, is that understanding is itself linguistic. Speech, too, is the medium in which the understanding of the other person, whether it is the text, or one's partner in dialogue, is concretised. Hence language has a central role in understanding. His concept of understanding follows that of

33. ibid, p. 29.

34. M. Heidegger : Being and Time, p. 183.

35. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 432.

Schleiermacher who already pointed out the universal function of language in understanding.

Although Gadamer sees language as a universal medium pervading human thought, feelings and perceptions, he does not mention the function of language as a multidimensional means of communication, reflecting man's multidimensional experience of reality. Another formulation of language by which he invites criticism is his idea of the autonomy of language. His statement that:



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That which can be understood is language. 36

betrays how he idealises language to the point of a metaphysical construct. His objectification of language is reminiscent of Kant's a priori categories. But there is a difference between the two thinkers. Gadamer opposes Kant's categories which overstress the role of human consciousness. Thus Gadamer regards the linguistic dimension of a subject's experience as prior to anything that the subject knows in the world.

With regard to the power of language, Gadamer remarks that:

We are almost handled by language.³⁷

He posits that the world presents itself through language although it is not necessarily the object of language:



I repeat again what I have often insisted upon: every hermeneutical understanding begins and ends Together in Excellence itself.³⁸

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Gadamer's notion of the thing does not mean Kant's Ding-an-sich which lies at the core of the Western metaphysics of presence or subjectivity. Gadamer's notion of the thing, Sache, has implications for language and dialogue. It is not the world that is represented or mirrored in language. Rather the world is mediated through language. By the same token, what fills the dialogue with spirit is not the will of speaking participants but the thing said in the

37. Interview with Gadamer : University of Zululand, 10 January, 1980 .

38. H-G. Gadamer: "The Problem of Historical Consciousness" in Interpretive Social Science : A Reader, ed P. Rabinow & W. M. Sullivan, p. 159.

dialogue. 39 The hidden but objective reason that unfolds in the dialogue goes so far beyond the subjective opinions of the partners, to the extent that the participants in the dialogue do not know what is coming next.40



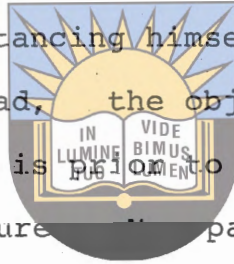
For the empiricists and the rationalists the dialogue would be the elaboration of reflective thought. But for Gadamer the ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~real~~ ~~reality~~, the "common accord", that comes out of the dialogue is conveyed by language. Hence ~~the~~ ~~structure~~ ~~of~~ the dialogue is not a cognitive relation of objectivity which represents ideas. To have a dialogue is not to relate to an object but to relate to a different kind of intentionality. What merits emphasis in Gadamer's thought is that the structure that supports dialogue, communication and understanding is history, tradition and culture.

Gadamer's hermeneutics sees in tradition a feature of historical consciousness. The thesis of effective historical consciousness is of course not original with

39. H-G. Gadamer : PH, p. 66.

40. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. 331.

him but is Heideggerian. Heidegger realised that it is impossible to understand a novel or poem or to appreciate a work of art without the orienting role of the prejudices provided by a person's background or tradition. The consequences of this for the human sciences is that the researcher does not base objective knowledge by distancing himself from his object of research. Instead, the objectivity of understanding is based on what is prior to the understanding, namely history and culture. Man participates in history and tradition.



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However participation in tradition lies at the root of the difficulties underlying Gadamer's historicist hermeneutics. To understand is not to make the author's meaning clear, but to impose one's history on to the text. He prefers the authority of effective historical consciousness to the logic that measures the efficacy of the text in terms of rules.

Since man's ability to grasp a text's meaning is conditioned by history, there is no textual identity. In the absence of the text's real meaning the interpreter must be open to the meaning that is

delivered by the text of tradition. To understand means to await meaning, provided the subject is totally available and open to the world unfolding linguistically in front of the text.

On the positive side Gadamer concludes his hermeneutic account with a broadened scope of hermeneutics, which is no longer limited to the Geisteswissenschaften. The structure of prejudice is universal. It holds for the natural as well as the human sciences. Gadamer writes consistently that *Together in Excellence*

... the burden of my argument is that this quality of being determined by effective-history still dominates the modern historical and scientific consciousness ...⁴¹

Tradition is universal and reflects itself in all thought, from the everyday dialogue among people, to the complex operations of scientists in natural science.

⁴¹. H-G. Gadamer : TM, p. xxii.

5.7 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing contents, it remains to draw a conclusion about Gadamer's conception of subjectivity and objectivity. Knowledge and understanding are both oriented to the horizon. Applied to the sciences, all research and knowledge are shot through with the horizon of the meaningful question.

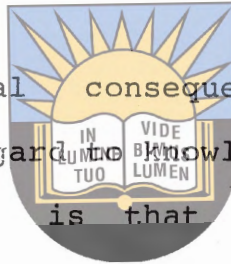


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Gadamer supports ~~his~~ ~~judice~~ ~~by~~ ~~his~~ ~~notion~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~logic~~ ~~of~~ ~~question~~ ~~and~~ ~~answer~~. Every question is an answer to an implicit and unexplicitated presupposition. The meaningfulness of the question does not follow from the objectivity of distance, but from the complex of questions surrounding the presuppositions.

Since the meaningful question can only be asked within the framework of tradition or historical context, Gadamer evolves a philosophical hermeneutics that hangs on the subjectivity of contextuality. This subjectivity is unavoidable because man can only see and speak from his given context. Thus what makes dialogue possible,

is the subjectivity which originates from the meaningful question. At the same time Gadamer's philosophy contains elements of objectivity because the pre-understanding is not something that is constructed by the subject.



The methodological consequence of the meaningful question with regard to knowledge in the human and the natural sciences is that all sciences ask the meaningful question from the specific type of Lebenswelt or *life-experience* of the people who do science. Although the sciences claim to be objective, they weave together a world-view which reflects man's experience.

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CHAPTER 6

6. CRITIQUE

The present chapter focuses on those elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics argued to be necessary to the analysis of subjectivity and objectivity as a problem of knowledge in the sciences ueberhaupt.

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In its introductory chapter the dissertation dealt with a historical perspective of the leading theories in philosophy. It showed that the world-views of the various epochs are indeed as influential on the development of philosophy as the co-ordinating and critical synthesis of the philosophers themselves. The historical perspective of philosophy was followed by an account of the history of hermeneutic theories. It became apparent that theories in hermeneutics reflect the development of ideas and theories in philosophy, the arts, and the sciences. The dissertation then focused on the distinction between the natural and the human sciences.

As it was seen, the thinkers in the 19th Century demarcated and defined the boundaries considered to distinguish the Naturwissenschaften and the Geisteswissenschaften. The natural sciences were regarded as dealing with knowledge of fact because they are based on unalterable, universal, and objective laws. By contrast, the human sciences were regarded as different because they deal with knowledge of values. Gadamer regards this distinction as artificial, ahistorical and therefore unacceptable.



Thus Gadamer rejects Dilthey's approach which assigns understanding to the rationality and praxis of the human sciences. He criticises Dilthey's formulation of hermeneutic understanding as a method for the Geisteswissenschaften, and, standing in contrast to explanation in the natural sciences. Gadamer's singular contribution to the Verstehen-Erklaren debate, is that his philosophical hermeneutics does not draw this distinction. He argues that the natural sciences too are grounded in man's life-world as a meaningful experience.¹ The person's life-and

1. G.A. Rauche: Knowledge and Experience : A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, pp. 78-9.

world-view make up the subject's starting point or situation in Gadamer's contextual approach. Thus the meaningful question emerges from the life-world. Being subjective the meaningful question reflects the subject's interests and values. Hence science, too, is subject to the world-views of the scientists, the questions, concerns and the unresolved problems that crop up again and again within their scientific Gadamer's statement that



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there is an element of tradition active
in the sciences.²

endorses the universality of the supportive role of man's history. The statement underscores the view that the work of the natural scientist is part of the spectrum of human history and culture as well.

By insisting that the human sciences as well as the natural sciences encompass an hermeneutical, that is, a subjective element, Gadamer defends the priority of Verstehen over Erklären. For

². H-G. Gadamer: TM, p 251.

him, the presupposition which demands that the human sciences be conducted by the taking of distance, fails to acknowledge man's participation in his history. Thus for Gadamer, truth is not achieved in a neutral process of cognition by the deliberate adoption of a "historical distance".³



In contrast, man is inserted in a context of historical events.⁴ The upshot of this historical view of Gadamer is that in all the sciences, knowledge is not exclusively objective but remains rooted in the life-world of the practitioners. Hence the nature of understanding is the same, whether the subject matter that is understood belongs to the human or the natural sciences.

The initial problem that sparked off this investigation was Gadamer's concept of the meaningful question. He demonstrates his historical theory by the example from statistics. The data of statistics, perceived as value-free, are thus

3. *ibid.*, p. 265.

4. G.A. Rauche : Knowledge and Experience : A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 79.

never questioned. But it is forgotten that often, the unresolved questions of the researcher, influence the selection of the data. The data are regarded as meaningful if they answer the questions that initially pricked the researcher's interest. 5

For the sake of clarity, it needs amplifying that the problem or question that demands unravelling or explaining is meaningful if it falls within the researcher's questioning horizon. Thus the questions he poses mirror his mental framework and reflect the problematicity presented by his surrounding environment. Because the researcher's situation is a precondition for the initiation of the research process, it follows that the starting point of enquiry in the sciences embraces an unavoidable moment of subjectivity. In other words, truth, including scientific knowledge, embraces both objectivity and subjectivity. It is on the basis of subjectivity, or significance for a human subject, that scientific theories are meaningful. The researcher cannot claim that he is exclusively given to the object because he occupies a standpoint. He is a historically existing being or Dasein. Thus he cannot avoid occupying a situation, perspective or

horizon which reflects his moral, religious, political or historical commitments and experience. Thus the theories the researcher formulates in the sciences encompass a hermeneutical aspect since he constitutes his perspectives or horizons from experience. Without the theories, the researcher cannot get a handle on the world around him. His life-world provides the background for the interpretation of his experience. Hence science too encompasses values and involves meaning. It is not strictly confined to neutral observation or explanation of phenomena in accordance with cold and situationless laws of cause and effect.



