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## Concepts in gadamer's truth and method

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### Abstract

The fundamental premise of Hans-Georg Gadamer's 1960 book *Reality and Method* is that truth cannot be completely defined by scientific method, and that actual meaning of language transcends methodological interpretation. The term 'hermeneutics' has traditionally been used to refer to a group of questions centered on the interpretation of writings, particularly religious and legal texts. The issues of "reconstructing" past ages, epochs, and periods, as well as obtaining "objective" historical knowledge, became part of the overall hermeneutical dilemma with the advent of methodical historical scholarship in the nineteenth century. Gadamer claims that hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) is more than just a means for identifying truth; it is also an activity aimed at comprehending the conditions that allow truth to exist. According to Gadamer, the role of hermeneutics in the human sciences is not the same as the role of methods of research in the natural sciences. Hermeneutics is not merely a method of interpretation, but is an investigation of the nature of understanding, which transcends the concept of method. Truth is not something which may be defined by a particular technique or procedure of inquiry, but is something which may transcend the limits of methodological reasoning. The truth of spoken or written language may be revealed when we discover the conditions for understanding its meaning. The term 'hermeneutics' has traditionally referred to a group of problems centered on the interpretation of writings, particularly religious and legal texts. The issues of "reconstructing" past ages, epochs, and periods, as well as obtaining "objective" historical knowledge, became part of the overall hermeneutical dilemma with the advent of methodical historical scholarship in the nineteenth century. The purpose of this brief review is to emphasize the concept of Gadamer's work in terms of truth and techniques.

**Keywords:** Truth, methods, hermeneutics, language and natural and human sciences

### Introduction

Hans-Georg Gadamer's book *Truth and Method* (German: *Wahrheit und Methode*) was published in 1960. Its central argument is that the scientific method cannot effectively describe truth and that the actual meaning of language transcends methodological interpretation. Adolf Grünbaum, a philosopher, criticized Gadamer's book *Truth and Method*, claiming that he misunderstood scientific procedures and created an inaccurate distinction between natural and human sciences.

Gadamer claims that hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) is more than just a means for discovering truth; it is also an activity aimed at understanding the conditions that allow truth to exist. The role of hermeneutics in the human sciences, according to Gadamer, differs from the role of research methodologies in the natural sciences. Hermeneutics is more than a method of interpretation; it is a study of the nature of understanding that goes beyond the concept of method. So, from pages 3 to 37, I attempted to describe the major notion of "Truth and Methods" in this article.

### Parts in Gadamer truth and methods

The book *Truth and Method* is divided into three parts:

**The First:** "The question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art,"

**The Second:** "The extension of the question of truth to understanding in the human sciences,"

**The Third:** "The ontological shift of hermeneutics guided by language."

### Concept of truth

The truth, according to Gadamer, might be a philosophical, linguistic, or scientific idea. It's part of a piece of art, a scientific hypothesis, or a logical argument.

Aesthetic consciousness can perceive the truth of a piece of art. Truth is not something that can be defined by a certain method or procedure of investigation, but rather something that can exist outside the scope of methodical reasoning. When we find the circumstances for understanding the meaning of spoken or written language, the truth of that language may be disclosed.

There are three components to it: art, history, and language. In everyday life, the truth is revealed to us and unfolds in front of our eyes, and it is uncontrollable. In addition, historiography: history and tradition equip us to know and understand. Historical events have also shaped it. Language is the truth: it is the foundation of all comprehension and allows existence to manifest. Truth is the only thing that is true.

### **Truth and universality**

Truth, according to Gadamer, is fundamental (historic/ancient) truth, or what is required for scientific and evidentiary truth to exist. As a result, it goes beyond the scientific truth. "Truth is not methodologically verified (it is merely a cognitive and objective world relation)". In contrast to Gadamer's assertion that truth emerges from the unfolding of language and tradition, "Language" is the second condition for the unfolding of an event's truth after history and tradition. Language has the ability to express truth. This implies that truth comes through our dialogical relationships with others, that the meaning is not only subjective and objective, but rather common and universal, and that it is entangled with the hermeneutical process.

