



Hans Georg Gadamer's point of view: The role of Historicity in our interpretation and understanding

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Abstract: *Hans -George Gadamer who was the most prominent hermeneutical thinker of twenty century and deeply influenced by Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics. Hermeneutics turn in new direction to philosophical hermeneutics. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not a method of interpretation but is an investigation of the nature of understanding which transcends the concept of method because method provide only limited degree of certainty which could not use in human science domain. He began the notion that all understanding is hermeneutical it is not concerned with fixed meaning of text rather it seek to establish a dialectic between past and present , the text and the interpreter, without aiming at a final or complete interpretation. Understanding is not only a matter of how we know classical texts, philosophical text, works of art rather a basic movement of human existence that encompasses the whole of life experience. Gadamer focus on historicity which helpful to understand and interpret text. Historicity is the focal point to a hermeneutical theory of understanding. It is a wave in which we live and participate in every act of understanding. We can understand anything at all from past is because we already stand in the stream of time that connects past and present. Every Understanding belongs to historical and cultural tradition. He shows that how history participate in our understanding, Which I will discuss in this paper.*

Key note- History, prejudice, tradition and fusion of Horizon.

Historicity was a fundamental theme of romantic hermeneutics but there it was understood in terms of historicism. History is the central to a hermeneutical theory of understanding. Human being always lives in historical vacuum through which their understanding effected to past and leads to it our present situation. Gadamer, following Ditley and Heidegger, the role of historicity in the formulation of philosophical doctrines as well as in the explication of hermeneutical accounts. In Gadamer's view, Our understanding is rooted not only into linguistically mediated preunderstanding but also historically mediated pre-understanding. Every understanding is neither in history nor above and beyond history rather moves along with it. We always related our self to history.¹ Gadamer claims that 'understanding itself is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as the entering into an event of transmission in which past and present constantly mediated. In short, "All understanding occurs in a historical context where our historically formed present informs our interpretation of any subject".² Prejudice, tradition and recognition of the authority are individual's understanding of past through which

describe the conditions of hermeneutic understanding. Gadmer withdraw the implications of Heidegger's disclosure of the fore-structure of understanding which is basis of his concept of 'prejudice'. The concept of 'fore-structure' of understanding includes preconceptions and project our own preconception whenever we interpret something but Gadamer redefine preconception as 'prejudice' which is the condition of interpretation and ungerstanding.³ He formulate that understanding is made possible by the fore-understanding constituted by the prejudices of the own historical tradition. According to him all understanding originates from the prejudgment of reader. He refers the individual preconception or prejudgment that constitutes this pre-understanding as Prejudice. Prejudice as a condition of knowledge and they make up the fundamental structure of our relationship with our historical understanding. "Prejudice are necessary and positive precondition of understanding, it present the object of understanding as always already pre-interpreted". In Gadamer's philosophy, Prejudice are inevitable precondition of understanding and do not have a positive or negative role per se, rather the simply judgment that precedes the examination of the element of a situation.⁴He criticize the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the 'prejudice against prejudice itself which denies tradition. What is needed in the new hermeneutics that gadamer is proposing is a fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice and recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Gadamer's theory of prejudice related to the concept of reason and authority. It is his contention that the opposition between reason on the one hand and prejudice and authority on the other, the opposition that is the foundation of enlightenment thought, is fundamentally wrong. Reason and logic are not, as the enlightenment thought, 'gifts of God, that is, absolutes the transcend time and space rather reason exist for me only in concrete, historical terms, i.e, it is not its own master but remain constantly depend on the given circumstances which it operates'. prejudice involves the understanding that authority is not based on the surrender of reason rather based on recognition and knowledge.⁵

Tradition and authority play an important role in understanding. Both are linked precisely in the recognition that our knowledge about the world depends on other who have mastered and passed on skill accumulated by tradition.

Gadamer's reconstruct the concept of tradition and authority, which is closely related to the idea of prejudice nature of understanding. The primary intention of this is to correct the enlightenment's view of tradition and authority as being diametrically opposed to rationality, he argues that authority is essentially based on knowledge instead of dominion. He justifies this controversial claim by suggesting that a person relies on the authority of another when this person believes that the other knows something better and not because the person is coerced to do so. Gadamer introduce the idea of authority of tradition as a critique of the enlightenment's abstract separation between tradition and reason. His intention is not to suggest that we should preserve traditional believes and practice rather indicate that the enlightenment abstract opposition between tradition and reason mistakenly designate tradition as an irrational source of error and dogma.⁶ The traditional hermeneutic conception of understanding, as it developed in romantic period ,is that it is something which is not