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Gadamer's emphasis on the pre-eminence of historical consciousness, as a precondition for understanding, is double pronged. Firstly, it underpins the importance of the meaningful question. Secondly, it challenges the positivistic notion of a value free science and the tendency to blow the subject-object distinction into a division.

The dissertation demonstrated the overarching operation of presuppositions by means of the example of the bursting pipes. It was noted there that a problem arises when concrete conditions no longer harmonise with man's common everyday presuppositions of his life-world.

From the foregoing demonstration of the priority of the life-world, it stands to reason why Gadamer rejects the "superior understanding" advocated in the "objective" elements contained in Dilthey's hermeneutics. *Together in Excellence*

Gadamer traces the origin of the objectivist view of hermeneutics to Dilthey and Schleiermacher's efforts to copy the objectivity of the Naturwissenschaften. In their efforts to achieve objective knowledge, these thinkers maintained that the temporal distance separating the historian and the events he studied, could be closed by the hermeneutic method. According to Gadamer, method distorts man's link with the past. Hence, he writes that meaning does not emerge by the "distance of understanding" but by man's situation in history. It is the express view of Gadamer that man's situation in history and participation in a culture are not

obstacles to be surmounted. Rather, as Gadamer puts it, the communality that binds people to tradition constitutes the supportive conditions of understanding. 6

What emerges from the above is that Gadamer supports the subjectivity demonstrated by man's position in history. Human understanding is not arbitrary or capricious because it is supported by tradition. Hence Gadamer rejects the "subjectivist" approach of the Enlightenment. This subjectivism, especially that of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, subordinates the text by a technique in which the interpreter manipulates and controls the object of hermeneutics.

The theoretical stronghold for Gadamer's historical thesis is his concept of the meaningful question. As it was pointed out, the link between questioning and life-experience, finds expression in his oft repeated statement that the questions people ask, they understand already. Thus for Gadamer, all knowledge is historical. As pointed out, the demand for an explanation "why did the pipes burst in the basement last night" is meaningful because the enquirer already

6. H-G. Gadamer: TM. p.264.

participates in a life-world. In terms of the life-world, the bursting of the pipes is an event that disturbs man's everyday order of understanding. In science too, no matter how objective the conclusions of a research are claimed to be, objectivity is not the starting point. The researcher's life-world works itself into his thoughts and activities. Hence the subjectivity of the researcher's context is a structural element of the meaningful question. Thus the subjectivity of the life-world anticipates the meaningful question, and is unavoidable, even in the enquiring enquiry of science too.



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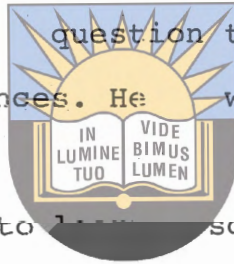
Gadamer challenges Dilthey's controversial approach that hermeneutics is a special method for the human sciences. To correct Dilthey's methodical conceptualisation of hermeneutics, Gadamer assigns hermeneutics a broad role of being an enquiry into the universal conditions "all ways of understanding have in common". In this ontological orientation he links up with Heidegger's ontological turn. But he moves further than Heidegger's conclusions.

He argues that the 19th century attempt of the humanities to constitute themselves as a science or a method is an extension of the objectivistic ambition of the natural sciences. He shows that the predication of hermeneutics as a special method for the human sciences, ignores the historicity of knowledge. For him the historical consciousness which emerges in the life-world, is prior to the methodical judgement. The judgement of reason or method is secondary to the experience of the historical consciousness which belongs to the tradition. With this concept of the life-world, Gadamer concludes that the subject is not free to appropriate the tradition as if tradition were an object. For instance, in historical research, the object is matched by a method which claims to be intellectually satisfactory, because it can mirror the object in its transparency.

Gadamer's contribution to hermeneutic theory brings together various disciplines. His publications provide philosophy of science, theology, law, art and literary criticism, with the insights which

enable these disciplines to engage in critical reflection about the nature of their projects.

As far as philosophy of science is concerned, the title of his major work, Truth and Method, does not oppose the role of method in knowledge, or call into question the validity of the empirical sciences. He writes that



whoever wants to learn science has to learn its methodology.⁷

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This shows that he understands the methodological grounding of the sciences. But he warns against the common misconception that truth is found only in the objective method of the sciences. He argues that truth cannot be found and explained through method alone. Thus he asks the sciences to apply their findings in a manner that takes account of the historical conditionedness of man's existence, otherwise their principle of non-prejudice will lead to man's alienation and destruction.⁸ His view on the practice of contemporary scientific culture, is a critique of the self-understanding of modern

7. H-G. Gadamer: PH. p. 11

8. G. A. Rauche: opus. cit. p. 80.

science. He is convinced that the expansion of modern science is rooted in Western man's inclination to dominate things. He argues that the development of Western civilisation emphasises the efficiency of scientific and technological control. He warns that this pattern of scientific power poses a threat to humanity unless it is tempered by self discipline and prudence.⁹ For him, the true historical task of the sciences remains the response to the moral challenges facing the human race :



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The history of mathematics or of the natural sciences is also part of the history of the human spirit and reflects its destinies.¹⁰

Gadamer has provided philosophy with the ideas of an original thinker. Nevertheless no thinker thinks in isolation. A number of his formulations have invited

9. H-G.Gadamer: "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences", lecture delivered at the University of Zululand, 15 September, 1980. c/f G.A. Rauche: Knowledge and Experience: A Typology of Knowledge in Hermeneutical Perspective, p. 80. Here Gadamer is referred to as follows: While he [Gadamer] does not believe in telling the natural sciences to limit themselves, he does express concern that the application of their findings could lead to destruction, if their possibilities of knowledge remain in the twilight.

10. H-G. Gadamer : op. cit.

criticism. One of these formulations is his idea of prejudice.

The dissertation argues that man's contingent experience of reality generates the meaningful question. In terms of the meaningful question which emerges from man's changing historical conditions, knowledge in the various sciences too is changed and modified in line with man's changing conditions. As was witnessed, Gadamer constitutes his perspective on truth from the vantage point of the meaningful question. In the historical philosophy of Gadamer, however, the connection between the meaningful question and man's contingent and changing experience of life, is not clearly spelt out. Hence his concept of the meaningful question remains an abstraction from the dynamics of practice. In other words, the postulation of the meaningful question is seen by Gadamer only partially as proceeding from the subjectivity of tradition and prejudice. Thus by failing to acknowledge that the meaningful question also emerges from a specific type of human experience, he ignores that the meaningful question is also an expression of man's natural inclination to transcend his conflict experience. 11 Although Gadamer acknowledges



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the import of the idea of the life-world as the basis of various types of knowledge, he does not do justice to the connection between theory and practice, thought and reality. He stops short of realising that the natural sciences too, like all sciences, are methodologically constituted as theories from man's contingent experience. Had he done so, he would have realised that all human theories or truths possess a theoretical and a practical dimension. 12 In other words, Gadamer's ontological metaphysics, his postulation of a reality underlying the meaningful question, remains an assumption.



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As a result, Gadamer's resuscitation of prejudice through the authority of tradition opens a sustained debate between the hermeneutic tradition stemming from Dilthey onwards and critical social theory represented by Jurgen Habermas. 13 Habermas is quick to point out the weakness in Gadamer's historical perspective. He points out that Gadamer's juxtaposition of distancing and participation merely renews the Enlightenment

12. ibid., p. 101.

13. Jurgen Habermas expounded his views in his essay "Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften". see Guttorm Floistand : Contemporary Philosophy (A New Survey) vol 2, Philosophy of Science, p. 480.

opposition between Romanticism and the rationalist rejection of prejudice, without resolving their opposition. 14

In addition, Habermas agrees with the followers of Dilthey that the historical-hermeneutic sciences, as he calls them, are characterised by the search for meaning. However, he criticises Gadamer's tradition-oriented theory as lacking a critical moment. According to Habermas, Gadamer's mere resuscitation of tradition, cannot dig beneath to the real causes of alienation and exploitation achieved through deliberate and systematic ideological distortions. From the Marxist perspective, critical theory is emancipatory knowledge. By contrast, hermeneutic understanding uncritically appropriates tradition, but does not take into account man's social conditions. In summa, critical theory claims to free man from the objective conditions of manipulation by the state and exploitation in the work place.¹⁵

14. P. Ricoeur : "Ethics and Culture-Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue" in Philosophy Today, vol xvii, 1973, pp. 153-165.

15. ibid.

The differences of perspective which surface in the Habermas-Gadamer debate provide an example of how the positions in which people stand influence how they think and perceive life and reality. In a philosophical discourse different from that of Gadamer, Habermas brings to Hermeneutics a theory of understanding which claims to provide a framework for unmasking those factors and elements in economic and political praxis which are deliberately designed to distort man's understanding. Although Habermas concedes that history reflects human subjectivity, he argues that beneath this layer of historically contextual meanings, human existence in society is constrained by objective conditions. He identifies these conditions as domination, repression and ideology. As indicated earlier, Habermas perceives Gadamer's historical orientation as failing to cope with the modern alienation which Habermas ascribes to man's domination and exploitation.

From the above Habermas-Gadamer debate, it should become apparent that a critical relationship comes into being when truth-perspectives of whatever type, call each other in question.

The reason for Gadamer's failure to dig through to the root causes of social alienation can be ascribed to his ontological orientation. He has followed Heidegger too closely in demonstrating the working of an underlying Being. With Heidegger, the working of an underlying Being results in the hermeneutical circle of preunderstanding.¹⁶ Especially in his later philosophy, Heidegger moved beyond Dasein as the ultimate source of the meaning of Being, to Being itself. Gadamer remains faithful to Heidegger's later ontological development, but he goes further. His *Together in Excellence* tradition is a reconceptualisation of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle of pre-understanding as the ground or foreground of meaning.