### **The problem of method**

Applying the method is what the person does who never finds out anything new, who never brings to light an interpretation that has revelatory power. (Gadamer, 2001, 42)

An inductive method based on observation so not metaphysical - But history is concerned not with universal laws, but with explaining individual cases. Humboldt suggested that the latter requires voluntary practical laws, (commandments). He tried to adapt Kant's distinction between freedom & nature to society, but this is not true to Kant's distinction.

Gadamer resolutely refuses to provide us with a rule book or anything approaching a method. There can, he insists, be no step-by-step procedures leading from understanding to application, since application and understanding comprise a single unified process. To understand is to apply whatever it is that I am seeking to understand to my own unique circumstances. This is a dizzying – and potentially anxiety-inducing – prospect.

### **Differentiating natural and human sciences**

Gadamer has made a tremendous contribution to twentieth century thought, for he has proposed a new and different model of understanding and understanding in the human sciences that carries us beyond the dilemma of ethnocentrism and relativism. This model is not that of a "science" that grasps an object but rather one of the speech-partners who come to an understanding together. Three important features of understanding are (1) it is bilateral in character, (2) it is party dependent, and (3) it involves revising goals. It follows that there is an important difference between the human sciences and the natural

sciences. Important to Gadamer's model of the human sciences is the "fusion of horizons."

Gadamer distinguishes between human and natural sciences in his book.

- Is natural scientific methodology entirely applicable to the human sciences?
- Is it at all misleading to speak of a "method"? Is scientific truth just inapplicable to the kind of truth found, say, in the hermeneutical interpretation of classic texts?

### **Natural sciences**

Induction, regularity, instantiation of universal law

### **Human sciences**

Individual not as one who confirms a universal law, but as unique historical concreteness, yet one must still resist the temptation to describe the merely negative as "inexact" compare to the "exact" sciences.

In the idea of comparing natural and human sciences, I summarized it as the explication of interpretation and understanding paves the way for a unified approach to both the natural sciences and the humanities. If understanding is nothing but an organism's organization of information and beliefs, then it seems quite evident that the empirical methods for gaining understanding in the natural sciences cannot be different from those we must use to acquire understanding in the humanities. The evolution by natural selection has established in our predecessors a disposition to detect false beliefs and stick to true beliefs. Humans are by nature intentional beings that learn from their cognitive successes and cognitive failures. So the justification of the use of empirical methods in the humanities as well as in the natural sciences is that these methods are grounded in a certain innate cognitive practice of belief acquisition. The capacity of learning is based on the cognitive mechanism of induction, and the modern specification of various types of empirical methods are abstracted and generalized from our mind's reflection upon the cognitive practice that rests on this mechanism.

In opposition to Dilthey and his school, Gadamer claimed that the humanities were not unique in demanding the use of methods different than those used in the natural sciences. However, he argued that objective interpretation of a text was not within the range of literary study. His reason for saying so was that any interpretation is bounded by a historical perspective and that the author's intention has no role to play in an interpreter's interpretation of a literary text. I believe he is wrong. I argue that Gadamer ignored a distinction between the act and the topic of interpretation. All interpreters are situated in a historical context and their interpretive hypotheses may be colored by the existence of such a context. But if the topic of one's interpretive hypotheses is the author's intentions, which exist independently of the hypothesis itself, and if one uses adequate evidence and empirical methods to justify these interpretations, the resulting insight will be as objective as something can be. Therefore, I conclude that a naturalistic stance to the humanities is superior to any hermeneutic stance.

### **Guiding concepts in humanism**

Gadamer's main concepts in Truth and methods are:

- Bildung (Culture/education/image/creation)

- Sensus Communis (communal sense)
- Judgement
- Taste

### **Bildung**

The term Bildung before and had interpreted to mean cultural self-improvement. It's the "fully human approach of developing one's innate gifts and capacities." In his exploration of the relationship between human sciences and the notions of touch and aesthetics, Gadamer employed the concept of Bildung as a starting point; he also used it to criticize the idea of method in these sciences.

