

# HANS-GEORG GADAMER AND THE ANAMNETIC CHARACTER OF TRUTH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to provide an account of Gadamer's conception of truth. Due to this, I attempt to venture in a path that has not been fully explored. I argue that Gadamer's conception of truth has an anamnestic character for the following reasons: First, Gadamer views truth as an event – a disclosure or uncealment of what is hidden within the being- is part of the structure of understanding without such truth happening will not occur. Second, I will show that Gadamer's view of truth is inseparable from his view of dialectic and understanding as these are necessary conditions of the possibility of conversation primarily characterized by his account on the hermeneutic experience, language, and tradition. Third, by looking at other salient Gadamerian concepts such as the four guiding concepts of humanism, language, understanding, and conversation, the link between truth and anamnesis is fully completed. These concepts are necessary to substantiate and support my view that indeed truth has an anamnestic character. However, I should be clear that my attempt to elucidate the anamnestic character of truth is not tantamount to trying to provide an account of the nature of truth for it is one thing to give an account of the nature of truth and another to simply provide a characterization of it.

The paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss Plato's view of anamnesis and his influence to Gadamer's thought. The second section will be on Gadamer's conception of truth and lastly, the concluding remarks.

*Keywords:* Anamnesis, truth, philosophical hermeneutics, understanding, dialectic, language

## Introduction

This paper attempts to provide an account of Gadamer's conception of truth. There are voluminous works and studies available on this issue at present. But then I would like to think that although accounts on Gadamer's truth are already adequate to understand its conception, I find that experts and scholars of Gadamer alike may have somehow overlook understanding truth in the light of Gadamer's conception of dialectic and understanding.

Due to this, I attempt to venture in a path that has not been fully explored. This, however, does not mean that I claim authority and better understanding of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Mine is a modest attempt with all audacity to shed some light on truth which others may see it remote to Gadamer. That being said, I argue that Gadamer's conception of truth has an anamnestic character for the following reasons:

First, following his great teacher Heidegger but with striking strategic and purposive difference, Gadamer views truth as an event – a disclosure or uncealment of what is hidden in the being. In light of this view, Gadamer indirectly and consciously inflicted his philosophical thought with an important Platonic idea, the so-called doctrine of anamnesis. I will show in the section below why I consider anamnesis as part of the event of truth by

elucidating and tracing the view of Plato on anamnesis. I will also try to sideline Gadamer's understanding of Plato most especially his assimilation of Platonic methodological frames namely - dialogue and dialectic to his hermeneutical thinking.

Secondly, I will show that Gadamer's view of truth is inseparable from his view of dialectic and understanding as these are necessary conditions of the possibility of conversation primarily characterized by his account of the hermeneutic experience, language, and tradition. This leads me, therefore to argue that in conversational dialectic the disclosure of truth or its unconcealment or happening is implicitly anamnestic. It is because anamnesis as an event does not necessarily presuppose that some fossilized ideas or knowledge is pre-existent in the mind that requires activation through reminiscing. But rather, anamnesis should be understood as an informed rational event. Contrary to the traditional view of Platonic anamnesis, I will show that the character of anamnesis as shown by Plato in his works accommodates the thought that anamnesis can be understood as a rational-event devoid of any determinations of pre-determined ideas imprinted in the mind.

Lastly, by looking at other salient Gadamerian concepts such as the four guiding concepts of humanism, language, understanding, and conversation, the link between truth and anamnesis is fully completed. These concepts are necessary to substantiate and support my view that indeed truth has an anamnestic character. However, I should be clear that my attempt to elucidate the anamnestic character of truth is not tantamount to trying to provide an account of the nature of truth for it is one thing to give an account of the nature of truth and another to simply provide a characterization of it.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part will discuss Plato's view of anamnesis and his influence to Gadamer's thought. The second part is on Gadamer's conception of truth and lastly, the concluding remarks.

### **Plato's Anamnesis and Truth**

In the history of philosophy, Plato is one of the most central figures to whom we confer in terms of major philosophical issues like knowledge, metaphysics, ethics, and socio-political philosophy among others. It is customary among philosophers and teachers of philosophy to always return to Plato when epistemological questions such as *Is knowledge innate or not?* is asked. In fact Whitehead once asserts that "European philosophical tradition...consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."<sup>1</sup> Some would consider this observation of Whitehead as an exaggeration but only when it is taken out of its context. What he really meant by this statement is to allude to the "wealth of general ideas scattered"<sup>2</sup> throughout the works of philosophers belonging to this philosophical tradition. In this sense we can take Whitehead's observation with a grain of truth.

Indeed it is difficult to measure the impact and influence of Plato to western philosophy until today. Undoubtedly, Plato has laid the foundation of western philosophical thought through his dramatic dialogues. He was not just a plain or ordinary writer for that matter, he is "one of the most dazzling writers in the Western literary tradition and one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed., David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

penetrating, wide-ranging, and influential authors in the history of philosophy.”<sup>3</sup> We can only imagine how his philosophical thoughts made tremendous changes to many western philosophers across periods. One of them is Gadamer. In one of his writings, Gadamer admits the penetrating and powerful influence of Plato to his thinking. Gadamer, referring to Plato’s dialogues, has this to say: “So I have to say that the dialogues of Plato, even more than the works of the great thinkers of German Idealism, have left their stamp on my thinking. These dialogues are my constant companions, and what a unique company they are!”<sup>4</sup> In his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, the thoughts of Plato effected so much force that one is convinced to think that Gadamer’s hermeneutics cannot be divorced from Platonic philosophy.

