**Institute for Christian Studies**

# *Phronesis*, Tradition, *Logos* and Context
# A Reading of Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

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BY

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# OUTLINE

Thesis: In this thesis I will show that Gadamer's nuanced appropriation of *phronesis*, tradition, and *logos* in his philosophical hermeneutics serves not only to emphasize the human context of all knowing, but to legitimate that human context as the authentic site of all fruitful knowledge.

# INTRODUCTION

## *PHRONESIS*, TRADITION, *LOGOS*, AND CONTEXT

Hermeneutic inquiry came in to its own as a distinct discipline in the twentieth century, in philosophy as well as theology. It was introduced as a discipline at least as early as Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, and it was given a more distinctly Christian/biblical orientation in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, though Schleiermacher is generally considered the father of modern hermeneutics. More recently, in the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger significantly expanded the role of hermeneutics in everyday life, and then Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of his most well-known students, wrote his *magnum opus, Truth and Method*,[1] as an exposition of his own approach which he termed philosophical hermeneutics. This thesis is driven in part by an interest in the implications of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for biblical hermeneutics, though this interest remains on the periphery of this study. This thesis is an investigation of three significant concepts in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, – *phronesis*, tradition, and *logos* – which have implications and resonances that permeate his entire project. In particular, this thesis will examine the way in which each of these themes emphasizes the inescapable contextuality of every hermeneutic enterprise, an enterprise which Gadamer insists engages all of one's lived experience.

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[1]The English text referenced in this paper is the second revised edition of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans., (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989).

In the first chapter I will begin with an exploration of the role and function of *phronesis* and *episteme* in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The impetus for this part of the project arose out of the studies in two seminars at the Institute for Christian studies in Toronto. One seminar in systematic philosophy investigated the rationality tradition through a reading of Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*[2] and Richard Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*,[3] the other was an interdisciplinary seminar which explored the concept of truth as it functioned in five of the world's major religions. Though the specific instigation of this project was Bernstein's criticism of Gadamer's use of *phronesis*,[4] a criticism echoed by John Caputo,[5] this thesis will not be structured primarily as a response to that critique. Another stimulus which is not addressed at length is an interest in the definition and role of truth in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics inspired by our investigation of the concept of truth operative in five of the major the world religions.

The way of knowing of *episteme* is of interest in this project because it provides a contrasting example of the ways of developing the relationship of universals and particulars, and the limitations

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[2](London: Duckworth, 1988). Cited as *WJWR*.

[3](Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Cited as *BOR*.

[4]*BOR*, p. 156ff. For two reactions to this criticism see James DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990) p. 106ff; and Marc J. LaFountain, "Play and Ethics in Culturus Interruptus: Gadamer's Hermeneutics in Post-modernity" in Lawrence K. Schmidt, ed., *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995) p. 213ff. Cited as *Specter*.

[5]John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) pp. 108ff. For a later reading of Gadamerian *phronesis* which is much more positive see Caputo's *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000) pp. 165f.

of mathematical reasoning in matters of moral and ethical concern. The first chapter will also highlight the problematics related to the inscription of universals as rules. The necessary interplay of universals with particulars in determining the meaning, significance, or proper correlation of the universal principle and the particular situation, and the implications of the exigency of this interplay, will lead into the discussion of how Gadamer's understanding of *phronesis* is impacted by his concept of tradition (in the second chapter), and the way in which the ascendancy of *phronesis* in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics nuances his ideas of *logos* (in the third chapter).

In the second chapter I turn to an investigation which seeks an understanding of the role of tradition in philosophical hermeneutics, and particularly its impact on *phronesis*. I will start by tracing the development of Gadamer's concept of tradition in *Truth and Method*, and I will introduce the salient themes from Gadamer's discussion with Jurgen Habermas, as tradition was one of the key issues in their dialogue. Habermas wanted to see more room for critical reflection outside of the constraints of tradition, and we will see how Gadamer's insistence that tradition is always an influence, but never only a static uni-directional influence, opens up space for a dynamic tradition which orients one's understanding, but in a creative dynamic nurturing rather than a stifling delimitation of possibilities.

Chapter three looks briefly at the history of the concept of *logos* in Greek philosophy and Gadamer's appropriation of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation—cast by the Apostle John in terms of the *Logos*—as a model which helps understand the dynamic of language in all human thought. For Gadamer, *logos* is always characterized and impacted by linguistic realities in its relational ordering of one's life and world. As such, *logos* is not an ideal ordering which purportedly reflects a divine *Logos*. Rather, it is an embodied way of making sense of one's world, and it also always colours–and

is coloured by—the whole of one's life experience, including one's language. Therefore, reading Gadamer's portrayal of the *logos* with an understanding of the pivotal role that *phronesis* plays in his hermeneutics radically nuances that *logos*. The Gadamerian *logos* has a dual function in that it does indeed provide one with a basis on which to organize and understand one's world, but this is never an absolute grasp because the essential *logos* remains always beyond the limitations of the immediate particular situation and beyond the grasp of certainty without remainder. This *logos*, like Gadamer's models of tradition, dialogue, horizons, and language, is always dynamic, never complete or static. It is always listening to the voice of the other with a genuine concern to understand, not only the other, but *die sache selbst*, and this listening is always a necessary and indispensable aspect of hermeneutics. This is the agenda for the investigation of *logos* in the third chapter.

## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Prior to the initiation of this investigation I want to make a few guiding comments about some of the terms that are prominent in this thesis in order to minimize confusion about the ways in which these terms will be used in the course of this project.

### *Phronesis*

*Phronesis* is a category of knowledge or wisdom that is concerned with the practical aspects of living in mundane situations. While a much fuller elucidation of the concept follows in the first chapter, I will introduce *phronesis* here as the practical wisdom which comes into play in everyday life as one ascertains the right course of action to be taken in the situations which are encountered in mundane life. In Greek philosophy there were four kinds of knowing which Aristotle distinguished on the basis

of their function: *Sophia*, *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*.[6] *Episteme* and *Sophia* were ways of knowing that were not characterized by open deliberation. The fuller investigation which follows in the first chapter will show that *episteme* is a mathematical knowing by means of necessary formulas according to the canons of logic. While *Sophia* is not founded on the same stringent requirements of logic and mathematical necessity and certainty, it is a knowing – by intuition and observation – which is also not subject to deliberation. This does not mean that there is no room for questions about the knowledge of *Sophia*, but only that these questions which may arise cannot be definitively settled by deliberation. The ultimate grounding of *Sophia* falls outside the pale of rational certainty or intellectually convincing argumentation. Justice, for example, is not only something about which arguments can be made and even won, but even in the face of convincing argumentation one may know that the argument, for all its persuasiveness, does not really actualize adequate justice. Thus, there is an intuitive knowing in *Sophia* which goes beyond deliberation.

*Phronesis* and *techne* are the other two ways of knowing which are linked because of their deliberative characteristics. *Techne* is normally thought of as technical skill which deliberates about the best way to achieve the desired ends of specific production. Thus one may have a general knowledge of mechanics and the operation of an engine, for example, but the production of a specific engine for a specific purpose requires deliberation about how to apply that general knowledge to this

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[6]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics*, Joel Weinsheimer, trans., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 152. Cited as *HRE*. Gadamer adds *nous* to this list and reads Aristotle's development of their distinctions as an original discrimination of these five ways of knowing which had been undifferentiated in Plato. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, Frederick G. Lawrence, trans., (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981) p. 120. Cited as *RAS*. Hollinger's assertion that, in Heidegger's opinion, the Greeks had no sharp divisions between *episteme*, *phronesis* and *techne* seems to be an evaluation of pragmatic concerns rather than traditional philosophical distinctions. See his introduction in Robert Hollinger, ed., *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) p. xv.

particular situation in order to achieve the desired result. *Phronesis* involves a similar deliberation though its concern focusses on the moral issues of life and about the right thing to do in a particular situation. Later in this investigation I will also show that Gadamer capitalizes on a crucial distinction between *techne* and *phronesis* in which *phronesis* is not only concerned with *how* to do the right thing but more specifically *what is* the right thing to do in this particular situation. This pivotal distinction means that *phronesis* does not only apply previous general knowledge (or a universal) to the immediate particular situation, but that the particular situation exerts its own demands on the meaning of the universal for the particular. While this knowing is generally thought of in terms of a moral knowing which concerns itself with what the good calls for in this situation, this does not mean that it is always concerned with the universal good. *Phronesis* is the ability to correlate what is good in general with what is good in this particular situation but it can become perverted by the selfish person into a concern with what is good for me and how that can be achieved in this particular situation. In either case, *phronesis* differs in important ways from scientific ways of knowing, or the mathematical ways of reasoning from given premises to necessary conclusions, which will be introduced in the next chapter as *episteme*. Upon reflection it will become evident that one way of knowing is not superior to the other *per se*, but that each has its proper sphere of function and it is only when an attempt is made to give one universal supremacy that difficulties are encountered in the distinctions between these ways of knowing.

***Logos***

*Logos* is a much more complicated concept in terms of the range of meanings it has come to denote. The concept of *logos* has been one of the most important concepts in Western philosophy. Perhaps its most familiar role has been that of a central organizing principle around which nearly the whole

of one's philosophy takes shape. It came to represent the nature of the universe as an orderly structure which served as a pattern for the rest of natural life. In spite of its long and venerated history the idea of such a unitary origin has recently fallen on harder times in the work of some poststructuralist thinkers. The idea of a structure characterized by such fundamental unity is decried as an idea which implicitly does violence to anything which resists incorporation into the mould as set by such a *logos*. The determination that everything must fit into the structure which one perceives as the "order in the universe" leads one to minimize, or even deny, genuine differences which mitigate against the incorporation of "things with a difference" into the system. Theology arguably has a special interest in the concept of *logos* due in a large part to John's identification of the *Logos* as God in the prologue to his gospel, though this interest has given rise to a broad diversity of definitions of *logos* within the field of theology, some of which are irreconcilably at odds with each other. Gadamer's *logos*, however, never stands as essentially an unassailable structure of pure reason. For Gadamer, *logos* is always inextricably linked with language, and language and *logos* are always co-constitutive of each other. In the third chapter I will briefly review the history of the concept of *logos* in philosophy and pay special attention to its role in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. However, in keeping with Gadamer's insistence on the very close relationship between *logos* and language I will, in order to do justice to Gadamer, broaden this investigation to include not only specific references to *logos*, but I will also note the development of the concept of language.

**Reason**

There are several intertwined ways of thinking about reason which can create confusion, hence the need to delineate a distinction in the ways that reason is used in this paper. The thought processes by which the body of scientific knowledge is derived from the primary premisses (an issue which I will address in the first chapter) are the reasoning processes which I will refer to as human reason, reasoning or reasoning processes. These are not reasoning in the sense of following the canons of logic patterned after mathematical laws, but the simple thought processes in which everyone engages in day-to-day living. They are more intuitive than consciously structured. However, it is this human reason which proceeds to order scientific knowledge according to the order found in the world as apprehended in the universals by a basic recognition of sameness and difference. In this arena the reasoning becomes more ordered and structured, however, and it becomes the logical reasoning of scientific or mathematical reasoning. The elementary distinctions of sameness and difference lie at the very root of the system of logic in which the most fundamental principle is the law of non-contradiction; A cannot be not-A.[7] The order in the world is an order to which human reason appeals as its justification. This order will be designated cosmic reason.[8] As such, reason is one way of knowing one's world and establishing proper activities and values which are consistent with the way in which one sees the world one inhabits. This way of knowing according to the canons of logic is the scientific knowing (*episteme*) of this project. Thus *episteme* is a reasoned way of knowing; a way of knowing that is rooted primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, in reasoning. Therefore, in

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[7]Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic Eighth Edition* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990) p. 293.

[8]For a more elaborate elucidation of the distinction to be made in reason see Hendrik Hart, "Sorting out Reason" in an unpublished manuscript, ICS, 1998.

this paper when I say *episteme* I refer to scientific knowing not in the sense of applied science, which is closer to the Greek concept of *techne*, but in the sense of that which has been thought of as abstracted, mathematical knowing by reason. I will, however, also question the hope placed in "the rigour, objectivity, permanence, and universality" which has been credited to science by some representatives of Western thought.[9]

Reason as this way of recognizing the structure in the world, and proceeding to expand this structure to a broader understanding of one's environment and the universe, is all but indistinguishable from the aforementioned *logos*. In time this way of knowing the world was worked out to include the idea that words, as a primary tool of reason, could be reliable means of gaining access to the things which they named. Words, and their related conceptualizations, became boxes in which things could be neatly encapsulated in a rational-conceptual understanding. I will return to this issue in the third chapter with more on how this corollary of *logos* thought is now being critiqued as logocentrism.

**Knowledge**

In this paper I take the position that knowledge can never be isolated. It is always knowledge within a context and it is always knowledge based on some grounds for knowing. For Aristotle, all instruction proceeds from pre-existent knowledge.[10] As will be seen in the section in which I investigate the Aristotelian background of Gadamer's thinking on *phronesis* and *episteme*, scientific knowledge is based on knowledge which is not itself subject to the demonstration and logical proof

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[9]Patrick A. Heelan, *Space Perception and the Philosophy of Science* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983) p. 15.

[10]Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.1, 71a.1. Cited as *PA*.

demanded of scientific knowledge. Rather, scientific knowledge is based on inductive or intuitive knowledge. Reason is one of the grounds for knowing, but so are experience or teaching or intuition (*PA* I.1; II.19). In nearly every case knowledge will be based on some combination of grounds for knowing. A mirage is a classic example of an experience being understood, not in isolation on its own merit at face value, but by means of a reasoned (though probably not explicitly reasoned according to canons of logic) analysis of previous visions (experiences) of a water-covered roadway which is never actually encountered, perhaps some teaching on the laws of physics related to the phenomena of mirages (though this component would be optional), and the intuition that a level roadway in a dry prairie under a clear blue sky would not be submerged under water, all leading to the conclusion (knowledge) that, while my experience is real, the water I see is not real in the normal sense. However, the elaborate processes which would explicate the underlying assumptions which accompany our perceptions are not normally made explicit. Polanyi reminded us that we are not necessarily consciously aware of what we know.[11] There is a requirement of certainty which suffices for the situation which varies according to the requirements of the situation. Karl Popper used the example of time to show that in most mundane cases concerning time one's personal timepiece will suffice.[12] However, it would be unlikely that an astronaut could be found who would be willing to engage in space travel in a program which did not utilize a more precise chronology than that of an ordinary timepiece. This does not cast doubt on the accuracy of a timepiece for mundane purposes, it simply illustrates the flexibility of certainty, which is analogous to a logical analysis of perception,

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[11]Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962) p. 61.

[12]Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) p. 78.

or to the ways of knowing. A mirage is immediately and unproblematically recognized as an anomaly of perception without the need for a detailed logical analysis of the phenomena.

In a similar way, various ways of knowing are appropriate to various situations encountered in life. No single way of knowing operates in isolation as the only way of knowing which has significance in a particular situation, but all ways of knowing function as an ingredient of a more holistic knowing, each of which carry proportionately varying weight in a particular situation. A mathematical knowing would be unsatisfactory as the sole knowing in a conjugal relationship but it is vital in our current lifestyle as it has application to engineering and technology. Mathematical knowing is, however, important in relationships because of the financial realities which impact relationships. Thus, mathematical knowing can be distinguished from conjugal knowing, even though it cannot be entirely divorced, isolated, and abstracted out of such relationships. James Olthuis expanded this knowing not only beyond specific categories of intellectual knowing, but also beyond intellectual knowing:

> Knowing is the multi-dimensional, embodied, gendered way human beings engage the world in order to situate themselves meaningfully (spiritually) and come close responsibly (ethically) to the different and the other. We also know by touch, by feel, by taste, by sight, by sounds, by smell, by symbols, by sex, by trust—by means of every modality of human experience. Knowing by thinking is no better, no worse, than any of the other modalities.[13]

The various ways or dimensions of knowing are best seen as complementary rather than exclusive. They depend on each other in the human quest of being-in and coping-with the world. Thus, while in various situations one way of knowing may become more germane and obvious, that does not

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[13]James H. Olthuis, Editor, *Knowing* Other-*wise* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) p. 6. Cited as *Knowing* Other-*wise*. See also Polanyi's preface to his *Personal Knowledge*.

mean that other ways of knowing have no contribution to make.[14] This also undermines the preference given to objective truth as truth removed from human situations and influence because it establishes knowledge as that which is meaningful in particular situations in life, rather than reserving the term for a knowing at a distance.[15] Knowing is not only the ability to manipulate facts and figures, although this is one way of knowing on which we rely in our everyday living. Knowing is a skill which allows us to cope with all the mundane situations of life as well as the unusual crisis moments. Thus mathematical knowing may well be important in the crisis moment of running out of gas and needing to calculate the amount of gas required to reach the next fuel supply, in order to avoid a repetition of the crisis prior to reaching that supply point. However, one's moral responsibility to one's passengers in a freezing vehicle is not so readily ascertained mathematically, yet is no less important, and mathematical calculations could certainly be an important component in the dispatching of those moral responsibilities. This is one of the key concerns of this thesis, namely, that context always plays an important, if occasionally obscured, role in ascertaining not only what kind of knowing is important, or in determining what the good means in a particular situation, but context also has a bearing on what knowledge will be available to an acting agent.

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[14]Hendrik Hart, "Conceptual Understanding and Knowing *Other*-wise" in *Knowing* Other-*wise*, p. 41.

[15]Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, "[T]rue knowledge is deemed impersonal, universally established, objective." p. vii. Polanyi modifies this conception in his elucidation of what it means for a person to know.

# 1

# *Phronesis* and *Episteme*

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will explore the function of *phronesis* in Gadamer's thought, and I will begin by investigating the Aristotelian roots of *phronesis* and its relation to *episteme*. The relation of *episteme* is of interest in this project because it brings to light the relation of universals and particulars and the limitations of mathematical reasoning in matters of moral and ethical concern. Thus it highlights the problem associated with Bernstein's and Caputo's criticisms of Gadamer's *phronesis*.[16] Their criticisms are directed at the difficulty of certainty and overpowering argumentation in cases of moral failure, such as the Nazi Holocaust, within the parameters of *phronesis*. Both seem to be implicitly asking for a means of ascertaining the correct foundations for moral values in order to derive the standards of right moral action, and thus be able to convincingly, if not authoritatively, spell out the error of moral failures. Their criticism is that *phronesis* cannot provide this certainty and authoritative argumentation. However, their criticism is misguided because, in fact, this is precisely what *phronesis* is not intended to do. To the extent that knowledge can be unerringly derived by mathematical linear calculations from secure foundations knowledge is an enterprise of *episteme*, or

[16]See above, p. vi, notes 4 & 5.

even *techne*, but not *phronesis*.[17] It is precisely in this space where mathematical certainty is unavailable that *phronesis* operates.[18] The purpose of *phronesis* is not only to ascertain the application of the universal to the particular, but it must discover the universal within the particular. This is not linear mathematical reasoning. It is a correlative reasoning which follows no prescribed path because there can be no prescribed path.[19] This is where tradition comes into play as the foundation upon which we decide what is right and what is not right. However, this is not only a foundation upon which we build, it is indeed a foundation which we ourselves must appropriate, and in the appropriation, we cannot escape our responsibility in describing and formulating that very same foundation. This introduces the role of tradition in *phronesis*, an investigation which must be postponed to the subsequent chapter.

In the context of *phronesis*, this chapter will also show the problematics related to the inscription of universals as rules. The necessary interplay of universals with particulars in determining the meaning, significance, or proper application of a universal principle in the particular situation, and the implications of the exigency of this interplay, lay a groundwork for the discussion of how Gadamer's understanding of *phronesis* impacts his concept of the *logos* in the third chapter.

## *PHRONESIS* AND *EPISTEME* IN ARISTOTLE

The Heidegger seminar in which Gadamer's attention was first drawn to Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* was a seminal moment in the development of his thought. By his own

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[17]For a similar analysis of Bernstein's criticism see James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997) p. 116.

[18]Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) p. 314.

[19]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981) p. 92.

admission it was the most important contribution to his later work.[20] His philosophical hermeneutic is uncontrovertibly thoroughly imbued with Aristotelian *phronesis*.[21] The entire project of philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes that real knowledge is lived knowledge, a knowledge which is not removed from concrete situations in life.[22] Rather, it reiterates that knowledge only realizes its purpose in its application to specific situations, and in this it is reminiscent of Aristotle's development of *phronesis* as a kind of knowing distinct from *episteme*. However, it also capitalizes on a further distinction of *phronesis* and *techne*.[23]

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle distinguished the deliberative faculties, *phronesis* and *techne*, from the scientific faculties, *episteme* and *Sophia*. One way of elaborating the distinction between these faculties would be to say that the scientific faculties are concerned with that which necessarily is what it is because of delimiting relations, whereas the deliberative faculties make the correlations which are variable.[24] The necessity of scientific knowledge may have a range of sources. In the case of *episteme* the necessity follows by means of rational certainty from the grounding premises, whereas the necessity of *Sophia* may be that of an intuition in which one recognizes that

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[20]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey" in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997) p. 9. Cited as *Philosophy*.

[21]Rod Coltmann, *The Language of Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998) p. 4.

[22]Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1983) p. 198.

[23]Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition From Ast to Ricouer* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) "The goal of hermeneutics is, thus, not wisdom (*episteme* or *theoria*) but practical wisdom (*Phronesis*), understanding drawn from hermeneutic *praxis*" p. 22.

[24]Coltmann, *Language*, p. 3. See also David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) p. 56.

the thing simply and obviously is what it is. For example, Kant notwithstanding, to be nice to people is simply and obviously better than to be arbitrarily mean. Arguments could be made about this but an argument which establishes that being mean to people is better than being nice is obviously specious, and conversely, an argument which establishes that it is rationally better to be nice than to be mean does not add anything pragmatically new and significant to the recognition that this is so.