automatic, it requires a certain openness of mind an ability to put oneself into the place of the author of the book or the participation in the way of life. The romantic understanding of tradition abstract opposition to the principle of enlightenment. Romanticism conceives of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature. And it opposite free self determination since its validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it. The romantic faith in tradition is just as prejudiced as the enlightenment faith in reason. Pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed, it needs to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated. Tradition must be actively maintained and this maintenance is an act of preservation and gadamer maintain 'preservation is an act of reason'.⁷ Gadamer state that we cannot free our self from tradition in examining the past because we are historical being ourselves and we cannot objectify history as if it were something alien that we ourselves are not a part of ,or can become detached from rather understanding in human sciences itself address by tradition.⁸ Gadamer make distinction between human science and natural science in natural science the scientist is not interested in the history of how scientific knowledge got to the point at which he is contributing to it, and still less interested in the various false stars and wrong turnings others have made along the way; he is only interested in the value of knowledge of what he discover and the progress of research is the self-evident standard of examination. The element of tradition affects the human sciences, in human sciences we are not primarily concerned with an end of research culminating in a final result which can be called progress rather it lies in the handing down of the tradition. We cannot speak that human science research object same in natural sciences because in human sciences the particular research questions concerning tradition that we are interested in pursuing are motivated in a special way by the present and its interests.⁹ Gadamer say we applied tradition to our own situation and he would point out that all interpretation involves application of historically mediated tradition to the present needs and perspectives of the interpreter we apply tradition to our own current situation.¹⁰ Gadamer's account of understanding is an emphasis on the importance of tradition as an ongoing dialogue or 'dialectic' between past and present. Understanding works as dialectic between the horizon of the present and the horizon of the past or tradition. This relationship is genuinely dialectical, because the past is not a simply inert or passive object of the hermeneutic process but more like a partner in dialogue. the interpreter who seek genuine understanding is engage in a common pursuit with an interlocutor from past , approaching the truth through a series of question and answer. Dialogue not only serves to improve our understanding of the past and its texts, it may also unsettle some of our own convictions and lead to revision in our present horizon of meanings. Our past continues to be effective in the present.¹¹

Gadamer's ideas of tradition as effective history. The concept of effective history refers to the idea that when we understand some work of art or a historical text from a temporal distance, its meaning can only be grasped as it is transmitted and effected by the tradition of interpretation that has gone before us. Gadamer argues that effective history influences our understanding to the extent that it determines what appears to us as being meaningful and worth inquiring into. Effective history makes

understanding inescapably partial and interested instead of being objective and disinterested. History is continuously influencing us in the present, it determine the background of our values, cognations and even our critical judgment and we can never give a full account of the way in which history influences us , nor is it possible to become detached from this completely. History is effective in the sense that we would not be who we are without the effects that history has upon us. This effectiveness of history is tied in with our finitude i.e the fact that we are mortal. Only infinite being one not bound by history-could comprehend history itself in its totality. So we must accept that our understanding of history is only partial, and that we our self are part of the history which we are trying to understand.¹² Despite Gadamer's insistence on the power of effective history, he develops a distinctly reflective notion of 'Historical effective consciousness''. Historical effected consciousness is an element in the fact of understanding. Consciousness of being affected by history is primarily consciousness of hermeneutical situation. The consciousness of the continuity of history raises the awareness that the interpretation of text is conditioned by our own history. Gadamer wraps up his understanding of the nature and conditions of the humanities in the hermeneutic concept of the consciousness of the historical effect. Gadamer explain that this notion means at once the awareness of the reality of a text, i.e., the text's own history of interpretation belongs to its meaning , and the awareness of the interpreter's own prejudices. However a text and its effects are not causally related according to the contingencies of history the effect of text refers to the fact that the reality of text consist in its being understood and understandable. The hermeneutic consciousness of this consists in being aware that a text is understood and applied by variable subjects and generations. Gadamer states 'understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to effect of history to the being of what is understood¹³. It means we always find ourselves within a situation with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand. This 'situation' refers the concept of Horizon. Horizon is range of vision that includes everything can be seen in particular vantage point. if a person who have no horizon, could not see for enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand 'To have Horizon means being not limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. In the sphere of historical understanding, too, we speak of horizon especially when referring to the claim of historical consciousness to see the past in its own terms, not in terms of our contemporary criteria and prejudices but within its own historical horizon. The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring an appropriate historical horizon, so that we are trying to understand can be seen in true dimensions. We must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint –I,e transpose ourselves into the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon. Horizon is something into which we moves and that move with us, it is never bound to anyone stand point. It changes for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of past, out of which all human life lives and which exist in the form of tradition, is always in motion. Undoubtedly, understanding tradition require historical horizon but this does not mean we require this horizon by transposing ourselves into historical situation rather we must always already have horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves

into a situation. So the horizon of present cannot formed without past and our understanding fuse to our past. In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly fore grounded from the other. Projecting a historical horizon is only one phase in the process of understanding, it does not become into the self alienation of the past consciousness rather is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding a real fusing of horizon occur- which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously supersede.¹⁴ Gadamer argue that all interpretation involves a fusion of horizons between the past and present. It take place not only in terms of an implicit involvement in a tradition but also with an eye to how that past can applied to our current theoretical and practical situation.

Gadamer use the idea of application which follows directly from the notion of effective history. Since we cannot understand historical text or some other embodiment of tradition independently of our situatedness in history, understanding the meaning of text requires applying it to ourselves and to our particular historical situation .Application is not a conscious act performed after understanding the meaning of text. We do not first grasp the meaning of text in some detached, objective or universal sense and then apply it to ourselves rather when we understand; we have always already applied the text meaning to ourselves and to our particular historical situation. He draw the model of the concept of application from the tradition of theological and legal hermeneutics and another from the Aristotelian notion of PHRONESIS(practical reason). In both case theological and legal hermeneutics there is an essential tension between the fixed text-the law or the gospel, on the other the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching. The law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Like, the gospel does not exist in the same manner but to be taken in such a way that it exercises it saving effect.¹⁵ In Aristotelian ethics, the concept of Phronesis is associate with the relationship between universal and particular. It refers that practical rationality that enables the application of a universal moral norm within concrete situation that require moral action. But Gadamer reinterprets and modifies this Aristotelian notion in order to present hermeneutical idea; he argues we cannot understand meanings independently of the concreteness of our historical lives and of the particular situation in which we always find ourselves. The notion of application should not be understood as indicating that understanding is arbitrary or entirely determined by particular context of interpretation rather gadamer emphasize that understanding is always direct toward the meaning of text and particularly to the truth that text articulate.¹⁶(Truth&Methodp-341)

The idea of understanding as mediation between the present and the past this does not mean that understanding merely does not serve the continuity of tradition. Gadamer argued that historically effected understanding is ‘Transformative’ by nature. Gadamer use ‘Experience’ to describe the transformative dimension of understanding. Experience transforms the experiencing person, as whatever is experienced become

the part of the person and his worldview and, therefore, the something cannot be experienced again, at least not identical way. In Gadamer's view what we follow from experiences of negations openness to new experiences thus being an experienced person means having a radically non-dogmatic orientation toward oneself and the world. Experience teaches us that the interpretation at which we arrive in understanding is never the final world and therefore we must maintain ourselves open to new experience.

According to Gadamer, understanding historical texts involve a particular potential for transformative experience, the text as an articulation of past rarely meet our expectation and anticipated meaning and therefore understanding the text does not leave our prejudice. Gadamer point out that we are ourselves affected by the same tradition to which the text belongs, the text as an expression of past is never entirely unfamiliar to us, rather we are already in some sense acquainted with subject matter that the text address and thus in principle capable of understanding the text's meaning.

Conclusion: After all above this discussion, now I reach this point that History play important role in our interpretation and understanding. 'Man is a Historical being' and our life always affected by history. We are created by history and tradition, historical understanding and interpretation can be develop only within particular tradition of knowledge and inquiry and this involve of presupposition and preunderstanding within which understanding must begin. We cannot understand any text without our prejudice which we use to create anticipatory structure that we know is understandable unless we had prejudices we would not be able to understanding anything. So understanding is not possible without preunderstanding and presupposition. No interpretation can be presupposition less; even scientific interpretation describe experiment does not come from the interplay of the elements in the experiment but from the tradition of interpretation in which it stands and the future possibilities open. In this sense the past-present and future temporality applies to both scientific and nonscientific understanding. Understanding is not only reproductive but always involves a productive element as well, it constantly adds to new dimension of the meaning of text that spring from the particular context of interpretation. It means that every age and every generation inevitably understand historical texts and other embodiment of tradition in a new and unique way, differently from their predecessors. Tradition deeply impact to our understanding we understand things in own current situation and tradition. Our understanding is always 'prejudge' by horizon of meanings within which we act and think. There is no understanding that is free of all prejudices. Our understanding and interpretation involves the fusion of horizon between past and present. The fusion of horizon describe the constitution of historical continuity in the process of understanding text from the past and merging of the present and the past in a wider horizon encompassing both.

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