One of the most important Platonic concepts that every philosopher would always associate to Plato is the concept of anamnesis or recollection as its English equivalent. Hence, this section will dwell on this issue as I try to establish its connection to Gadamer’s conception of truth. This section will be divided into two sub-sections: a) I will discuss Plato’s view of anamnesis prominent in two of his major dialogues namely: *Meno* and *Phaedo*<sup>5</sup> and, b) I will try to show that there is a link between anamnesis and truth. The linkage is made possible because the account on anamnesis makes a space to characterize truth as anamnetic. The truth, of course that I am referring to here is the one found in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

### *Plato on Anamnesis*

I mentioned above the two major dialogues where we can glean insights on the doctrine of anamnesis, namely: *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Best known scholars and interpreters of Plato always refer to *Meno* when it comes to understanding the notion of anamnesis and only seldom they read other major dialogues such as *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.<sup>6</sup> There might be various reasons for this. One of them is explicitness and centrality of the subject matter of the dialogue. We have seen, for example, that in *Meno* the immediate issues are knowledge and virtue. These are the principal issues of the dialogue. However, Plato, in order to establish the importance of these issues, he has to introduce the doctrine of anamnesis. Hence, the prerequisite of understanding knowledge and virtue is a) to know their origin, and b) to account their possibility, that is, how it is possible to have knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Kraut, “Plato”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Fall 2017 Edition), accessed December 2, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=plato>.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>5</sup> The discussion of these dialogues is heavily based on Ackrill’s interpretation of anamnesis in *Phaedo* in J.L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Vlastos’s anamnesis in *Meno* in Gregory Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, vol. II, ed., Daniel W. Graham (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); Scott’s interpretation of recollection in Dominic Scott, *Plato’s Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kahn’s analysis of recollection in Charles Kahn, “Plato on Recollection”, *A Companion to Plato*, ed., Hugh H. Benson (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 130-143. The choice is deliberate as these all serve the purpose of my study.

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Scott, for instance argues that the *Phaedrus* provides a “useful parallel to the *Meno* as far as the religious aspect of the doctrine is concerned. See Dominic Scott, *Plato’s Meno*, 93.

and virtue. For this reason, *Meno* is the best candidate as the main source of the doctrine of anamnesis. But another major source of the doctrine is *Phaedo* which became the subject matter of Ackrill's analysis.

Generally, anamnesis is understood as the doctrine that accounts for the origin of knowledge or ideas. Here, the doctrine gains philosophical significance in three counts: one, the anamnesis is considered to be the primal cause of the theory of innatism; two, anamnesis precedes the Kantian *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinction of knowledge; three, anamnesis becomes one of the central issues in both epistemology and psychology.<sup>7</sup> However, the first philosophical significance is thought to be controversial and notoriously objectionable. In the words of G.W. Leibniz, Plato's doctrine of anamnesis "is very sound, provided we take it in the right way – cleansing it of the error about pre-existence."<sup>8</sup> Along this line of thought, Kahn, Ackrill, Scott, Vlastos, and the like are one with Leibniz. They argue that anamnesis is not to be understood in the line of pre-existing principle. Vlastos interprets anamnesis as an act that brings out the special character of an *a priori* knowledge. What he means by this is that, for Vlastos, anamnesis or recollection in the *Meno* is "*any enlargement of our knowledge which results from the perception of logical relationships.*"<sup>9</sup> Here, Vlastos tries to show that the activity of recollecting prior knowledge means discovering it 'within oneself'. This does not mean that there is already an available material or fossilized ideas in the mind of the person who does the recollecting. Kahn agrees with Vlastos, however, Kahn considered Vlastos' view too narrow "to cover what is going on in the geometry lesson," (referring to the story of the *Meno*) and further argues that "recollection must mean not only the perception of formal relationships but also the *capacity to make judgments of truth and falsity, or equality and similarity.*"<sup>10</sup> In other words, what Plato meant by it in the *Meno* is simply this: the person, in this context, the slave-boy has the capacity to form logical inference and judgment on its own by understanding the problems issued to him. This act of judgment is what we consider to be within oneself that was conceived through Socrates's questioning. Vlastos thinks, therefore, that had Plato made such claim, "the first question he [Plato] would have to put to himself...is the very one raised by Leibniz," because "to say that we acquire knowledge by recovering knowledge we acquired at some earlier period or periods...is simply to raise all over again the problem how this earlier knowledge itself was gained."<sup>11</sup>

Scott, on the other hand, believes that when we examine the exchange of conversation between the slave boy and Socrates, we find that some questions asked by Socrates contained correct answers in the form of 'such and such is true, is it not?' This kind of shrewdness of Socrates or Plato has been used as an objection. As Scott states, "The objection [to the idea of recollection] is simply that Socrates is feeding the boy the answers."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Ackrill in his analysis of *Phaedo* also arrived at similar observation. On the one hand, the *Meno* shows that the doctrine of anamnesis account has to do with the process of discovering necessary truths. The *Phaedo*, on the other hand, has to do with

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<sup>7</sup> See Charles Kahn, "Plato on Recollection", 119.

<sup>8</sup> G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, XXVI, trans. P.G. Lucas and L. Grint (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, 157. Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Kahn, "Plato on Recollection, 120. Emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup> Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 101.

acquisition of concepts or explaining concept formation. Ackrill uses the English equivalents of anamnesis which are *recalling* and *being reminded of*. In the final analysis, Ackrill shows that understanding these phrases as recollection or reminiscence do not support the claim of pre-existence status of ideas or knowledge. Rather what these phrases try to show is that in the act of judgement or inference one has able to make a correct judgement not because one has it already in the mind but that one has already able to recall or being reminded, consciously or unconsciously, of something that had occurred before.

In other words, what we know about recollection or anamnesis, as suggested by Kahn and company, stands for human rationality “as the distinctively human capacity to comprehend discourse and to make use of sense-perception.” What then is required of the slave-boy, according to Kahn is precisely “to understand Socrates’ questions and to respond by making judgements of equality or inequality on the basis of what he sees.”<sup>13</sup>

What interest this paper is not really on issues or controversies surrounding Plato’s doctrine of anamnesis but rather to show that anamnesis as an activity or event discloses something that we have not yet considered or examined carefully as it should be, that is, the close connection between anamnesis and truth. This can be established by looking at how dialectics works or functions in Plato’s philosophy. Most importantly, on how Plato employed dialogue or conversation as a mode of inquiry. From here, we can already clearly see the connection of anamnesis or recollection as an act or activity to truth and how truth carries in itself an anamnetic character. In what follows is an attempt to bridge anamnesis and truth. In so doing, I hope that my surgical procedure will be successful.

The first thing that we need to do and/or to know is how we will proceed with the surgery.