The terminology of "scientific" faculties may be confusing if this is understood in the contemporary sense of science as a technological enterprise. There is a distinction to be noted in the relation of science, *episteme*, and *techne* which is crucial to this study, and in his later writings Gadamer emphasized precisely this distinction, that for the Greeks *episteme* was not identical with what we today call science. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* it is clear that *episteme* (scientific knowing) is much closer to what we now call rational knowing or knowing by reason. The concept of *episteme* "for the Greeks, had its model in mathematics and did not encompass the empirical."[25] I will show later how it is that, in Aristotle, empirical knowing precedes scientific knowing. What we currently think of as science corresponds more closely to what the Greeks called *techne*.[26] Science in modern times has become closely aligned with technology and, in fact, is often seen as being performed in service to the ever-increasing domination of nature and society by technology. The justification for science is often built on the hope seen in science for an enhancement of the quality of life for humans by means of improved technology, whether in terms of improved healthcare,

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[25]*Philosophy*, p. 56.

[26]Ibid.

information technology, workplace efficiency, leisure tools and the like.[27] According to Habermas "the cognitive interest of the empirical-analytic sciences is technical control over objectified processes," processes which can be turned toward the enhancement of the quality of life and leisure.[28] In order to nuance an understanding of the categories of deliberative faculties and scientific faculties I will proceed with an elucidation of universals and particulars and their bearing on these faculties of the mind. An understanding of universals, particulars and their relation will be important throughout this paper.

**Universals and Particulars**

For Aristotle, all instruction by way of argument, which was the scientific way of knowing by unambiguous demonstration, depended on pre-existent knowledge (*PA* I.1, 71a.1). Every argument rests on premisses which must also be demonstrated in order to qualify as scientific knowledge. However, this is an infinite regress which Aristotle desired to circumvent, so at the conclusion of his *Posterior Analytics*, his elucidation of the proper ways of argument and demonstration which were appropriate to scientific knowing, Aristotle explained how this pre-existent knowledge was achieved. This knowledge began with a recognition of the repetition of particulars which led by induction to a recognition of universals (*PA* II.19). Aristotle's well-known example of the army in flight which terminates its flight, turns, and resumes its formation (order) and the battle, indicates how universals

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[27]George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1986) p. 11-34. Grant had a lot to say about the current obsession with technology, calling it a "world wide religion." *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1969) p. 113f.

[28]Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jeremy J. Shapiro, trans., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) p. 309. See also Heelan, *Space*, "The third criticism of modern science is technicism, that is, the view that science is no more than a *τεχηνε*, albeit a very successful one for manipulating and exploiting nature." p. 16.

are recognized (*PA* II.19, 100a.11ff). The initial perception of a particular is a sensory perception, the repetition of which leads to the memory of the particular which contains within it the universal as well as the particular (*PA* II.19, 100a.5,15). The universal of the army taking a stand contains within itself the particular of each individual soldier taking a stand and, conversely, each individual (particular) taking a stand contains within itself the rudimentary intimations of the universal. Repeated memories lead to experience, in the sense of a knowing experience rather than a sensory experience, which culminates in empirical knowledge. All scientific knowledge followed from this inductive movement from the perception of particulars to the knowledge of the universals, a movement which the soul was constituted to be capable of (*PA* II.19, 100b.10ff). The knowledge of primary premisses understood by intuition was the source of scientific knowledge, and intuition alone was the equal to scientific knowing which was the source of all other knowledge following from these primary premises.

In Aristotle, scientific knowledge was the certain knowledge of universals and particulars in a necessary relationship, a relationship which could not be otherwise. As shown earlier, knowledge of universals followed from particulars which were apprehended through sensory perception. Thus scientific knowledge followed the order of the universals in a logical fashion. All scientific knowledge had to be supported by these universals known by induction from the sensory perception of one's life-world. The logical principles by which this was to be accomplished were elaborated at length in the *Posterior Analytics*. Since the processes by which the universals were derived from the particulars were so clearly defined it followed that the proper procedure could guarantee that the universals arrived at from the observation of particulars were indeed necessary; they could not be otherwise. This is why scientific knowledge was the most reliable way of knowing, as the induction by which

universals were understood by means of clearly defined argumentation and demonstration from the sensory perception of particulars (*PA* II.19, 100b.10ff). However the stipulation that scientific knowledge be subject to clearly defined demonstration also disallowed its standing on its own merit. Demonstration always rests on other grounds than that which is demonstrated, therefore scientific knowledge cannot be the originative source of knowledge (*PA* II.19, 100b.11ff).[29] Hence the need to establish reliable grounds for scientific knowledge. However, it was also the case that scientific knowledge could not be more certain than that upon which it was founded, therefore intuition was the only equal to scientific knowing (*PA* II.19, 100b.5f). This is, however, a pivotal point which hints at the role of tradition in knowing. One's intuition is shaped by the tradition within which one operates. I will expand on this role of tradition in the next chapter.

**Scientific Faculties and Deliberative Faculties**

While the correlation of universals and particulars was rigidly defined for scientific knowing, the same was not the case in practical wisdom (*phronesis* and *techne*). Practical wisdom was concerned with action which fit both the particular situation and the universal principle, and so stood in need of a knowledge of both the particular and the universal in order to see the proper fit between the two.[30] While scientific knowing was absolutely defined so that the progress from particular to universal (or from universal to particular) was a mathematical linear progress in which deviations from the prescribed path could be made evident by scientific (mathematical) proof, this was not the case for practical wisdom, in which a knowledge of each was necessary to their proper correlation. The

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[29]See also Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, "[T]he actual foundations of scientific knowledge cannot be asserted at all" p. 60.

[30]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.7, 1141b.15. Cited as *NE*.

indeterminacy injected into the process by this requirement of a knowledge of two components in order to achieve a proper conjunction of the universal with the particular meant that there was in a certain sense a need to choose the best of several options. If the proper apprehension of each required a knowledge of it in conjunction with its counterpart then it is evident that variant understandings of one will lead to correspondingly variant understandings of its counterpart. This gives rise to the element of choice which requires deliberation in order to ascertain the best correlation of the universal with the particular situation. This choice is not arbitrary; it is to some extent conditioned by prior decisions and the current situation, but it is, nevertheless, a choice (*NE* III.2,3). This element of choice is a distinguishing feature of deliberative versus scientific knowing. In the case of scientific knowing the path of reasoning is rather precisely prescribed by logic, whereas the open-ended nature of deliberation which seeks to correlate the universal and the particular in the absence of strictly pre-determined rules is a reasoning process which cannot be strictly delimited. While it could be said that there is an inherent idea of application in the correlation of the universal with the particular, it is nuanced by the mutually interdependent roles played by each in the search for the appropriate correlation. In the case of practical knowledge it is not only a matter of applying the universal to the particular situation, but it is equally a mater of "applying" the particular situation to the universal in order to ascertain what the demands of the universal are in the specific situation (*HRE* 30). Hence the correct terminology for the interrelation of universals and particulars within the purview of practical wisdom is correlation rather than application.

This concern with deliberative application helps us understand Gadamer's interest in this distinction, and the reason for his appropriation of this distinction in Aristotle for his own development of philosophical hermeneutics in which the emphasis on the applicative moment of all

understanding is so central. For Aristotle the scientific faculties cannot be deliberative because there is no room for deliberation about that which cannot be otherwise due to its definition by necessary relations (*NE* VI.1, 1139a.14). The method for scientific knowing was so clearly prescribed by the canons of logic that there appeared to be no room for choice, or deliberation, in the derivation of scientific knowledge. Deliberation only becomes necessary when something can be otherwise, or when there is a choice to be made; when the method is not, or cannot be, clearly defined. Reasoning processes, in the mundane sense of thought processes which do not necessarily conform to the canons of logic, indubitably have a role in both deliberative and scientific knowing, but the nature of the reasoning involved in scientific knowing is significantly different from reasoning operative in deliberative knowing. The reasoning which culminates in scientific knowledge is a human reasoning, in the simple sense of thinking, but as it appeals to cosmic reason this reasoning (thinking) becomes structured and patterned as a linear or mathematical reasoning. As such, it proceeds with very careful attention to prescribed ways of reasoning and operates only within these guidelines. However, the deliberative faculties of *phronesis* and *techne* do not necessarily have the benefit of previously defined guidelines to which they can defer when making an application of universals to a particular situation because every particular situation is different (*TM*, 318; See also *NE* V.10). An additional complication arises from the fact that a knowledge of the particular is necessary to the appropriate knowledge of what the demand of the universal in relation to the particular is. Thus we have the notion of *phronesis* and *techne* as deliberative faculties correlating universals and particulars in concrete ways which cannot be determined beforehand; that is to say, without a knowledge of both the universal *and* the particular in isolation from each other. Scientific knowing is a movement from universals to particulars or *vice versa*, whereas practical wisdom is a mutual interplay of universals

and particulars. *Phronesis* and *techne* are a knowing which involve deliberative reasoning rather than mathematical reasoning, whereas *episteme* and *Sophia* are a knowing which is not characterized by such open-ended reasoning. The knowing of *episteme* is carefully defined by prescribed ways of reasoning, the canons of logic, and *Sophia* is an intuitive knowing which is not so stringently subject to verification by mathematically defined reason. *Phronesis* and *techne* could be called a reasoning (though not the strictly delimited reason but, rather, a deliberative reasoning simply as thinking processes) that requires a knowledge of the particular situation and the universal which bears on it. *Phronesis* and *techne* are a knowing how, whereas *episteme* and *Sophia* are a knowing what. *Phronesis* and *techne*, as deliberative activity concerned with the correlation of universal principles and particular situations, include a form of reasoning which correlates the knowledge of the universal with the knowledge of the particular situation. In the investigation that follows I will begin with the relation of *phronesis* to *episteme* as a means of contrasting the deliberative character of knowing in each, and then I will turn to the relation of *phronesis* to *techne* as a means of contrasting the role of the universal and the particular in moral knowing as compared to scientific knowing.

## *PHRONESIS* AND *EPISTEME* IN GADAMER

The foregoing investigation of the Aristotelian formulations of the ways of knowing which are central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provides a basis upon which I can now proceed to the explication of Gadamer's appropriation of those Aristotelian concepts. The distinction of deliberative knowing from scientific knowing is fundamental to Gadamer, but also central to Gadamer's thought is an additional distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* as deliberative ways of knowing which, while they share many similarities, are nevertheless also distinguished in some fundamentally significant ways.

**Initial Explorations**

The nature of the reasoning processes operative in the deliberative faculties is not rule governed in the same sense as it is in *episteme* (mathematical rational knowing). In fact, as noted earlier, the reasoning operative in deliberative knowing necessarily operates outside of the parameters of rule-governed activity as it seeks to correlate the rules (universals) with specific situations (particulars). As Gadamer, following Aristotle, noted, *epieikeia* is the correction of the law because the law anticipates generalities rather than specific situations (*TM* 318; *NE* V.10, 1137b.11ff). This does not make the law wrong, it simply indicates the nature of the matter, namely the nature of the correlation of universals and particulars in the cases involving deliberative judgement (*NE* V.10, 1137b.17). Universals and generalities, by their very nature, can never anticipate all the particular situations to which they address themselves. It is in these unanticipated situations in which one must step outside of the prescriptions of the law in order to maintain the universal which the law was intended to endorse (*NE* V.10, 1137b.20ff). Therefore, there can be no exhaustive rules for the application of rules (*TM* 38f).[31]

> ...(E)ven a writer like Kant, so powerfully bent on strictly determining the rules of pure reason, occasionally admitted that into all acts of judgement there enters, and must enter, a personal decision which cannot be accounted for by any rules. Kant says that no system of rules can prescribe the procedure by which the rules themselves are to be applied.[32]

Thus it is the deliberative knowing operative in *phronesis* and *techne* which provide the correlative moment which occupies Gadamer in philosophical hermeneutics. This is a deliberative knowing which includes not only knowing *what* the universal and the particular are, but it is also a knowing

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[31]See also *WJWR*, p. 95, 116ff.

[32]Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 105. See also *RAS*, p. 49, 121.

which knows *how* to correlate them so that they fit with each other. In citing the prominence of deliberation in specific situations as a key distinctive of *phronesis* and *techne*, I am not suggesting that *episteme* and *Sophia* are not also nuanced by their own particular situations and processes, I am only reiterating that deliberation in particular situations is not as exigent and immediately obvious in the latter kinds of knowing, which are concerned with universals themselves, and are concerned with their relation to particular situations only in carefully delimited, rationally linear ways.

***Deliberative and Applicative Knowing***

There is a further distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* which captured Gadamer's attention. While *techne* is the application of knowledge to the production of crafts, resulting in ends which are the for which of the skills (*techne*), *phronesis* (ideally)results in good actions, which are in themselves the end of *phronesis* (*HRE* 31).[33] That is to say that *techne*, as the application of knowledge to a specific project, results in a finished product which is the *telos* of *techne*. *Phronesis* on the other hand, is the deliberative application of knowledge in a specific situation resulting (ideally) in good *ethos* which in itself is the *telos* of *phronesis*. In other words, the good, which is the *telos* of *phronesis*, is not something that is produced in the exercise of *phronesis*, nor is the good a rule which is simply applied to the particular. The good is realized integrally as *praxis* in the exercise of *phronesis* (RAS 123). This was an important distinction for Gadamer because it made *phronesis* and *ethos* inseparable.[34] The theory of interpretation which allowed the moment of application to be

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[33]A consideration of *phronesis* gone bad follows below, p. 32f.

[34] "Wie Aristotles will auch Gadamer ziegen (sic), das es ohne *phronesis* kein *ethos* und ohne *ethos* kein *phronesis* gibt." Ting Kuo Chang *Geschichte, Verstehen und Praxis* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1994) p. 155. See also Gadamer, "Reply to Karl-Otto Apel" in *Philosophy*, p. 97; *HRE* 155; *RAS* 133.

separated from the moment of understanding was unsatisfactory to Gadamer. "Understanding ... is always application (*TM* 309)."[35] "To interpret the law's will or the promises of God is clearly not a form of domination but of service. They are interpretations – which includes application – in the service of what is considered valid" (*TM* 311). Furthermore, it was the import of this connection which made Aristotle so vital to Gadamer's project:

> Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something specific to a particular situation. This makes *Aristotelian ethics* of especially important (sic) for us.... It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension, but with the right estimation of the role that reason has to play in moral action. But what interests us here is precisely that he is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it. (*TM* 312)

Although Aristotle was not concerned with the hermeneutic problem *per se*, his focus on the appropriate role of reason in moral action provided Gadamer with his entry into the role of knowledge and the role of reason as integral parts of the becoming of the being. In Aristotle, knowledge and reason are neither isolated from each other, nor are they isolated from the person. Rather, they are co-determined by the person as well as playing an ineluctable role in the determination or development of the person. This is consistent with the fundamentally dialogical nature of philosophical hermeneutics as evidenced by such classic positions of philosophical hermeneutics as, for example, the hermeneutic circle — which is an interaction of the part with the whole leading to a better understanding of each in a process of mutual illumination, or in the context of tradition the hermeneutic circle is that whereby tradition influences society even as society

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[35]What follows in this section is in the main an exposition of the section in *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer reflects on "The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle," which constitutes Gadamer's elucidation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI.

influences tradition in its appropriation of the tradition.[36]

### *The Circle of Influence*

For Gadamer, following Aristotle, this is also the point at which the fundamental difference between nature and human civilization comes into stark relief. Whereas nature is the arena which is largely determined by external forces, human civilization is an arena in which the developments are at least in part autonomous.

> Human civilization differs essentially from nature in that it is not simply a place where capacities and powers work themselves out; man becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves — i.e., he behaves in a certain way because of what he has become. Thus Aristotle sees *ethos* as differing from *physis* in being a sphere in which the laws of nature do not operate, yet not a sphere of lawlessness but of human institutions and human modes of behaviour which are mutable, and like rules only to a limited degree. (*TM* 312)

Thus the arena of human and civil development is neither strictly rule governed nor is it autocratic or arbitrary. There is a governing form of development which is neither simply imposed from outside the arena of human life and activity nor is it totally determined by human choice or action. There is a spiral effect of interaction of the activity of a person in shaping the person (Who you are is shaped by your actions and choices) which influences, affects, and guides what the person chooses and does (Your actions and choices are shaped by who you are) which guides what the person becomes, and thus, while the development of the person is not arbitrary, neither is it an external imposition without regard to personal input. Furthermore, as a social being a person is deeply influenced by the culture

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[36]For more on the hermeneutic circle see *TM* 190ff, 265f, 291f; or Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., Joan Stambaugh, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) p. 7f, 152f, 314f. For a dialogue on the interactive roles of society and tradition see Graeme Nicholson, "Answers to Critical Theory" and Dieter Misgeld, "Modernity and Hermeneutics: A Critical-Theoretical Rejoinder" in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, Continental Philosophy IV (New York: Routledge, 1991).

and society within which that person lives, so that the society within which the individual lives provides another guiding influence on the becoming of the person. Conversely and simultaneously, the individual, as an integral part of society, is equally an formulative ingredient of the society within which one operates. For MacIntyre, this was an important nexus of Aristotle's political theory with Aristotle's ideas on practical rationality:[37] "Virtue is required if there is to be right choice of actions, and it is *phronesis* which issues in right action; so there is no *phronesis* without *arete*. But equally there can be no *arete* without *phronesis*."[38] The individual who has developed both *arete* and *phronesis* has developed original biological capacities which could equally have been developed for the service of injustice, and likely would have been so developed in an individual deprived of the justice provided by the *polis*. Thus the *polis* provides a guiding function in the development of *phronesis*, without which "what could have been a human being becomes instead a wild animal."[39] The role of the *polis* in Aristotle parallels the role of tradition in Gadamer. Neither are exhausted in the idea of explicit collective consensus, thought this indubitably a component, but both refer to a milieu of being which pervades all of one's existence as an existence in a particular environment.[40] In both instances the influence is that of one's community in temporal continuity as well as communal solidarity. It is evident that this idea of societal influence intimates that the interaction of choices and development occurs not only within the individual or within a society, but also across these boundaries. The individual influences society and society influences the individual, but this angle is

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[37]*WJWR*, Chapters VI to VIII.

[38]Ibid., p. 97.

[39]Ibid., p. 98.

[40]See the Translator's Preface in *HRE*, p. ix.

underdeveloped in MacIntyre's explication of Aristotle. For MacIntyre, it appears, a tradition is something within which one is situated, but one can leave that tradition behind in favour of a tradition which seems to provide a superior explanation for anomalies and situations encountered in life's pursuits.[41] The role of tradition in Gadamer, along with his notions of horizons of understanding, rightly problematizes the idea of leaving one's situated horizons for another horizon so easily. I will return to this problem in order to develop the role of tradition in philosophical hermeneutics in more detail in the next chapter.

However, to illustrate the reciprocal influence of society and individuals on tradition take, for example, the issue of impaired driving and the development of social pressures in relation to it in the last two decades in North America. I was recently party to a discussion on the responsibility accruing to an impaired driver who was involved in an accident in which an innocent victim was maimed or killed. The responsibility attributed to the driver by the participants was curiously divided along generational lines. The older participants were willing to say that the impaired driver had been guilty of carelessness but could not see such an individual as being responsible precisely because of his impairment. Younger people had no qualms about attributing responsibility to the impaired driver because the eventuality of a casualty is well-known prior to consumption of alcohol and the subsequent operation of a motor vehicle while impaired. It would appear that a good case could be made for the effectiveness of the campaign against impaired driving which has taken place over the last decade in terms of the general consensus with regard to the culpability of offenders in the minds

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[41]For reviews of *WJWR* which also suggest this deficiency, though not necessarily as a criticism, see Julia Annas, "MacIntyre on Traditions," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8: 388-404; Robert P. George, "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," *Review of Metaphysics* 42: 593-605. A fuller treatment of this criticism will follow in the next chapter.

of younger people. This is an example of the mutual impact of social and personal values in that the younger generation which has been subjected to the social campaign to heighten awareness of the dangers of impaired driving hold such offenders to a higher level of accountability, while the campaign was itself instigated by individuals to whom this was an issue of importance.

This led Gadamer to the question of the possibility of "philosophical knowledge of the moral being of man and what role knowledge (i.e., *logos*) plays in the moral being of man" (*TM* 313).[42] What kind of knowledge is it that undergirds the moral action of a human being? The insertion of *logos* at this juncture is an interesting move which bears further investigation. I will initiate the discussion here in order to facilitate this exploration of *phronesis*, but the investigation of *logos* which follows in the third chapter will bear the bulk of the burden of elucidating the concept of *logos* operative in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

For Gadamer, language was the primary meaning of *logos*, and language was formative in all aspects of human thought.[43] Language, for Gadamer, was not merely a tool we use to make sense of our world, it is the only way we can know our world (*TM* 403ff., 417). Our every perception of the world is always already languaged (ML 62, 67). In this Gadamer followed the lead of his teacher,

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[42]While the connection of *logos* to knowledge may be somewhat unusual it supports the idea that *phronesis* includes both knowledge (most simply, an understanding of one's world which enables one to function in that world) and reasoning processes (one of the ways in which one functions in the aforementioned world, in this case, ranging from reasoning processes in the mundane sense of everyday thinking to formally structured mathematical reasoning) in the application of universals to particular situations. This connection drawn by Gadamer serves to accentuate this dual role of *phronesis*. Hence knowledge becomes not the static knowledge of knowing of things in themselves, but the dynamic knowing of things in relation to one another, and to oneself, which enables one to function in one's world.

[43]Gadamer, "Man and Language" in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, trans., (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) p. 59. Cited as ML.

Heidegger. This theory, connected with his observation that, while language is the primary meaning of *logos*, the ideas of concept and law are also contained in *logos* (ML 62), considerably expands the reference of *logos*. Language functions both as the medium and the object of the investigation of language, and it is unique in its all-pervasive role in all human activity from thought to communication, to research, and to the organization of one's world into a meaningful place to live. It is the integrally relational function of language which provides the conceptual apparatus necessary to the organization of one's world, but this conceptual apparatus is not neutral and as such it sets certain parameters for the conceptualization of one's world which are implicit in the language of operation. Thus language functions not only as a conceptual apparatus but also as a law of sorts, determining to some degree the direction taken by the conceptualization. It is evident, then, that this idea of knowledge, far from reaching for a knowledge which stands at a distance from human interests, is a knowledge which is thoroughly coloured by the realities of human existence, including the language within which humans operate. The knowledge of an English speaking person will necessarily differ from the knowledge of a French or German speaking person, simply on the strength of the influence of language on all human knowing, as indicated by the studies of the relation between worldviews and languages (ML 61f). Thus the reference to *logos* ion this context indicates that the knowledge which plays a role in the moral being of man is not a neutral and distanced knowing, but it is a knowing that is proximal to the situation and, in fact, is at least in part formed by the situation as well as having application to the situation. A more complete elucidation of the Gadamerian *logos* is deferred to the third chapter.

