

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER

A. Hermeneutics and Philosophical Hermeneutics

1. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics¹ is a theoretical science of interpretation. Hermeneutics elucidate about the principles of exegesis, or interpretation of a text, and idioms. This method assumes that differences in historical and psychological settings greatly affect the processes and products of interpretation. Carl Braaten defined Hermeneutics more broadly as “*the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in a past time and culture may understand and become existentially meaningful in our present situation.*” This definition, according to him, is relating to the methodological rules and epistemological assumptions of understanding.²

Richard E. Palmer showed the existence of six modern notions of hermeneutics. In the earlier emergence of hermeneutics, it refers to the science of interpretation, especially the principles of textual exegesis. However, according to Palmer, the field of hermeneutics have been defined (in chronological order) as: (1) the theory of Biblical exegesis, (2) general methodology of philology, (3) the science of linguistics understanding, (4) the foundation of *geisteswissenschaften* (social

¹ The term *hermeneutics*, a Latinized version of the Greek *hermeneutice*, has been part of common language from the beginning of the 17th century. Nevertheless, its history stretches back to ancient philosophy. Addressing the understanding of religious intuitions, Plato used this term in a number of dialogues, contrasting hermeneutic knowledge to that of *sophia*. Aristotle carried this use of the term a step further, naming his work on logic and semantics *Peri hermeneias*, which was later rendered as *De interpretatione*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> on January 17, 2009.

² M. Muhsin Jamil, “Tekstualitas Al-Qur’an dan Problem Hermeneutika”, in *Teologia*, Vol. 17, Semarang: Fakultas Ushuluddin IAIN Walisongo Semarang, 2006, p. 82. See Carl Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966, p. 131.

science), (5) phenomenology of existence and existential understanding, and (6) interpretation systems both re-collective and iconoclastic, which humans use to reach the meaning behind the myths and culture. Each definition is a mere historical stage, which refers to an “event” or a critical approach to the issue of interpretation. Each definition essentially represents a viewpoint where hermeneutics is viewed; it brought forth a different view, but legitimizing the lattice action of interpretation, especially interpretation of texts.³

In another hand, Josef Bleicher classified hermeneutics into three different definitions. He broadened categories of hermeneutics as hermeneutical theory, hermeneutic philosophy and critical hermeneutics.⁴

a. Hermeneutical Theory

The first type of hermeneutics is a science that shows you how to understand. In this classification, hermeneutics is a guiding study for an accurate and proportional understanding. What is a comprehensive understanding? That is the main question of hermeneutical theory. Hermeneutics in this group recommends the understanding of the context as one aspect that should be considered to obtain a comprehensive understanding. Beside questioning about the meaning of texts such as what the meaning of texts morphologically, lexicologically and syntactically, it is also necessary to question about who the text come from, for what purpose, under what conditions and how the conditions of its author when the text is structured.

b. Hermeneutic Philosophy.

The second type of hermeneutics step further into philosophical, so it is more known as philosophical hermeneutics. In this type, the focus is no longer how to get a comprehensive understanding, rather it

³ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics; Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, trans. Musnur and Damanhuri Muhammad, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003, p. 38

⁴ Joseph Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 1

analyzes further of what kind of human's condition when they are trying to understand something.

This means that hermeneutics in philosophical dimension, perhaps more precisely epistemologically, can be defined as an "understanding of understanding." This kind of hermeneutics is done at least for two purposes: *firstly*, to put the results of understanding into proper portion and proportion, and *secondly*, to "produce" a new meaning from previous understanding.

c. Critical Hermeneutics

The third type of hermeneutics is essentially a further development of the second, even it can be said that both type have same formal objects. The different thing that distinguishes both is that the third type emphasizes on historical determinations in the process of understanding, and to what extent those determinations results in alienation, discrimination, and hegemonic discourse, including social-cultural-political repression due to the authority mastery of meaning and understanding by certain groups.⁵

Hermeneutics, can be said, moves in three horizons, namely the author's horizon, horizon of text, and the recipient's or the reader's horizon. Procedurally, hermeneutics works on texts, contexts and, contextualization, either in methodological operational or epistemological dimension in its interpretation. The first kind of hermeneutics emphasizes the process of understanding on the former two horizons, while the second and the third kind focus on the readers' horizons. The first type of hermeneutics is trying to trace back how the text is understood by its author, and then the author's understanding is considered as the most accurate meaning of the text. While the other two are more to see how the text is understood by the reader, because the author is not able to drive the

⁵ Fahrudin Faiz, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Tema-tema Kontroversial*, Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2005, p. 8-11

reader's understanding of the text that have been produced, so that the text is basically the absolute property of the reader to understand as they want.