Gadamer's concept of tradition summarises and endorses the historical assumptions of his philosophical hermeneutics. As the exposition showed, Gadamer couches the relationship between the interpreter and the text in intersubjective terms. The text is a revered speaker, or as he succinctly puts it, a 'Thou'. However this idealisation of the text in personal terms is achieved at the price which renders the text independent and unpredictable.

16. M. Heidegger : Being and Time, p. 182.

Further, in Gadamer's terms, the perspective of a transmitted thought is determined by a time element. The effect of the working of this temporal element is that the mutual understanding, between the text and the interpreter, takes place every moment. Thus the meaning which emerges in the encounter between the interpreter and the text changes continually. Gadamer clarifies the independent and unpredictable nature of textual meaning by pointing out that even the author's own work continually changes. The author too cannot repeat his original meaning in identical words. Hence for Gadamer, no particular historical understanding or perspective of a text can claim absolute unshakeable validity because it is

...still embraced by the changing horizons and moved by them. 17

His stand-point that meaning can be experienced even where it is not intended and his assertion that

Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author...18

17. H-G Gadamer : TM, p. 484.

18. H-G Gadamer : TM. p. 264.

both show the extent of Heidegger's ontological influence on him.

However, Gadamer's ontological metaphysics leads him to ontologise language. The idealistic tendency in his linguistic ontology wipes out the distinction between meaning and language and reality. Gadamer claims that everything that can be understood is language.¹⁹ He adopts this metaphysical view of language to underwrite his claim that hermeneutics applies in all forms of human praxis.

By ontologising language, Gadamer betrays an idealistic bias that the world is structured linguistically. By absolutising reality in terms of language, he commits his philosophy to a water tight compartmentalisation which does not do justice to the variety of human experience. There is no single formula to which philosophy can appeal to describe man's experience of the universe. Reality is not only linguistic but also multidimensional experience. But by absolutising language, Gadamer places himself in a transcendental position which neutralises other

¹⁹ c/f H-G Gadamer : WM, Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache, p. 450

approaches based on different types of human world experience. This leads to man's alienation from reality as a contingent experience.

The thrust of his thought which evokes debate and criticism against him is his hermeneutical approach in historical perspective. Summarised, his historical approach emphasises that the social-historical situation or context of the subject is central to understanding his historical approach crystallises into the thesis that objectivity should not depend on the elimination or the transcending of the subject's contingencies of constitution and historical particularity. Hence objectivity incorporates all the subject's given circumstances including his life-view or Weltanschauung, life-world or Lebenswelt.

Gadamer's formulation of contextuality is rigid. Thus it lays him open to attack. He confines interpretation to the interpreter's sense of tradition. He does not realise that it is man's contingent and changing experience of the conditions of life that influences him contextually. He starts with the underlying

Being or Truth. His ontological starting-point however, gives the impression that the presuppositions and prejudgements supplied by his history or tradition short circuit the interpreter's power or freedom of choice in adopting that interpretation which, in his judgement, meets his changed historical conditions. But according to Gadamer's ontological assumption, the meaning of the text seems to be predetermined and fixed by tradition. Such an ontological determinism discourages true dialogue. This dissertation argues that it is on the basis of ~~others' evidence~~ ^{our own} and variable experience that the texts of life, history or cultures remain open. Gadamer is correct in pointing out that understanding is not fulfilled by recourse to the meaning of words in isolation from the context of the interpreter. His concept of understanding in context opposes isolating texts and attributing to them a prima facie meaning which has to be displaced or modified as man's experience of life changes. That is granted.

But there are two poles to understanding. There is the context of the subject and that of the text. When the two poles are not balanced, emphasising the context of the subject may, in particular cases, tend to strain the meaning of the text. It remains doubtful if

the objectivity of an underlying Being in Gadamer's hermeneutics does not somehow compromise the context of the text.

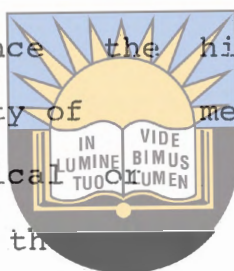
The contextuality of understanding, which reflects man's changing experience, accounts for the plurality of methodological approaches to his experience. As method is man-made, it reflects the experiences man encounters throughout the course of human history. He encounters various types of experience of religious or aesthetic nature. His needs are met as he constitutes these experiences rationally and methodologically. Thus man uses method to constitute his experiences scientifically as knowledge. But Gadamer does not point out that man's attempt to constitute his experience rationally and theoretically generates the various disciplines or truth-perspectives. Natural science is thus not the only type of science. Theology is another type because it constitutes man's religious experience rationally and methodologically.



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Philosophers often engage in interminable debates because they absolutise one particular type of experience, hence one particular type of method. Because the experiences which methods reflect are of a contingent nature, not one of them is absolute. Hence the history of philosophy exhibits a variety of methods of a deductive, inductive, analytical hermeneutical nature. Not one of them, including Gadamer's hermeneutic method, is absolute or perfect.



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Hence Gadamer's method, too, is controversial. By skirting the problem of the critique of knowledge, especially the issue of textual identity or the objectivity of meaning, Gadamer has invited criticism. As a theory of interpretation, Gadamer's method fails to specify the conditions necessary to secure consensus about meaning. A text does not have meaning independent of the interpreter's position. This ontological bias makes him to underestimate the epistemological function of hermeneutics. His hermeneutics is not able to judge between two competing expressions or evaluations of beauty, morality or truth.

What is beautiful, good, moral or meaningful is what matches or suits a person's position, situation or historical context.

Hence Gadamer is unable to satisfy the expectations of his critics like Betti²⁰ and Hirsch²¹ who expect him to provide norms for the correct understanding of historical expressions.



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Betti challenges Gadamer's inability to produce a theory for determining the accuracy of a given text. He sees the text as the embodiment of the author's intention. Betti's quest for an objective meaning of a text rests upon a theory of objectification and objectivity which goes back to the methodological formulations of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Hence for Betti, the essence of hermeneutics is to guide the reader of the text to the correct meaning by the adoption of correct canons of interpretation.²²

20. Emilio Betti is an Italian legal expert whose Die Hermeneutic als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften challenges Gadamer's failure to produce a theory of textual accuracy.
21. Hirsch enters the hermeneutic debate from the perspective of literary criticism. see E.D. Hirsch : Validity in Interpretation.
22. R.E. Palmer : Hermeneutics, p. 58.

Hirsch develops Betti's arguments further and reaches conclusions opposed to Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics. For Hirsch, hermeneutics is concerned with the practical determination of the author's intention as the standard for the correctness of an interpretation. Hirsch represents the tradition oriented to methodical hermeneutics. The tradition of methodical hermeneutics aims at a self-identical, fixed and timeless verbal meaning.²³ Thus he rules out Gadamer's conception of historical understanding as ~~an~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~process~~ ~~of~~ ~~determining~~ ~~meaning~~. Gadamer rejects Betti and Hirsch's objectivism and advocates the subjectivity of contextuality and participation in tradition. Hence for him there cannot be a once and for all fixed meaning of any text. According to him Betti and Hirsch's positions fail to account for the plurality of meanings sedimented throughout the centuries of human experience.

It ought to be clear that the concept which makes Gadamer's hermeneutical theory run into difficulties is tradition. The result of Gadamer's notion of tradition or effective history is

23. E. Hirsch, Jr : Validity in Interpretation, p. 46.

that the text can only be understood out of a historical context which is never fixed but constantly changing. Hence for Gadamer historical distance makes it impossible for the interpreter or historian to understand the text from its perspective. In other words, for Gadamer, it is not what the text means by itself, but what it means for the interpreter from the position in which he stands.



Gadamer's notion of tradition does not cease to be philosophical merely because it is controversial. At the very least, the ~~philosophical~~ argument on knowledge and truth, as a process of human thinking, and on the ground of man's contingent experience of reality, reflects both objective and subjective elements. The systems of philosophy, and theories based on them, are subjective in the sense that they are constituted from a certain type of human experience. At the same time, they are objective, in that they form a link in the chain of the continuing philosophical argument on the basic questions of knowledge and truth, on the grounds of man's contingent experience of reality.

Since man's experience of reality is a contingent and variable experience, all knowledge methodologically constituted from it yields only partial, not absolute knowledge. As a result of the perspectival nature of human knowledge, all theories enter into a critical relationship with one another. In terms of this critical relationship between theories, man's search for knowledge and understanding continues. In other words, as methodological constitutions of various types of human experience, theories in whatever field of investigation, the natural sciences or the humanities, are inconclusive truth-perspectives which remain controversial.



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The critical relationship into which they enter with one another generates man's ongoing search for knowledge and truth in all fields of human effort, including the hermeneutics of Gadamer. As a result, some of Gadamer's formulations are controversial. For an example, his notion of a "fusion of horizons" is a case in point. Not only does this notion lie at the

core of his philosophy, but also, it is borne out by reality.

The significance of the "fusion of horizons" points to the fact that every theory is characterised by an epistemological limit, so that 'fusion' in this context means that two opposing theories enter into dialogue with one another. For the sake of clarity, a further example of more controversial constructions should be given. This example is his undemonstrable and experiential conception of Being and Truth underlying the meaningful question.



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Gadamer's questionable assumption of an underlying but unprovable Being or Truth prevents him from establishing the experiential ground or the basic experience from which all meaningful questions are asked. Thus his ontological presupposition of an underlying being predisposes him to disregard man's contingent experience of life or reality. In this way, Gadamer defeats his own purpose, namely, the achievement of dialogue issuing from the fusion of horizons and the meaningful question.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the perspectival nature of human knowledge and the ongoing critical argument about the nature of knowledge and truth stemming from it: Firstly, the ongoing argument about knowledge and truth points to the limits of human knowledge. In other words, the ongoing argument about knowledge and truth yields only truth-perspectives, which are only relative truths. Truth-perspectives are not absolute and mirror man's contingent experience. the Truth in-itself is never realised. It is always in the process of realisation but ~~never reached~~ never reached finality. Secondly, a truth-perspective of whatever kind, should be seen as an attempt to achieve the Truth, without ever achieving it. In this way, man may be said to be constantly on the way to truth.