***The Universal Good and the Particular Situation***

If a human in a specific situation must answer the question of the good for that situation in order to

perform an act of moral integrity, then there is in a certain sense an application of a universal — the rule of the good, to a particular — the current situation. However it also indicates that knowledge which does not enable one to determine the correct application of the good to the specific situation is meaningless at best, and may in fact obfuscate what really is required in the situation. Gadamer noted Aristotle's contrast to the theory of the good based on Plato's doctrine of ideas which ultimately gave rise to Aristotle's emphasis "that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics" (*TM* 313; *NE* I.7, II.2).[44] The Platonic ideals functioned as the ideals of which we only see shadows and representations in this world. He used the well-known imagery of a cave-dweller who saw the shadows cast by these ideal forms, which were always outside his cave, as they were cast on the walls of his cave. Thus no good in this world could ever be a real good. It was only a shadow cast by the ideal of which it was an image. In this sense there could be an intellectual analysis of the shadow's portrayal of the ideal but the ideal itself was never actualized in the world of lived experience. This concept of the good was too anaemic and distanciated for Aristotle (*NE* I.6-7). Aristotle wanted to know what was really good and how do we actualize the good in lived life. The good was not only a matter of thought, but a matter of action. However the move from thought to action was what concerned Aristotle. How do we get from thinking about the good, and thinking about the good, to doing the good? It was in this sense that the problem of method acquired a moral relevance.

Recall our earlier observation that for the Greeks mathematics was the highest model of *episteme* and it becomes evident that what we have here is a distinction between two different kinds

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[44]Gadamer develops this distinction in greater detail in his *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, P. Christopher Smith, trans., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

of knowledge, *episteme* (scientific knowing)and *phronesis* (deliberative knowing), which are constituted by fundamentally divergent characteristics. *Episteme* is a rational knowing in which the path from particular to universal (or *vice versa*) is clearly prescribed (*Posterior Analytics* I.2,4,6), whereas *phronesis* is the deliberation which proposes the relation of the universal and the particular when that relation is not determined unilaterally, but requires an interactive co-application. Therefore the deliberation required for determining the appropriate application of the good to a specific situation is not the linear knowing of *episteme*, because the necessity of deliberation as to the apropos signification of the good to the specific situation indicates that the application of good to the situation could be otherwise. If the application could not be otherwise then there could be no deliberation. "Indeed, to demand this kind of (mathematical) exactitude would be inappropriate. What needs to be done is simply to make an outline and by means of this sketch give some help to moral consciousness" (*TM* 313; *NE* I.7 and II.2). There is a need, then, for some guidance in relation to the demands of the good in a specific situation, but this help can never legitimately usurp the responsibility of the individual who must deliberate. There can never be rules which exhaustively prescribe every application of the law, not only because it would be morally suspect in its usurping the responsibility of the individual who must himself act, but also because it would be ridiculously impractical, requiring a rule for every conceivable situation and, in fact, for every actual situation.

> Thus it is essential that philosophical ethics [should] have the right approach, so that it does not usurp the place of moral consciousness and yet does not seek a purely theoretical and "historical" knowledge either but, by outlining phenomena, helps moral consciousness to attain clarity concerning itself. (*TM* 313)

Gadamer's concern is inextricably bound up with the problem which is intimated in the title of his *magnum opus Truth and Method*. In contrast to the idea that the proper method could be a panacea

for all of the problems encountered in human experience, Gadamer sees the essence of moral deliberation as falling outside the parameters of a methodical approach which defined all of the appropriate steps in advance.[45] The responsibility of the individual must not be — and cannot be — pre-empted by rules and structures, not even the rules of logic or reason (*HRE* 111, 114, 149), and the stringently delimited knowledge of universals and their correlation to particulars provided by *episteme* does not allow the flexibility required of moral deliberation as to what is good in a particular situation when that particular situation makes its own demands on the universal principle.[46] There is always a measure of indeterminate flexibility in the determination of what is good in a specific situation. This deliberative function can only be fulfilled by *phronesis*, the faculty which considers that which is variable, in order to ascertain what is good in a particular situation. It is *phronesis* which recognizes the claim of the universal, the good, and considers its appropriate correlation with the particular situation. However the fact that *phronesis* can only properly recognize the claim of the universal on the particular situation within the context of the particular situation not only undermines the distanciated objectivity attributed to *episteme*, but it also suggests that it is in fact *phronesis* which can lay claim to a fuller appreciation of the universal (*HRE* 33).

***Phronesis, Techne,* and *Episteme***

This raises the question concerning the kind of knowledge that moral knowledge (*phronesis*) is. While it is a knowledge of the universal which must always be what it is, it is also a knowledge of the particular which is variable, and thus the variability of the particular situation demands that the application of the invariable universal to the variable particular must be appropriate in order to assure

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[45]Risser, *Hermeneutics*, p. 110.

[46]Jean Grondin, *Sources of Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) p. 57.

that the invariable universal does not in fact change by an inappropriate application or correlation. Moral knowledge is the knowledge which knows how to make the appropriate application by means of proper deliberation.

> For moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge—i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do.
>
> Obviously this is not what we mean by knowing in the realm of science. Thus the distinction that Aristotle makes between moral knowledge (*phronesis*) and theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) is a simple one, especially when we remember that science, for the Greeks, is represented by the model of mathematics, a knowledge of what is unchangeable, a knowledge that depends on proof and can therefore be learned by anybody. (*TM* 314).

*Phronesis* cannot be "objective" knowledge which stands at a distance, removed from the situation. Objectivism is, minimally, the idea that there is "some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness or rightness."[47] In a certain sense universals could be seen as such an matrix which puts specific values into place without delimiting the ways and means by which these values are to be lived out. However, objectivism often assumes a certain distance and separation from the object, as Gadamer indicates in the foregoing quote. In this sense of distance objectivity is seen as a guarantor of truth or knowledge which has not been contaminated by the human touch. In order for knowledge to be reliable it must see its object in its own right, standing entirely by itself.[48] Knowledge in application or in relation is a derivative of this pure knowledge; it is at best only a poor country cousin to the "richer and more sophisticated" city-dwelling relatives. On this account distance is seen

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[47]*BOR*, p. 8.

[48]Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 16.

as a safeguard which protects knowledge from contamination by subjective influences and prejudices. This prejudice against prejudice was one of Gadamer's key projects in *Truth and Method* and this project will be explored in greater detail in the context of tradition (*TM* 271-277).

However, for Gadamer, knowledge can only be knowledge *of* a particular situation, *in* a particular situation, which has real significance *for* the particular situation. Gadamer's purpose in returning to Aristotle's ethics was to expose the chimera of objectivity which had allowed "the objectifying methods of modern science" (*TM* 314). Inherent in the idea of human beings as acting beings is a concern with things that can be otherwise. Action, if it is genuine action rather than a being acted upon, includes the notion of open-ended possibilities (*NE* III.1-3). Therefore the knowledge of concern to the human who acts is not only *episteme*, a knowledge of the invariable, but also *phronesis*, a knowledge of the variable, in order to facilitate action with the *telos* of the good. *Phronesis* is a knowledge which recognizes the particular and the universal and seeks a way to bring the two into a harmony which recognizes each on its own merit. Thus the knowledge of primary benefit to the acting human is inextricably embedded in a situation. "An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his *action*" (*TM* 314). Knowledge which is not related to a situation is irrelevant as it concerns the action to be taken in a particular situation. *Techne* and *phronesis* are alike at this point. "For we find action governed by knowledge in an exemplary form where the Greeks speak of *techne*. The question is whether moral knowledge is knowledge of this kind" (*TM* 314). Gadamer concluded that they are indeed similar in the sense that "Both are practical knowledge — i.e., their purpose is to determine and guide action. Consequently, they must include the application of knowledge to a particular task" (*TM* 315).

*Techne* and *phronesis* are both concerned primarily with the application of knowledge to a particular task but, in the light of our earlier assertion that it was the distinction between the two types of deliberative knowing which drew Gadamer's initial attention to these concepts, we must ask what it is that distinguishes them.

Gadamer proceeded to elucidate this distinction by noting that the central challenge of hermeneutics, as it is in *techne* and *phronesis*, is one of application, but that the applicative moment in these three movements is not identical. "Certainly application does not mean the same thing in each case" (*TM* 315). Therefore to say that *phronesis* and *techne* are both concerned with the application of knowledge to a particular situation is not at all to deny that they can be distinguished.

> There is a curious tension between a *techne* that can be taught and one acquired through experience.... [T]he prior knowledge involved in a *techne* cannot be called "theoretical," especially as experience is automatically acquired in using this knowledge. For, as knowledge, it is always related to practical application. (*TM* 315)

There is a complex interaction of the theoretical and empirical in the knowledge which constitutes *techne* (and likewise *phronesis*) which mitigates against a simple delineation of theoretical and empirical components of this knowledge. In fact, as Gadamer noted, there is a certain sense in which theoretical knowledge put into practice becomes experience, or empirical knowledge. However Gadamer was adamant that for all the similarities in *phronesis* and *techne* in terms of the theoretical and empirical components at work in them, they are not identical.

> There is, no doubt, a real analogy between the fully developed moral consciousness and the capacity to make something — i.e., a *techne* — but they are certainly not the same.
>
> On the contrary, the differences are patent. It is obvious that man is not at his own disposal in the same way that the craftsman's material is at his disposal. Clearly he cannot make himself in the same way that he can make something

> else. Thus it will have to be another kind of knowledge that he has of himself in his moral being, a knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge that guides the making of something. (*TM* 316)

The knowledge of *techne* is a skill (know how) that guides the way in which one goes about his task in a craft, but for Gadamer there is a difference between this knowledge and the *phronesis* which guides the moral consciousness. Aristotle distinguished the self knowledge of moral consciousness (*phronesis*) from theoretical knowledge (*episteme* or *Sophia*) as well as distinguishing it from technical knowledge (*techne TM* 316; *NE* VI.8 1141b 33, 1142a 30). Both *techne* and *phronesis* are concerned with action and the application of knowledge rather than operating only within the parameters of reason as theoretical abstraction. However, even when the craftsman learns to see the carving in the wood as he goes about his craft, and adjusts his work to bring out what is perceived in the wood, this remains a different kind of knowledge at work as *techne* than is the case in *phronesis*. In both kinds of knowledge it is necessary to see what needs to be done, to make a careful decision (deliberation) about the proper means to achieve this end, and to do the right thing. In order to clarify this distinction Gadamer elaborates three points in Aristotle which serve to elucidate the distinction between *techne* and *phronesis*.

***The Application of Phronesis***

The first distinction concerns the application of *phronesis*. In the case of *techne* one can learn a skill and forget a skill, and one may choose to use a skill, or choose not to use a skill. In the case of *techne* one is not bound to perform an action of any kind when presented with an opportunity to do so. This is clearly not the case with *phronesis*. As the story of the Good Samaritan shows, to choose to ignore an opportunity to do good is to choose against the good. "Rather we are always already in a position of having to act" (*TM* 317). "We have free choice, but we are not free not to choose"

(*HRE* 155). Thus the one who is faced with a particular situation which demands of the individual some application of the universal good to a particular situation cannot avoid the responsibility to act because however one chooses to respond, even if one attempts to ignore the situation and do nothing or simply retreat from the situation, one *is* responding; the individual *is* acting. Therefore, the individual must act, and in acting the individual is ineluctably building character, whether the character thus formed is good or bad. In the case of *techne* the refusal to do a good work can result in a purposeful bad work but it may also result in no work. When the situation concerns *techne* or the making of a craft, non-participation is an option, but in the case of *phronesis* or person-making, non-participation is not an option. If we are "always already" in this position of having to act then we must have the knowledge required to act, what ever that may be. "(A)nd hence we must already possess and be able to apply moral knowledge.... For we can only apply that which we already have" (*TM* 317). Thus the knowledge of *phronesis* is not learned in the same way that *techne* is. In a certain sense *phronesis* involves a knowledge of the rules from outside the rules, or prior to the rules, in order to apply the rule in keeping with the spirit of the rule.

However, what is right within a particular situation can never fully be determined apart from the situation, and this is indicative of another distinction related to the application of knowledge.

> But there is still a basic difference between this (the image of what one ought to be which guide one's action) and the guiding image the craftsman uses: the plan of the object he is going to make. What is right, for example, cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action from me, whereas the *eidos* of what a craftsman wants to make is fully determined by the use for which it was intended. (*TM* 317)

Thus the acquisition of *techne* can be done independently of its application, and while this learning is enhanced by the experience of application to a particular situation, this application does not change

the *telos* of the *techne*. The end product (*telos*) remains the same even when the means to the end require an accommodation to a particular situation (*TM* 318 I will explore the means/end relationship in more detail in the next section). Gadamer, following Aristotle, used the example of a judge's responsibility in applying the law to show that application in *phronesis* differs from application in *techne* (*NE* VI.8).

> In a certain instance he will have to refrain from applying the full rigour of the law. But if he does, it is not because he has no other choice, but because to do otherwise would not be right. In restraining the law, he is not diminishing the law but, on the contrary, finding a better law. (*TM* 318)

Aristotle, in his analysis of *epieikeia*, said "*epieikeia* is the correction of the law" (*NE* V.10).[49] It is in this sense that *phronesis* also operates outside the bounds of rules and prior patterns to bring to fruition the good which the law desires but is unable to prescribe in advance for every situation (*RAS* 126f). The *telos* of *phronesis*, then, is not merely to uphold the law, but to apply the universal good to the particular situation. The *telos* of *phronesis* is the good in this situation, and as such it could be said that the means is the end, and the end is the means. This stands in contra-distinction to *techne* in which the means are adjusted to the end.

***The Telos of Phronesis***

I return to the discussion of means and end, initiated earlier, by quoting Gadamer:

> Here we see a fundamental modification of the conceptual relation between means and end, one that distinguishes moral knowledge from technical knowledge. It is not only that moral knowledge has no merely particular end but pertains to right living in general, whereas all

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[49]Gadamer followed this quotation from Aristotle with an intriguing exposition on natural law in Aristotle, showing that natural law for him was not unchangeable law but, rather, served a critical function in the case of a discrepancy between one law and another. Thus justice, which is the end of the law, is not a higher law, but an ideal or concept which is to be used to sharpen awareness of the intent of the law, but valid only as schemata and "concretized only in the concrete situation of the person acting." (*TM* 320).

technical knowledge is particular and serves particular ends. (*TM* 320f)

The *telos* of *phronesis* is right living in general, and right action in particular situations *is* right living in general. It is inconceivable, apart from a eulogy, that an individual who consistently chooses actions that do harm rather than good would be spoken of as a good person. Most people do not operate with perfect consistency but there is a general level of achievement with regard to good activity in particular situations which determines how the life of the individual will be characterized. It is the weight of one's actions in particular situations which determine how the life will be judged. It is in this sense that the end of right living in general is achieved by right living in particular situations.

In the case of *techne* there is always an end in sight for the sake of which *techne* is acquired and applied. One whittles a whistle for the sake of having a whistle with which to whistle a tune, not simply for the sake of whittling a whistle. Deliberation is involved in ascertaining the proper means to achieve the desired ends, but the end is always removed from the situation in which one deliberates about the proper means. The best way to whittle a whistle out of a block of wood is never in itself a whistle. In the case of *phronesis* the relation of means and end is different because right living in general is inseparable from right living in particular situations.[50]

This raises significant complications for the knowledge operative in *techne* and *phronesis*. If the means in *phronesis* are inseparable from the ends, then it is impossible to have moral knowledge (*phronesis*) in advance in the same way that we can have technical knowledge (*techne*) in advance.

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[50]This indicates a distinction between the relation of experience to life and the relation of the particular to the universal. Whereas the particular is an instant of the universal, experience cannot be separated from the life of which it is an integral part in the same way (*TM* 68). See also Risser, *Hermeneutics*, p. 84.

> Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught. The relation between means and end here is not such that one can know the right means in advance, and that is because the right end is not a mere object of knowledge either. There can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole. (*TM* 321)

This indicates that deliberation is necessary for *phronesis* in a way which is not demanded of *techne*. Technical knowledge can be learned in advance, and applied when the opportunity presents itself in a way which is impossible in *phronesis* because of the way in which *phronesis* depends on the particular situation for knowledge, not only of the means (as in *techne*), but also of the end (in distinction from *techne*). *Phronesis* is always concerned with the good in every situation but the question of what is good in a particular situation is precisely the question which must be answered in the situation itself, and this very specific question cannot be adequately addressed apart from the situation. "Do good" is a rather vague generality, admirable to be sure, but not particularly meaningful until it is applied in concrete action in specific situations. The universal value that one should have respect for human life is widely acknowledged but what does this mean in specific situations? What does respect for human life mean when saving a life may mean forfeiting your own? What does respect for human life mean when your home is invaded at night by armed larcenists who threaten the lives of your family and the termination of the lives of the intruders would save your family? Or is it legitimate to kill if that appears to be the only option to ward off a sexual assault? The meaning of the universal for the particular situation must be, and can only be, assessed in the particular situation.

> Thus a knowledge of the particular situation . . . is a necessary supplement to moral knowledge. . . . Moral knowledge is really knowledge of a special kind. In a curious way it embraces both means and end, and hence differs from technical knowledge. (*TM* 322)

Since knowledge of the particular situation is a necessary part of *phronesis* it follows that experience is a necessary part of *phronesis*. One must know a particular situation before one can determine the good for the particular situation. For Gadamer this knowing is, once again, a knowing which includes the experience of the situation (*TM* 322). It is not a knowing apart from the particular situation but a knowing within the particular. This means that not only can *phronesis* not be learned in advance, but it also indicates that *phronesis* cannot be strictly a theoretical knowledge. *Phronesis* cannot be achieved solely by means of reason, human or cosmic, although reasoning is certainly an important component of the deliberative moment in *phronesis* (*NE* VI.9, 1142b.12). In fact MacIntyre suggests that, although *episteme*, as concerned with universals and therefore an integral part of *phronesis*, is an aid in any *phronetic* application of such universals, it is always possible that the individual who has the experience but lacks the *episteme* relevant to a particular situation, may well make a better choice in the particular situation than will the individual who possesses the *episteme* but lacks the experience.[51] Additionally, if the *telos* of *phronesis* is right living, then theoretical knowledge alone cannot accomplish the task of *phronesis* because right living requires not only right theoretical knowledge (*Sophia* and *episteme*), but right action within specific situations.

***The Sympathies of Phronesis***

The situational embeddedness of authentic moral knowledge is also reflected in Gadamer's treatment of Aristotle's analysis of moral reflection in inter-personal relations. Aristotle introduced *synesis* as

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[51] *WJWR* p. 92. For another position on the possibility of reaching *phronesis* through reflection see Demetrius Teigas, *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, Toronto: Associated University Press, 1995) p. 125. While Teigas seems too optimistic about the possibility of the individual attaining *phronesis* through reflection, he is in substantial agreement with MacIntyre's position that *episteme* provides the presuppositions for *phronesis*. Teigas, p. 21, *WJWR*, p. 92.

a modification of *phronesis* because in the case of *synesis* it is not the reflecting individual who must act (*TM* 322; *NE* VI.11). Rather the reflecting individual brings to bear all the technical and deliberative skills of *phronesis* on a situation which affects some one else. *Synesis* is a capacity for moral judgement in which the one who judges does not merely judge for his own ends, but in a sympathetic understanding of the other, makes a judgement that he would wish for if he were in the other's position. The technical knowledge of good deliberation, which characterizes *phronesis*, is now coupled with *synesis*, sympathetic understanding, to ensure that the technical and deliberative knowledge of *phronesis* is indeed used for good. *Synesis* involves the moral judgement of *phronesis* and has the same interest in the particular situation, but it is not the application to concrete action only for oneself, but for the other who is affected by the action. As such, authentic *synesis* demands that one not only have the knowledge of the relevant universals, but in order to properly understand the application of the universal to the particular situation one must also be cognizant of the particular situation from the perspective of the who is in the particular situation.

> This knowledge also is not in any sense technical knowledge or the application of such.... Once again we discover that the person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected. (*TM* 323)

That *phronesis* is not simply technical knowledge is made clear by Aristotle's reference to the *deinos*, "a man who has all the natural pre-requisites and gifts for this moral knowledge, a man who is able, with remarkable skill, to get the most out of any situation, who is able to turn everything to his advantage and finds a way out of every situation" (*TM* 323; *NE* VI.13 1144a 23). The same *technical* knowledge in the hands of a person who is interested only in his own benefit, rather than the claim of the universal good on his own actions in a particular situation, can be used in terrible

ways to further the ends of the *deinos*. "Nothing is so terrible, so uncanny, so appalling, as the exercise of brilliant talents for evil" (*TM* 324). *Phronesis* does not necessarily result in good moral behaviour. Excellence in deliberation and facility with the correlation of universals and particulars does not necessarily result in choices which favour the greatest good. These are skills which can be used for selfish ends to the detriment of others. Authentic *synesis* eliminates this option because the one who deliberates considers not only his own interests, but feels himself to be in a common bond of friendship with the other which compels him to do what is good for his friend. This is clarified by two other varieties of moral reflection which Gadamer designates "insight" and "fellow feeling" (*TM* 323). A person is said to have insight when their judgement is seen to be fair and correct. The judgement is deemed fair and correct when it evidences due consideration to the individual affected by the judgement. Again, this judgement is a result not only of technical excellence in deliberation, but also of genuine empathy, and a concern for the global good within this particular situation.