Bildung refers to the mix of education and knowledge required to succeed in a given society. It is both the process and the outcome. It's a promise of an attainable utopia to which anybody can participate. It is a force for the social revolution that is peaceful. It is apparent that there are several approaches to studying Bildung, one of which invokes the "old mystical tradition according to which man carries the image of God in his soul." This is how logical, rational, and abstract thought separates us from the reality around us. "Man is defined by the intellectual, rational half of his nature's demand that he break with the immediate and natural." "In this sphere, he is not, by nature, what he should be" – and hence he needs Bildung. p11 (Gadamer is quoting from Hegel here.)

Moreover, the term Bildung; Herder: rising to humanity via culture, Kant: develop natural talents & capacities. Bildung is the end product of a continuous formation process that has no external goals. Bildung, on the other hand, maintains its course of formation - [Hegel: Geist reconciling itself with itself]. Bildung entails rising to the universal and so surrendering the particular; it also entails opposing desire, particularly as it relates to work (p. 13). Theoretical Bildung is the process of learning to recognize and accept differences in the universal. Tact is more than just psychological equipment; it demands the formation of memory, which necessitates forgetting. [Nietzsche] (p. 16) - Tact is knowing how to behave in a situation with sensitivity, therefore it's a kind of universal sense (so we must turn to the humanist tradition).

Bildung contains the root term Bild, which means "shape," "image," and, more specifically, "picture," according to Gadamer. "Cultivation" is the process of "shaping" oneself into an ideal "picture" of a human being. In the theory of Bildung, art, as a general capacity to generate "pictures" or representations of experience, had a special significance.

### **Sensus communis (communal sense)**

It categorizes objects based on universal assumptions. We see this theme of "immediate contact and intuition" continue in man's attempt to comprehend the divine mystery of life as we progress through the discussion of sensus communis: "the presence of God integrates diversity into unity," and it is this "communal sense" that can distinguish all living things from the dead.

According to Gadamer, studying the humanistic heritage is crucial because it will provide us with important hints regarding the "human sciences' style of knowledge." It has everything to do with his view of prejudice, historical vistas, and the efficacy and rehabilitation of tradition as vital factors in hermeneutical understanding.

Elements of the traditional concept of wisdom, such as eloquence and truth. Sophia, the wise man, vs. phronesis,

the scholar who relies on the wise man. Sensus communis is phronesis (an intellectual ethical virtue) based on the probable and the art of finding arguments while taking into consideration an endless variety of circumstances. All people develop a feeling of the common good as a result of living in a community with its goals and structures. [Historical -convincing instances]; Shaftesbury: Sensus Communis: wit and humor, sensus communis = common sense (Reid) = le bon sens (Bergson) avoid both scientism and utopias, sensus communis = common sense (Reid) = le bon sens (Bergson) avoids both scientism and utopias, Pietism - Oetinger - sensus communis, as interpreted in terms of life - the intuitive perception of objects shared by all humans, senses communis – a sense of the whole is more important than interpretive rules, application to oneself is most important => Judgment, and sensus communis decayed into a mere corrective = "Don't contradict consensus!".

### **Judgment**

Despite Kant's preference for "reflective judgment," in which a "determinative judgment" that subsumes intuition under a universal concept is impossible in the case of appreciating great art, he still maintained that aesthetic judgment implies a type of universal agreement based on sensory rather than conceptual grounds. Kant believes that taste is the true sensation of community. For Kant, the act of determining an object or a property of an object to be an instantiation of a universal, a concept, or a rule is a judgment or the power of judgment. According to Gadamer, taste judgments are unusually decisive; good taste makes decisions without hesitation.

In a nutshell, Gadamer's concept of judgment is as follows: Good judgment can tell the difference between a good man and a fool. Particulars are subsumed under universal conceptions and laws through judgment. The ability to recognize something as an example cannot be shown, and judgment identifies the one-of-a-kindness (Baumgarten). As a result, internal coherence is more important than subsumption.

Reflective judgments is only the particular is supplied, and determinative judgments concept is also given, according to Kant. As a result, aesthetic judgments are synonymous with thoughtful judgments.