First, we have to take into consideration the nature of Platonic dialogues and its functions. One of the main questions here is this: why did Plato use dialogues as his medium to convey his philosophical thought? One obvious reason for is Plato’s deepest admiration toward his teacher Socrates. Plato begins his career as a writer in order to give expression to the philosophy and way of life of Socrates. He regards Socrates, a remarkable man, as a model of wisdom and insight. It is Socrates where Plato found the way how to do philosophy in a manner similar to the method Socrates employed in teaching. It could be thought as well that Plato’s writings are simply a response to the cultural force of his time. But, according to Christopher Rowe, the use of the dialogue as a medium and a strategy to expose Plato’s philosophical thoughts should be understood within Plato’s own understanding of reason and intellectual progress. Plato knows very well the nature of reason and intellectual progress that stating the truth outrightly is not the best way to make the readers think. In this sense, Plato opted to use dialogue akin to the structure of human reasoning or intellectual progress. Rowe says that “we have to work things out for ourselves.”<sup>14</sup>

Dialogue is a form of discussion. It is a reminder, that just like oral exchange, insights come “through discussion with others and not through mere reading.”<sup>15</sup> Kraut explains that “The dialogue form provides a natural way to air challenges the reader might

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<sup>13</sup> Kahn, “Plato on Recollection”, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Rowe, “Interpreting Plato”, in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27.

be expected to make to the theories under discussion; assigning an objection to a speaker is a vivid way of clarifying and defending the views being presented.”<sup>16</sup> But most importantly, according to Rowe, the “Platonic, and Socratic, thinking is extraordinarily *radical* – so radical that, if it were presented to us simply and directly, it would strike us, as no doubt it strikes many readers even when it is spelled out.”<sup>17</sup> But, of course, Plato’s mindset is always philosophical rather than literary. The literary device is simply secondary to the main goal of Plato. What he intends to really do is to present a kind of understanding of philosophical issues in a most subtle but easy way for the reader to grasp with ease the philosophical significance of his dialogues. Aside from the said purposes of the dialogues, we must also consider Plato’s main objective here, i.e., to present his philosophical argumentation. And the best way for him to state or present his philosophical claims and arguments is in a form of a dialogue wherein a real presentation of arguments and counter-arguments take a form of a simulation of an oral exchange of ideas.<sup>18</sup> This I think is the main purpose of why Plato chose writing a dialogue over writing a standard treatise.

Secondly, it is also important to note that truth in the Platonic sense is not a *specie* nor identical with knowledge.<sup>19</sup> In the *Dialogues* we can find at least two important conceptual variants of Platonic truth. In the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*, Plato discusses truth in relation to belief and is thought to be a property of statement or proposition. In other words, insofar as truth is related to belief and belief is a precondition for knowledge, therefore, truth is not just related to knowledge but rather is part of it. However, this is not the case in Plato. Belief, knowledge, and truth have distinct natures.<sup>20</sup> In *Theaetetus* and *Meno* we find there

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Michael Frede’s discussion. Frede notes that “Plato has certain views about the value and status of philosophical theses and philosophical arguments, as a result of which he thinks that the only responsible way to put forth such views and arguments in writing is in the form of a fictional dialogue, more precisely the kind of dramatic dialogue he writes” (202). Michael Frede, “Plato’s Arguments and the Dialogue Form”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy: Methods in Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*, ed. James C. Klagege and Nicholas D. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> In contemporary discussion of knowledge, truth is considered a species of belief while belief is one of the conditions for knowledge or to put it in another way, knowledge is a sort of belief. This is clearly shown in the standard analysis of knowledge i.e., knowledge as a justified true belief. See for instance introductory readings on the theory of knowledge. Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990); Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003); Matthias Steup, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998); Roderick M. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989); Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boulder and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010). All of these materials subscribe to the idea that truth is a species of knowledge. Contrary to this claim, Plato sees truth as an independent entity.

<sup>20</sup> Such distinction is quite transparent when we trace the etymology of the terms: *episteme* for knowledge and *doxa* for belief. Gerson, for example, provides an illuminating discussion on this. He argues that, based on the Standard Analysis of Knowledge, contemporary theory of knowledge considers knowledge as a *specie* of belief or knowledge as related to belief. He in fact charged contemporary epistemologists of misappropriating Plato as the originator of the Standard

that the discussion revolves around the question of *true belief*. But as such is not tantamount to knowledge at all since one can have true belief of something without knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Two, in the account of his allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, we find that truth is no longer simply propositional but rather non-linguistic, extramental entity such as the forms or ideas.<sup>22</sup> This notion of truth is central to Heidegger's critique of Plato.<sup>23</sup> But this is not the main issue of this paper. Rather what I want to show here is simply the idea that these are just among the differing notions of truth that so far can be accounted by this paper. There may be voluminous account of notions of truth coming from different camps. However, this paper subscribes to a different view that I consider a 'reconciliatory' view of truth. What this view of truth tries to solve is the tension between the two notions of truth as discussed above. I think there is a way to reconcile the two competing notions and this is to consider the idea of anamnesis. Anamnesis provides the bridge to close the gap between these two notions of truth. In what sense, therefore, does anamnesis become an answer? If we consider truth as anamnestic, the gap disappears. But how? It is because truth in this reconciliatory view allows both notions (propositional and eventual) to be true and therefore a way out from the tension. As I mentioned above, to justify truth as anamnestic, we need not to go farther from Plato because the *Dialogues* already provide us an answer. I would like to proceed by advancing two important theses to close my surgical procedure of the issue.

The first thesis is that Plato's use of dialectic<sup>24</sup> in a form of discussion, interrogation, conversation, or dialogue reveals an important process in the activity of anamnesis and

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Analysis of Knowledge. According to him, SAK is a product of the desire to emulate or imitate scientific spirit of rigorous analysis and thereby ended up formulating a 'scientific'-based analysis of knowledge. He argues that "the determination of exactly what counts as a *justified* belief was in the hands of those who were engaged in refining scientific methodology. As a result, the criteria for scientific knowledge came to be accepted as the criteria for knowledge *tout court*" (3). Lloyd P. Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> The notorious argument against this form of analysis of knowledge is offered by Edmund Gettier in his brief essay "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*, vol. 23, no. 6 (June 1963), 121-123.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Inwood, "Truth and Untruth in Plato and Heidegger", in *Heidegger and Plato: Toward Dialogue*, eds. Catalin Partenie and Tom Rockmore (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>23</sup> See also Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (Maiden Lane, New York: Continuum, 2002). Heidegger argues here that for Plato truth is a sort of correspondence theory or 'correctness'. In this sense, Heidegger lamented the lost of a more primordial understanding of truth for the Greeks as *aletheia*, which means unconcealment or an event. But this is simply Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave. In my personal opinion, it is difficult to find such view of Plato. Similarly, Stanley Rosen argues that Heidegger's claim is a product of not paying so much attention to dramatic situation of the dialogue and also of not "sufficiently attentive to the silence of Plato" (51). Stanley Rosen, "Heidegger's Interpretation of Plato," in *Essays in Metaphysics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 51-78.