Gadamer's exploration of Aristotelean *phronesis* culminated by citing the way in which Aristotle's analysis offered "a kind of *model of the problems of hermeneutics*" (*TM* 324). For Gadamer "application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomena of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning" (*TM* 324). In both hermeneutics and in *phronesis* there is not an application of a pre-given universal to a particular situation, but the proper understanding of the universal is not separable from its application to, and correlation with, the particular. "Consequently application is not a mere 'application' of understanding but the true core of understanding itself" (*RAS* 129). In arriving at a proper understanding of a text, or the proper understanding of the universal in a particular situation, one must not try to disregard one's self and

one's situation but, rather, one must relate the text, or the universal, to one's situation if one "wants to understand at all" (*TM* 324).[52]

## *PHRONESIS, EPISTEME* AND CONTEXT

This serves to emphasize the significance of the context for all knowing. While the implication of the context for *phronesis* has been more fully developed in this chapter than have the implications of context for *episteme*, the contextual situatedness of *episteme* has also been intimated, and it will be developed at greater length in the next chapter on the role of tradition. However, I have already noted the roots of *episteme* in *Sophia*, an intuitive and empirical knowledge, which is deeply influenced by one's culture, location, needs and the like. A civilized westerner who becomes stranded in a rainforest will not have the same odds for survival as an aboriginal who has known only the law of the jungle, due to the impact that their acculturation has for their powers of observation. This modified observation will necessarily lead to variant methods of dealing with the environment, which will have real consequence on the odds of survival. Thus, the implications of the roots of *episteme* in empirical and intuitive groundings for the content of *episteme* becomes evident, and at its most foundational levels, *episteme* is contextually oriented.

One of the most portentous elements in Gadamer's appropriation of *phronesis* is the relation of universals to particulars and the way in which this interrelation is interactive and co-constitutive. The dual origin of the relationship between universals and particulars on this reading is one in which judgement and deliberation are inescapable, which means that there can never be a method which allows one to simply follow the correct procedure in order to arrive at the correct correlation of the

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[52]See also Risser, *Hermeneutics*, p. 109.

universal with the particular.[53] This was reflected in Kant's telling admission that there can be no rules for the application of rules, indicating the interpretive necessity involved in any and every application of a directive.[54] Every perceived universal, directive, or inscribed statement must then be seen as derivative of a principle or value in which the inscription is rooted, a principle or value which therefore takes precedence over the statement concretized in writing, speech or other communication. Such an inscription is always too general to account for every specific situation, or else it is too specific to be applicable in broader generalities. The context is always of paramount significance in any deliberation concerning what would constitute right action, whether this is seen as a response to the call of the good, the call of justice, or the call of God.

For example, the moral force of the commandment which says "You shall not kill" is generally considered to be a universal command to preserve human life, but that does not settle the issue of all killing. In the case of capital punishment, for example, is capital punishment a killing which is also proscribed by this command? Or is capital punishment a killing which supports the respect for human life which this command clearly endorses, in which case capital punishment would be allowed, and perhaps even endorsed, by the commandment? The fact that an injunction which, on the surface, seems as straightforward and apparently uncomplicated as "You shall not murder" cannot be maintained without a human interpretation of the law serves to highlight the interpretive nature of every reading and, Gadamer insists, every human activity including the appreciation of a work of art, the understanding of history, and the search for truth.

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[53]Risser, *Hermeneutics*, p. 8.

[54]See above, p. 11, note 32.

It is, however, far from sufficient to acknowledge this inescapable interpretive dimension. It is also necessary to allow the situation to define the context of the application of the universal. This is not to suggest that the situation determines what is right. The good which is sought remains primordially determined by the universal, but what the universal means in this particular situation must be determined within the context of the situation, and until this happens the import of the universal for the particular situation is, at best, unclear. This is not a radical relativism which insists that what is right can be determined individually in each situation in isolation from any other situation or person. Rather, this is a relationalism which insists that the relation of the universal to the particular must be recognized in the uniqueness of each situation in order for the relation to be authentically true to both the particular situation and the universal principle.

For Gadamer, and this is one of the strengths of his position, this is not merely the best we can do in the absence of "perfect objective knowledge", this is the way things truly are. This is the way in which we are in the world and there is no need to lament our finitude. What we must do is recognize the importance of our situatedness in determining what is good in this particular situation because it is the situation in which we find ourselves that plays a vital role in concretizing the good in practice. Our situatedness encompasses all of the facets of our earthly existence. In this context, it is important to keep in mind Heidegger's insistence on the unity without division, but also the unity without assimilation without remainder, of *Da-sein* and the world of *Da-sein*. The society in which we live, the geography that surrounds us, the education we are bequeathed, the body we inhabit, are but a few of the influences which shape us so originarily that we cannot begin to conceive what we would be if we could escape some of these mitigating circumstances of our life. Tradition is one of the influences on (contexts of) human being which most concerns Gadamer, and I now turn to an

investigation of what tradition is, how it plays it role in human activity, and its implications for *phronesis*.

# 2

# *Phronesis* and Tradition

## INTRODUCTION

In *Truth and Method* Gadamer modelled the application of philosophical hermeneutics, focussing on the areas of aesthetics, the study of history, and the interpretation of literary texts.[55] Gadamer certainly realized that the implications of philosophical hermeneutics went far beyond the areas which he explored in *Truth and Method* and in his later writings he addressed some of the additional areas of application.[56] Perhaps one of his most well-known discussions was in response to a challenge posed by Jurgen Habermas,[57] a contemporary German philosopher whose initial references to *Truth and Method* were made in the context of his interest in the distinctions between the methodology of the natural sciences from that of the social sciences.[58] One of the focal points of their discussion was

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[55]*BOR*, p. 34, 35. See also Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969) p. 162.

[56]Hans-Georg Gadamer "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, trans., (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977) p. 19, 20. Cited as FR.

[57]Ibid., p. 20. Nicholson calls the debate launched by Habermas "one of the deepest, most interesting and most important philosophical debates in recent times." Nicholson, "Answers," p. 151.

[58]Robert C. Holub, *Jurgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, (New York: Routledge, 1991) p. 61.

the role of tradition in shaping human activity. This issue has ramifications for the understanding of Gadamer's appropriation of *phronesis*. Aristotle made much of the *polis* and its pivotal role in the individual's acquisition and development of *phronesis*. Aristotle's notion of the *polis* parallels the role of tradition in Gadamer's *phronesis*. *Polis* and tradition both indicate the community within which the individual operates. For this reason it is necessary to pay close attention to the function of tradition in Gadamer's philosophy. It is not only something which influences posterity and individuals, but it is always something which is recognized and appreciated for what it conveys, though this content is not merely absorbed. Indeed, the very individual who is influenced by a tradition is reciprocally shaping the tradition which shapes him by the very fact that he works within that tradition. For Gadamer, a tradition is like a text which experienced and understood in a reciprocating dialogue.[59]

In this chapter I will explore the role of tradition in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics by tracing his development of this theme in *Truth and Method*, and by picking up the pertinent strands in his dialogue with Jurgen Habermas.[60] I will show that the role of tradition in philosophical hermeneutics is a dialogue of reciprocal influence between tradition and the one who stands in a tradition. The implications of this investigation of tradition, which shows the inexorability of this two way influence of tradition as dynamic and interactive rather than static and uni-directional, will enhance our understanding of *phronesis*. Tradition does not simply determine the way in which universals are understood and applied to particulars. Rather, an authentic understanding of the

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[59]Risser, *Hermeneutics*, p. 130f.

[60]The principal contributions in this dialogue can be found in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1990).

particular means that one also reflects on the tradition within which one stands and operates – within which one correlates universals with particulars and vice versa – and in doing so one always also shapes that tradition. I will conclude that while the influence of tradition in moral knowledge cannot be absolutely transcended, even for the purpose of an ideological self-criticism of one's own tradition, neither is it an influence which is impervious to shaping by those whom it shapes. Much more, those who are shaped by tradition always also have a vital reciprocal formative impact on the tradition which shapes them by the very fact of their functioning within that tradition.

**TRADITION IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

One of Gadamer's primary projects in *Truth and Method* was the reversal of the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice (*TM* 277).[61] He began this project under the heading "The Rehabilitation of Authority and Tradition." This heading insinuates a theme which Gadamer later develops, namely that authority and tradition are basic prejudices which are not to be superceded in the search for knowledge and truth. Rather, it is only on the basis of being in a tradition, or in relation to an authority of some sort, that we can know our world (*TM* 290ff). Gadamer prefaces his analysis of tradition with a review of Heidegger's view of understanding as circular.[62] For Heidegger, understanding is always based on fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conceptions, which allows understanding to initially occur.[63] These pre-conditions of understanding are neither arbitrary, nor are they absolute in informing one's understanding. Rather, they initially inform one's understanding,

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[61]See also *BOR*, p. 127.

[62]See also Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding" in John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner, eds., *Hermeneutics versus Science?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) pp. 68-78. Cited as OCU.

[63]Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 32, 63.

but they are also immediately reformed in order to fit with the development of one's understanding which, nevertheless, can be developed only on the basis of these pre-conditions for understanding.[64] The role of tradition in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics parallels this circle of understanding in that tradition originarily directs these pre-conditions of understanding, and tradition itself in turn is impacted by the understanding which arises out of this understanding (*TM* 293).

**Tradition as prejudice**

In order to establish a space for his conception of tradition, Gadamer must first challenge the enlightenment idea that to follow a tradition is to allow unwarranted grounds to stand as an authority which informs our thought and action (*TM* 279). The concern with objective certainty during the Enlightenment made prejudices dubious, and it led to the perception that prejudices which preceded an understanding of the thing itself, to employ a Kantian terminology, served only to pollute understanding, and that such prejudices rendered suspect the understanding built on such unqualified grounds. "[T]here is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power (*TM* 270)." This prejudice against prejudice denies tradition its power because, for Gadamer, it is only within a tradition that we can know and understand our world. Among other things, recognizing the authority of a tradition as a legitimate authority, on certain qualifying conditions, allows for cooperative achievements, as a society can work together, building on the pioneering work of others whose credentials are trusted, in this way avoiding

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[64]For Heidegger's elucidation of the circle of understanding, an important concept in his thought and a pivotal concept operative in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, see *Being and Time*, p. 150.

the reduplication of efforts involved in the "each to his own" approach to the project of understanding as endorsed by Kant.[65]

Tradition is a form of prejudice which operates at the most fundamental levels of human being. Doing things simply because "that is the way we have always done it" is a prime example of the unquestioned devotion to tradition which is sometimes evidenced in the ways of the participants of various societies. However, even the posing of this answer as justification for action already indicates that some question has been raised about the validity of a certain way of doing things. Thus at this level, there already is a departure from the ordinary mundane unquestioned way of doing things "because they have always been done that way," without asking "why?" At this level of introspection there is already an abstraction from the normal practice of operating within a tradition without questioning the validity of that tradition. This accentuates the originary way in which a tradition influences, or prejudices, activity prior to the level of conscious awareness of such influences.

**Prejudice as negative influence**

The Enlightenment heritage was given a distinctly rational orientation with Descartes' project to found knowledge on indubitable certainty and, ultimately he founded his certainty on the authority of his own thinking, "*cogito, ergo sum.*"[66] Descartes deliberately set out to clear aside every ground of knowledge which could possibly be doubted. This is clearly a case of an attempt to extirpate all prejudice from his thought in order to be left with a self-evident and indubitable foundation for all subsequently derived thought. Thus, Descartes set the stage for the denigration of prejudice as unwarranted grounds to be relentlessly deracinated in the quest for pure and certain knowledge, which

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[65]Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*

[66]Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy.*

came to be seen as the only reliable form of knowledge. The ideal was a knowledge that could stand on its own merit, a knowledge which was self-evident in itself, which was therefore insusceptible to proof or disproof.[67] This came to be known as objective truth, the truth of the object in itself.

Prejudices were viewed as negative factors which only clouded, polluted and perverted one's observations and thus disparaged the objectivity and reliability of knowledge. It was imperative that all such prejudices be recognized and eliminated in order for one to obtain a pure, objective and unbiased grasp of a phenomena or concept. Adequate intellectual deracinating vigour applied to the foundations of knowledge led to the vaunted objectivity of a knowledge which saw the things themselves from a distance, which recognized the thing itself in itself, and saw it as it really was in its own right. Failure to perform this "exorcism" of unfounded grounds for knowledge meant that one's knowledge would be built on prejudices which deformed truth, and such allegedly specious grounding diminished the validity and veracity of that knowledge.

This unfounded prejudice could be distinguished in two ways. It could be based on the opinions of human authority figures, such as purported specialists in a certain field of inquiry, or it could simply be the result of an overhasty conclusion on the part of the individual (*TM* 271). Either form of prejudice led one into error. The way to avoid either error was to have the courage to make use of one's own understanding. Both errors of prejudice are a matter of not doing the work required to ensure adequate grounding for thought oneself. The first relies on others to provide this grounding

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[67]For a parallel critique of this position in current philosophy see Jacques Derrida's critique of Edmund Husserl in Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, David B. Allison, trans., (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) p. 4. Derrida's work is particularly germane to this issue because of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* which were an attempt to improve on the original Cartesian project of founding a basis for science and knowledge. For Gadamer's analysis of Husserl's project which agrees with this perception see his "The Phenomenological Movement in *PH*, p. 134, 153f. Cited as *PM*.

by means of their own expertise, in the latter case the required work is simply not done, perhaps out of sheer laziness, perhaps out of an inability to ferret out the grounds of one's thought. In either case the corrective for unfounded prejudice is to rely on one's own understanding, in other words, to think for oneself. The blatant prejudice, inherent in this approach to knowledge, in favour of autonomous rational activity as the way to truth is obscured (to say nothing of the way in which this prejudice in favour of intellectual activity as the way to get to truth has also nuanced the idea of truth itself as being primarily a cognitive category). The fact that authority is unquestioningly given to reason is not highlighted. The inescapability of some authority, in this case a rationality which has since become known in some circles as the rationality tradition, as the founding and grounding of a way of being in the world is passed over. The attempt is made to provide, or uncover, a ground for knowing which is indubitable. There is to be no unquestioned authority of any sort which provides the foundation for knowledge (except, presumably, that of reason).

This linear concept of knowledge stands in stark contrast to the circle of understanding as developed by Heidegger, and which undergirds the work of Gadamer. The enlightenment ideal of knowledge was a linear progression of knowledge from certain foundations to equally reliable knowledge, provided that the proper reasoning procedures were followed. This is the *episteme* introduced in the earlier chapter, a knowing which has its proper sphere of function, but which cannot ultimately and singularly serve as the foundation of thought because of the grounding which *episteme* itself requires. Aristotle was aware of the infinite regress involved in positing *episteme* as the source of knowledge, which is why *Sophia* and intuition played an important grounding role in his scientific knowledge.[68] The circle of understanding proposed by Heidegger does not require the same

[68]See above, p. 6f.

grounding, and linear progress from the point of grounding, because Heidegger's grounding is not the onetime foundational grounding which once laid, need never be laid again. Rather, it is a grounding which coincides with the progress of the knowing which it grounds. The grounding, in Heidegger, is continually reworked to make the grounding fit with what is discovered on the basis of the grounding, and Gadamer follows Heidegger rather closely at this juncture. Hence grounding is always provisional and never initially adequate for all time, though it may well be adequate for initial explorations.

**TRADITION IN GADAMER**

Herein lies one of the fundamental problems with the enlightenment view of tradition, on Gadamer's reading, namely, the idea that acceding authority to a tradition was in fact granting authority to an influence which had not been properly grounded by autonomous reason and hence was not adequately justified. Tradition, as noted earlier, is such a fundamental prejudice, and it is an authority of sorts, though not necessarily such an unquestioned authority. It may be followed unquestioningly, but it need not be. Tradition may well be recognized as a primordial influence, but it may also be concomitantly recognized as having meritorious grounds which qualify its standing in this position, and on that basis allow the tradition to stand as an originary influence (*HRE* 153).

There is a major distinction here in the way that the enlightenment thinkers came to see grounds for knowing, and the way that Heidegger, Gadamer and others came to see this grounding. For some enlightenment thinkers it seemed that this grounding must be either final or specious. Any ground for knowing which required fine-tuning for subsequent investigations was insufficient. For Heidegger's circle of understanding this was precisely not the case. Any grounds for knowing, if they were appropriate to the object of knowledge, would enhance knowledge, and by that very fact would

require finetuning to "grow" along with the understanding which these pre-conditions for understanding undergirded. Thus a tradition may be a ground for knowing but it need not be an infallible ground, only a productive ground. Tradition could be granted an authority as a ground for knowing but that did not preclude revisions, or even an overhaul of the tradition which provided the basis for one's work. Indeed, Gadamer insisted that traditions were not sources of authority which vitiated the need for reason and warrant, but that they were authorities precisely because knowledge (in the form of reason, or some other form of knowledge, eg., *Sophia*) supported the validity of recognizing the authority of traditions or people qualified for such recognition (*TM* 279).

For Gadamer, following Heidegger in the circle of understanding, grounding is never absolutely and finally adequate at the genesis of a project of knowing, but the grounding may be adequate as a provisional starting point. The ideal is not matter of getting out of this circle understanding, but a matter of getting into the circle the right way.[69] Thus, prejudices, such as a tradition, are the starting points which first enable us to understand, but they are not absolute in the sense that whatever we understand on the basis of our prejudices, or within our traditions, is necessarily finally correct. We may well find that our initial prejudices (or traditions) need to be reworked on the basis of what we discover through our prejudices. What is vital for Gadamer is that prejudices are the starting point to any project of knowing.

**Tradition as necessary prejudice**

Gadamer asserted that prejudices were not negative factors to be overcome and neutralized but, rather, prejudices are necessary pre-conditions for any understanding.

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[69]Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 153.

> What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to the historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. (*TM*, p. 277)

There is certainly room — or more accurately, a necessity — in Gadamer's thought for critical self-analysis of one's own prejudices in an attempt to root out "overhasty" and therefore illegitimate prejudices, but it is a vain fantasy to think that one could ever eliminate all prejudice. Furthermore, such a project would be misguided from the outset because it is only by means of prejudice that one gains any understanding at all. These enabling prejudices are an integral part of the heritage passed on in traditions. It is only within, and on the basis of, the traditions and prejudices within which one is situated that one is able to make sense out of one's world, live in that world, and attempt to make some progress in, for example, the pursuit of knowledge (OCU 70).

Gadamer reminded his readers that prejudice was a decision rendered before all of the pertinent elements had been *finally* examined (*TM* 270, italics added). Thus the original force of the word did not necessarily carry the negative connotations it came to have in the context of Enlightenment thought, in which the certainty of knowledge was dependent on its being objective and distanciated, knowledge standing on its own without connection to other things. It is not hard to understand that this ideal of knowledge would necessarily cast doubt on knowledge which was based on grounds that were related to other grounds, unless all of these grounds were understood to be valid in their own right, based on exhaustive investigation. Hence, prejudice acquired this negative connotation as unfounded grounds – and therefore illegitimate grounds – which subverted all knowledge rising from those grounds.

However, in German legal terminology, a prejudice was a provisional legal judgement which preceded the final verdict. This judgement was based on findings but not the entire weight of evidence, and it adversely affected the disputant's chances (*TM* 270). In this case it is evident that a prejudice is not unfounded and that it may indeed provide a basis upon which to proceed. This serves to counter one of the fundamental problems with tradition according to the rationalist enlightenment, on Gadamer's reading, namely, the idea that acceding authority to a tradition was in fact granting authority to an influence which had not been properly grounded – which had not been adequately justified. The negative value attached to prejudice (*Vorurteil*) as unfounded judgement is, for Gadamer, the result of the Enlightenment infatuation with rationality as the final court of judgement as to the legitimacy of prejudices (*TM* 270ff). However, in the context of Gadamer's elucidation of the German legal precedent for the actual role of prejudice it is evident that prejudices are not unfounded, but merely not finally and absolutely grounded.[70] They are provisional but not arbitrary, and they provide the grounds upon which to proceed, but always with the understanding that these grounds will, in all likelihood, need to be revised as new evidence comes to light. This idea is important in Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice.

Even the attempt to make Gadamer's claim less objectionable by using the term "pre-judgement" in place of "prejudice" fails to recognize the heart of his claim.[71] Gadamer's contention is precisely that

> It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being.... Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions

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[70]Gary B. Madison, "Beyond Seriousness and Frivolity: A Gadamerian Response to Deconstruction" in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, p. 131. Cited as BSF.

[71]*BOR*, p. 127.

> whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us.[72]

We can engage in critical reflection about our prejudices and make judgements about certain values and aspects inherent in these prejudices but we can never completely get behind the whole of our prejudices (OCU 77; *RAS* 104, 108).[73] Even in our reflection at a certain level of abstraction in regard to our prejudices we still operate only within our prejudices. Thus prejudices are not merely pre-judgements – i.e., conscious decisions we have made about the basis upon which we have chosen to proceed – they are more original than that. They are the fundamental "biases of our openness to the world." They are the initial basis upon which things in the world are recognized and meaningful. "The operation of tradition in advance of all our reflection makes it inevitable, and correct, for us to have prejudices."[74] These biases remain biases, however, because they are not neutral in the sense that they give no direction to the raw material of our perceptions. Rather, they give meaning to what we perceive precisely because they give direction to our perception (*RAS* 111). Even more, without an orientation to our world and the things in our world we could not perceive things, much less perceive their significance to our world and ourselves.[75]

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[72]Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* p. 9. Cited as UP.

[73]Ellul's recognition of this need for self-critique is evidenced in his criticism of Marx as being insufficiently aware of his own biases while earnestly ferreting out those of his targets. Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1981) p. 27.

[74]Nicholson, p. 153.

[75]See Patrick A. Heelan, "Perception as a Hermeneutical Act" in Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde, eds., *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, Albany, NY: SUNY 1985.

***Tradition and critical reflection***

Habermas' interest in the implications of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for the distinctions between the practice of the natural sciences from that of the social sciences, prompted his challenges on certain points which Gadamer made in regard to the role of tradition in human knowing.[76] Gadamer's analysis of history in *Truth and Method* contained an extensive analysis of the social sciences with a focus on its history, and how the processes – and the people who conducted the processes – were situated within a tradition and therefore deeply influenced by that tradition (*PH* 28). Habermas' concern, on the other hand, was directed toward the philosophy of contemporary social science. He was interested in the implications of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic for the pre-suppositions and methods in the current practice of social science and, in particular, the implications for the validity of the practice of social science.