Gadamer sees in tradition, that is history and culture, a dimension of hermeneutical consciousness. He conceives a notion of the human person which is not just individualistic but which is influenced by the unconscious history of his community. In this manner, he evolves hermeneutic philosophy in a manner of philosophising that is not specifically Western, or limited to the epistemological problem in the human sciences

but intercultural. It is in this connection that the point of comparison or contrast between Gadamer's philosophy and African philosophy should be sought.

Gadamer's formulations like tradition, history and sense of the community suggest an association with African cultural philosophy. The next chapter shows that African cultural philosophy functions like a cosmology which establishes a meaning of man's relationship with the universe that differs from Western philosophy.



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CHAPTER 7

GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN
THOUGHT : OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN AFRICAN
PHILOSOPHY

1. INTRODUCTION



Certain Western philosophers sometimes assume that African philosophy is per definition impossible. They adopt this stand for two reasons. Firstly, the Western philosophical problematic of knowledge often finds expression in interminable debates about specifically Western themes like objectivity and subjectivity. Secondly, African philosophy does not cover the same themes, use the same method or employ the same terminology.¹ This assumption is opposed by the a priori fact that philosophy is a universal human expression.² Gadamer too affirms that philosophy is common to all human beings.³ However,

1. H. Maurier, "Do We have an African Philosophy?" paper in R. A. Wright, African Philosophy, pp. 11.
2. T. Okere : African Philosophy, p. i.
3. H-G. Gadamer : "The Universality of Philosophy", paper delivered at the University of Zululand, 10 September, 1980.

this insight is often lost sight of in debates which deny the existence of African philosophy.⁴

The objective of the present chapter is not to renew or continue the debates about the existence or possibility of African philosophy. Its aim is neither to carry over the Methodenstreit into the African philosophy. The real objective is to show however, that a global philosophy or philosophia perennis is possible by comparing and contrasting certain concepts in Gadamer's philosophy with corresponding themes in African thought. The themes that are examined are tradition, culture and history.



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A brief discussion of subjectivity and objectivity in Western and African philosophy is given first. In view of the reluctance of Western philosophers to accept African thinking as an integral part of philosophy, the chapter gives a brief motivation why certain strands of thought in Gadamer's hermeneutics are, to some extent, related to African philosophy. The

⁴ H. Maurier, in "Do We have an African Philosophy?", essay in R. A. Wright : African Philosophy, pp. 1-13.

chapter also focuses on the Greek concept of phronesis, by drawing parallels between this concept and the African collective wisdom. The present approach has the advantage of demonstrating that African philosophy is not oriented to the scientific concept of objectivity, which, in the West, according to Gadamer, is geared to the control and subordination of nature. As it is shown, although African philosophy concerns itself with the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, it does not draw a watertight distinction that polarises the subject and object.



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The concept of dialogue features prominently in Gadamer's philosophy. Still continuing the discussion of African philosophy, the chapter finally indicates how the process of the give and take of dialogue, can mediate between diametrically opposed parties holding totally differing viewpoints. In reality the strategy of dialogue carries the practical advantage of breaking down the feelings of mistrust and hate that often characterise deeply divided societies.

2. THE QUESTION OF OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

In Western philosophy the concept of objectivity was inaugurated by Greek philosophy. The concept was born within the problematique of knowledge. That is to say, in order to maximise the possibility of seeing an object as something, a person had to deliberately stand aloof from the object in order to see it as something.⁵



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Since its beginning with the Greeks, objectivity has meant that whatever is delivered by the lumen naturale, the natural light of reason, to use a medieval phrase, does not in any way reflect the feelings, impressions or prejudices of the subject.⁶ As Conradie aptly expresses it, the freedom from the influence of subjective elements

... is the distinctive gift of Western man. He is able to fix his gaze on the object, regardless of the exigencies of the subject.⁷

5. A-L. Conradie, "Africa", essay in J.R. Burr: Handbook of World Philosophy, pp. 401-2.

6. ibid.

7. ibid.

Continuing, she explains that

...the properly intellectual vocation (of objectivity) requires him to strip himself of his particularity brought about by his body, by history, and by the unruly inclinations of the will.⁸

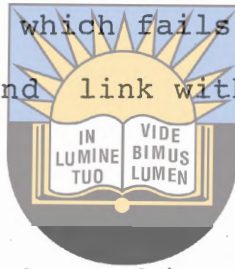


That is to say, knowledge that is free of subjective elements, will be useful and reliable to the extent that it is independent of place or person. The ability "to strip himself of his particularity" has enabled Western man's thinking to move beyond concrete concepts to universal concepts. Hence the ability to abstract has proved to be the cornerstone of scientific thinking in the West. Yet Gadamer criticises the methodological approaches which constitute truth by absolutising the objectivist approach of scientific thinking

Along with Gadamer's rejection of the objectivist framework which emphasises the object at the expense of the subject, African philosophy is sceptical of

8. ibid.

the Western style of objectivity which overemphasises the distinction between the subject and the object to the extent of separating and dichotomising the relationship between the knower and the known.⁹ African philosophy considers that Western philosophy presupposes a watertight subject-object dichotomy which fails to take account of man's relationship to and link with the world.



In contrast to the subject-object separation which characterises Western philosophy, African philosophy argues that for the African the cosmos and things in the world are mingled in such a way that reality cannot adequately be covered by the objectivist framework, which leads into a situation in which man is alienated from the world.

10. The objectivist framework is unsuitable for African philosophy because the African cultural world is one of integration. Hence its principles of understanding and of aesthetic continuum stress the unity and togetherness of everything. Thus African knowledge differs from the Western concept of knowledge

⁹ ibid.

¹⁰ H. Maurier : op.cit. p 10.

which depends on a separation between the subject and the object.¹¹

Gadamer introduces the concept of participation to describe how human beings, individually or collectively, relate to their traditions. The human subject belongs to and participates in tradition. Participation denotes a basic relationship of man to his environment. Man's environment is made up of other men and his history. The ~~subject~~ ^{University of Fort Hare} ~~that~~ ^{Together in Excellence} his knowledge of the world is independent of the influence of subjective factors like his psyche, experience, and world view. But for Gadamer, such a claim to objectivity remains questionable because man's basic relationship to things-in-the-world is one of participation.

Gadamer's use of the concept of participation shows an affinity with its use in African philosophy. In sharp contrast to the Western idea of a free, self-sufficient and independent subject, African philosophy posits a

¹¹.K.C. Anyanwu, "The African World-View and Theory of Knowledge", essay in E.A. Ruch and K.C. Anyanwu : African Philosophy, p. 78

relational and a participative subjectivity.¹² To say that the African subjectivity is relational and participative means that the subject is immersed and participates in a web of relationships with other human beings and nature outside him. Hence African philosophy sees the human subject as determined by his tradition, experience and people's collective wisdom. The explanation for this conception is that in the African mind, tradition is linked to a mythical order of the universe. To participate in tradition is to pay respect to one's ancestors whose remains are ~~used with Excellence~~ and whose spirits are thought to watch over the living. Violations of tradition are considered capable of releasing unknown but certainly unfavourable consequences in a world where natural and supernatural forces, man's behaviour and nature are all linked. As a result, for the African, all experiencing has reference to this overarching mythical totality.

...experience does not address itself to reason alone, imagination alone, feeling and intuition alone, but to the totality of a person's faculty. The truth of this experience

¹².ibid. p. 10.

is lived and felt and not merely
thought of.¹³

It remains to highlight the notion of subjectivity as a sub-concept of the problem of knowledge, in both Western philosophy and African philosophy. As a universal concept, subjectivity is a point of debate in African philosophy and Western philosophy. In African philosophy, just as in Western philosophy, the act of knowing involves a person, Ego or subject who knows, and the object that is known. The subject who knows and the object that is known together constitute the dual poles of subjectivity and objectivity. The duality of subject and object that results from the interaction of subject and object is natural and acceptable as long as this duality does not degenerate into a dualism.

Within experience itself the duality of experience harbours the problem that the subject or knower is himself a part of the world which he must transcend in order to know. Hence the split of human

¹³.K.C. Anyanwu : op. cit. p. 87.

experience results in a contradiction between the self and the world.¹⁴ The unresolved contradiction between the subject and the object is seen clearly by Dilthey. He asks how a subject who studies historical events understands history objectively without imposing his perception of reality on the object he studies. The historian is himself a part of history. He has convictions, values and general experiences which make it difficult for him to be explicit about the history he studies because he is part of it.



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To resolve this contradiction, 19th century Western philosophy conceived the distinction between the sciences of nature and the sciences of human affairs. However, Gadamer considers that the Western orientation which differentiates between the methodology of the sciences has led to a tension between the nomothetic sciences, that is, those which are governed by unalterable laws of nature, and the idiographic sciences, that is, those that study individual human events.¹⁵

¹⁴.K.C. Anyanwu : op. cit. p. 85

¹⁵.H-G. Gadamer : "The Sciences of Man and Nature", unpublished paper, delivered at the University of Zululand, September 12, 1980.

3. MOTIVATION

A comparison of concepts from African philosophy with corresponding concepts derived from a Western philosopher involves a methodological problem: Western philosophers tend to doubt the appropriateness of African philosophy, because it is largely a crystallisation from collective and subjective world views. Whereas by comparison, Western philosophy is composed of rational and consciously reflected judgements of individual thinkers.