<sup>24</sup> The Greek noun *dialektikē* is derived from a verb *dialegethai*- meaning, "to engage in conversation". The use of dialectic with a small letter 'd' is preferred here than the dialectic with capital letter 'D' since Benson argues that dialectical method with a small letter 'd' "includes all methods [i.e., elenchus, hypothesis, , collection and division, and Dialectic]" (87). See Hugh H. Benson, "Plato's Method of Dialectic," in *A Companion to Plato*, 85-99. While, I believe that

truth. Essential to the dialectic of Plato is the technique introduced by Socrates – the so-called *elenchus*.<sup>25</sup> The elenctic procedure seen in various dialogues adds not just dramatic effect to the dialogue but most importantly to establish and introduce a genuine conversation. “Genuine conversation” according to Gadamer “transforms the viewpoint of both. A conversation that is truly successful is such that one cannot fall back into the disagreement that touched it off.”<sup>26</sup> This establishment of genuine conversation is essential to the dialectic of Plato. For instance, Brickhouse and Smith argue that although elenchus has a violent and destructive aspect, yet beneficial to its recipient. This is because “elenchus achieve[s] the goal of freeing an interlocutor from the pretence of wisdom and why Socrates would count that as important.”<sup>27</sup> Dialectic in this sense, hence does not only require two people in conversation regarding various matters that they both deemed important. For such an activity is not entirely and truly be considered a true conversation because a true conversation requires an act of sacrifice in order to give birth to truth.<sup>28</sup> This act of sacrifice like the willingness to accept destructive attack from the other such as one’s defeat over the other is not enough to attain genuine conversation. Gadamer sees a more important moral disposition here, i.e., openness. This openness according to Gadamer has the “structure of a question”<sup>29</sup> simply because to “ask a question means to bring into the open.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, what one has to sacrifice when engaging in an authentic conversation, such in the case of Socrates’ interlocutors in the early *Dialogues* is not so much on the tolerance to accept their defeat but on the willingness to be open, that is to take the mode of Socratic epistemic humility i.e., knowing that one does not know. This

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Plato’s dialectic resembles that of Gadamer and thus I find Gadamer’s conception of truth similar to Plato as I try to show above, Richard E. Palmer on the other hand, argues the opposite. He said that “While it [Gadamer’s dialectic] has similarities with dialectic in Plato, it does not presuppose Plato’s doctrine of ideas or his *conception of truth and language* (166, emphasis mine).” I am not resolved to either agree or disagree at this point since Palmer in his work did not provide any explanation or justification why he said so. However, granted that this view is correct it goes essentially against my claim. But, it is because a different way of understanding anamnesis opens up the possibility of considering Gadamer’s view of truth a Platonic one, insofar as, his view of truth was inspired by Heidegger who in turn was fascinated and obsessed with Plato’s notion of truth. See Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

<sup>25</sup> See discussion of Charles M. Young, “The Socratic *Elenchus*,” in *A Companion to Plato*, 55-69. Here, Young suggests several dialogues as starting point of understanding the nature of Socratic elenchus that somehow shed light to the conflicting issues that shadowing it. He tries to suggest a way to solve conflicts of interpretations such as the question concerning whether Socrates actually had employed a method or not and the like.

<sup>26</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, “Socrates’ Elenctic Mission,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* vol. IX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 140.

<sup>28</sup> There are conversations that do not require truth-seeking. Some conversations are so mundane and banal that people only aim at entertainment and bluffing.

<sup>29</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998), 363. In the succeeding discussion any references to Truth and Method will be from this edition. *TM* hereafter.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.



for Gadamer is the beginning of openness to the other: “All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know.”<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, it is only through genuine conversation that truth occurs.<sup>32</sup> Its occurrence is guided by an elenctic dialectic. Note, furthermore, that some dialogues, most especially the early dialogues where Socrates played a most prominent role, show the elenctic mark of Socrates. He is not to pin down his interlocutor or to show intimidation by undermining his interlocutor’s claims (this is what Brickhouse and Smith consider as ‘destructive’) but rather through elenchus he seeks to know the truth whereby from it and through it the truth will appear transparently.

Given this account on elenchus as an essential component of dialectic, I now try to show its relation to anamnesis. As we have seen in the previous discussion, anamnesis is an activity whereby one is able to know the thing by retrieval or remembering. In relation to this, anamnestic act is conditioned by the activity of dialectic or conversation. Not the whole corpus of Plato’s dialogues contain the discussion on anamnesis but dialectic (with a small letter ‘d’) is being employed. That being said, it includes the issue on anamnesis which Plato introduced and developed in a form of dialectic. This only shows that dialectic as a general method is a prerequisite for the activity of anamnesis. For one to remember something one must be reminded of that something is. But this *remembering* and *being reminded of* are caused by a dialectic activity, at least in Plato’s *Dialogues*. But this does not mean that all remembering and being reminded of require other interlocutors for the dialectic to take place. Just because it is possible that you can be a locutor and interlocutor at the same time, does mean that the activity ceases to be dialectical. In this sense we can extend the meaning of Plato’s dialectic by taking Gadamer’s idea of it. Gadamer thinks that “dialectic is an art of thinking”<sup>33</sup> which supports the idea that it is not necessary that one has to have an external interlocutor for a dialectic to operate because what is most essential in dialectic is self-understanding. Gadamer asserts that “Dialectic is the art of having a conversation and includes the art of having a conversation with oneself and fervently *seeking an understanding of oneself*. It is the art of thinking.”<sup>34</sup>

The second thesis is that truth either eventual or propositional or both carries in itself the anamnestic transparency. I argue that this anamnestic transparency is seen not on the truth-expression but rather to the truth-bearer, i.e., the degree of the effect to the one possessing it will show only once one successfully and properly remembered what ought to remember. The eventual truth bears the anamnestic mark in the very involvement of the person to that event. Without such involvement or engagement, the event of truth will not transpire. In other words, in whatever form of dialectic or genuine conversation one is engaged into, anamnesis plays an important part. The same principle of anamnestic transparency is applied to propositional truth. This means to say that when we regard propositions as true or assert that *p* is true, the anamnestic character is transparent. The act of stating a proposition and regarding such proposition to be true requires an act of judgment which reminds us of course of our ability to remember to think and to think in order to remember. It is in a sense that remembrance “memorializes truth, allowing it to be

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 365-366.