Above explanation clearly shows that the problem is related to the problem of interpretation of text. How to change something from a situation of ignorance into understanding, or the transition from an abstract expression and the dark became clear expression in the form of language that humans can understand, while the transmission of ideas into concrete concepts often getting into constriction of meaning. Outer language is often unable to accommodate the meaning of which was conceived and prosecuted by the ideas and concepts that are perfectly hidden. Although the outer language remains the only way that can explain the meaning beneath the surface of the idea, but it would be able to reveal exactly when it can flexibly explore its own contents.

Essentially, hermeneutics is related with language. We think, speak and write through language. We understand and create interpretation with language. Gadamer states that language is the *modus operandi* of how we are in the world and is a form that seemed to embrace the whole constitution of this world. In short, hermeneutics is a new way revealed in the language, to “consort” with the language. Language embodies human culture.⁶

Hermeneutics also simply means as “message analysis”, or “things for interpreting”: the interpretation of tradition, the messages we receive from the past. Hermeneutics is usually applied to areas where tradition is considered important in people’s lives: religious texts, legal precedents, and so on.⁷ The concept of “text” is here extended beyond written documents to any number of objects subject to interpretation, such as experiences.

Essentially, hermeneutics involves cultivating the ability to understand things from somebody else’s point of view, and to appreciate

⁶ E. Sumaryono, *Hermeneutik; Sebuah Metode Filsafat*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1995, p. 27

⁷ Nick Szabo, *Hermeneutics: an Introduction to the Interpretation of Tradition*, retrieved from <http://szabo.best.vwh.net/hermeneutics.html> on May 23, 2009

the cultural and social forces that may have influenced their outlook. Hermeneutics is the process of applying this understanding to interpreting the meaning of written texts and symbolic artifacts (such as art or sculpture or architecture), which may be either historic or contemporary.⁸

2. Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics in its various historical forms from antiquity to modern times in general offered methodological help in solving interpretive problems that arise with certain kinds of texts: dreams, laws, poetry, and religious texts. With the emergence of German romanticism and idealism, the status of hermeneutics is changed. Hermeneutics turns philosophical. It was Gadamer who firstly used the term “philosophical hermeneutics”⁹ in reference to his philosophy. He came to see in Heidegger’s thought the basis for a philosophical hermeneutics. It is no longer conceived as a methodological or didactic aid for other disciplines, but turns to the conditions of possibility for symbolic communication as such. The question “How to read?” is replaced by the question, “How do we communicate at all?”¹⁰ The former is asked by, as Bleicher said, Hermeneutical Theory. While the latter question is asked by what so-called as Hermeneutical Philosophy.

Furthermore, what is philosophical aspect of philosophical hermeneutics, or, what is the relevance of philosophical hermeneutics can be seen from its commitment to the metaphysics of the theory of understanding. It means that what makes Gadamer’s hermeneutics called philosophic is a series of ontological claims about power and way of working of what is so called in traditional metaphysics as the human soul

⁸ Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutics> on January 17, 2009.

⁹ The term philosophical hermeneutics (German: *Philosophische Hermeneutik*) is chosen by Gadamer to refer to his general thinking, because he wanted to summon a hermeneutics that have “philosophical” relevance. This is different from what Heidegger proposed with the term “hermeneutic philosophy.” The consequence of this is that all interpretations, including interpretations of self and the entire researches in the field of philosophy of, are really the philosophy itself.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> on January 17, 2009.

(*Geistmannlich*). Philosophical hermeneutics make itself busy with everything that makes understanding is possible and why it is possible to be. Gadamer said:

*“I don’t intend to produce a manual for guiding understanding in the manner of the earlier hermeneutics. I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences... my real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing, since that which ‘happens’ to us over and above our explicit activities is the effective-historical constitution of our own knowing selves.”*¹¹

In general, all the main concepts of philosophical hermeneutics set afloat the philosophical relevance of this issue in every aspect of human understanding. That is why Gadamer claimed it (philosophical hermeneutics) as something universal.