Although Habermas appreciated Gadamer's emphasis on *praxis* as an essential element of understanding, he had some concerns in regard to the implications of this approach for the veracity and profitability of work in the social sciences. Habermas was concerned about the circularity involved in the assertion that understanding came only through tradition and so he posed the question of the origin and development of tradition. Was tradition not shaped by the self-same intellectual activity which was itself shaped by tradition? In Habermas' view a philosophical hermeneutic led necessarily to a relativism which undermined the value of scholarship.[77] It was within the parameters of this concern about epistemology and objectivity that Habermas drew attention to the circularity

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[76]Jurgen Habermas, "Review of *Truth and Method*" in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1990) p. 237.

[77]Habermas, "Review," p. 236f.

which he perceived in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic. Gadamer said that we can know only because we are always already situated within a tradition, only because we are always already prejudiced.[78] However, Gadamer also advocated critical reflection directed toward our traditions and prejudices. Habermas recognized a circularity in this idea that tradition shapes our every moment and yet we are to critically reflect on our tradition, and thus presumably reshape our own tradition, as we consciously appropriate it.[79] Habermas, and his colleagues in critical theory, recognized that all knowledge is historically conditioned but they thought that truth claims could, however, be "rationally adjudicated independently of immediate social (e.g. class) interests."[80] In other words, ideological critique by the rigorous methods of scientific reason could, if not circumvent, at least mitigate against these fundamental biases of tradition, thereby neutralizing their orienting influence. This gave them a more secure rational footing for the assessment of competing truth claims and, in Habermas mind, illuminated a circularity and a weakness in philosophical hermeneutics (*PH* 28).

Furthermore, Gadamer had suggested that the authority of tradition lay not in its domination of the individual but in the individual's recognition of the authority of tradition as a legitimate authority with adequate, though not absolute, founding (*TM* 279). Nevertheless, the foundational role of tradition as a precondition for understanding, and as such a prejudice, could not be circumvented even by the recognition that tradition had this founding function in understanding. This was too facile for Habermas, who maintained that "A structure of pre-understanding or pre-judgement that has been

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[78]*BOR*, p. 142.

[79]Habermas, "Review," p. 236f. See also Nicholson, "Answers," p. 155.

[80]Held, *Introduction*, p. 15

rendered transparent can no longer function as a prejudice."[81] Habermas' faith in ideological critique was such that he saw ideological critique as a tool capable of exposing prejudices so efficiently that the capacity of these prejudices, having been recognized as prejudices, were effectively neutralized.

Gadamer's response was that positing an opposition between [i] the reality of being influenced by an ongoing tradition and, [ii] the practice of critical reflective appropriation of the tradition within which one finds oneself, is a fundamental error. Everyone who operates within a tradition is by the very fact that she is operating also contributing to, and influencing, that tradition (*PH* 28). Tradition is not something which comes only from past history and is impervious to change in the present. Tradition is a dynamic process of influence which shapes people in the present and is shaped by people in the present. Indeed, tradition is as open to rupture as it is to continuity.[82] We mould tradition, even while we are deeply influenced by the tradition within which we function, whether or not we reflect on our tradition and our own impact on it. However, purposive and focussed critical reflection on the tradition which encompasses us has the potential to open up new avenues of effecting positive change in our tradition. It is not a question of *either* being influenced by a tradition *or* appropriating a tradition in critical reflection, but rather a matter of *both* being situated in and influenced by a tradition, *and* affecting the tradition within which we operate, whether this effect occurs inadvertently or as the result of critical reflection. This is a parallel to the function of the hermeneutic circle, which both provides a basis, or a framework, for understanding, and yet the framework which facilitates understanding is itself enhanced by the extension or growth of

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[81]Habermas, "Review," p. 237.

[82]Nicholson, "Answers" p. 156

understanding. The tradition which provides the ground for our experience of reality, is also inexorably reformulated by our experience of reality.

Gadamer saw the false dichotomy in regard to the bilateral direction of the originary influence of tradition as evidence of a dogmatic objectivism which failed to recognize the reality of the influence of tradition as it affected the role of the interpreter. The suggestion that there is a problem in the idea that one is embedded in a tradition while critically reflecting on that tradition, is based on an underlying assumption that there is the possibility of a situation in which one is not inextricably embedded in a tradition, an assumption that one can transcend one's tradition and its influences for certain rational functions (*PH* 28). This assumption stands in stark contrast to Gadamer's central thesis as to the impossibility of achieving a pure, transcendental, unbiased standpoint outside of the influence of a tradition. Furthermore, Gadamer's assertion is not only that we are all already thrown into a tradition which directs our entire mode of being in ways consistent with that tradition, but additionally this tradition – or this bias – is the only means by which we are enabled to know or understand anything at all. Not only is a pure objective standpoint impossible, but even if it were possible, rather than enabling one to attain pure knowledge, such a standpoint would preclude any meaningful knowledge.

***Prejudice and framework***

Thus the inescapability of prejudices is not an unfortunate or deplorable situation which suggests that our every perception is suspect because it is originarily influenced and thus perverted by prejudice, rather a prejudice is the basis upon which our perceptions can have any meaning or significance for us. This casts suspicion on the idea of a "pure fact" objectively verifiable by any human, even when their scientific credentials are impeccable and the scientific method is rigorous. Our observations can

have significance only because we are able to place them into a framework within which they bear a relation to other factors which already are significant to us. It is the context of a framework within which things become connected to our world and the things in our world, and it is only in this context that things become meaningful in the first instance. This framework necessarily affects the way in which these relations are effected, and this framework has a bearing on the way in which new factors come to have significance for us. Factors which do not fit our framework are meaningless to us and cannot be properly appropriated until such time as our framework develops those features which allow and facilitate the incorporation of formerly alien factors. In fact, the very first step in the exploration of the unfamiliar, the questions which are posed and the answers which are sought, already set an agenda according to which factors will be observed and understood.[83] Tradition plays a vital role in our ability to make sense of our world and it shapes and nuances our understanding of our world. Here, again, there is a parallel between the function of tradition and the role of language as *logos*. This role which will be more rigorously analysed in the final chapter but I will make just a few comments by way of introduction here.

***Tradition, linguisticality and understanding***

Gadamer's investigation of the social sciences and the linguisticality of human experience followed the model of translation (*PH* 19). The purpose of translation is to work with that which is foreign to one's experience in the world (a text in a foreign language), and to come to an understanding of it by reformulating in terms – or within a framework – with which one is already familiar. This cannot be accomplished unless one possesses at least a degree of familiarity with – and understanding of –

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[83]Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 199.

that which is foreign and in need of translation. An understanding of at least some aspect of that which is foreign is a pre-condition for translation.

> Misunderstanding and strangeness are not the first factors, so that avoiding misunderstanding can be regarded as the specific task of hermeneutics. Just the reverse is the case. Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world. (*PH* 15)

The pre-requisite of such a pre-understanding disallows the entrance of something totally other, new, and alien into one's experience or observation but it does not eliminate the possibility of expanding the boundaries, or revising the content, of one's knowledge. What it does indicate is that "new" knowledge can never be totally foreign to, or incommensurable with, that which is already known. There must always be a context of familiarity which allows the recognition of the new. "The process is continuously one of understanding the parts in terms of a conjectured sense of the whole, and altering the latter in light of better knowledge of the former."[84] This is a helpful corollary to the correlation of universals and particulars in that the universal has implications for the particular, but the implications of the universal are best understood in the context of the particular. A sense of justice makes space for considered action in a particular situation, but what in fact constitutes justice is best understood as a call for just action in a particular situation.

All of one's experiences and observations are interpreted and understood in terms of that which one already knows and is familiar with. This precludes the possibility of an unbiased apprehension of any factor, regardless of the precision of scientific method or the stringency of one's self-criticism. Rather, it indicates that any such aspirations to pure grounding are not only doomed

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[84]David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980) p. 312.

to failure but, furthermore, that such aspirations are misguided because the success of such a project to nullify all prejudice would then necessarily, if inadvertently, preclude all understanding. This point is particularly salient to our investigation of *phronesis* initiated in the first chapter because it reflects the way in which the knowledge of universals is enhanced and enriched by a knowledge of the particulars to which they relate and I will return to develop this theme more fully in the conclusion to this chapter.

The inescapability of the influences of tradition on every aspect of life grows out of Gadamer's conception of human experience as essentially linguistic. "For language is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world (PH 29)." The very nature of language is relational. Linguistic terms never have a meaning in isolation, by themselves or in themselves. Terms always have meaning by virtue of a reference or a relation. Ink arranged in a certain pattern on a page signifies something which people trained in the appropriate way recognize as the word "chair." This word itself is meaningless unless one recognizes this word as referring to an object which is useful for reducing the stress placed on one's legs. Even the idea of reducing the stress placed on one's legs is superfluous unless one is also familiar with the concept of fatigue which may result from the exertion of effort in the musculature structure of the legs. One could go on and on *ad infinitum* detailing the relationships between signifiers and the signified, between concepts and experience, and explicating the relationships between meaning, language and experience, emphasizing the point that nothing exists in isolation. All of the experiences of life are related in a complex web of relations to an innumerable host of other factors, experiences and influences. It is this inter-relation which allows an experience to be significant. An important part of this inter-relation is the concept of a tradition which connects our experience of the present to a

rich history, as well as an uncharted future. No human exists in isolation, or in a vacuum but, rather, our life has significance to other people who share our tradition. As such we not only share a tradition because we have common interests, but we also have common interests because we share a common tradition.

**Tradition, *phronesis* and *episteme***

It follows from the foregoing investigation of tradition that there is no objective approach, no scientific method, that works only with pure, raw facts, uncolored by any observational biases, not only because all knowledge stands as an answer to some question which necessarily guides and slants the knowledge to which it leads (*RAS* 106), but because there can be no understanding without pre-conditions for understanding.[85] These guiding questions themselves form part of the influence of tradition because the interests and concerns of an individual are not arbitrary but rise out of the milieu, or tradition, within which the individual operates. Thus *phronesis* and *episteme* are both influenced by the tradition within which they are practised.

**Episteme *and method***

This has obvious implications for *episteme* because, although *episteme* is a matter of rigorous method which, it is hoped, will guarantee that the move from observations or experience to knowledge will be reliable, *episteme* also rests on observations and experiences of individuals and societies which are all but inseparable from the tradition of which they are an integral part. This situatedness impugns the objectivity, or the purity, of knowledge and the recapitulation of any knowledge. It does not necessarily deny the veracity of knowledge but it does affect the qualitative and quantitative boundaries of that veracity. Knowledge may be correct in so far as it is accurate within certain

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[85]Nicholson, "Answers" p. 159.

programmatic limits but it can never be comprehensive, and it is always situated within a tradition. Thus knowledge may be true to the extent that is reliable and productive, it may contain elements of truth to the extent to which it is intended to explain certain and specific factors, but truth can never be a matter of exhaustive comprehension of the matter under consideration, and truth is always formulated in response to the particular interests of the tradition within which the individual operates. It is evident, however, that in spite of the best intentions of the most conscientious scientists, in spite of all the extreme care taken in establishing the most rigorous requirements of scientific method, it is inevitable that something more than "pure science" creeps into the methods, observations, and results of science.

> Only one who stands within a given science has questions posed for him. How much the problems, thought experiences, needs, and hopes proper to an age also mirror the direction and interest of science and research is common knowledge for any historian of science. (*RAS* 136)

Unavoidably, part of that "something more" is the influence of tradition. The tradition within which one works influences her interests and agenda, in science as well as in any other pursuit of life.

The nature of truth, arguably the ultimate object of the scientific enterprise, is acutely implicated in this contextuality of the entire human enterprise. Although Madison and Bernstein cited truth as one of the most elusive concepts in Gadamer it has been the focus of substantial scholarly effort.[86] Gadamer never explicitly delineated his concept of truth, not even in his *magnum opus Truth and Method* (which presumably deals with truth matters), but there is little doubt that the modernist notion of scientific truth would not serve his purpose, given his concern to address the lived-in nature

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[86]Madison, BSF, p. 132. Madison makes the observation that in addition to truth appearing in the title of Gadamer's *magnum opus*, truth also "is the last word" in the book, a delicious metaphor which refers not only to specific word order. See also *BOR*, p. 151.

of knowledge characterized by *phronesis*.[87] Gadamer implicitly defends in *Truth and Method* "a notion of truth broader than (and perhaps antithetical to) that delimited by scientific method."[88] Gadamer's exploration of the truth as it is experienced in art, history, and texts was from its inception a project designed to show that method was not an ultimate source of objective knowledge, in contrast to the dominance of this idea in modern science.[89] However, based on our investigation so far we recognize that Gadamer's project was not to overturn the ideas of science, method, knowledge and truth, but to open them up for what is genuine knowledge but falls outside the purview of these traditional ideas of truth.[90] This exploration into *phronesis*, tradition, and *logos*, does not denigrate the foundations of science and truth, but it opens the boundaries to allow other mundane ways of knowing truth to be recognized as equally legitimate in their own right.

The project in the first part of *Truth and Method* was an investigation of the experience of truth in art (*TM* Part I). This investigation begins with a lengthy introduction to the history of the humanist tradition in order to lay the groundwork for the experience of art. Gadamer acknowledged at the outset that the knowledge of the human sciences was fundamentally different from the knowledge of the natural sciences (*TM* 5), that practical knowledge differed from theoretical knowledge (*TM* 21), and that reasoned knowledge differed from the historical knowledge which gives rise to a *sensus communis* (*TM* 23). However, Gadamer did not allow that the knowledge of the

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[87]Coltmann, *The Language of Hermeneutics*, p. 20.

[88]Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1997) p. 3.

[89]Tom Rockmore, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Overcoming of Epistemology" in *Specter*, p. 59.

[90]Frithof Rodi, "Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Life: A Critique of Gadamer's Interpretation of Dilthey," in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, p. 83.

*sensus communis* obtained any less truth value than the knowledge (*episteme*) based on reason (*TM* 23). "Ultimately, it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge" (*TM* 23). The application of rationality and scientific method as the standard for human sciences was not appropriate and this error lead to the impoverishment of the tradition (*TM* 24). Knowledge from history, the *sensus communis*, was not only a legitimate way of knowing in the human sciences, it was a way of knowing which was not at all inferior to the knowledge of reason. The human sciences, concerned with agents who were not only rational but also volitional, need not allow the agenda to be set by the court of cosmic reason and rigorous method, but must equally address the matters of practical and historical concern on their own merit.[91] When addressing matters of concern in mundane life it seems only reasonable to allow for a broader spectrum of influence than only the linear methodical knowing of *episteme*.[92] The concerns highlighted by a tradition are real concerns and deserving of genuine response prior to a requirement of scientific-rational formulation and justification.

Gadamer saw within the human sciences and their attempt, not to surpass but to understand human experience, implicit evidence of an expectation that there was indeed truth to be found in human experience (*TM* 99). It would seem self-evident that truth in human experience cannot be comprehensively – or even adequately – defined in strictly rational conceptual terms. There is always more to human experience than what can be said about it. Similarly, it is evident that the experience of truth in art is very different from a conceptual truth which can supposedly be encompassed by

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[91]Gadamer cited the work of Swabian Pietist Oetinger, who conducted an extensive investigation into *sensus communis* which was directed against rationalism (*TM* 27f).

[92]Grondin, *Sources*, p. 132.

reason (*TM* 98). A concept must be definable with rather more or less specific boundaries which encapsulate the concept in a way which is impossible in the case of an experience of art. In the case of an experience of art it is evident that there is always something more to the work than one experiences in an immediate context. Furthermore an experience of art is always a part of the work of art itself (*TM* 99). "The experience of art acknowledges that it cannot express the full truth of what it experiences in terms of definitive knowledge. There is no absolute progress and no final exhaustion of what lies in a work of art" (*TM* 100). Hence, truth is larger than the scope of *episteme*, which mitigates in favour of Gadamer's project of *phronesis* as a way of getting at truth which does not conform to methodology of *episteme*. *Phronesis* seeks the fittingness in human experience which eludes the grasp of scientific knowledge, which intimates Gadamer's concept of truth as something larger than, thought not necessarily antithetical to, science. It is antithetical to the scientific concept of truth only to the extent that science claims an exclusive understanding of truth. Scientific truth as genuine truth which is always only a part of a larger truth is not problematic for Gadamer.

Truth, for Gadamer, is not best seen as something which we pursue as an object but it is an event in which we participate (*TM* 111). We experience truth in mundane life rather than only discovering truth through theoretical abstraction (*TM* 211, 229). However, as humans, our every experience of the world is "languaged" and this has inescapable implications for the nature of our experience and our understanding of truth.[93] Every language provides only a partial or specific perspective on a matter so every authentic understanding is true, but only a part of the truth.[94]

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[93]For a fuller treatment of the linguisticality of human life see Gadamer's "Man and Language" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

[94]Schmidt, *Specter*, p. 2, 74.

Furthermore we do not discover the truth as much as the truth presents itself to us in our experience as an enlightening experience.[95] Nor is understanding and interpretation something which we do but it is something that happens to us, an endless "happening of meaning" that we are caught up in.[96] "Thus here it is really true to say that this (hermeneutical) event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself." (*TM* 463). Thus, while there is no truth "in itself", every experience of art is an experience of truth, a different experience of what may nevertheless be the same truth.[97]

The philosophical hermeneutic brooks no exception to the all-encompassing influence of tradition. From the initial idea that some aspect of our existence, our reality, needs investigating the process of investigation is already oriented in a certain direction in terms of its goal, and the investigator can only operate within a tradition which no amount of critical reflection can comprehensively countervail, because even this critical reflection can only occur within a tradition. Thus whatever differences there may be between life as it is lived in everyday affairs, and the attempt at abstraction in theoretical work such as philosophy, or even such technological pursuits as the sciences, one always operates within a tradition and the influences that accompany such situated-ness. Nothing exists in isolation and nothing can be understood in isolation. Meaning can occur only in relation to other factors, and meaning is always necessarily influenced by these other factors to which it must relate. There is no distanciated standpoint which transcends a situation and is thus capable

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[95]Ibid., p. 73ff. The measure for truth in *Truth and Method* is "*einleuchtende Ansicht der Sache selbst.*" Lawrence Schmidt, *The Epistemology of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1985).

[96]Rajan, R. Sundara, *Studies in Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1991) p. 235. See also Schmidt, *Specter*, p. 73.

[97]Schmidt, *Specter*, p. 3.

of a pure, objective analysis of phenomena, situation or fact. There is only meaning and significance which is found within a situation and, because this relation is inextricably linked to myriad other situations, it's significance is not limited to itself, but it's significance can illuminate a whole new world by virtue of these relations. So just as in life no experience exists in a vacuum, so also in science no project enlightens only the phenomena under consideration, nor can it be said that any experimental project is successfully isolated sufficiently to allow the pure study of a subject. Boundaries are always being blurred, and distinctions must always be qualified.

Hence the enlightenment dream of objective purity is a deluded dream which is misguided from the start. Such objectivity would leave one in a black-hole-like vacuum centred around one observation with no point of connection to the rest of the real world, hopelessly isolated, and totally powerless to escape the limitations of this singularity in order to engage the rest of the world. Gadamer suggested in its place an inter-subjectivity in which a play, based on mutual respect and enlightenment, can transcend the limitations of one individual's horizon by a fusion of horizons,[98] and so foster the development of a community of seekers. This community of seekers, exploring and

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[98]I consider Gadamer's choice of terminology "fusion of horizons" (*TM* 306-307, 397) unfortunate because what he is referring to is not a nuclear fusion in which the singularity of each individual horizon is annihilated in order to make room for a new singular horizon which encompasses both old horizons. His point is that horizons are not immutably fixed, and that the experience of an enlightening understanding is like a shift of horizons, in which the one whose understanding is aided by an other comes to share the horizon of the other to the extent that they now see eye to eye. This understanding is not primarily a matter of understanding the position of one's conversation partner, but of understanding the matter of discussion. Since understanding is the way of our being in the world, this understanding is essentially an enhanced understanding and realization of our selves, and expansion of our experience of our world. See his "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism," p. 119, and his "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 55, both in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989). See also *TM* 374, 576; RAS 110f.. Madison also emphasizes the experience of the subject in this fusion of horizons (BSF 134).

learning together, and from each other, always recognizes that they are not seeking the end of philosophy, or the ultimate foundation of knowledge, but simply to nurture growth. This community of seekers recognizes that they are always working with what others have bequeathed to them, and that they, too, are leaving a legacy which future generations, in their own time, will enhance.

**Phronesis *and deliberation***

I noted earlier that one of the distinguishing characteristics of *phronesis* is that of deliberation.[99] *Episteme* is linear and relatively predictable because it works with relationships which cannot be otherwise than they are. The movement from universals to particulars is defined by canons of logic and proper method. However, I also noted above that *episteme* is not without its roots and influences in a specific tradition. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is all about the inter-relation of universals and particulars and so must take into account the impact each has on the other, precluding the linear movement of *episteme*. Tradition is another of these influences which initially enables the development of *phronesis*, and tradition also guides the way in which *phronesis* understands and evaluates the universals and particulars with which it engages.[100]

Judgement, an integral aspect of deliberation, is shown to be not a matter of evaluation based on exhaustively defined reason (*TM* 31). I noted earlier that there can be no rules for the application of rules.[101] Judgement must always operate outside of rules and strict formulations in its principled deliberation in specific situations. Thus Gadamer showed that "Not the application of the universal but internal coherence is what matters" (*TM* 31). Recognizing that "Consistency is an obligation for

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[99]See above, p. 7f.

[100]Habermas is in agreement with Gadamer on this point. See his *Review*, p. 233.