<sup>32</sup> Francis J. Ambrosio, “Dawn and Dusk: Gadamer and Heidegger on Truth,” *Man and World*, 19 (1986), 21-53.

<sup>33</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, 367.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

the ‘same,’ by engaging in conversation.”<sup>35</sup> This I think is what makes anamnesis transparent in truth.

To sum it up, in this section I have shown by offering two theses. To think of truth as anamnestic in character is implicit within the Platonic dialogues. We need not go farther from Plato in order to see how anamnesis and truth relate to each other and most especially how anamnesis leaves its mark on truth. I think it is already enough to show the connection between anamnesis and truth as found in Plato’s *Dialogues*. This is a necessary task insofar as my main task is concerned, i.e., to show that in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, truth is anamnestic.

### **Hans-Georg Gadamer: On the Concept of Truth**

Gadamer is known to be a lover of the Greek philosophical tradition. This can be luminously felt when one reads his works. One cannot deny the influence of the Greek masters of philosophical thought to Gadamer’s thinking, of course, not to discount here the enormous influence of Heidegger and Hegel. As Paulette Kidder argues “Gadamer’s lifelong companionship with Greek philosophy has profoundly affected his thought, such that it is impossible to understand his ‘original’ contributions in separation from his scholarly interpretations.”<sup>36</sup> What this paper aims to accomplish is to show that Gadamer’s conception of truth is not just purely Heideggerian but also Platonic. The following discussion will focus on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutic thought.

The next section will be on Gadamer’s conception of truth. In what follows will be the division of the section. The first sub-section will discuss Gadamer’s philosophical project, i.e., philosophical hermeneutics. The second sub-section will briefly explore Gadamer’s discussion of the four humanistic concepts namely, *bildung*, *sensus communis*, *judgement*, and *taste*. I find this essential in understanding his concept of truth. Following this section will be a discussion on truth proper. And the last subsection will be a recapitulation of the entire section.

#### ***Gadamer on Truth***

To start the discussion on Gadamer’s conception of truth, it is important to give the context of his project to better see what he was up to. In this case, we need to proceed first from his general philosophical project before delving in the main philosophical issue of this paper which is on truth. In so doing, my discussion will heavily rely on his magnum opus *Truth and Method* for insightful passages but not limited by it.

One way to approach Gadamer’s hermeneutics is to see it in the context of trying to rehabilitate human sciences to their claim to truth. In this connection, Gadamer’s magnum opus aims to give a philosophical justification for “the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method.”<sup>37</sup> Such experience of truth for Gadamer can be found in three major areas, viz., art, hermeneutical experience, and human sciences.<sup>38</sup> Here Gadamer argues that “The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of

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<sup>35</sup> Ambrosio, “Dawn and Dusk: Gadamer and Heidegger on Truth,” 42.

<sup>36</sup> Paulette Kidder, “Gadamer and the Platonic *Eidos*,” *Philosophy Today*, 39 no. 1 (1995): 83-92.

<sup>37</sup> Gadamer, *TM* xxiii.

<sup>38</sup> See Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Durham: Acumen, 2006), 95.

method at all.”<sup>39</sup> But how can we understand the phenomenon in such a manner by which it enables us to obtain truth? Gadamer, thus, tries to show that truth does not only emerge by and through the use of a method but also in the very mode of our being, i.e., from our human understanding, which following Heidegger, a “fundamental ontological structure of human being.”<sup>40</sup> Such is the aim of philosophical hermeneutics. As Gadamer puts it: “My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.”<sup>41</sup> It seems then that this concern demands greater work on our part because for us to know the ‘what happens’ one has to understand the process of such ‘happening’ and therefore, must be ready to explore deeper into the depths of our own being to find out what is there to successfully account for such happening. In other words, this philosophical task demands an understanding of understanding. It is only through this act that we can understand the ‘happening’ that takes place in all human experiences. But Gadamer wonders how such a phenomenon of understanding possible.

This leads Gadamer to investigate and discover what is common to all modes of understanding and assert that “understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.”<sup>42</sup> For Gadamer, hermeneutics is above all the art of understanding. However, there is more to this assertion than simply understanding as art. Here Gadamer thinks that understanding is possible because of language. He understands understanding in its linguisticity: “Being that can be understood is language.”<sup>43</sup> This cryptic statement means for Gadamer “that we should try to understand everything that can be understood.”<sup>44</sup> I will discuss in passing this controversial well-known dictum when we go to understanding and language. For the meantime, let me discuss Gadamer’s views concerning the human sciences and their claim to truth.

### **III.b. The Four Humanistic Concepts in *Truth and Method***

To talk about truth, Gadamer criticizes the imperial attitude of science to truth – as if showing that their method is the key to its discovery. For Jean Grondin, he describes *TM* as a “fundamental critique of the obsession with method that typified those concerned with the scientificity of the human sciences.”<sup>45</sup> Supporting this view of Grondin, Gadamer asserts clearly towards the end of his magnum opus “that no method can ever be sufficient for the closure of truth and that truth belongs so essentially to history that it can never be disclosed fully.”<sup>46</sup> Gadamer’s iconoclastic question against the method of the sciences is that whether it can help human sciences to adequately comprehend the mode of understanding proper to them or not. Palmer comments that “method is incapable of revealing new truth; it only renders explicit the kind of truth already implicit in the

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<sup>39</sup> Gadamer, *TM* xxi.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics*, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Gadamer, *TM* xxviii

<sup>42</sup> Gadamer, *TM* xxxi.

<sup>43</sup> Gadamer, *TM* xxxiv

<sup>44</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” *Continuum*, 8, 1 & 2 (1970), 87.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 109.