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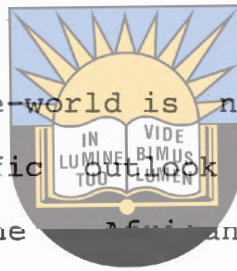
However the first motive for comparing Gadamer's conception of subjectivity and objectivity with corresponding notions in African philosophy is that African philosophy is itself an amalgam of world views which are not readily transparent to a Western reader. By taking the notions of subjectivity and objectivity as a common concern of both Western and African philosophy, it is shown that hermeneutics has universal application beyond the

themes and concepts which exclusively occupy the hermeneutics of Western thinkers.

The second motivation why Gadamer's thought is in a sense related to African philosophy derives from the nature of the African world-views. Since African world-views reflect a collective experience rather than individual rationalisations, Western philosophers have tended to sidestep world-views as non-philosophy, and as such as lying outside the parameters of the objective. However, Conradie defends the objectivity of African world views. She points out that the world view of the African is not prerational but has an inner logic. Although this logic finds expression through the myth, its meaning can be assessed. 16 For this reason Conradie concludes that the African myth is objective. She writes as follows about the objectivity of the African mythical consciousness:

16.A-L. Conradie : op. cit. p. 402.

We may thus legitimately speak here of objectivity, but of an objectivity which is totally incarnated in the praxis of daily life.¹⁷



The African life-world is not characterised by the abstract scientific outlook which prevails in the West. Rather the African life-world reflects a prescientific objectivity. In comparison, Gadamer thinks and writes from the perspective of the Western existential hermeneutics which stresses the subjectivity of the human life-world. Thus he is opposed to what he sees as the present century's over-reliance on scientific objectivity. To control the unchecked growth of scientism which he sees dominating everyday life in Western thinking, Gadamer aligns the ideas of ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle on his side. He gives an account of Aristotle's conception of practical philosophy in a manner that shows that he is convinced that the current technological society has removed itself from the phronesis or wisdom of the Greek type.

¹⁷. ibid.

Further, Gadamer's account of philosophical hermeneutics renews concepts such as tradition, culture, history, and authority. Because these concepts are universal and therefore obtain in all cultures at all times, Gadamer's rehabilitation of these concepts provides a fruitful rubric under which to conduct a cross-cultural exchange between a Western thinker and African thought. A study of this chapter shows that many parallels can be drawn and lessons learnt by contrasting and comparing these notions for common grounds between Gadamer and African philosophy.



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Lastly, in the West, the practice of hermeneutics has traditionally been confined to the explication of written texts. But it is argued that not only the West has texts, but all cultures have texts because the first text in history is the text provided by human life. On the basis of the text of the life-world, the Africans bear witness to a broader object of hermeneutics than the written texts.

Among the Zulus a courtesy is observed that serves as a text of life. A custom still prevails among Zulu maidens of making bead necklaces and decorated glass beaded articles etched with secret love messages which they give to their lovers as tokens of affection. The message woven into each article is secret and can only be "deciphered" by those who understand the context in which the article of affection is sent.¹⁸ But at times there are conflicts of interpretation when the intended meaning has to be contested and debated because it is not clear.



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This example shows that, in the African context, meaning is not merely something that is handed down but is dynamic, changeable and dialogical, because it emerges from life. Hence if the need arises, meaning is constructed and represented.

A further African example, closer to the hermeneutical tradition of the West, is provided by the symbols of the language of myth, found in the West, but is also characteristic of the African mode of thinking. Because

¹⁸ Extracted from a caption at the Kwa-Zulu Cultural Museum, Ulundi, South Africa.

symbols constitute a language of double meaning, African mythical thought can be regarded as per excellence a field for interpretation. Gadamer writes approvingly of myth, especially in his critique of aesthetic consciousness:

Not only art, but all human tidings (Kunde) which we perceive, speak to us.¹⁹



Africanist scholars argue that the prescientific thinking that *Together in Excellence* also observes the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, although this distinction does not make a sharp separation between the knower and the known, subject and object.²⁰ Instead, subjectivity and objectivity are lived and experienced in a variety of ceremonies which mark the attainment of passage like puberty and male maturity.

19. H-G. Gadamer : "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment", trans. Thomas Wren, in Philosophy Today, vol 16, 1972., p 239.
20. A-L. Conradie, "Africa", essay in J.R.Burr: Handbook of World Philosophy, p. 402.

However in the 19th century, thinkers misunderstood this expression of the African culture. European social scientists like Taylor in his Primitive Culture and Levy-Bruhl in his Primitive Mentality understood African world views as expressions of people still in an immature stage of civilisation.



Having judged African culture by the yardstick of Western civilisation, they passed judgement on African culture in the light of Western scientific understanding. They ignored the fact that science and technology do not form the totality of human experience. Had they done so, they would have realised that the understanding of foreign cultures cannot be undertaken on purely scientific terms without falling into dogmatism and subjective evaluation.

In the light of the above, Africanists could well argue that Gadamer's notions of phronesis, Bildung and participation provide a point of mutual contact with African thought.

In the classical West, Gadamer has shown that the unity of subject and object finds expression in the social awareness described in the concepts of phronesis, Bildung and sensus communis. All these enumerated notions, have an approximate counterpart in the African ethic of the collective wisdom. In the next section it is argued that the African collective wisdom provides a complete example of how truth is diffused or distilled in the community rather than encapsulated in abstract judgments.



4. A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CONCEPT OF PHRONESIS IN ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN COLLECTIVE WISDOM.

As shown above, philosophy asks questions about the validity, reliability and origin of knowledge. In the course of such thinking, people arrive at the self-evident truth that knowledge involves a relation between subject and object. But in Western philosophy the distinction between subject and object is driven to the point of a separation. In the

Western tradition, this separation is pervasive. Gadamer argues that the artificial separation of subject and object leads to the overemphasis of the object which is objectivism or overemphasis of the subject which is subjectivism. For him the sharp separation between the subject and object results in the disappearance of what Aristotle calls phronesis or practical wisdom in society.



Gadamer's renewal of the Greek concept of practical philosophy is ~~Together in Excellence~~ **University of Fort Hare** scientism, the idea that science and the use of scientific research alone can solve all problems. He is convinced that modern man has allowed the one-sidedness of science to create a cleavage between scientific practice and the practical wisdom of ordinary life. Hence, modern scientific research does not aim to assist the scientific practitioner to integrate his knowledge in politics and society, but to subordinate human beings in society to the scientist's political and social plans.

Phronesis is neither theoretical nor technical knowledge but practical knowledge. It is knowledge which the wise man acquires through experience. On the basis of experience, the wise man makes wise decisions, although he, too, may occasionally be mistaken. But his mistakes are not those of the ignorant man but merely errors of judgement.²¹ The possession of phronesis is not the literal holding of a concrete object by the subject but is a requisite quality or presupposition for making wise decisions. A wise man arrives at wise decisions because he possesses a natural gift to discern what is good for man and society in general.



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Gadamer's concern and preoccupation with the conditions of transcendence in day to day life underlie his reconstruction of understanding as practical wisdom. But wisdom cannot be taught, nor is it knowledge that can be demonstrated by reason.

²¹B.R.Wachterhauser : Historicity and Objectivity in Interpretation: A Critique of Gadamer's Hermeneutics, (Ph.D.Thesis), p 58-60.

Gadamer decries the fact that modern society has lost the foresight of the wise man of the village. This loss reflects the irony of scientific thinking. To correct the objectivism of scientism and its encroachment onto the social and political life, Gadamer conceives hermeneutic understanding as akin to phronesis. For him phronesis is suited to the understanding of

life in society, in family relations, in the daily co-existence of people.²²



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Gadamer develops the practical element of Aristotle's thought in opposition to the overconfidence Western thinking places on the power of the scientific expert.²³ Gadamer substitutes the objectifying reason of the scientific expert with the phronesis or prudence of the wise man. The man who possesses phronesis is not omniscient. Thus he acts within the limits imposed by the finitude of the human condition. Phronesis dictates that he exhibit a sense

22. H-G. Gadamer : "Hermeneutics and Social Science", unpublished lecture, delivered at the University of Zululand, 15 September, 1980.

23. H-G. Gadamer : "The Power of Reason", trans. by H. W. Johnstone, Man and World, vol. 3, February 1970, pp. 5-55.

of moral obligation when discharging his duty to his fellow men.

In consequence Gadamer distances himself from those philosophical approaches which disregard tradition in their effort to study man and society in terms of explanatory methods borrowed from the natural sciences. For him, all sciences, including the natural sciences, are part of the spectrum of the human life-world, and should incorporate the element of practical wisdom or phronesis. Hence, he considers that the task of philosophy ~~remains~~ *Together in Excellence* through the unity of science, in an effort to heal the split in human knowledge that influences modern medicine to treat the human subject as an object or a bundle of flesh, that is, as a case of a scientific law, rather than as a member of the community.²⁴

In African philosophy something similar can be observed with regard to phronesis because African philosophy distinguishes subject and object but does not separate them. In the traditional African society

²⁴.cf. the holistic approach in African traditional healing procedures. The doctor or diviner who treats the patient first enquires into the quality of his relationships with his neighbours, relatives and obligations to his ancestors.

there is no reduction of practical wisdom to the application of science.

The African culture, like other cultures, provides classical examples of practical wisdom or phronesis, which the people employ to cope with the demands of life. For instance, the ethos of solidarity in the African community readily translates into corporate projects like savings and burial clubs as a response to new social and economic obligations in the changed milieu. These people-centred projects ensure that those at the bottom rung of the employment ladder, farm labourers and cleaners, who exist on the threshold of destitution, who have only "what is essential and no more" can feed, clothe and educate their children. Hence it can be concluded that phronesis is comparatively more developed in the black community because of its situated struggle for existence.

To renew the principles which helped the forming of social truths, Gadamer goes back to the half-forgotten idea of the sense of the community or sensus communis,

the corporate wisdom of the community, as the basis of truth. He advances this ancient idea as a basis for questioning the scientific claim that objectivity is the exclusive yardstick of determining knowledge and truth.²⁵



The notion of the sensus communis has a parallel in the African community because of the well developed kinship relationships bind the community together. The clan and kinship relationships in the African community influence a person's understanding of the world. The African's understanding of meanings and relationships between entities and processes is mediated by his group's collective wisdom.