[101]See above, p. 11.

every kind of rationality" (*TM* 569) and that "consistency plays its fullest role in practical experience" (*TM* 570) leads to the conclusion that what is important is not only the rational consistency of chosen means, but the consistency of desire, beyond the parameters of pure reason (*TM* 570). Rationality is, for Gadamer, an example of a particular instantiation of a universal principle of consistency. Rationality aims for consistency in the sphere of intellectual activity. *Phronesis* aims for consistency in the sphere of conduct and this is why, for Gadamer, internal coherence matters more than the application of universals. *Phronesis* brings the universal and the particular situation into a mutual harmony with each other rather than only bringing the particular into subjection to the universal. Since rationality is not the ultimate principle, Gadamer looked to other ways of experiencing reality which do not fall within the sphere of purely intellectual activity.

This is why the experience of art was Gadamer's chosen starting point for his investigation in *Truth and Method*. "It is not by accident that I oriented my investigation toward the experience of art, whose "meaning" cannot be exhausted by conceptual understanding" (*TM* 572). Furthermore the concept of taste, an important aspect of aesthetic judgements, "undoubtedly implies a *mode of knowing*" (*TM* 36). Gadamer criticized Kant's *Critique of Judgement* for its implicit limitation of "the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason" (*TM* 40). He asks "But is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge? Must we not also acknowledge that the work of art possesses truth?" (*TM* 41). What Kant did accomplish was to distinguish aesthetic judgement from conceptual knowledge, laying the groundwork for Gadamer's assertion that in art we find an example of knowledge and truth which is not conceptual or scientific, but which is, nevertheless, not inferior to conceptual knowing or rational truth (*TM* 41, 97).

At this point Gadamer turned to play as the model for understanding, the model for how truth happens.[102] However, it was important for Gadamer that play be seen not merely as the activity of a subject who engages in play but he wanted to explore play as a mode of being in which the player loses himself in the play (*TM* 101). "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in the play" (*TM* 102). In the same way an experience of art is not simply a subject observing, appreciating, and evaluating a work of art. "All encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event" (*TM* 99, 116). In aesthetic experience, as in play, the participant is not an isolatable ingredient in the event but, rather, becomes an integral part of the event. Take out the participant and the whole event is changed. Replace the pitcher in a ball game with another pitcher and the whole game is changed. In a similar way the work of art by itself is never what it is as a part of an aesthetic experience (*TM* 102). This indicates a vital interaction of the participants–provisionally the viewer and the viewed–in an aesthetic experience which problematizes the traditional distinctions of subject and object. In fact Gadamer said that "All playing is a being-played.... Whoever "tries" is in fact the one who is tried." (*TM* 106). This is not simply a reversal of the normal subject/object distinctions in the concepts of play and aesthetic experience, but it is the groundwork for the concept of dialogue which is an essential aspect of philosophical hermeneutics, and it serves as an additional reminder that the *phronetic* correlation of universals and particulars is an integrally embodied way of living in the world.

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[102]Madison, BSF, p. 133. Madison cites the centrality of play in both hermeneutics and deconstruction, however he also sees the function of play in the respective positions as reflecting the key distinctions in the disparate approaches to truth taken by these two streams of philosophical thought.

For Gadamer truth is never arrived at in isolation from the application of that truth, and there is no hope of penetrating to an objectifiable truth.[103] The truth of concern to Gadamer is the truth which must be worked out by people in their everyday affairs. The knowledge of the universal must be correlated with the knowledge of the particular situation in order for an understanding of their proper relation to yield, not only an appropriate application of the universal to the particular situation but, in fact, it is only in conjunction with the particular situation that one can achieve a proper understanding of the universal. It is this application of *phronesis* which is the truth. The truth of a text, for example, is indeterminable apart from the situations to which it is applicable, and as its application to particular situations changes, the truth of the text changes as well.[104] The same applies to universals and their application to particulars. Thus truth is not something which is out there awaiting understanding and application to our situations but it is, rather, something which must be worked out in our situations. Hence the deliberative qualities of *phronesis* are indispensable in our attempts to correlate what we perceive to be universal principles with what the particular situations in which we find ourselves call for. This deliberation of *phronesis*, like the rational movement of *episteme*, is always embedded in a tradition which influences the deliberative process. However, it would be erroneous to suppose that this tradition is a static unilateral influence on the acting individual. An appropriated tradition is always revitalized in its appropriation, in its integration in a new context, as this integration allows the tradition to speak in a new voice to a new situation.

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[103]Sundara, *Studies*, p. 235. See also DiCenso p. 83.

[104]Schmidt, *Specter*, p. 6.

***Tradition as dynamic***

It is important to realize that all knowledge is appropriated within the framework of a tradition which deeply influences the significance attached to various components of a structure of knowledge. Therefore one must realize that for most questions there is no such thing as the one right answer. There are theories which are created to fit a philosophy, or to complement a pre-conceived conception of what is right. These theories are supported by data which, viewed from the situationally appropriate perspective, corroborates the theory. Given the complexities of the individual human, of whom there is no single ideal, multiplied by the masses which make up social units, it is hard to conceive the possibility of a social philosophy which adequately portrays the realities of society. This does not discredit the practice of social science but it indicates that social science is not so much a search for conclusive answers as it is a program of growth. Current positions are always suspect – especially when they attempt to lay claim to a God's-eye view – and major changes in social theory can, though they need not, be seen as progress rather than setbacks. Ultimately, abstract theoretical pursuits, for all their supposed rational integrity, are as set in traditions and prejudice, as are the coffee one consumes in the morning, the choice of brand names in the supermarket and the car lot, or the church one chooses to attend. All can be shown to involve some degree of rationality, and all of the reasons are historically and traditionally situated within the parameters of one's specific experiences.

For Gadamer a legitimate understanding is not precluded because of one's proximity to that which is under observation, and understanding is not ideally removed from the subject, but always happens only in relation to the subject. In fact, Gadamer noted, the essence of theory (*theoria* – to see) in its Greek origins refers not to a seeing from a distance, but rather a participatory seeing in

proximity and affinity (*RAS* 17, 89f). To be human is not to encounter a variety of prejudices which correspond to the variety of situations one encounters. To be human is, rather, to be primordially prejudiced from the genesis of existence. Hermeneutic reflection is then not limited to abstract intellectual activity, but it is the stuff of life, it is the fibre of existence, it is how one lives in the world. Without the enabling influence of a tradition experience can have no meaning at all, and the quest for knowledge is doomed to failure before it begins, because the quest can have no beginning without a framework

It is, however, not the case that tradition arbitrarily dictates what the significance of a particular fact or event will be in the structure within which it is placed. To say that everything is situated within a tradition is not to say that there is no room for individual variations in the appropriation of the tradition.

> Practical philosophy presupposes that we are already shaped by the normative images or ideas (*Vorstellungen*) in the light of which we have been brought up and that lie at the basis of the order of our entire social life. That does not at all suggest that these normative perspectives remain fixed immutably and would be beyond criticism. Social life consists in a constant transformation of what has been held valid. But it would surely be an illusion to want to deduce normative notions *in abstracto* and to posit them as valid with the claim of scientific rectitude. The point here is a notion of science that does not allow for the ideal of the nonparticipating observer but endeavours instead to bring to our reflective awareness the commonality that binds everyone together. (*RAS* 135)

Gadamer's point in his debate with Habermas was precisely that, although there was no possibility of transcending one's traditions, the very act of operating within a tradition affected the tradition and thus the tradition was changed from the inside out. It was not necessary to transcend tradition in order to affect change in the tradition. Thus Habermas' concern to place the social science on an objective footing outside of tradition was futile because all science is conducted by humans who are

inextricably embedded in a tradition, and it was unnecessary because tradition is not a suffocating barrier which allows no wind of change to blow on those held in its sway. Every appropriation of tradition is an opportunity to invigorate the tradition by means of an individual contribution to the tradition by the very act of appropriation. The practical effect of a fresh appropriation of a tradition is, in fact, a refreshing of the tradition. Tradition is not merely something which comes from the past to exert its influence on the present, but before it can come from the past, it must be made in a present. Every tradition which comes from the past was made in a present. The tradition which will affect our progeny is being formulated by us in the present. There is no such thing as not affecting a tradition. We either make it a living tradition by revitalizing it in our appropriation, or else we impoverish the tradition, and those who follow us in the tradition, by attempting to ensure that we effect no change on it. Furthermore, the appropriation of a tradition is not exempt from the requisite justification of the claims of that tradition. A tradition is not authoritative simply because it comes from the past, but it is recognized as authoritative because its claims are seen to be well founded, though not immutably so. The claims of a tradition are always subject to verification in every generation, in every situation.

## *PHRONESIS*, TRADITION AND CONTEXT

Tradition is ubiquitous in its fundamental influence on our lives, though it should never be construed as a uni-directional influence. Tradition is that basis upon which we see things, understand things and are enabled to deal with things, including tradition itself. In other words, it is only on the basis of tradition that we are even able to interact with our own tradition, appropriating and reformulating it in the course of this interaction. The very existence of the variety of traditions within which human society functions indicates that there is a context for tradition as well as a context of tradition. That

is to say that traditions develop within a context of time, geography, climate, culture, religion, and all the other myriad factors which condition an environment and impact a tradition. Traditions, in turn, provide a context for those who inhabit the particular context of a tradition. While tradition does place certain limits on the expressions and experiences available to its subjects, it is also the enabling ground for the life of that culture. As tradition enables understanding, comprehension and facility, it also gives these coping strategies a more or less specific direction, that is to say, the direction is not rigidly determined but generally oriented. Tradition is a context for experience which enables and guides the facilities required for adequate function.

*Phronesis* relies on tradition for the basic elements of its function in terms of recognizing universal principles and the situations which call for correlation with these principles. Aristotle noted that it is within the context of a *polis* that one develops *phronesis*. *Polis* and tradition are all but inseparable in this context because every *polis* represents a tradition. Every society has a tradition which the participants in that particular society share, and that shared tradition is an important part of what makes them a *polis*. Hence, *phronesis* is developed within the context of a tradition and, as such, is fundamentally shaped by that tradition. However, as noted above, every action within a tradition is also an activity which itself shapes that tradition. A tradition is always carried on whether it is carried on in a way which effects minimal change as it revitalizes the tradition in the current context, or the tradition may be radically altered in its revitalization, but only a tradition which is not changed can die. The context of tradition is inescapable, but it is not impervious to change and adaptation, and this is what allows tradition to be a fruitful ground of knowing, including especially the knowing of *phronesis*.

This sets the stage for the investigation of the knowing of *logos* and language to which I turn in the next chapter. The connection of *logos* and language, in which all human experience is embedded, has affinities and implications for *phronesis* and tradition because all three are concerned, though each in their own way, with the relation of universals and particulars. In the next chapter I want to show that Gadamer's *logos* is never an absolutizing universal. Rather, in its own linguistically constituted nature, its own context of language, Gadamer's *logos* is, like his notions of *phronesis* and tradition, always an openness to what escapes the grasp of concept, language and understanding, to that which is other, to that which can expand one's epistemological and empirical horizons.

# 3

# *Logos* and Language

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of *logos* has been one of the most important concepts in Western philosophy. Perhaps its most familiar role has been that of a central organizing principle around which nearly the whole of one's philosophy takes shape. It came to represent the nature of the universe as an orderly structure which served as a pattern for the rest of natural life. In spite of its long and venerated history the idea of such a unitary origin has recently fallen on harder times in the work of some poststructuralist thinkers.[105] The idea of a structure characterized by such fundamental unity is decried as an idea which all but legitimates violence to that which resists incorporation into the unified structure. This sense of the *logos* is perhaps better termed onto-theology, a term which is used to refer to the idea of a unitary origin for the universe and everything in it.[106] While the fluid use of terms makes it difficult to ignore some of the connotations which have become a part of terms such as *logos*, in this chapter I want to focus more exclusively on *logos* and logocentrism in the sense of words or thoughts which in themselves accurately reflect reality by means of a comprehensive self-

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[105]Logocentrism was a key point of contention in the Gadamer-Derrida encounter. See their conversation in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

[106]Derrida in particular uses this term to critique the western tradition and the idea of presence which has been so prominent in that tradition. See for example his *Speech and Phenomena*.

presence of thought, language and consciousness. In this sense *logos* becomes the means for knowing the world, which surreptitiously leads to rationality being seen as the epitome of the ways of knowing the world – reason becomes *the* way to know the world and sets up the specious ideal of objectivity as the necessary requirement for pure knowledge.

However, in Gadamer the *logos* does not stand as essentially a structure of pure reason. For Gadamer, *logos* is inextricably linked with language, and language and *logos* are co-constitutive of each other. *Logos* is always situated in a specific time and place, and it is the product of a specific environment with a particular orientation given it by that environment. Following Heidegger, one of the primary senses of *logos*, for Gadamer, is that of relations.[107] In this chapter I will briefly review the history of the concept in philosophy, and pay special attention to its role in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. However, in keeping with Gadamer's insistence on the very close relationship between *logos* and language I will, in order to do justice to Gadamer, broaden this investigation to include not only specific references to *logos*, but I will also pay special attention to the development of the concept of language.

## *LOGOS* IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

The concept of *logos* has a long history in Western thought, with roots in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy. The initial prominence of the concept may be found in the work of Heraclitus, though Heraclitus' multifarious use of the word accentuates the difficulties associated with the translation of *logos*. While the basic meaning of *logos* is "word" it carries "connotations of proportion, measure, and perhaps even here pattern. The *logos* is the first principle of knowledge: understanding of the world involves understanding the pattern of the world, a pattern concealed from the eyes of ordinary

[107] *Being and Time* 7b.

men."[108] *Logos* as a first principle of knowledge, in the context of our assertion that knowledge is a way of coping with our world, highlights the relational component of knowledge, as coping with one's world is the paradigm case of being in relation. Although the paucity of extant Heraclitean writings makes a precise elucidation of what was included in this concept of *logos* for Heraclitus problematic at best, it is not hard to see how this is related to the discussion of *onoma* (name) in Plato's *Cratylus*, a discussion which expanded to include not only proper names, then categories, but also ventured into speculations about the proper origins of words. In *Cratylus* Socrates indicates his opinion that all words are names which are attached to their referents because of a fundamental correspondence, a correspondence which completely escapes the current users of language. As such the ideas of pattern and relationship are indubitably present in the concept of *logos*, as evidenced in the way that Socrates postulated the correlation of words to their referents. Neither is it difficult to understand the association of *logos* with reason or logic, an association which Gadamer thought deficient (*PH* 59). I will expand later on how, for Gadamer, *logos* means much more than reason or knowledge. Gadamer emphasized the linguistic component in *logos* as word and especially as language. Structure and pattern are exigent components of reason, as they are of language.[109] In order to develop an understanding of *logos* and its significance to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics I will briefly review the early Greek conceptualizations of *logos*.

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[108]Reginald E. Allen, *Greek Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1991) p. 9.

[109]Recall the discussion of *episteme* as mathematically structured reason in the first chapter. Method as a rigid structure is a key ingredient of *episteme* which, by ensuring correct procedures, leads necessarily to correct knowledge.

**Heraclitus**

Heraclitus is commonly attributed with the earliest philosophical use of the term "*logos*." In Heraclitus *logos* functions as an originating force from which everything derives, and as a guiding force which keeps everything in balance.[110] All things are in flux and constantly changing but the change is guided by *logos*, which itself remains stable.

> Heraclitus' vision of the universe—a universe in which enemies sustain each other in and through their enmity, in which war and contention are inseparable elements of unity and peace, in which identity is identity in difference, and difference, difference in identity—has never ceased to grip the imagination of his successors.[111]

There is, in Heraclitus, the idea that all things are in relation to other things, even and especially in the case of apparently opposing elements. Thus good and evil could both be viewed as originating in, and held in balance by, the *logos*. This idea presupposes that everything is interrelated by means of a medium by which all is held in balance. While the concept of *logos* undergoes significant change in the early stages of Greek thought, and subsequent developments in Western philosophy, it never completely loses the aspirations to a superstructure capable of encompassing the entire universe and everything in it.

Heidegger's exposition on Heraclitus' use of *logos* shows how the West came to appropriate the universalizing power of *logos* but missed the vital respect for the individual which, in his mind, was the real point of Heraclitus' work.[112] Heidegger suggested that *logos* and the related term *legein*

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[110]F. M. Cornford compares the Fire-*logos* in Heraclitus to the idea of Love in Empodocles as that which pervades everything and holds it all together. See his *From Religion to Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) p. 234.

[111]Allen, *Greek Philosophy*, p. 9,10.

[112]Martin Heidegger, "*Logos*" in *Early Greek Thinking* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984) pp. 59-78.

(to speak) in its original force indicated "to lay", in a way similar to the morphologically related German term *legen* (lay). This laying, in true Heideggerian form, means not simply "to lay down" but every laying down carries overtones of a harvest and also means first "to gather together" and "to lay it down together". This notion of gathering and laying then becomes a model of the universalizing role of the *logos*. It is in language, words, and thought in which one can come to a comprehensive understanding of one's world.

This idea of an all-pervasive universalizing structure in the universe is an idea which is exigent to the universalization of reason, as will be seen later, and it contains the seed for the theory that the words which name entities are related by more than chance or convention. After all, if all is in relation and everything fits into some universal structure in a mathematically rational order it follows that the inter-relations of things must be verifiable if one has the proper understanding of the structure, the *logos*.

**Sophists**

Sophists is a nomenclature attached to rhetors in the early Greek period who were known for their confidence in the power of persuasive speech. They were not characterized by any coherent philosophical position, but rather by their rhetorical ability and their willingness to propagate rhetorical skills for a fee. The major significance of the Sophists to our discussion is their interest in *logos* as speech, and the power of speech to motivate and mobilize people.[113]

Protagoras, the most well known of the Sophists, was seen by some as a radical relativist who taught rhetorical skills with an eye solely to winning arguments by whatever oratory means would carry the day, with no regard to truth or justice, hence the term 'sophistry'. While this charge carries

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[113]Harry A. Ide, "Sophists" in *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

the weight of a moral failure for some, the accusation was of no concern to Protagoras because he insisted that humans are the measure of all things – there is no objective truth – therefore skilful use of rhetoric to convince others of the legitimacy of one's opinion is a perfectly justifiable project.[114]

Gorgias, another Sophist, insisted that people who were cajoled to action by the persuasiveness of speech could not be held personally responsible for their actions.[115] In the same work Gorgias revealed the respect accorded to the *logos* by characterizing it as "a great potentate who brings truly godlike things to pass." This deification of *logos* is perhaps a harbinger of some themes in Christian theology which later speak of the creative power of God's Word (*logos*) but, as I will show when investigating Gadamer's appropriation of Augustine's inner word (*verbum*), there are important dissimilarities which facilitate a distinction.

**Plato**

Plato uses *logos* in many different ways which encompass a wide diversity of nuances of the word. Generally he used it with reference to intellectual capacities or procedures. *Nous* (mind, not the mind of a person but better thought of as a universal or cosmic mind) is more basic in Plato's thought, and *logos* and *dianoia* (thought in the mind of a person) stand for the expression of *nous*. *Dialektike* (dialogue or discussion, interpersonal or intrapersonal) leads to *logos* which may be true knowledge but *dialektike* carried out from false grounds or in unsound ways may also lead to a false pseudo-knowledge; hence *logos* is not necessarily a reflection of ideal truth. However, the idea of dialogue will figure prominently in Gadamer's development of *logos* in his philosophical hermeneutics.

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[114]Protagorus, *Truth*.

[115]Gorgias, *Encomium on Helen*.

Plato's *Cratylus* investigates words as *onoma* (name, or word as a name) and *rhema* (word as an expression) rather than *logos* but it is, nevertheless, is the starting point for Gadamer's treatment of language and *logos* in *Truth and Method*. The *Cratylus* is an exploration of how these sounds which are the words that identify entities came to be names for their referent. Here the relation between names or words and that which the words name is neither accidental nor merely convention. In *Cratylus* Plato explores two options for the origin of the conventions of names. Perhaps names were initially linked to their referents because of a certain fittingness which originally established the names as proper to the named. For example, Socrates indicated that the sound of the r and the frantic convolutions required of the tongue in order to enunciate the r is like the busyness of running in which every body part is in motion. (This is even more evident in the case of languages in which the proper enunciation of the r is a rolling r.) Thus it is fitting that the action of running be named by a verbal convention which bore certain affinities to the action of running. However some words, like numbers, do not have a referent which can be captured by specific sounds or actions so there must be another way of explaining the origins of these words. This suggests that these names, if not in fact all names, have been assigned, either by the conventions of humans, or else by someone who possessed a knowledge of the thing and that which suitably represents it which escapes the grasp of mere mortals. The conclusion then is that these names may have been assigned by someone more than human, in fact, by the gods. For Gadamer, this becomes significant for the way that it shows how language is not a way of pure communication of ideas and concepts in isolation from the things themselves. Rather, language always participates in that which is brought to light in language. Names and words participate in the being of the thing. I will have more on this later in the exposition of Gadamer's appropriation of Greek thought.

**Aristotle**

Aristotle uses *logos* mainly for reason as an intellectual activity, or as speech.[116] When referring to the intelligence that guides the cosmos he prefers to use *nous* rather than *logos*. The relation of *nous* to *logos* is not clearly explicated although, in *On Interpretation*, Aristotle defines *logos* as significant utterance, which could be considered more or less a combination of intellectual activity and speech. Not just any utterance qualifies as *logos*, only that utterance which bears some significance to the human enterprise. Hence there is the suggestion that only thoughtful utterances, utterances which arise from an intellect which has been stimulated and exercised, are *logos*. Thus significant utterance rises out of intellectual activity and, correlatively, *logos* derives from *nous*.

**Stoics**

The Stoic idea of *logos* perhaps approximates most closely the popular idea of *logos* as a divine reason which orders the universe and provides a pattern for human reason. According to this view the *logos* imbues and guides all of nature from inanimate objects and the simplest life forms to the most complex, the highest instantiation in nature being human reason, which nevertheless always remains an inferior derivative of the divine reason. However, even as an inferior derivative of divine reason it provides humanity with a genesis for the project of understanding the world and the meaning of the world. Truth, on this view, becomes a matter of achieving a progressively more accurate reflection of the infinite divine *logos*, which orders the universe and structures its morals, in the finite capacities of human *logos*. The appeal this theory had for early Christian thought is understandable,

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[116]In Cornford's comparison of Empedocles and Aristotle on the soul he interprets Aristotle's use of λογος as proportion. This provides an interesting example of how the range of ways in which λογος is used shows the interconnectedness of apparently heterogenous concepts. *Religion to Philosophy*, 235f.

especially when the Stoics cast this universal principle in triadic terms of its being, in material terms, *pneuma* (spirit); in functional terms, *logos* (word or reason); and in terms of valuation, *theos* (god). The theological resonance of the universal *logos* principle articulated in this way is impossible to miss. There are remarkable and explicit affinities to the theology of the Trinity as developed in the early church and canonized in church creeds.