<sup>46</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 436.

method.”<sup>47</sup> This means that the activity done in human sciences creates a possibility to discover noble truths compared to the natural sciences. In this case, Grondin locates the value of Gadamer’s notion of *Bildung* in the human sciences as a necessary condition and capacity in the formation of truth-claims. Grondin explains: “The truths of the human sciences are the truths of formation, which form us in all senses of the term. They are stamped on us, they constitute us, and they transform us.”<sup>48</sup> It is then imperative for Gadamer according to Grondin to a) restore the experience of truth and bring truth outside the grid of modern science and b) to thwart the disparaging effects of reductive approaches of human sciences toward the experience of art and truth.<sup>49</sup> What he wants the sciences to accept despite its power to colonize almost all domains of human activity is to acknowledge that “in a time when science penetrates further and further into social practice, science can fulfill its social function only when it acknowledges its own limits and the conditions placed on its freedom to maneuver.”<sup>50</sup> However, this heroic attitude does not attempt, according to Di Cesare, to ruin nor to discredit the status of natural sciences but rather to simply “offer an occasion for critical reflection on the truth implied by science.”<sup>51</sup> True to this observation, Gadamer reminds his readers that his endeavor is “to mediate between philosophy and the sciences.”<sup>52</sup> In the *Afterword* of his magnum opus, Gadamer responds to the issue concerning misunderstanding of the title of his work *Truth and Method*. He says: “What hermeneutics legitimates is something completely different, and it stands in no tension whatever with the strictest ethos of science.”<sup>53</sup> Clearly, for Gadamer, what he intends to accomplish here is not to create further division between these sciences but rather to communicate an invitation for a dialogue.

For Gadamer, human sciences have no method of their own. It is because of this that Gadamer returns to the guiding concepts of humanism as a kind of replacement to method wherein they are able to still make truth-claims just like the natural sciences. These guiding concepts are essential in understanding Gadamer’s conception of truth because these serve to be the foundation of the structure of understanding.<sup>54</sup> These guiding concepts are the following: *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, *judgement*, and *taste*. All of these play an essential part in the formation of hermeneutical experience and in the process of knowing the nature of understanding and its relation to truth.

Human sciences, according to Gadamer, despite the absence of any method in their pursuit to discover truth still have the resources remain in their own disposal. And these resources are nonmethodical avenues to truth. *Bildung*, for instance, refers to formation, education, and culture. For Gadamer, “*Bildung* is intimately associated with the idea of culture and designates primarily the proper human way of developing one’s natural talents

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<sup>47</sup> Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 165.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (Chesham: Acumen Publishing, 2003), 25.

<sup>49</sup> See Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 552.

<sup>51</sup> Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>52</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 552.

<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 551.

<sup>54</sup> Anja Müller, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: The Rediscovery of Truth*, (MA Thesis, Center for the Study of Literature, Theology and the Arts, University of Glasgow, 1998), xi.

and capacities.”<sup>55</sup> It is necessary in the formation of man and in making sense of the hermeneutic experience. It is also the driving source of forming and cultivating one’s character. For Gadamer, *bildung* is described “as rising to the universal, is a task for man.”<sup>56</sup> Here, Gadamer shows that through *bildung* human sciences can form truth-claims as well. “The modern concept of science and the associated concept of method are insufficient. What makes the human sciences into sciences can be understood more easily from the tradition of the concept of Bildung than from the modern idea of scientific method.”<sup>57</sup> Gadamer therefore sees *bildung* as one of the sources of truth.

Another guiding concept of humanism is *sensus communis*. Gadamer defines it as “the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men; moreover it is a sense that is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims.”<sup>58</sup> Again, similar to *bildung*, *sensus communis* can be found in a community. It is the community that nourishes it, that gives life to it, and determines its direction. Just like *bildung*, *sensus communis* gains a status of importance in terms of human activity and moral formation of men. As indicated above, it is the *sensus communis* that regulates our actions and moral behavior. But this regulation is always in accord with and based on the community that is the one with legitimate power and authority. It is considered a “virtue of social intercourse.”<sup>59</sup> Seen in this context, *sensus communis*, therefore, is one of the sources of truth for the human sciences. The truth that *sensus communis* offers is the truth of practical life. This form of life belongs to the whole community and its tradition. It also includes *bildung*. The formation, education, and culture are all historically conditioned and thereby belonging to the whole tradition of the community. In this sense, these guiding concepts cannot be understood separately.

The third guiding concept for Gadamer is judgement. Gadamer understands judgment as something analogous to common sense. In contrast to *sensus communis*, judgement “requires a principle to guide its application.”<sup>60</sup> However, what makes judgment and *sensus communis* similar is the fact that they are an ability. Judgment, just like *sensus communis*, according to Gadamer is “something that cannot be learned, because no demonstration from concepts can guide the application of rules.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, judgment is an inherent ability of man to know, identify, understand, and infer.

Closely connected to judgment is Gadamer’s discussion of taste. For him, taste is a “social phenomenon of the first order.”<sup>62</sup> This makes taste connected to judgment and *sensus communis*. Gadamer argues “Taste is therefore something like a sense. In its operation it has no knowledge of reasons. If taste registers a negative reaction to something, it is not able to say why. But it experiences it with the greatest certainty.”<sup>63</sup> What Gadamer I think tries to explain here is that taste and its validity whether good or bad is not determined by the person alone who experiences it but rather by the whole community.

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<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 10.

<sup>56</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 12.

<sup>57</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 18.

<sup>58</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 22.

<sup>59</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 25.

<sup>60</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 31.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 36.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

This makes one judgment of taste universal rather than simply subjective. When I say that this x tastes good or he/she has a good taste when it comes to choosing his/her clothes, this statement, though is a product of my subjective judgment, is not totally subjective. The statement has a claim to universal validity. Its universality is based on the recognition and the capacity of the community to regard my statement as mine and subjective, therefore, making them agree on it. Gadamer states “It does not say that everyone will agree with our judgment, but that they should agree with it (as Kant says).”<sup>64</sup> This is what happened when Kant relegated taste to simply a judgment on aesthetics.