As an example, the African's conception of personhood does not refer to the biological state only but includes social relations. To be a man is achieved in association with others rather than in individualistic isolation that characterises western society. Closer social relations in the African community lead to the idea that the senior members of the community are the centres of tribal

²⁵H.G Gadamer : TM, pp 5-39.

wisdom. Aristotle's concept of phronesis too was not possessed by young men, but was the distinct achievement of senior elders.

The relevance of the Greek concept of community and the role which the tradition of elders play in it, stands in sharp contrast to the individualism of the modern West. It should be borne in mind that, for the Greek mind, in contrast to the modern mind, man was a member of the city state or polis first. His affiliation to the polis took precedence over his individuality. By resuscitating the Greek notion of sensus communis, Gadamer provides a counterpoint to the solipsistic and individualistic subjectivity of Western philosophy. By the same token, the overarching group-consciousness in the African community provides a necessary antidote to the alienating subjective consciousness presupposed in isolated individualism.

The collective consciousness evident in the African culture does not mean that the African subject wallows in a crushing collectivism. The African collective consciousness simply means that the African subjectivity develops and thrives in a relational

setting provided by ongoing contact and interaction with others. 26 According to van der Walt

Man in Africa seeks an individual identity always within the ...extended family and the tribe, which encompasses the whole of life.²⁷



Hence, the dominance of a sense of community has a bearing on African anthropology or conception of man. The conception of man which follows from the above description is that man is ~~not~~ just an individual, like Descartes's isolated Ego but is also

a social being, integrated into a cultural community, and emotionally attached to a human group. His existential reality is therefore largely shaped not only by his individual being-in-the-world, but also by his socio-cultural identity.²⁸

This collective African understanding of the human essence shades into the African theory of knowledge.

26.H.Maurier : op. cit. p 11.

27.B.J. van der Walt : On Being Human and a Christian in Africa, p. 2.

28.E.A.Ruch : "The Role of the Philosopher in Cross-Cultural Cultural Communication", unpublished paper, p 2.

5. THE AFRICAN THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The African theory of knowledge is not a rejection of Western rationalism. But African philosophy questions the tendency in Western scientific methodology to accept as knowledge only the data that have been collected by the objectifying methods of science. Thus from the perspective of objectifying methodology, African philosophy views Western rationalism as an abstraction in comparison to the concreteness of lived experience. Here the subject does not seek to understand his concrete experience through discursive reason but by a direct personal contact with individual phenomena.

The theory of African knowledge is summarised in the formula that it is collective, socialising and participatory thought.²⁹ To know is not to possess the truth for its own sake as was taught by the classical Greek scholars. To know is to use knowledge and to

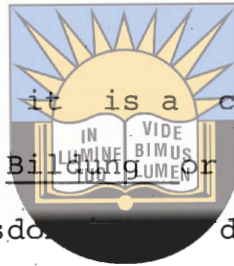
²⁹B.J.van der Walt : "A Comparison between Bantu and Western Thought", unpublished paper, p. 108.

transmit it as handed down by the tradition. Knowledge is not something discovered or invented. Knowledge is deposited in the tradition of the tribe, community or village.

Closely related to the idea of knowledge is the idea of understanding. In Gadamer's thought and in much the same way in African thinking, knowledge and understanding are rooted by an underlying being or tradition. Looked at in these terms, Gadamer compares with ~~the African model~~. But there is a difference. For Gadamer, the context of understanding is provided by the person's presuppositions. But for the Africans, the individual's presuppositions are supplied by the customs of the community, made up of the skills, moral values and taboos passed down by the elders. All the above-mentioned types of knowledge, influence the world-view of the community.

A second class of formative element Gadamer sees as declining in influence is the notion of Bildung. He uses Bildung or cultural education as a counter-weight against the notion of knowledge defined as the acquisition of verifiable or certifiable data. In

contrast, cultural education contributes to the cultivation of virtue and phronesis or practical wisdom. Phronesis enables an educated individual to know how to act appropriately in a given situation.³⁰



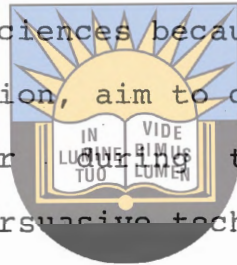
In Zulu society, it is a common assumption that the possession of Bildung or cultural education and phronesis or wisdom is dependent on admission to a formal institute of education. A person's daily intercourse in the community's life-world is an educative process by itself.

The finding of parallels between Gadamer's understanding of the Greek notion of Bildung does not mean that all is well with African society. For an example it should be mentioned that African society is tradition bound in a manner that tends to resist change and the reception of fresh and creative ideas from other cultures. A culture needs to develop a critical tradition by which to retain what is good and modify what needs to be changed. This critical

³⁰H-G. Gadamer : TM pp. 5-39.

mind set is however not always active in African culture.

A third idea Gadamer posits is rhetoric, the art of persuasion in speaking. He proposes rhetoric as a model for the human sciences because, for him, rhetoric does not, per definition, aim to change one's partner in the dialogue. Rather, in the dialogue, effective rhetoric uses persuasive techniques to sway the partner to one's point of view while leaving room for the best in the partner's view. It can be argued that the African, too, is inclined to expect to find truth in the mediating role of the rhetorical exercise, based on the recognition of the mutual relationship of the partners in the dialogue. To take part in the dialogue means to engage in the to and fro of free discussion. Such a discussion ends in agreement about a truth which is not exclusively personal or one-sided but collective and intersubjective. Thus, understanding is dialogical, in the sense that it mediates between speaking subjects. At the same time understanding is dialectical in view of the to and fro structure of question and answer which brings together subject and object.



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Lastly Gadamer revives the original and unspoilt meaning of "theoretical". Unlike the Western association of theory with method or practice, Gadamer examines "theoretical" in its ancient Greek meaning. The source of the modern word "theory" is the Greek noun theoros. In its Greek setting, the theoros is someone sent to take part in the city state celebrations. By being a representative of his city state, the theoros is not a neutral observer. He participates, and thus is a part of the celebrations.³¹



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Gadamer uses the example of the Greek participator in the Greek festivals to correct the objectivist model which demands a disinterested attitude of the knower in order to secure objectivity. He maintains that alienation occurs when the subject surveys objects at a distance. In this way he rejects the attitude of self-detachment or distancing which the social sciences copy from the natural sciences.³²

³¹.H-G. Gadamer : RS p. 17

³².ibid.

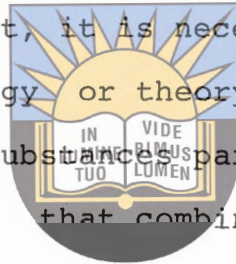
6. PARTICIPATION AS THE TRANSCENDING OF METHOD

In contrast to the sharp division which objective methodologies create between the subject and the object, Gadamer introduces the idea of participation. Participation accommodates the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity but opposes their separation. Similarly participation is opposed to the attitude of subjectivism which stresses the activity of the subject at the expense of the object. *Together in Excellence* token participation resists objectivism because objectivism stresses the priority of the object to the exclusion of the subject. For Gadamer both these extremes of objectivism and subjectivism lead to relativism.

In addition, participation corrects the attitude of self-detachment which obscures man's bond with the world as described in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world. Thus Gadamer links the notion of participation to tradition and history. From his idea of participation it can be concluded that man is not a self-sufficient or an isolated

entity. He coexists with others and is not immersed in his own individualism. As Gadamer says, man participates in the "continuity of history"³³

To understand the meaning of participation in the African context, it is necessary first to understand African ontology or theory of being. In African ontology all substances participate in a life-giving force or medium that combines all substances into an unbroken series or continuum.³⁴ This ontology finds expression in the belief that matter possesses a power to bring about good or to suppress evil. The presence of unity or continuum in African ontology conditions the African's understanding of reality and his relationship to the world. Since man sees himself as an integral part of reality, the African mind does not separate or distinguish between the self and the world, man and nature, subject and object.



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- 33.H-G. Gadamer: "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment", trans. by Thomas Wren, Philosophy Today, vol.16, 1972, pp. 230-240.
- 34.J. S. Mbiti : African Religions and Philosophy, p. 21.

There is however a difference between Gadamer's notion of participation and the African conception of participation. For Gadamer, participation functions with respect to knowledge. The individual's knowledge and understanding reflect the tradition in which he lives. But for the Africans, the notion of participation is a metaphysical construct underlying the totality of a person's existential and social engagement.



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The meaning of participation in the African context can be demonstrated with reference to the totality of meaning the African ascribes to the universe, his social ethics, his conception of personality and attitude to death, in short, his ontology. Participation provides an overarching ontological description of the African psyche because it determines his whole being, ingress in the community, relationship with the past and future, as well as his ancestral relatives and contemporaries.

6.1. Participation and the Social Ethic

Firstly, with regard to the African's social attitude, the African society places a high value on the security and solidarity of harmonious living afforded by a person's link with the extended family, clan and community. Individual tendencies are frowned upon. Greed and the desire for material gains at the expense of social relations are considered a moral weakness. But ~~one who is~~ a person engages in for the welfare of others are praised. Participation in the community activities comes naturally to the African because he generally assumes that no person is sufficient unto himself. A Zulu proverb such as

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye

translated as

A person is a person through others, or
A man is a man through others,

extols the virtues of group consciousness and responsibilities. Hence Wiredu, the African philosopher, writes:

What is morally good is what benefits a human being; it is what is decent for man - what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, joy to man and his community.³⁵



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The above accounts do not however mean that every aspect of the African culture is perfect. Although "the virtue of sharing and compassion" is good in itself, it is still open to exploitation by unscrupulous people. Because the African culture places considerable weight on social responsibility, group solidarity easily circumscribes the development of individual self-sufficiency. Thus group consciousness may in given conditions strain scarce community resources and demotivate individual initiatives.³⁶

35.K. Wiredu : African Philosophy, p. 6.