## *LOGOS* IN GADAMER

Gadamer explored the history of thought in regard to *logos* and language, beginning with an exegesis of Plato's *Cratylus*. He pointed out certain fundamental flaws in early Greek thought which seemed to him to skew the whole history of philosophy in regard to the relation between language and the things represented in language and, after critiquing this history, he proposed a way of thinking about language and *logos* which fundamentally altered this relation. Gadamer found the precedent for his way of conceptualizing the relation between language and the things brought into being in language in the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

### Language and *Logos*

The relation of language and *logos* in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is an interesting and fruitful study as it provides a new way of thinking about the *logos* as a provisional and limited or finite perspective which can be true without necessarily being infinite and exhaustive. When the highest expression of the *logos* is thought in terms of the rigorous method of *episteme* elucidated earlier,[117] then it follows that given a veridical origin, an accurate understanding of the entire universe could follow. This kind of a handle on reality would then be a powerful tool for understanding and knowing everything, and it would accordingly grant the one who wields it practically unlimited authority. However, this

[117]See above, chapter 1.

assumes too much because it ignores the original influences which orient one's primordial understanding, as shown in the case of traditions, as one example of originary orientation. Given these fundamental biases it is evident that every understanding is an understanding with a particular orientation, and since it is not a view from nowhere, it is only a partial understanding. This partial understanding may well be adequate without being comprehensive. This is where Gadamer's concept of *logos* is a significant departure from traditional ideas of *logos* which hold that truth is only possible in proportion to the accuracy with which a finite understanding of *logos* reflects the infinite *logos*. On my reading of Gadamer, an understanding may be authentically true without being entirely comprehensive. For Gadamer, language is another of the primordial influences which shapes our understanding of the world prior to our appropriation, analytic or otherwise, of that world. As noted earlier, the interrelation of *logos* and language makes it impossible to understand Gadamer's use of *logos* without considering the role of language in his thought. In what follows I will work at an understanding of both in conjunction.

***Logos and onoma***

Gadamer began his elucidation of language and *logos* by recalling that in earlier times the name or word was so closely tied with the thing named that, if the word was not actually a replicative substitute for the thing named, it certainly was a part of the thing named. In fact, *onoma* (word) means name and so every word is a name for something. Given this extremely close-knit connection of word and thing, it could be said that words *belong* to what they name. For Gadamer, it was the insight that a word is *only* a name, that it is not in fact part and parcel with the thing named, that provided the genesis for Greek philosophy (TM 405). With this recognition that a word was not a

replicative substitute for the thing came the realization that words could only substitute because of – and as – a lack of the presence of the thing itself.[118]

This distance between word and thing quickly led to the question of the truthfulness of the word. When the word is only a substitute in place of a lack rather than a substitute which stands as a replica of the thing substituted then the adequacy of the word to accurately represent the thing becomes a question, and the truthfulness of the word becomes a concern.[119] The problem of this relationship of word and thing is the impetus for the Socratic dialogue in *Cratylus*. The adequacy of the word to the thing is neither strictly dependent on the suitability of the word to represent the thing, nor is it arbitrarily determined by convention, whether that be the convention of the people who use the language or the fiat of the gods. There is something about language that precedes and escapes the strictures of both these theories, and this is significant to Gadamer's theory of the relation of language and *logos*.

Gadamer's self-confessed nontraditional reading of Plato's reason for raising this problematic was that Plato's program was an attempt to throw into question the capacity of language to contain truth (*TM* 406f). Plato showed that words are separate from things, that they are only signposts pointing to things, and that the truth of the thing can only be known from the thing itself. Words cannot open up the way to truth and their adequacy to represent the thing can only be known from the knowledge of the thing itself. This does not mean that Plato wanted to suggest that we can have

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[118]On the other hand, we have Derrida's insistence that presence in the word is one of the fundamental premature assumptions of the western tradition. See his *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 6ff. However, it is important to distinguish here the presence of the idea in the word (Derrida's concern), from the presence of the thing in the context of the word (the concern of the Greeks).

[119]Derrida is not so sure that this is a valid move. He suggests that we do far more making of the truth in our language than merely reflecting truth. Ibid., p. 25.

knowledge of the thing without words, simply that words are not adequate for authentic knowledge of the thing, and that knowledge of the thing in some sense bypasses the word.

Gadamer gave qualified agreement to this idea, but for him this proved an inadequate conception of the relation of words to things. Gadamer understood Plato to separate language from the thing and from thought. In the *Seventh Letter* Plato regarded language as an external and ambiguous element, as external expressions of internal thought about the thing itself. The internal dialogue, the pure thought of ideas, in its ideal form superceded language, but it became language when it was enunciated in speech (*logos*). This is where Gadamer finds fault with Plato, insisting that thought is also thoroughly linguistic (*TM* 407). For Gadamer, this problem arises from Plato's theory of the ideal forms, forms of which we only see derivative instantiations. Thought and speech, cast in terms of these ideal forms, demands that thought, as the ideals which are mirrored in speech or language (*logos*), transcend language.

For Gadamer, this a major flaw in Plato's philosophy of language. Indeed, this is an idea which Heidegger emphasized and which Gadamer whole-heartedly endorsed: that we are never in a pre-linguistic state in which we reach for language as a tool to use in a specific situation (*BT* §34, *TM* 403ff.). For Gadamer language is not an instrument, or a tool, which people use to accomplish a purpose and, having achieved a said purpose, lay the instrument aside until such time as it became necessary to again pick up the tool for some further purpose. "Language is not one of the means by which consciousness is mediated with the world." (*PH* 62). We do not use language as the tool of choice for the purposes of the moment to make sense out of a world which comes to us in a pre-linguistic state because there is no pre-linguistic state; our every perception and experience are always already thoroughly embedded in language. "(W)e never find ourselves as consciousness over against

the world and, as it were, grasp after a tool of understanding in a wordless condition." (*PH* 62). Everything that we know, we know only by means of a linguistic understanding and our language, therefore, necessarily affects what we can know and how we know it. "Linguistic" here should not be understood as limited to natural or spoken language. Rather, the essence of language is to make sense of things and our world by bringing everything into a relation to other things and to us, an order which makes things understandable and meaningful to us. This relationality is also a key function of *logos* for Gadamer. The language we speak does, however, inevitably influence the way in which we order our world. "The language one masters is such that one lives within it, that is, "knows" what one wishes to communicate in no other way than in linguistic form" (*PH* 87).

However, this appears to be Plato's approach. For Plato, language is indeed a tool for the expression of inner thoughts, and a copy of the things themselves. As such words are to be judged on the basis of their correctness, a judgement which necessarily entails a prior and direct knowledge of the thing in itself. Such a knowledge of the thing itself which circumvents language is not possible in Gadamer's philosophy, because for Gadamer, following Heidegger, "Being that can be understood is language" (*TM* 474).[120] However, given Plato's insistence on a gap between the word (*onoma* and *rhema*) and the thing itself, a gap which is bridged in the inner *dialektike*, both of the aforementioned theories of the ground of the meaning of words is thrown into a new light and it now becomes evident that these theories have been insufficiently investigated. The question of the correctness of words must now be asked in a whole new way. It is not a question of having a word which merely reflects the thing itself, as the rolling 'r' reflects the action of running, nor is it a matter of simply giving a

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[120]See also Heidegger, "The Way to Language" in *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed., (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), and "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, trans., (San Fransisco: Harper & Row, 1971).

name to a thing arbitrarily, as by fiat of gods or men. Gadamer wanted to investigate the relation between language and things at a much more primordial level.

The conventionalist theory ultimately severely limits concern for the correctness of the word, for if meanings are merely assigned by convention there is no room for questions of fittingness until after the implementation of such conventions, and even then the question of fittingness must be asked on the basis of the convention first rather than the fittingness of the word to the thing itself. Socrates refutes the conventionalist theory on this basis by showing that *logos* (speech) can be true or false, which in turn means that *onomata* (words) can be true or false as well. However, this throws the conventionalist theory into question because if there are grounds on which to cast doubt on the correctness of words, then there must be a certain requirement for the word to reflect knowledge of the thing itself.

Conversely, the theory that words are determined by the nature of the thing itself, and the adequacy of the word to reflect the reality of the thing, is undermined by showing that there are degrees of correctness in the adequacy of the word to reflect the thing. If a word is not perfect in its reflection of the thing but it does portray some aspect of the thing adequately for the purpose of a specific discussion, then its use is justified in spite of its shortcoming. Therefore, participation in the nature of the thing is at best a relative standard for determining the correctness of a word. However, when Socrates turns to words for numbers the correspondence theory fails completely because numbers are not reflected in the words used to name them. Furthermore they could not be so reflected because they have no nature apart from numeric value which defies encapsulation in sounds other than sequences which replicate the number concerned. Numbers, then are the epitome of relationality (*TM* 412). They are defined solely by their relation to other numbers. When one counts

five stones the focus is explicitly on the stones themselves as a definable, quantifiable repetition of entities. The number 'five' itself could have no meaning in itself without 'four' and 'six' and all the other numbers in relation to which 'five' is 'five'. 'Five' is quantifiable as 'five' only because it follows 'four' and precedes 'six' in the order of quantities.

Thus neither correspondence nor convention adequately explains the logic of language. Plato's position seems to be that in general the similarity principle holds, but that it must be interpreted and applied with a good deal of flexibility, and it can in any case not account for all language. Thus, for Plato, the convention theory is a useful supplement to cover some of the gaps left by the similarity principle.

**Beyond *mimema* and *deloma***

The discussion to this point has centred around the finding and giving of names and this, for Gadamer, is a fundamental misdirection of the whole discussion. Framed in these terms the discussion remains at the level of considering language as if it were a tool. Granted, there is an understanding that the word is not only a copy of the thing but that the word presents the thing. However, Gadamer questioned the adequacy of ***mimema*** (representation) and *deloma* (presentation) as concepts within which to frame the discussion of language (*TM* 410f).

For Gadamer, the representing that occurs in a word naming a thing is much too intimate a relationship to be portrayed by the concepts of an original and a copy. Representation is in fact a portrayal of something different than the thing which portrays; a word normally presents a thing which is not only a word, but this relationship is not that of a copy and an original. The word provides an opportunity for reflection on the thing itself, a reflection which must occur across the gap between the word and that which it names. However every word has a meaning, it names something, or else

it is just noise and not a word. Therefore every word is correct and fittingness is only a question of the relationship of a word to a thing in a specific situation. Thus the fittingness demanded of a word is not adequately captured by the idea of correctness. The very fact that a word can be recognized as being incorrect for a situation in fact reveals that the word itself has its own correctness but its use in the situation is not correct. There could be no determination of the use of a word being incorrect if there was not an understanding of the word having a specific reference to a thing in which the word is correct. In a situation where the use of a word is not fitting it is the *application* of the word which is incorrect, and not the word itself. Speaking of the correctness of a word becomes rather meaningless. This allowed Gadamer to speak about the *absolute perfection of the word* (*TM* 410). When you hear "apple" you immediately think of an apple, and if what you are offered is an orange you recognize that the word was used incorrectly. The word conveys its meaning with no perceptible relation, and therefore the categories of original and copy are simply not appropriate in the discussion of words and language. The absolute perfection of the word is not a reference to the capacity of the word to bring the thing as it is into view, but the immediate connection of the word to the thing in the use of the word.

In *Cratylus* Socrates uses the example of pictures and words to indicate the distinction of correctness and truth. When considering a man and a woman, the terms for man and woman, and a picture of a man and a picture of a woman, Socrates argues that relating the picture of a man to the person who is a man is correct but this relation is not properly true, whereas to say that the male person is a man is both correct and true. This is an important distinction for Gadamer because it opens the way to understand that a word is not only correct but true because of its "perfect intellectuality" (TM 411) – because the word's relation to its meaning is different from the relation

of the picture to its meaning. The picture includes many details which may or may not perfectly portray the man to whom it is said to refer. Details like the clothes worn at the time, the colour of hair or skin, or the figures involved, are not sufficient to destroy the correctness of the picture's relation to the man rather than the woman. However the name "man" itself means man and its being related to the man is not only correct but also true because of the meaning of the word itself. The picture is a copy of the original and may be more or less correct in the details of its portrayal of the man and yet adequately represent the man as a male as opposed to a woman. Thus the word is correct and true because it is a concept. Thus all words are true because they mean what they mean and using words incorrectly does not call the truth of the word itself into question, but it calls the use of the word into question.

For Gadamer this is very significant because it indicates that the meaning of a word is not identical with the thing the word refers to and, furthermore, that the intentional act in naming things is not identical with the actual naming function of speech. What one means to say with a word is not necessarily what one does say with that word. It is this excessive capacity of speech (*logos*) to go beyond what is intended which gives speech its capacity to communicate truth (*TM* 411). If a word always meant exactly what the speaker intended it to mean and nothing else than one could not understand another's words unless one knew in advance what the speaker intended to say. It is because of the relative permanence of the referent function of a word which gives a word the ability to convey truth. However, the permanence of the word is always relative, and hence the real locus of truth in language is not in individual words themselves, but in the relation of words (to each other

and to the objects of knowledge) and the way in which words are used.[121] Gadamer suggests that the Sophist's misuse of speech depended on their inability to recognize that it is language itself which has the capacity to convey truth. To the extent that the Sophists were radical relativists who believed that whatever truth there might be was unknowable to humans, and found their justification to push their own agendas as far as their rhetorical skills carried them in this relativism, they could not have considered that in language itself truth was communicated. Such considerations would have cut the ground out from under their own feet and presented a self-refuting argument of sorts against their own use of language.

Gadamer made some very careful distinctions in the relation of language to truth, and the relation of language to things, and it is at this juncture that we begin to get an idea of how linguistic Gadamer's conception of *logos* really is. It is through *logos* (speech and discourse) that a thing is presented but it is crucial to distinguish the signifying character of words from the truth conveying capacity of speech (*TM* 411). Without this distinction it could appear that words provide an understanding of the thing which is equivalent to the thing itself. In that case language could be an absolute path to truth. Knowledge could then be analysed in its component parts in the individual phrases, words, and, said Socrates, even the individual letters of the words (*Cratylus* 430ff). However, this conclusion is obviously pushing the similarity principle too far and even Socrates

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[121]Madison, BSF, p. 130. "No reading, however, is context-free, and it is precisely this phenomenological fact that there is always a context that serves to anchor the text in our actual living and to allow it to have a decidable meaning." Although this statement is intended to address the issue of decidability of meaning, which is not precisely the point of this discussion, it does emphasize the way in which words have meaning, not in themselves per se, but in their context, in their relation to the other words, together with which they are employed, and the situations in which those words are used. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) p. 268-69.

recognized this, pushing the argument so far simply in order to refute the idea that the similarity principle suffices as a theory of language. This is not the way in which truth is to be found in language. When Gadamer said that truth is conveyed in language his point was that truth resides in *logos* – discourse and speech (*TM411*). By this he meant that truth is found in the whole of relations of things, in intending a unitary meaning, not only in individual words and, ultimately, "not even in a language's entire stock of words" (*TM* 411). Truth is to be found not in individual words, nor in individual sentences, nor in individual books, and not even in individual languages in isolation. Truth is contained in the relational ordering of all things in unified discourse, understood in the context of the discourse in its relation to all other discourse, discourse not being limited to verbal discourse. The usage of words is *logos*, and it is the *usage* of the word, its association with something, which may be true or false, not the word itself, although the word appears to be false when it is used (associated) incorrectly. This is why, as noted earlier, a word which has a meaning is always true, though its incorrect use makes it appear false. In fact it is the *logos*, the association of the word with something to which it is not fitting, that is false (*TM* 412). If the word itself can be appear to be false then it must have an association in which it is true, else it could not appear false. On the other hand, in the case of a word which has no meaning, it makes no sense to speak of its truth or falsity. *Logos* as speech is part of the ordering of our world, but as speech it is also always only a part of the ordering, both for ourselves and for the universal ordering of the world. This means both that we order our world in ways which go beyond speech, and that any one ordering of the world is not an exhaustive ordering, because it is an ordering from a particular perspective and it is a finite ordering. It may be a true ordering but it can never be infinite; it can never order our entire world in all the possible

variations of relations which can be made. This is a function of the finitude of humanity and is not a deficiency, it is simply the nature of human being.

However, there is more to *logos* than relational ordering as correspondence of the word with the thing. In this relational ordering *logos* always says more about the thing than what it says about the thing itself. It cannot, in the context of relational ordering, say anything about a thing itself because relational ordering always places the thing itself in a context of relationships. This is why, when words alone are not true or false, *logos* is.

> For precisely this reason, it is not the word (*onoma*) but the *logos* that is the bearer of truth (and also error). From this it necessarily follows that being expressed, and thus being bound to language, is quite secondary to the system of relations within which *logos* articulates and interprets the thing. We see that it is *not word but the number* that is the real paradigm of the noetic: number, whose name is obviously pure convention and whose "exactitude" consists in the fact that every number is defined by its place in the series, so that it is a pure structure of intelligibility, an *ens rationis*, not in the weak sense of a being-validity, but in the strong sense of perfect rationality. (*TM* 412)

Gadamer places the expression of the thing in language subsequent to its orientation in relations by the *logos*. Thus words are always already situated in relations and meaning, while numbers, because they (or, rather, the words for numbers) refer not to things, but to ideas, are an example of pure rationality. Pure rationality in this case is patently not rationality untainted by human experience, an idea which Gadamer discredited earlier in *Truth and Method* (*TM* 271-284). Rather, it refers to the fact that numbers cannot be or seen or touched, they are poetic – they are concepts formulated in the mind. It is always things that are seen in terms of numbers, it is never the numbers themselves that are seen. On this basis Gadamer will suggest that while neither similarity nor convention adequately address the foundations of language, both are operative in language, but in the end even the combination of these theories are not adequate to describe the function of language. If *logos* is the

sphere of the noetic in associations, then words become mere signs for what is known before the sign, and the question of the adequation of the word to the thing is a valid query. This approach was employed in the discussion of *Cratylus*, in which the attempt was made to begin with the thing in order to ascertain how the word can appropriately convey the thing into language. The conclusion was that words are signs assigned to represent things based on a prior knowledge of the things themselves.

Now, however, we start with the sign (word) and ask how it conveys the meaning of the thing, and what it conveys along with the thing. If words are signs, how do they point to the things? The point of inquiry no longer focusses on the suitability of the word to the thing, but it asks the question of how the word reveals the thing. The nature of a sign is to point away from itself to the thing it is a sign for. In order for the directional value of a sign to be realized the sign must be "foregrounded from the context" (TM 412) – ie., it must be noticed – but it cannot remain the focus of attention. To the extent that it remains the focus of attention it fails to be a sign pointing to an other and its directional purpose fails. The sign must disappear into its meaning. However in disappearing into its meaning the existence of the sign is not extinguished but realized for its purpose and in its full potential. The sign has its own being, but its own being is only properly realized in its relation to the thing to which it points. "The difference between what it is and what it means is absolute" (*TM* 412). Thus what the sign is and what it means are not identical. The sign is itself, but the sign never means itself. However, it is also vital to recall that the sign does not have its own meaning in itself apart from the subject. It is after all the subject who takes it as a sign (*TM* 413). Hence, the sign carries a meaning in itself, but this meaning is inane if it is not recognized as a sign with a meaning, or if the meaning of the sign is not recognized. The word as a copy does have a content of its own in which

the copy is an image of the thing to which the copy is intended to point. Hence the word as a copy, or a representation of the thing, is susceptible to a criterion which evaluates the accuracy of its reflection of the thing (*TM* 415).

The conclusion of *Cratylus* that words are not images but signs is, in Gadamer's words, "an epoch-making decision" (*TM* 414). Now the ideal investigation of the being of things is to be without names because if names are only signs then there is no truth of the thing itself to be found in names for the things themselves. The word has become totally removed from the thing to which it refers. There is a belief that thought is prior to, and can be wholly removed from words, operating in the realm of pure ideas. This gives rise to theories of universal languages and technical languages in which the goal is to develop a "pure" language for use in the investigation of the things themselves. This is necessary because, while there is no truth to be found in the names for things, in words, it is impossible to carry out an investigation of the things without recourse to language. Therefore connotations which inevitably accrue to words in the course of human use of language are carefully excised by means of precise definitions in an attempt to minimize, if not eradicate, the polluting effect of language. This is the ideal of mathematical language and logic which would consider ambiguous variation of meaning in words an unfortunate pollution of language, in spite of the fact that it is this very variability which gives the poetic word its force. Gadamer called this sterilizing use of technical terms "violence against language" (*TM* 415). That this is not the normal course of language is indicated by the way in which the meaning of words tends to remain fluid and the general use of technical terms does not stay within the confines of its precisely delimited boundaries. In fact

Humboldt cited this flexibility of terminology in ordinary language as a necessary dynamic of development.[122]

Gadamer rightly questioned this valorization of mathematical language. "It is a universal truth that human imperfection precludes adequate knowledge a priori, and that experience is indispensable" (*TM* 416). Indeed this question is also rooted in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* (II.19) where he shows that *episteme* (mathematical knowledge) rests on intuition and experience. Knowledge that has not been nuanced by human experience is blind because there has been nothing to see. Symbolic knowledge only indicates that there is something to be known, but in experiential human terms nothing has been given to the human to know as long as the proffered knowledge remains purely symbolic. Thus the ideal of a universal language, which depends on a universal reason, by which things and the world can be known, is not an ideal which fits with the human experience.