These four guiding concepts, according to Müller, together form a mode of being. These concepts “established and unfolds a valid form of knowledge, which cannot be attained or demonstrated through strict methodological procedure.”<sup>65</sup> It is from these concepts that Gadamer finds refuge for the human sciences where they can freely refer and utilize for their acquisition and adjudication of truth and knowledge. In this case, the human sciences as shown by Gadamer do not need a method in order to discover truth or make truth-claims.

Just like Gadamer who started his work with the discussion on the four guiding concepts of humanism, this paper follows the same strategy in showing its claim on truth. It is of my personal opinion that these four guiding concepts or principles are necessary to understand how truth works and why truth is anamnetic. One of the reasons for this is that truth for Gadamer is an event and event is understood in the light of language that provides the material for conversation. But conversation is not possible without language, history, and tradition. With these Gadamerian concepts, I hope to prove that my claim on truth will be complete. The following discussion will now focus on both the general conception of truth across historical spectrum and Gadamer’s conception of it.

### **Gadamer and the Anamnetic Character of Truth**

To speak about the truth is easy but to understand it is simply mind-boggling and puzzling. Michael Lynch identifies a reason why talking about truth in philosophical language is a difficult task: “One of the reason is that truth is an extremely basic concept. It is difficult to engage in any theoretical inquiry without employing it.” He continues, “You cannot even argue over a theory of truth without using the concept, because to question a theory is to question its truth, and to endorse a theory is to endorse it as true.”<sup>66</sup> In fact the history of western philosophy shows that mistakes were committed in understanding the nature of truth.<sup>67</sup> But truth is one of the most basic concepts that philosophy introduced to the world. We are reminded by the question of Pontius Pilate: “What is truth?” The great masters of philosophical thought such as Plato, Aristotle,

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<sup>64</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 37.

<sup>65</sup> Müller, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: The Rediscovery of Truth*, 62.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Nature of Truth* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, Kirkham argues that “A failure to grasp the big picture about truth is the root cause of many philosophical mistakes. That failure is reflected in the fact that too many theorists of truth have been lax in explaining what questions they suppose themselves to be answering and what relevance their answer to the question has far broader intellectual problems (ix).” See Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Mass: MIT Press, 2001).

Aquinas, Descartes, and Kant have seriously pondered upon its nature. Various proposals have been advanced, examined, and scrutinized in so many various ways. Some theories of truth have survived maybe because philosophers find them worthy of their time to rethink and reexamine again. But many have disappeared. To follow what Gadamer has said about tradition, their survival might have been due to the inherent capacity of tradition to preserve what is seen or deemed relevant, valuable, and appealing.<sup>68</sup> To give a brief survey on the theories of truth, there are at least two ways on how to describe the enterprise on truth up today.

First, by tradition. Philosophers are divided into what we call different traditions (I am only speaking about the Western philosophical tradition) the so-called ‘Continental’ and ‘Analytic’ traditions.<sup>69</sup> Each tradition follows a different trend of philosophical discourse. For instance, in the Analytic tradition, discussion on truth is taken to be heavily centered on the notion that it is propositional and linguistic as well. Starting from Bertrand Russell (Correspondence theory), Strawson (Performative theory), Searle (Speech Acts theory), Tarski (Semantic theory), Davidson (Semantic theory), and Putnam (Semantic theory), there are various truth theories that emerged from them. Meanwhile in the other side of the continent, we have the ‘Continental tradition’ that heavily distinct in their approach to the issue concerning truth. To them to talk about truth as propositional is unexciting exercise. That is why truth-talk is a talk about nonpropositional truth. Representative of this form of truth-talk discourse are Heidegger and Gadamer.

Second is historical. This form of describing the enterprise is related to the first one. However, its distinctive character is that, it offers a more comprehensive view of truth as it records the ups and downs and development of truth. Furthermore, the historical approach can offer so much insight as to the significant and relevant issues surrounding the discourse. For instance truth-talk during the ancient period may differ from that of the medieval, modern, and contemporary period. In this case, the survey of truth in this manner extends farther back from the beginning up to today.

What these ways of approaching truth try to show is that it has a long historical narrative. In this case, what I will do now is to present the truth that belonging to the tradition of Gadamer. My main goal here is to simply provide Gadamer’s conception of truth as he presented it partly explicit and partly implicit in *Truth and Method* and then proceed to show why his conception of truth carries an anamnestic character.

I would like to approach Gadamer’s conception of truth in this manner. First, I will present various insights coming from different Gadamerian experts on what they seem to be considered Gadamer’s concept of truth. Second, I will try to show that those insights are intrinsic to Gadamer’s theory of understanding that what goes on in understanding reveals an answer to the question ‘what is truth?’ Third, I will show that at the end even Gadamer’s linguisticity of understanding is still dialectical, and so therefore is connected to anamnesis as well.

Majority of experts on Gadamer and studies published everywhere observe that Gadamer in his works most especially in *Truth and Method* did not explicitly offer a clear and precise view of what truth is. What we find in his magnum opus are scattered thoughts

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<sup>68</sup> Gadamer characterized tradition as “essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change.” (*TM*, 281).

<sup>69</sup> Such kind of divide is considered illusory and counter-productive though. See Simon Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

regarding truth most importantly in his discussion on the work of art. This section of his work provides us insightful thought materials to decipher and examine what he really means by truth. Despite this lacking, which I think is not really a kind of lack, but rather a matter of style and temperament typical of those belonging to his tradition, experts and scholars of Gadamer were able to develop what we now know as Gadamer's theory of truth.