The universality of philosophical hermeneutics is the motion of text towards experience. By mean, understanding is not an activity that done consciously and based on human choices when faced with an object (text). Instead, the continuous human experience is a constant stimulation to make an interpretation, because “the other” and something alien continually meet the human experience in daily life. “*Understanding begins...when something addresses us. This is the primary hermeneutical condition.*” Hermeneutical phenomenon is not merely a matter of method *an sich*, not a problem of appropriate method to understand a text, nor a standardized science that could meet the criteria of modern science. Understanding the tradition is not only a matter of responding a text; rather it is capturing the inspiration and admitting the truth.¹²

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, edited translation by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. xviii.

¹² Inyia Ridwan Muzir, *Hermeneutika Filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2008, p. 97-101

B. Biographical Sketch of Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans Georg Gadamer was born in Marburg on February 11, 1900. He grew up in Breslau (now Wroclaw in Poland), where his father was Professor of Pharmacy.¹³ In 1918 he studied with Richard Hoenigswald at Breslau, and in 1919 he studied with Nicolai Hartmann and the neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp at Marburg. In 1922 he graduated with a thesis on *The Essence of Pleasure and Dialogue in Plato*. In 1923 he met Husserl and Heidegger at Frieberg. He wrote a second doctoral dissertation under Heidegger, and became a *Privatdozent* at the University of Marburg. Gadamer once stated that he owed everything to Heidegger, his greatest influence. Heidegger's hermeneutical approach and his idea that philosophy is inseparable from historic and artistic culture would form the basis of Gadamer's philosophy.¹⁴

Gadamer's first academic appointment was to a junior position in Marburg in 1928, finally achieving a lower-level professorship there in 1937. In the meantime, from 1934-35, Gadamer held a temporary professorship at Kiel, and then, in 1939, took up the Directorship of the Philosophical Institute at the University of Leipzig, becoming Dean of the Faculty in 1945, and Rector in 1946, before returning to teaching and research at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1947. In 1949, he succeeded Karl Jaspers at Heidelberg, officially retiring (becoming Professor Emeritus) in 1968, continuing to teach there for over 50 years. Following his retirement, he traveled extensively, spending considerable time in North America, where he was a visitor at a number of institutions and developed an especially close and regular association with Boston College in Massachusetts. He was known as a sociable and vivacious personality, and remained active until the last year of his life.¹⁵

In 1960 he published *Truth and Method*, which would describe most thoroughly his work on philosophical hermeneutics. The book is an extension of Heidegger's ontology into critical hermeneutics, and attacks the view of

¹³ Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> on January 17, 2009.

¹⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.egs.edu/media/library-of-philosophy/hans-georg-gadamer/biography/> on May 23, 2009.

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> on January 17, 2009.

scientific method as the only route to truth. Critical hermeneutics can be understood at the philosophy of understanding and interpretation. *Truth and Method* examines language as a vehicle for interpretation, and includes critiques of Kantian aesthetics, Romantic hermeneutics, and the historicism of Dilthey. Gadamer argues that the truths of history, society, and culture are only revealed through a kind of dialogue: through listening to history as it is revealed in traditions, institutions, and culture as it is revealed in poetry. These truths remain inaccessible to scientific observation. The hermeneutical method is indispensable to historical and artistic discourse, and is also applied in law, theology, literature and philosophy.

Near the end of his life, Gadamer began to study religion attentively, hoping to imagine a way toward reconciliation between religions of the world and resistance to a mechanistic and alienated vision of human destiny. Gadamer died in Heidelberg on March 14, 2002, at the age of 102.¹⁶

C. Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

1. Text, Understanding, Language, and Tradition: Gadamer's Main Hermeneutical Concepts

Gadamer's hermeneutics ascribes comprehension as a communicative event that has its basic characteristic on the hermeneutical conversation. The central relationship of this event is the question and answer. For Gadamer, "*(a) person who thinks must ask himself questions*". In this way, the format of the conversation applies to all the experiences of life, for it is the way in which human beings produce meaning. In relation to textual comprehension, Gadamer states,

"A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges

¹⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.egs.edu/media/library-of-philosophy/hans-georg-gadamer/biography/> on May 23, 2009.