36.B. J. van der Walt : Being Human (A Gift and a Duty) p. 36-7.

As the African notion of participation shades into his understanding of human nature, it is appropriate to enquire into the African idea of personhood.

6.2. The African Conception of Personhood



The African conception of personhood does not refer to the biological state only but includes social relations. To be a man is achieved in association with others rather than in individualistic isolation.

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Tempels acknowledges the social character of the African person by pointing out that the African man

never appears in fact as an ... independent entity. Every man, every individual, forms a link in the chain of vital forces...37

6.3. The African Attitude to Death

From the perspective of the theory of participation, it is easy for the African to regard death as part of

the wider plan for the survivors. People who have passed on are not seen as having perished but as having merely "translated" into another form of life. Hence death to the African is no more than a change in which the physical is eliminated for the spirit to pass on to commune with those who have gone before.³⁸ Hence the behaviour of the living towards the dead demonstrates the absence of opposition between the living and the dead. Because the dead person is merely having assumed a different form and responsibility, he is believed to retain his ~~existence~~ **existence**. Because the African's understanding of personhood is diffuse and preabstractive, African philosophy may be able to help the West to understand the logic and rationality of ascribing personal qualities to a dead person.

7. GADAMER'S UNDERSTANDING OF TIME VS THE AFRICAN CONCEPTION

Gadamer's understanding of time is based on happenings which invest time with significance and which have an impact on the lives of people. He speaks of epochs, for

³⁸J. S. Mbithi : op.cit. p. 157.

instance of the industrial revolution, atomic energy and science. These events are significant in people's lives because they "happened and can never be undone". By their finality such events are irreversible and invest time with a concrete meaning. Time then can be experienced because it is filled with a concrete reality.³⁹



Gadamer's understanding of time finds expression in his phrase, "the existential moment"⁴⁰, a description which suggests a parallel with the African conception of time.

To the African time is experienced, as opposed to mathematical or calculated time. It is made up of remembered events. Without events, time has no moment, and, thus remains silent. The day, the month, the year, a person's life time or a group's history is divided into segments for the purpose of realising

39. H-G. Gadamer : "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment", trans. Thomas Wren, in Philosophy Today, vol 16, 1972. pp 230-240. (cf. H-G. Gadamer: "Concerning Empty and Fulfilled Time", trans. R.P.O'Hara, in Martin Heidegger in Europe and America, ed. by E.G. Ballard and C.E. Scott. pp 77-89).

40. ibid.

human projects or marking human achievements or events.

The day is partitioned according to happenings such as the crowing of the cock, the break of day, drawing water, milking or grazing of cattle. All the listed activities impinge on people's lives and give time a concrete content. As the activities like milking, grazing or driving out of the kraal afford people the opportunity to realise projects, they are are a mode of ~~intentionality~~ ~~in~~ their own right in contrast to the unconcretised intentionality that accompanies merely thinking, remembering or imagining something.⁴¹

A general misconception exists among Westerners that Africans have no sense of time. This misconception stems from the fact that the African follows a different time rhythm than the one which rules man in the mechanised industrialised West. Like other people, the African feels that time without projects to complete is empty and meaningless. In this way, the African's consciousness of time

⁴¹ J. S. Mbiti : op.cit. pp. 19-20.

compares favourably with the time consciousness shaping Western culture. Western students of African culture however tend to extrapolate from a limited moment of empty time, when the African sits down in between projects, to the misleading conclusion that the African exhibits a prodigal attitude to time. Nothing could be further from the truth.



However it can be seen that the African's cultural universe accommodates a relaxed time economy. When there is no work to be done the African will sit down and watch time pass by. The African draws a thin dividing line between work and leisure. Biesheuvel describes the two contrasting attitudes to time as follows:

Perhaps the "laziness" and "indolence" of the African is his finest attribute; his negritude as it has been called- just the ingredient that Western executive man needs to temper his rush and bustle with, in order not to progress, materially, but to remain alive to enjoy the fruits of the material progress. 42

42. S. Biesheuvel : "Race, Culture and Personality", Hoernle Memorial Lecture. (1959) (Quoted in Phillip V. Tobias: "The Meaning of Race", (1961), p. 19.

From the above quotation of Biesheuvel it becomes clear that, viewed from the perspective of African culture and history, the African conception of time is closer to authentic humanity than the time economy that reduces man to a mere cog in the machine. In the West time controls man. Consequently, the work ethic in the Western industrialised world, which sees time as a commodity to be exploited, turns into a source of misery and human degradation.



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Like Gadamer, ~~Together in Excellence~~ the poet of the African Diaspora, rejects the 20th century culture of mass production and exploitation of nature through technology. He sees this scientific culture as responsible for reducing man to the level of a mere tool among other production tools. He writes:

Hurrah for those who have invented nothing
 for those who have explored nothing
 for those who have tamed nothing. 43

43.A. Cesaire : "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" poem trans. in English as "Return to my Native Land", quoted in E. A. Ruch: African Philosophy, p. 207.

From the above accounts, it may be concluded that the Western and African time conceptions merely reflect different histories, ideologies and visions of human truth, all of which are valid relative to the national, cultural and historical situations of the groups or nations involved. The African time conception is a reflection of an unfinished history that is still unfolding in Africa. Similarly the European time economy reflects the impact of a mechanised and industrialised whose evolution is not finished but still in progress.⁴⁴



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In line with the future-oriented view of time in the West, most philosophies of history in the West exhibit a pattern of history that is expected to occur in the future.⁴⁵ Gadamer's idea of history has strong ties with the Christian tradition which looks forward to an end. Gadamer wrote:

Our hope for the future lies in the promise
 of salvation.⁴⁶

44.P. Hountondji : African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, pp. 160-161.

45.K. Lowith : Meaning in History, pp. 3-6.

46.H-G Gadamer : TM, p. 476.

The above sentiment is in line with the general drift of Gadamer's philosophy which recognises the limit and finitude of human subjectivity. But the philosopher who puts himself up in opposition to Gadamer is Hegel. As soon as Hegel enthrones his absolute subject he makes it a deity. Hence, Gadamer questions Hegel's positing of the absolute subject which is master of world history. To distance himself from Hegel's historicising of the human subject, Gadamer points out that there is a contradiction in Hegel's subject who is above the flow of history. For Gadamer temporality is the limiting feature of human possibility.



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Unlike Gadamer's future-oriented history, African thought does not exhibit a sense of history in the form of a transcendental or immanent principle that moves forward toward an eschatological "Golden Age".⁴⁸ The African eschaton lies in what Mbiti, the African philosopher and theologian, calls the Zamani.⁴⁹ In this time analysis, the Zamani refers to the distant past. The Zamani together with the

47. ibid.

48. E. A. Ruch : "Philosophy of African History" in African Studies Journal, vol 32, no 2, p. 119.

49. J. S. Mbiti: op. cit. p. 18.

Sasa, the present, influences the African's time orientation. While the Western historical orientation, including Christianity and Marxism, moves forward to an unrealised future, the African historical orientation focuses back to the Zamani, as the burial ground of time and the home of the ancestral spirits.⁵⁰



To round off this section, a few critical remarks may be appropriate to explain why the African people have been the last to enter world history. The explanation is that ~~together with the~~ ^{university of Fort Hare} inhibiting effects of colonialism, African culture contains certain elements which tend to circumscribe the African's progress in the 20th century. The concept of a home-grown "African time" reflects an anachronistic attitude to time which is no longer relevant for the present modern conditions. At worst the concept of so called "African time" justifies a prodigal attitude to time which displays a deeper lying tendency to do nothing, a comfortable but misleading quietism which leads to evasion and escape.

50. ibid. p. 17.

In Africa, the tradition of dependent time orientation tends to circumscribe to a considerable extent the black man's reception of the Western time economy. This situation still obtains because the Zamani time scale, which Mbiti describes, explains why the African reacts to unforeseen contingencies when these appear as crises. By comparison the Occidental is proactive and plans systematically for future contingencies. To play a more fruitful role in the future which will largely be determined by computer and other modern technologies, *Together in Excellence* consciousness needs to telescope or focus more vigorously into the future.



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Tradition

The concept of tradition in Gadamer's philosophy and in African philosophy merits elaborating on.

The concept of tradition in Gadamer's philosophy refers to the entire background of assumptions and presuppositions which derive from the subject's experience. Tradition should thus be taken as a part of the Lebenswelt. According to Gadamer, tradition is

an active element in the constitution of knowledge or the mediation of understanding. He acknowledges tradition as opening the path to further knowledge and understanding. Knowledge and understanding are thus historical and limited in the sense that they are mediated by a tradition which is contingent and not fixed. What is important is to recognise the hermeneutical circle of understanding within tradition involved here.



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Whereas with ~~Together in Excellence~~ functions with respect to knowledge, in African philosophy, tradition refers to the overarching background which colours the entire manner in which the subject relates to and understands the meaning of the world, and the place and function of man within the universe. As it has been noted, the African mind is oriented to the ancestral tradition, which is linked to a mythical order of the universe. The African orientation is such, because its mind set is based upon an entirely different ontology than that which dictates the modern Western thinking.

For instance, because of the different nature of the African consciousness, the African individual or microcosm, mirrors or reflects the whole or macrocosm. It can well be that the individual or the life force, cannot be understood without reference to the whole life force. Such a view of the world leaves little place for the historical consciousness. Therefore, the differences between African philosophy and Gadamer is that, the ontology of African thought and its hermeneutical circle, lacks the historical perspective of Gadamer's ontology or hermeneutical circle.