Since Gadamer did not provide a formal definition or understanding of his concept of truth, many of his scholars and experts in his works describe truth in various descriptive phrases such as "dialogical concept of truth,"<sup>70</sup> and "transformational concept of truth."<sup>71</sup> This only shows that there is a varied interpretation of the Gadamerian text when it comes to truth. However, I do not think Gadamer will frown over these varied labels attributed to his idea of truth for he would more or less violate his own hermeneutical principle, i.e., in the process of interpreting and translating the meaning of the text by the interpreter there occurs "the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter."<sup>72</sup> In this sense, no one claims an absolute interpretation of a text insofar as the text itself does not allow such to occur. Any form of interpretation is temporal and historically conditioned. Meaning, in the Gadamerian principle of hermeneutical reading, there is no such thing as uncontaminated interpretation in a sense that no one is not influenced by his/her own tradition and prejudices in interpreting the text. However this does not mean that there is no legitimate or correct prejudices. Gadamer makes it clear that there are correct/true prejudices and they are preserved by tradition. These correct prejudices allow one to arrive at correct understanding. As Gadamer would say "the harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding."<sup>73</sup>

Since there are various interpretations of Gadamer's concept of truth, it is then proper that we take a look at some of them. Barthold defines Gadamer's truth as "the movement of the self away from and back to itself. Thus truth requires both the distancing and return of the self to itself – an essential movement in the process of understanding."<sup>74</sup> She understands that truth here is of essence in the process of understanding since truth is a "component inherent within understanding."<sup>75</sup> She further argues that such understanding cannot be understood apart from understanding the four guiding concepts such as *bildung*, *sensus communis*, judgment, and taste. Barthold explains that such conception of truth "will not fit on the continuum with either correspondence or coherentist theories of the truth."<sup>76</sup> Contrary to this claim is Linda Alcoff's account of Gadamer's truth. She contends that "The best conception of truth is not going to be a correspondence relation but the achievement of coherence among the multiple and diverse elements involved in the process

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<sup>70</sup> Lauren Swayne Barthold, *The Truth of Hermeneutics: The Self and Other in Dialogue in the Thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Faculty of Political Science of the New School of Social Research, 2002), 8.

<sup>71</sup> Gaetano Chiurazzi, "Truth is More than Reality: Gadamer's Transformational Concept of Truth," *Research in Phenomenology*, 41 (2011): 60-71.

<sup>72</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 293.

<sup>73</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 291.

<sup>74</sup> Barthold, *The Truth of Hermeneutics*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



or flow of knowing practices.”<sup>77</sup> Alcott’s interpretation fits in to Gadamer’s understanding of truth but she failed to consider the context from which Gadamer is operating. Here, the danger of appropriating Gadamer’s conception of truth as coherence is exposed.

Another view of truth according to the reading of Ambrosio is this: “Truth as an event means ‘presencing,’ the way in which beings in general come into presence. The structure of this event, the very truth as unhiddenness happens, is the abiding opposition of revealing and concealing.”<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, this notion of truth is Heideggerian and it is this notion that is explicit in the work of Gadamer. Similarly, Di Cesare locates truth in the event of understanding. She argues that if this is the case then truth “can neither be deduced nor theoretically conceived, but only shown each time at the place where it happens.” This led her to assert that the aim of hermeneutics is “to describe the event of truth.”<sup>79</sup>

So what we have identified above are views about truth deduced from Gadamer’s text most especially in *Truth and Method*. What seems to be dominant among the said views is the idea that truth is essentially connected to the structure of understanding. That being said, it is then proper to look into this matter, i.e., what Gadamer understands by understanding.

There are several passages from the text of Gadamer that points to understanding. One of these is to describe its happening. Gadamer says “In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth.”<sup>80</sup> In this sense of comprehending understanding, the reality of truth has been revealed, i.e., truth is essentially part of the structure of understanding. In the first pages of Gadamer’s text, he asks this question: how is this understanding possible? The answer to this question is not simple. However, we can provide one for the purposes of this paper.

One of Gadamer’s theses is that understanding is dialogue. This means that understanding is language-bound which Gadamer himself has asserted. However, Gadamer is quick to qualify that such “assertion does not lead us into any kind of linguistic relativism. It is indeed true that we live within a language, but language is not a system of signals that we send off with the aid of a telegraphic key when we enter the office or transmission station.”<sup>81</sup> What then Gadamer wants to convey here is that language provides us the capacity for understanding as it is expressed always in a form of conversation or dialogue. This is where Gadamer departs from Heidegger. Gadamer sees the evental nature of truth in relation to the linguisticity of understanding. And such linguistic nature of understanding leads us to infer that it is dialectical. As Grondin puts it “To understand in Gadamer’s sense is to articulate a meaning, a thing, an event into words, words that are always mine, but at the same time those of what I strive to understand.”<sup>82</sup> That is why understanding for Gadamer is linguistic and at the same time dialectical. Furthermore, how

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<sup>77</sup> Linda Alcoff, “The Case for Coherence,” in *The Nature of Truth* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>78</sup> Francis J. Ambrosio, “Dawn and Dusk,” 25.

<sup>79</sup> Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 490.

<sup>81</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 156.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” in *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43.

understanding occurs is based on what Gadamer considers as “agreement”. This notion of agreement also characterized his linguistic view of understanding in a sense that agreement is articulated and occurred through conversation, dialogue, and language. For Gadamer, a community is such “living together in language and language exists only in conversation.”<sup>83</sup> We see how Gadamer gives importance to language as the medium by and through which we are able to articulate our being in the world and with others, as well as showing the practices of understanding. Understanding and its miracle becomes transparent because of language. This understanding too characterizes “the original form of the realization of our existence.”<sup>84</sup>

In this connection, seeing the nature of understanding as linguistically and historically conditioned, we find that truth occurs out of the event of understanding and as such is possible because of language. In stating so, we are led to conclude that truth is anamnestic in character. This means to say that due to the inherent nature of understanding as linguistic because it is conversation and in turn for Gadamer language is dialectical, truth bears the mark of anamnesis. We have to recall that in the previous section anamnesis is an event that takes place dialectically.

Truth for Gadamer is evental. But such event occurs and coincide with understanding which manifestation is only possible in language. And since language for Gadamer is dialectical, following Plato, it is directly or indirectly thought to carry a mark of anamnesis.

To recapitulate, we have seen that in Gadamer, truth one of his major preoccupation in developing a hermeneutics. He develops a conception of truth that is not independent of his entire philosophical hermeneutical project. One cannot analyze truth apart from his major aims and goals in doing hermeneutics most especially concepts such as understanding, tradition, language, and history which are the hallmark of his philosophical hermeneutics.

## Conclusion

In the first main section of this paper, I have shown the possibility of interpreting truth’s character as anamnestic based on a different approach and interpretation of Plato’s doctrines and Gadamer’s understanding of truth which presupposes essential elements such as understanding, language, agreement, dialectic, dialogue, and the four guiding concepts of humanism. What I just intend to show here is that there are other dimensions that are less explored in Plato’s and Gadamer’s philosophy.

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<sup>83</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. Richard Palmer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>84</sup> Gadamer, *TM* 269.

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