*only because he is reading the texts with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning.”*¹⁷

The basic model of understanding that Gadamer finally arrives at in *Truth and Method* is that of conversation. A conversation involves an exchange between conversational partners that seeks agreement about some matter at issue. Consequently, such an exchange is never completely under the control of either conversational partner, but is rather determined by the matter at issue. Conversation always takes place in language and similarly Gadamer views understanding as always linguistically mediated. Since both conversations and understanding involve coming to an agreement, so Gadamer argues that all understanding involves somethings like a common language. In this sense, all understanding is, according to Gadamer, interpretative, and, insofar as all interpretation involves the exchange between the familiar and the alien, so all interpretation is also “translative”.

Gadamer’s commitment to the linguisticity of understanding also commits him to a view of understanding as essentially a matter of conceptual articulation. This does not rule out the possibility of other modes of understanding, but it does give primacy to language and its conceptuality in hermeneutic experience. Indeed, Gadamer takes language to be, not merely some instrument by means of which we are able to engage with the world, but as instead the very medium for such engagement. We are “in” the world through being “in” language. This emphasis on the linguisticity of understanding does not, however, lead Gadamer into any form of linguistic relativism. Just as we are not held inescapably captive within the circle of our prejudices, or within the effects of our history, neither are we held captive within language. Language is that within which anything that is intelligible can be comprehended, it is also that within which we encounter ourselves and

¹⁷ Dilys Karen Rees, *Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics: The Vantage Points and the Horizons In Readers’ Responses to an American Literature Text*, *The Reading Matrix*, Vol. 3. No.1, April 2003, p. 4.

others. In this respect, language is itself understood as essentially dialogue or conversation. Like Wittgenstein, as well as Davidson, Gadamer thus rejects the idea of such a thing as a “private language”. Language always involves others, just as it always involves the world.

Gadamer claimed that language is the universal horizon of hermeneutic experience. The original hermeneutical experience is therefore less that of language than that of the limits of language. It is because language never succeeds in exhausting everything that wants to be said and understood that our understanding always remains in a permanent quest of language. The constitutive insatisfaction of *Sprachlichkeit* corresponds to what Gadamer names the "speculative" structure of language, which is studied in the second to the last chapter of *Truth and Method*, the chapter that prepares for the universalization of the hermeneutical experience at the end of the book. The "speculative" dimension refers to everything which is not said in that which is effectively said or to the entire sphere of the unsaid which is only mirrored (the term speculative comes from *speculum*, mirror) or reflected in effective discourse. There is a willed meaning, which never achieves its full crystallization in the proposition.¹⁸

The speculative understanding encourages a comprehensive accomplishment of meaning which takes into account this “unsaid,” the motivational background, the context, in short, the dialogue which precedes the given discourse. The speculative dimension is at work as much at the level of the speaker as of the listener. The speaker 'risks' statements, he “commits” himself (in this regard one might say that stammering is language's most honest form of statement) while knowing perfectly well that his words do not exhaust his willed meaning. The speaker whose propositions are taken literally knows herself to be poorly understood. She can take a certain distance with regard to her own

¹⁸ Jean Grondin, *Sources of Hermeneutics*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 150

propositions while looking for others so that she can express what she really wants to say; or all that which it would be necessary to state in order to be adequately understood.¹⁹

Gadamer's account of this speculative element of language merits being quoted in full length:

“language itself has something speculative-not only in the sense Hegel intends, as an instinctive pre-figuring of logical reflection-but, rather, as the realization of meaning, as the event of speech, of mediation, of coming to an understanding. Such a realization is speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are oriented toward the sense intended as toward the infinite. A person who has something to say seeks and finds the words to make himself intelligible to the other person. This does not mean that he makes 'statements.' Anyone who has experienced an interrogation-even if only as a witness-knows what it is to make a statement and how little it is a statement of what one means. In a statement the horizon of meaning of what is to be said is concealed by methodical exactness; what remains is the 'pure' sense of the statements. That is what goes on record. But meaning thus reduced to what is stated is always distorted meaning.”