Sensus communis is not included in Kant's moral philosophy. Because the moral imperative is categorical, no parallels to other people's sentiments are applicable, but an appeal to other people's probable judgments is required. Moral feeling cultivation is thus necessary but not part of moral theory. As a result, aesthetic judgments, rather than moral judgments, appeal to the community, and only aesthetic judgments require the community's unanimous agreement.

### **Taste**

Taste is unmistakably linked to a method of perception. It's a delicate balancing act between instinct and intellectual freedom. Traditional tastes were based on moral rather than aesthetic considerations. Taste is the paradox in which a judgment of a work of art, which by definition lacks a universal idea, feels globally valid to the subject since everyone with "good taste" will agree that, for example, Mozart's work is superior to Britney Spears'. As a result, his

artistic work gains the stature of a genius who is endowed with this talent almost by chance.

However, Kant's stress on taste and genius (brilliant creation that is incapable of being reduced to basic principles) resulted in a profound subjectivization that ironically desecrated all knowledge except that of the natural sciences. As a result, human sciences have been driven to adopt natural scientific methodology in order to understand themselves. If truth has evolved to have such a narrow definition, it's even debatable if art, for example, has any truth at all.

As far as my reading is concerned the concept of taste can be summarized as:

The taste was a moral concept before Kant: excellent taste fostered good society (& transcended class & status). So good taste was social, but it's still a sense, because it can't be taught, makes snap decisions, doesn't understand why things are the way they are, and is mostly negative (i.e. no taste is the opposite, not bad taste). He also argued that fashion is based on empirical universality and regard for others. Taste is not subject to community feelings or opinions: it necessitates measurement (for example, in adjusting fashion) and is not empirical, instead claiming that everyone should agree. As a result, taste and judgment are used to determine if an object "fits" in the context of the whole. Moral knowledge must include case considerations, so that the judgment of the beautiful and sublime can be applied to things other than art and nature. Moral judgments are not grounded in taste, but they are completed by it. As a result, Kant abandons the humanist tradition of historical and philological study. Kant believed in the subjective universality of aesthetics, taste, art, and genius. As a result, aesthetic autonomy implies that human science can only be investigated via natural science approaches.

### Developing our horizon

Horizon refers to the boundaries that limit knowledge. Without a horizon, there can be no Truth. It's preconceptions, prejudices, and the fact that we all bring our own thoughts and attitudes into a scenario. These are what Gadamer refers to as "prejudices," but not in the negative sense: "a judgment made before all of the elements that influence a situation has been thoroughly studied." It is also known as 'Bildung,' or openness to meaning, language, and imagination, contrary to popular belief. It is a method of conceptualizing comprehension.

### Objectivism

The objection of the other is premised on the forgetting of oneself

### Absolute knowledge

According to which universal history can be articulated with a single horizon

- We all have our horizon
- By interpreting the horizon of others broaden our own horizon.
- People are embedded in a context
- They have their vantage point, their horizon
- Interpreting a narrative involves a fusion of horizons.

Gadamer states that: 'the concept of the horizon suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must-have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what

is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better'.

Understanding happens when our present understanding or horizon is moved to a new understanding or horizon by an encounter.<sup>3</sup> Thus the process of understanding is a 'fusion of horizons'. The old and the new horizon combine into something of living value.

We could see the 'fusion of horizons' as a metaphor for the consultation process, a simple image of what happens in a consultation, with patient and doctor interacting and resulting in changed horizons.

There are several ideas to explore on the way to developing our horizon as detailed by Gadamer. These are pre-understanding, prejudices, fore-conceptions, 'Bildung' or openness to meaning, language, and imagination. Both the patient and doctor will be running these processes. Both enter and leave the consultation with separate horizons and will have undergone a fusion of horizons.

### Summary

In general, with this short paper, I tried to summarize the ideas presented by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, first published in 1960 from pages 3-37. Gadamer's perspective is that human understanding is always historical, dialectical, and linguistic. He is not concerned with presenting a methodology for correct interpretation but with describing the activity of understanding in general. He shows that understanding is the fundamental condition for the possibility of all human experience and inquiry and that ultimately all understanding takes place in language. The written text thus becomes the paradigm for all modes of understanding whether these be historical, theological, legal, artistic or the experiences that we encounter in our everyday lives.

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