It becomes clear that language is not an ideal system of symbols which denote the things themselves, but neither are words copies of objects. Although both ideas can be seen in language there is something more that Gadamer allowed was "hard to grasp" (*TM* 416). He calls the connection of the word to the thing "mysterious," and he will later turn to the Incarnation as an example which helps explicate the function of words in the revelation of truth. Onomatopoeia is an example of the copy function of words which is widely recognized but a vast majority of words are not so readily seen to be copies of the things which they name and yet no one argues that they are therefore not appropriate for the thing. However, when words are seen as fundamentally divorced from the things it can quickly lead to abstraction which results in "the rational construction of an

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[122]Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, George C. Buck and Frithof A. Raven, trans., (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971) § 9.

artificial language" (*TM* 417). This stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what language and words really are, and it is connected with the presupposition that there is system of truths to which a linguistic system has application. "Language and thinking about things are so bound together that it is an abstraction to conceive of the system of truths as a pre-given system of possibilities of being for which the signifying subject selects corresponding signs" (*TM* 417). Words are not pre-given tools which are picked up and used to explain things, nor are they constructed in order to explain things. The word is already meaningful but not because it precedes experience. In fact, experience itself seeks and finds the right word to express itself, though this seeking and finding the right word is neither a mere copying nor an arbitrary construction of the right word. The very fact that a word is sought indicates again that the word has meaning and the right word must be found, and yet the word is not a pre-given tool because only in the experience does the word come into its own; only in the experience is the word understood for what it is.

Gadamer returned Aristotle's example of the army in flight, originally a model for the formation of concepts, as a model for how words are formulated (*PA* II.19). In a later paper Gadamer returned to Aristotle to inquire about the process of language acquisition and the closely related concept of how we achieve an understanding of our world. "It is Aristotle once again who gives us the most extensive description of the process in which one learns to speak. What Aristotle means to describe is not learning to speak, but rather, thinking, that is, acquiring universal concepts." (*PH* 63). Aristotle's definition of language acquisition necessarily included an explication of the process involved in the development of universals because this process is a fundamental step in language acquisition. We know what a word means when we know how to use it but we cannot know how to use it unless we know what it means. This led Aristotle to his next question: "Exactly

how can this knowledge of the universal come about?" (*PA* II.19, *PH* 63). This question is probed by posing an explanatory question of how it is that an army in flight comes to take a stand again. It is not clear that the army takes its stand again when the first soldier stops, turns, and resumes the fight, nor is it clear that it resumes its stand with the second soldier or the third soldier who takes a stand. Neither could it be said that the army only regains its stand with the last soldier who stops his flight to resume the fight. However, it is clear that at some point in this process the army does, once again, take its stand. Gadamer, after Aristotle, sees the process of arriving at universals or, in the case of languages, the development of words, in the same way. In Gadamer's words: "It is precisely this way with the knowledge of the universal, because this is really the same as its entrance into language." (*PH* 64). One does not come to universals on the basis of any specific occurrence or any specific number of repetitions of an occurrence, but in the course of the observation of similarities of occurrences one does eventually formulate a concept of a universal with respect to the phenomena in question. In a similar sense one begins to use words and develops an understanding of words as one learns to understand those words in the context of an ever changing spectrum of experiences. The understanding of words and experiences go hand-in-hand. For Gadamer, "the *logos* is bound up with the language" (*TM* 417).[123] One's understanding and projection of the *logos* is thoroughly linguistic, not only in the primordial linguistic sense of signific relations, but also by virtue of the impact that one's natural language has on one's reading of experience.[124]

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[123]See also *PH*, p. 172. "All our ways of thinking are dependent upon the universality of language."

[124]Gadamer saw a parallel to the linguistic embeddeness of knowledge in Husserl's theory of apperception. This theory held that in every perception which recognized that which was confronting one, there was included the apperception of the hidden side of what was perceived, which could never be observed. For example, one can never see the other side of a cup because as one circles the cup,

However, this understanding of the interrelation of word and thing is not what the early Greek philosophers had in mind, according to Gadamer. His reading of that time period is that there was an attempt to minimize the limitations and distractions of language by engaging in an investigation of the things in themselves outside of the strictures of language. This was more or less an inevitable result of the view taken that words had no direct relation to things, but were merely signs, in spite of whatever role *mimesis* and onomatopoeia may have had in the development of language (*TM* 417). In Gadamer's view, this was a distraction from the real nature of language, which was much more closely tied to conceptualizations of things because of the role of language in thought. Language is so fundamental to our being in the world that its impact on our understanding of our world and everything related to our world cannot properly be so easily ignored, in spite of a long history of attempting just that. "Thus from early on, the Greeks philosophers fought against the *onoma* as the source of seduction and confusion of thought, and instead embraced the ideality that is constantly created in language" (*TM* 418). The Greek notion at this time was that the *eidos* determined the *logos* and so language as a system of signs was to follow the *logos* and ultimately lead the way to truth. This truth eventually was also seen in terms of a conformation to this *logos* which was untainted by human language or experience in its ideal forms, if not in its human expressions. Gadamer read the *Cratylus* as the first step toward this idealization.

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or turns the cup, to see the other side, there always remains an other side which is hidden from view. What is important in this context is that one is always aware of the other side, and in particular, of the hiddenness of the other side. *PH*, 133.

**Language and *Verbum***

Gadamer thought there was a better way to think of language and the relation of words to the things and he saw a superior model for conceiving language in the Incarnation and Augustine's concept of the inner word. For Gadamer, the Incarnation is certainly not to be conceived in dualistic terms and this is the strength of his model. He takes great pains to distinguish the doctrine of the Trinity from the Greek ideas of the soul and body as two entirely different entities. The Greek ideas of embodiment, in which souls can move from body to body in the cycles of death and birth, are not at all what the Incarnation is. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus, who was designated the *Logos* in John's prologue, although it used concepts from Greek philosophy, introduced a whole new dimension into Western thought. Gadamer portrayed this as the event which first introduced into Western thought the appropriate way of thinking about the *logos*. What is significant to Gadamer here is that in the event of the Word become flesh "the *logos* is freed from its spirituality, which means, at the same time, from its cosmic potentiality" (*TM* 419). Now the *logos* is not only a sign or ideality of meaning but it is the thing itself expressed in an event. "For, in contrast to the Greek *logos*, the word is pure event" (*TM* 419). The *logos* is no longer purely noetic, but it is an integral part of real lived experience. The *logos* is an event that falls squarely within in human experience.

The distinctions made by the Stoics between the inner word (*logos endiathetos*) and the outer – or spoken – word (*logos prophikoros*) is cast in a whole new light in the Incarnation because the *logos* now is not merely something that reflects the thing itself or points to the thing itself, it is the thing itself expressed in a new way. Thus when an Anglophone speaks of snow she means that white form of $H_2O$ which falls from the heavens in cold weather. However an Inuit has in excess of fifteen

words which refer to the same material, but they have different words for different qualities of snow.[125] New fallen snow has a particular name, as does snow which is good for sledding, or snow which is good for building a shelter, or snow which has partially melted, and when it refrozen it has a new name, et cetera. These terms are not arbitrary, nor are they fixed by the things themselves, in which case it could be said that the Englishman is in error when he calls all white $H_2O$ snow. The name by which this white stuff is recognized is in part a function of one's linguistic training, but there is much more to these variant names for what is essentially the same material. The function of snow in Inuit life is vastly different from the function of snow in the life of most Anglophones, for whom it is generally little more than a nuisance to be shovelled off of walks and driveways. For the Inuit snow is the stuff of life and that is what prompts the Inuit to recognize it in its many forms. The Inuit needs a certain quality of snow in order to facilitate the erection of shelter from the storm on a hunting excursion, and snow which is optimum for sledding means that his travels will be greatly enhanced. It is due to the elevated role which is played by snow in Inuit life that the Inuit learns to recognize these various qualities, and this recognition becomes second nature which does not require conscious intellectual effort. Hence, the various names which highlight any one of a myriad qualities of snow immediately bring to the mind of the acculturated Inuit the corresponding quality of snow in reference. That which is merely snow to the Anglophone is brought to mind in a new way. At the other extreme, to a drug addict on the street snow has nothing to do with cold or water, it is his term for a fix or a hit; it is how he spells relief. Words express certain aspects of the thing, but these

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[125]Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations*, Fourth Edition (Toronto: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1998) p. 313.

aspects are aspects which are coloured by means of certain human intentions in the service of human interests. Thus words express qualities of interest to various subjects.[126]

Gadamer attached great significance to John's declaration that "In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God" (John 1:1 NASB). This means that what came into being as the Word (*Logos*)always already was the Word. The Incarnation was a new expression of the Deity but the Deity did not become something else in the expression. Though this resonates with the idea everything is always already languaged, it is also a reference to the way in which things are brought to mind in an integral way in the words which belong to these things. It reflects the way in which every word participates in the being of the thing which it names, just as the Inuit word for a particular quality of snow brings to prominence that quality.

However, it also situates the problem of language squarely within inner thought (*TM* 420). Augustine devalued the exterior word in favour of an inner word (***verbum***) which was a reflection of the Divine word. Inner thought gave rise to words which were known to be true because of their conformity to this inner thought which academicians could not throw into doubt.[127] The inner word is never exhausted in its outer expression in natural language, as is evidenced by the variety of languages and the subsequent disparity of words for the same thing. Inasmuch as the same ***verbum***, when enunciated into the various languages, is never enunciated in precisely the same way, the ***verbum*** can never reveal itself in its true being (*TM* 420). Thus the word itself, in participating in the being of the thing named, has no being of its own but its being is to be revealing of the inner word.

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[126]Gadamer insists that this was an integral part of Husserl's maxim "To the things themselves" *PM* 140ff.

[127]Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV, 11.21-22.

"It has its being in its revealing" (*TM* 421), but every revealing is only a partial revealing of the *verbum*.

Even though words always shape the expression of our thinking they do not necessarily impose arbitrary immovable limits on our thinking.

> Even if we remember that our reason preserves its freedom in the face of the bond of our thinking with language, either by inventing and using artificial sign languages or by translating from one language into another – which presume a capacity to arise above bondage to language to attain the sense intended – nevertheless this capacity itself is, as we have seen, linguistic. The "language of reason" is not a special language. (*TM* 421)

The dynamic fluidity of languages indicates this, as does the power of the poetic word. Even though we always express our thoughts with words we find ourselves looking for creative ways to use words in order to give expression to what we think that defies encapsulation in words. However our expression always remains linguistic in that it is an expression of the thing in terms of something other than only the thing itself. Whether we use words, actions, or other non-verbal means of expression, such as artistic expressions like music or painting, the linguistic nature of expression remains virtually unchanged. We give expression to our thoughts by means of signs but the signs are not only signs, they are signs which participate in the things we desire to convey. But what is this inner word? It is not merely the Greek *logos* of inner dialogue.[128]

The distinction between *logos* and *verbum* reflected in this discussion is an important one for Gadamer. The inner word is not a particular language, but it is a thinking which attempts to grasp the whole of the subject matter though its expression of the matter is always limited as the outer word. However, the inner word always has an eye toward expression in the outer word. The inner

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[128]Plato, *Sophist*, 263e.

word is not to remain interior and silent, it is bound for expression. However, the reality of the finiteness of being human is that one is always seeking more of the whole or, to use the metaphor of horizons, one's horizon are always shifting, but by their very nature they remain a limiting factor even as they provide a vital role in understanding as they enable one to situate things within that horizon. This finiteness should be assumed to be neither bad nor good, that just is what it is to be human. The thinking that is *logos* is a dialectic within oneself about the thing in which getting at the whole of the thing in itself, as well as in its web of relations, is always in view. This dialogue, the inner word, is the process of coming to knowledge (*TM* 422ff). Again, this idea of dialectic and the inherent notions of inter-relatedness, and situating things in dialectical relations is a mark of philosophical hermeneutics.

Following Thomas Aquinas, Gadamer likens the genesis of the word to that of an outward flow as water flows from a spring (*TM* 423). Nothing is lost in this outward flow of the inner word as it moves from an inner dialogue to expression in the outer word, there is always an excess which remains even after the word has revealed the inner word. Neither is the thing depleted, much less exhausted, by giving rise to the word which participates in the being of the thing. This model also shows how the word participates in the inner word without being its identical expression. The word is that which brings the inner word, or thoughts, into presence and allows this inner word to be known and appropriated. However, the outer word as the *telos* and expression of the inner word, which is the process of knowledge, is not subsequent to the completion of the inner word and knowledge. Rather, "it is the act of knowledge itself" (*TM* 424).

Although Gadamer saw in the doctrine of the Trinity something which put the dynamic of language in a new light, he did not want to use this theology as a pattern or template for

understanding language. For him, the theology of the Trinity must remain incomprehensible, and so it is the dissimilarities of the Trinity and language which interest him as elucidations of the nature of language (*TM* 424). There are three distinctions that Aquinas noted which Gadamer followed.

The first is that the human word is a potentiality before it is actualized. In Christian theology the *Logos* was always the *Logos*, was always God. However, the human word, which is the expression of the *logos*, is a development that has an origin in the dialectical thought processes. However, the mind does not originate the word as an act of the will, rather, the thought processes which think the thing through to an understanding result in the perfect word which is formed only in thought (*TM* 425). Nothing is added or subtracted to these thought processes in the creation of the word, and when the word is formed the inner thought is present in the word. Hence the word is not a tool. Rather, the word is like a mirror in which the whole of the thing is seen, and only the thing is seen. This word is the thing in the mind, not a word in any natural language, and should not be confused with the idea of full-presence in thought or speech.[129]

Secondly, the human word, as function of finitude, is always incomplete. Gadamer does not want to say that the word itself is deficient, but that the finitude of the human mind does not allow a complete grasp of the thing so that, while the word is sufficient to the portrayal of the thinking of the mind, the finitude of the mind requires the plenitude of words for the presencing of the thing in its multifarious dimensions. In fact, Gadamer asserts that the human mind cannot be fully present to

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[129]In *Dialogue and Deconstruction* Gadamer reiterated his belief that the point at which he and Derrida diverge is at the fundamental level of what language is. Gadamer thinks the theory which sees language as signs starts too late and this becomes evident here. For Gadamer the word is not a sign but "has the ontological character of an event." See *DD* 120f., *TM* 422.

itself in what it knows, hence the profusion of words is not due to remediable deficiency of the word, but the finitude of the mind.

Thirdly, and closely related to the previous point, the essential incompleteness of human thinking on every thing opens the way to the true infinity of the human mind, not as a grand mastermind, but in its ability to constantly surpass itself and develop ever new ways of thinking about the thing, and new ways of using words to open up the nuanced dimensions of the thing. The infinity of the mind refers to the infinity of ways in which to obtain an additional partial understanding of the thing, a capacity which is required due to the finite mind's inability to comprehensively understand the thing with a view from nowhere.

Gadamer draws two important lessons for hermeneutics from his study of the inner word. It is particularly important to realize that whatever the mental processes involved in the dialectic of the thing and the word, the inner mental word is not created by a reflective act of the mind (*TM* 426). The inner word is what enables reflexive thought about the thing but the word comes into being as an expression of the thing itself, and not as the expression of the mind. The word reflects not the mind but the thing itself. The word constitutes the full expression of the thing in the mind, its limitation in exhausting the thing being, as noted earlier, not the limitation of the word, but the limitation of the finite mind. Indeed, the word, as the ground for thought about the thing, is like a light which first makes observation possible.

The uniqueness of the relation of the word to the thing, and the multiplicity of words for the inner word, also indicates that the dialectic of unity and multiplicity is a fundamental condition of the nature of the word and language. The inner word which is expressed in so many different outer words is in the nature of language. No one word exhausts the thing, and every linguistic expression

of the thing brings to light new dimensions of the thing, and this is the nature of language. Again, Gadamer saw in Christian theology a correlation in the Incarnation, an absolutely unique expression of God, which is spoken anew into every situation in which the gospel is spoken, and so the singular and absolutely unique expression of the Incarnation becomes a multivocity of expression every time the gospel is told and retold (*TM* 427). Thus the nature of language is not to bring closure to things, but it is to open up the participants in the dialogue to ever new ways of seeing the world and its things.

It is at this point, I think, that Gadamer is most vulnerable to the charge of "closet essentialism."[130] The *logos* here is a matter of unity and multiplicity in a dialectical relationship where each relies on the other to feed and to orient its own function. What is not entirely clear is whether the unity aspect of the dialectic is an absolute unity, or whether the unity is a unity relative to the particular multiplicity to which it relates. The theological language coming from a monotheistic religious perspective could make it difficult to see this as anything other than an absolute unity. However, there are signs in this text that make me think that the unity is relative to the multiplicities, which would bring this text into line with the way I read the rest of *Truth and Method*, which remains an important consideration. Gadamer has made fairly extensive use of the doctrine of the Trinity in this discussion of *verbum*, and he includes a line here which I read as a strong indicator of a unity

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[130]I borrow this terminology from Caputo who employed it in his criticism of Gadamer's view of tradition as the source of his closet essentialism. On my reading of Gadamer tradition does not fit the bill for this criticism because of the way in which Gadamer nuances the appropriation of tradition (See above, chapter two). On the model of the hermeneutic circle, a tradition gives us ground for a genesis, but we are not bound to only being acted upon by tradition, but in every action within tradition we are revitalizing the tradition by our appropriation of it, whether that appropriation of our tradition is negatively or positively implemented. See Caputo's "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism" in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

which is not an absolute unity. "Even the divine Word is not entirely free of the idea of multiplicity" (*TM* 427). This seems to me to be a rather strong indication that the unity is relative to its correlate multiplicities. The unique event of the Incarnation is expressed in a multiplicity of expressions, new every time the story is told again (*TM* 427). From a standpoint of religious pluralism the story of the Incarnation is a unique story in its historical context, but it does not necessarily preclude other stories which are also unique in their own context. In any case, the reality of language and its centrifugal function in Gadamer would emphasize not the closing down of variety, but the openness to other expressions, whether those expressions are ultimately seen as a heterogenous expression of a single inner word, or whether they are seen as expressions of an other inner word.

## *PHRONESIS, LOGOS* AND CONTEXT

Gadamer's exegesis of *logos* and language provides a fruitful way of recontextualizing the relation of language, words, and thought. His insistence on dialogue, which permeates his work, means that we must remain open to the other – the other as a conversation partner or the other which is an object of investigation – not just so we can refute error, but so we too can learn. Furthermore, his intimate connection of *logos* and language at the most basic levels of thought, along with the role of tradition in situating and enabling our quest to understand our world, show that we all start somewhere, and that starting somewhere else, while never an option for us, does give others a perspective which we do well to hear. Their contrasting starting points give them a unique perspective, which means that their understanding of truth will also differ from our own, but the finitude of humanity means that we can have truth without the specification of absolute truth. This allows for disagreement without dictating that those whose views differ from our own are necessarily not true.

At this point the discussion of the first chapter on *phronesis* and the relation of universals to particulars is pertinent. The investigation of *phronesis* showed that the universal determines what is to be pursued in the case of the particular, but what remains to be determined in the particular situation (or by the individual) is how that demand of the universal is to be realized in the particular situation. The investigation of the *logos* in this chapter, correlated with the investigation of tradition in the previous chapter, shows that we cannot develop a "pure method" by which to determine the appropriate application of the universal to the particular. What is required in every situation is an openness to new ways of heeding the call of the universal in the particular situation in order to be true to both. In a similar way the thing in the mind, the inner word, which seeks expression in the outer word, the spoken word, is never an expression of the thing itself but it is always an expression of the thing as we see it in its relatedness in our world, as *logos*. This *logos* is impacted by our traditions, our language, and by the universals we perceive in our world, and all of these factors are impacted by this *logos* as well as by each other. The hermeneutic circle has no self-grounding origin for linear progress, it is way of understanding which builds on the inter-relatedness of our world. Not only does every understanding happen within a context, much more, every understanding depends on a context for its generation as well as for its possibility for significance.

# CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

What arises out of this reading of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the interplay of what had previously been considered isolatable factors of existence, bearing significant implications for epistemology. This integration has its roots in Heidegger's analysis of the being-in-the-world that *Da-sein* is. Heidegger problematised the clear distinctions traditionally drawn between being and world, and Gadamer expanded this problematic into the traditional dichotomies of universal and particular (*phronesis*), between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge (tradition), between a world rationally ordered (as it really is in itself) and the world of our lived experience (*logos*). Gadamer not only recognized the reality and inescapability of this lived-in nature of our experience of our world, he asserted in the strongest possible terms that this was authentic knowledge, and that the objectivist aspirations of the modernist Cartesian ego impoverished the Western tradition.

The foundation for Gadamer's project was laid in Heidegger's seminars, and Gadamer's testimony is that the most important thing he learned from Heidegger was the idea of Aristotelian *phronesis*. The indispensability of knowledge of the particular to a proper understanding of the universal underwrites much of the dynamic of Gadamer's thought as it relates to the impact of tradition, and to the ordering of our world, the *logos*. The universalizing impact of the universal is mitigated by the insistence that an authentic understanding of what the universal calls for can only be realized within the context of the particular situation. Justice is never properly understood as an idea. Justice is not properly understood until it is concretized in a particular situation which cries out for

justice to be done. A tradition is not properly understood until its implications in the present are perceived. A tradition is not properly understood as something which comes from the past to influence us in the present, but a tradition is best understood as a vital enabling sense of what we are about in the here and now, but always in continuity with our past and our future. The ordering of our world is likewise an ordering which is not isolated from our own selves, but neither should this ordering be a narcissistic ordering which assumes that we are the measure of all things. We understand our world when we understand ourselves, and we understand ourselves when we realize that we are made by – as well as makers of – our world. We orient ourselves and our world linguistically as our language shapes us, and the sense we make of our world is the sense we make of ourselves. The enlightenment project to know the things themselves is revealed as an impossible dream but the investigation of things is not by any means entirely discounted. Our investigation of things becomes part of the process of understanding our world, and ourselves, but this investigation is chastened by the knowledge that we are part of this world, and nothing in the world can exist in splendid isolation. Such an isolating objective investigation is always programmatic and derivative of the thing. Genuine knowledge requires a context, and a recognition of context, while realizing that our perceived context is always a specific context, a finite point of view. However, this finite point of view is genuine knowledge. It is a knowledge in context, in our own context, the context of primary consequence to each one of us. This is the knowledge that matters.

> *But I will stop here. The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word. (TM 579)*

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