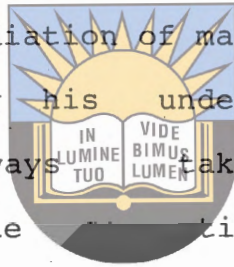
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8. HERMENEUTICS AS OPEN DIALOGUE : IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Gadamer's account of hermeneutics begins from the intersubjective encounter of I and Thou. This intersubjective relationship is important because it demonstrates that the process of

Understanding is not to be reduced to the epistemological relation between a subject and an object.⁵¹

Gadamer highlights the notion of dialogue as a leading agent in the mediation of man's understanding of the world including his understanding of other men. Understanding always takes the form of a dialogue. For Gadamer the notion of understanding as the grasping of a meaning that is explicit and exact, rules out the possibility of dialogue in communication or dialogue. Dialogue presupposes that there is a question : that is, what the communication or dialogue is about. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as already in the world, is helpful to understand Gadamer. In Gadamer's conception of dialogue, the participants exist in the world in a communal and participatory way because they share a language.



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⁵¹D. C. Hoy : The Critical Circle, p. 130.

As a shared horizon, the linguisticity of the participants to the dialogue facilitates agreement about the answer that is not absolute or fixed but derived dialectically. The finitude, limitedness and temporality of the human subjectivity demands that the dialogue be open, so that question and answer can go on. The openness of dialogue, the conception of hermeneutics as a conversation, finds expression in Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics as question and answer, assertion and criticism. This openness keeps the dialogue of understanding creative and self-renewing. Where there is no dialogue there is no criticism. Conversely, where there is no criticism, there is no dialogue.



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Gadamer extends an old phenomenological insight into the nature of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is always mediated by consciousness of the other. This phenomenological insight has implications for the South African situation because it is a situation that is fraught with conflict.

The situation in South Africa is conflict-ridden, not only in terms of black-white relations but also in respect of blacks among themselves and whites among themselves. In terms of whites themselves, there are opposed political alignments, to the left, centre and right of the political spectrum. Similar oppositions exist with blacks among themselves too.



As South Africans enter into dialogue by way of seeking for solutions ~~to their problems~~ ^{to their Excellence} political problems, participants in the dialogue need to know that mutual distrust and feelings of insecurity and hatred (from the tradition) will not be eliminated without Socratic dialogue.

Socratic dialogue means that the truth that is hammered out between the parties is not exclusive to any one particular side but is arrived at dialogically. The spirit of dialogue demands a critical resolution of differences in order to bring birth to the desired social order and justice. Gadamer aptly conceives dialogue as the mediator of a "common accord". This notion means that even though

participants in the dialogue may be polarised ideologically, yet their ideas complement one another in a common ground.

Humility, self-restraint and goodwill are the necessary conditions of dialogue. In the spirit of give and take, not hubris, a participant in the dialogue can understand the other person's fears and aspirations and appreciate the other person makes his assertions ^{On judgements} from that fear and aspirations. They ^{some truth} to which both partners in the dialogue can agree, will emerge.

Gadamer writes:

... a task of mutual understanding presupposes a certain optimistic attitude that such a task is reachable...The serious question is to recognise how far we are able to listen to the other in his own right...That is hermeneutics to develop this theory of what I call dialogue.⁵²

52.H-G.Gadamer : "Hermeneutics and Social Science" unpublished lecture, delivered at the University of Zululand on 15 September 1980.

9. CONCLUSION

To conclude: this chapter presented the African in his world as guided by his own conception of reality, and place of man in the scheme of things.

The framework that began to crystallise is that African subjectivity emerges in what the existential phenomenologists like Heidegger call "being-with-others". In lived experience, subjectivity is concretised in the social realm which the African observes through "participation".



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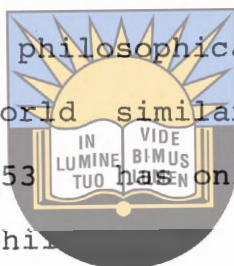
The African does not yet observe the objectivity which prescribes a critical distance between man and world, subject and object. Yet the African exhibits an objectivity which reflects itself in the African life-world comprised of his lived experience and all beings which belong to and participate in the life forces linking man to his past through history and his ancestors.

By comparing African philosophy and Gadamer's concepts, the dissertation hopes it has brought Western philosophy in contact with a more concrete and situational understanding of life and reality than the one that obtains in Western philosophy. Subsequent to this contact, African and Western philosophy should engage in serious dialogue based on their differing traditions. Then African philosophy should stand firmly within its own tradition as African philosophy. Similarly Western philosophy should stand firmly within its own tradition as Western philosophy, willing to teach as well as to be taught. Thus cross cultural philosophising will not be locked up in an unresolvable opposition. Philosophy in the West could learn from African philosophy and pay attention to the demands of participatory subjectivity. African philosophy in turn, could learn from Western philosophy without falling into the trap of a one sided objectivism.

It is the merit of Gadamer to have brought about reflections around the notions of life-world, tradition and history in a way that evolves into a mode of reflection which is not specifically tied to

the Western problematic of knowledge but that is global.

Gadamer's conceptualisations and themes have provided a point of contact between African and Western philosophy. The philosophical exploration of the African life-world similar to Manganyi's Being-Black-in-the-World⁵³ has only just begun. It is here that Western philosophy could look for contact with African philosophy.



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SUMMARY

The object of the dissertation was to examine the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity with regard to knowledge in the human sciences with special reference to the hermeneutics of Gadamer. The dissertation showed that a central thesis of Gadamer's hermeneutics is that knowledge in the human sciences as well as in the natural sciences, is influenced by and reflects the questions, prejudices and interests of the researcher, ~~and of which~~ are rooted in man's historical experience.

To provide a logical basis for Gadamer's thesis on the contextuality of knowledge, the dissertation showed right from the beginning in chapter one, that all theories of knowledge - in science and philosophy, reflect man's historical experience and life world or Lebenswelt. Bearing in mind this thesis in historical perspective, the dissertation demonstrated that the development of theories in hermeneutical perspective also reflects the development of ideas in science, art, politics and philosophy.

From the vantage-point of the above mentioned historical perspective, it was possible to demonstrate that, for Gadamer, research in all the sciences is conducted from a perspective influenced by man's life-world. Because of this unavoidable historicity, the dissertation showed how Gadamer questions the objectivity of science and rejects the uncritical assimilation of the objective methods and calculative procedures of the natural sciences into the human and social sciences. It was further pointed out what Gadamer maintains, in relation to the differences between the *Together in Excellence* human sciences. He maintains that although the human and the natural sciences differ in their application of method, according to him they are all to a lesser or greater degree historical and therefore subjective, because their theories reflect man's experience.

In addition, it became clear that Gadamer rejects historical objectivity based on methodical distance and neutrality. Instead, he supports the subjectivity of contextuality. He does not rule out objectivity, but he warns against the impossibility of suspending one's insertedness in tradition.

For Gadamer, objectivity consists in the underlying Being or Truth, in terms of which meaningful questions are asked in a contextual situation. He emphasises that prejudices are the conditions or preconditions for reaching understanding. He shows that prejudices provide the background for the judgement to become visible, or to emerge from the prejudgement.



He insists that its horizon of the meaningful question that influences the direction the investigation ~~might take~~ ~~can be~~ ~~understood~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~context~~ ~~of~~ ~~Gadamer~~, it was seen, the meaningful question can only be asked within a historical context. But since the meaningful question derives from the Lebenswelt, the historicity of understanding determines the context of knowledge.

Thus for Gadamer, the subject secures understanding and knowledge by participating in his tradition. Hence the meaningful question is subjective because it derives from and reflects man's Lebenswelt. Without the subjectivity of contextuality supplied by tradition, there can be no horizon of understanding, and hence, no understanding at all. The meaningful question is also objective in the sense that it derives from a preunderstanding which reflects a pregiven truth or

being which the subject cannot accept or discard at will.

The merit of Gadamer's contribution to the understanding of the structure of knowledge was seen in his shifting of the paradigm of scientific knowledge from the exclusive preoccupation with objectivity, to the paradigm that acknowledges the subjectivity of the scientist's contextual experience or life-world.



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The stand taken by Gadamer was regarded as reflecting a Heideggerian orientation. For Heidegger understanding is a necessary and universal structure of the life-world. Hence for Heidegger understanding was pre-reflective. That is to say, long before the subject grasps things conceptually, thematically or objectively, he already has a preunderstanding of the things before him. For Heidegger, the meaningful question emerges from the preunderstanding. Although Gadamer has inherited this ontological tendency, his weakness was seen to lie in his philosophising in a radically more ontological way.

It was pointed out in the critique that Gadamer goes further than Heidegger's orientation by overextending the ontological dimension of understanding. Gadamer bases the meaningful question on his concept of tradition, which he thematises too deterministically. He should have realised, it was noted, that if man's understanding in history, art and politics is based on man's historical experience, then whatever theories man constitutes, are of necessity controversial because they reflect man's contingent and variable experience. The controversial aspect of man-made theories, including the sciences, does not exclude Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy. As a particular theory, his philosophy is controversial too.



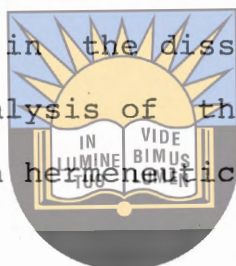
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Finally Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to knowledge lended itself to a comparison with African philosophy. His related concepts of tradition, history and experience provided a convenient point of comparison between the Western and African notions of subjectivity and objectivity.

On the basis of the concept of the Lebenswelt alone, the theoretical possibility of African philosophy was established. On the strength of the a priori validity

of African philosophy, the task of philosophy in the future was argued to lie in a global philosophising based on the search for shared values between the tradition of African thinking and Western philosophy.

The method used in the dissertation was a historical and critical analysis of the problem of subjectivity and objectivity in hermeneutical perspective.



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ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|
| KS | = | KLEINE SCHRIFTEN |
| PH | = | Philosophy in Excellence |
| RS | = | REASON IN SCIENCE |
| TM | = | TRUTH AND METHOD |
| WM | = | WAHRHEIT UND METHODE |

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