The task of a hermeneutical penetration of language is to re-conquer the speculative density of discourse by putting in the balance the un-said which reflects itself in what had been uttered. One sees that the hermeneutical intelligence of language, understood in the subjective sense of the genitive, is more an intelligence, which distinguishes language itself than it is our own. What this intelligence requires of us is an understanding, even a compassion, in the hope of awakening the speculative truth which attempted to express itself in the limited (although intelligent) terms of discourse. Gadamer continues:

“To say what one means (. . .) to make oneself understood-means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and to ensure that it is understood in this way. Someone who speaks in this way may well use only the most

¹⁹ Jean Grondin, *Ibid.*

ordinary and common words, but he is just the same able to bring to language what is not said and must be said.”

To know how to convey in what is said all that which cannot be said, this is truly the perilous task of discourse, but also that of comprehension which attempts to take the proper measure of that which gets said. To understand is therefore to enter into dialogue with what has been uttered, of course also with what an author wanted to say, but also with everything, he was not able to say. Speech and understanding thus emerge as “speculative” processes whose success is nothing less than fragile. To understand is to bring out the unsaid, which is necessary in order to accomplish that which was said. Hermeneutics must therefore be in the virtuality of meaning which dwells within language. Human comprehension operates in this universal element of dialogue, of the search for language, which precedes the objective world of statements.²⁰

According to Gadamer, understanding is always applicable to our current situation, although it relates with historical events, dialectic, and language. Therefore, understanding always has a position, such as our own personal position today. Understanding is never objective and scientific. Because understanding is not “knowing” statically and outside the framework of time, but always in certain circumstances, at a special place in the frame of space and time, for example in history. All “living experience” is being historic. Language and understanding are also being historic.

For Gadamer, questions relating with the importance of time in understanding and interpretation raises hermeneutic circle. We cannot better understand firstly, “and then” make interpretations. Our mind is not merely a mirror that mechanically reflects all the light it receives. The process of understanding is actually the interpretation itself. Our mind makes distinction, gives priority, delays, works, and utilizes what is collected from our senses and from intellectual process itself. When our

²⁰ Jean Grondin, *Ibid.*, p. 150-152

mind “understands” something, interpretation is also included in it. Otherwise, when our mind is interpreting, understanding is also included in it too.

For Gadamer, human are being through and in the tradition. He clearly saw that the situation actually when understanding occurs is always understanding through language and tradition. By defining understanding as linguistical events of tradition, conceptual problems can be approached spatially.

Our relationship with the tradition lies on the fact that we are here and now equally share the fundamental prejudices with tradition yesterday and there. This relationship is possible because of the language that is derived by means of text or because of the tradition that was played and addressed by the text to us. Within this relationship there is a game between the distances and closeness. Here is the place of hermeneutics. Gadamer said:

“The place between strangeness and familiarity that a transmitted has for us is that intermediate place between being an historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition. The true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area.”²¹

Humans as an interpreter or reader, as an agent of history, is not absolutely in position to lead, because he is always situated and conditioned by the tradition in which he living. Tradition, as Gadamer said, makes me as I aught. Tradition is a collection of ideas, beliefs, practices, which allows me to understand and deal with people, institutions, and objects. Tradition is always “now” and I've never fully been outside of it. Cultural variables given by a tradition is the basis of history. In Gadamer's own words:

“They constitute the initial directedness of our this whole ability to experience. They are biases of our openness to the world. They are

²¹ Gadamer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 262

conditions whereby Simply We experience something ... whereby what We Encounter says something to us ... Thus, to stand within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but make it possible."

The facts of human's fallen into certain traditions affirm the human finitude as the central ontologism. The medium that became a vehicle (or mode) for people to realize their fallen within a particular tradition is language. Within and through language, our historical nature and relationship are mediated with the world and then new insights were subsequently produced. Language is the trace or the record of limitations.

Language and understanding are two structural aspects that cannot be separated from human-being-in-the-world. Gadamer looked at language not merely as the instrument of reason and understanding; before we are able to reveal the truth through language, "language" which has been crystallized in the form of tradition has given us materials that we use in expressing the truths.²²

This truth disclosure must be based on tradition, not on methods or theories. For Gadamer, humans are able to understand because he has a tradition and tradition is part of our experience, so there will not be a meaningful experience without referring to tradition. Strictly speaking, the understanding of the truth to be unhidden entities would only be a possibility if it grounded in tradition. That is why the act of understanding is considered as the way Dasein to be.²³

2. Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy

According to Gadamer, hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of an older tradition of practical philosophy. Its main question, how is

²² Alim Ruswanto, "Tradisi Sebagai Rumah dan Bahasa Sebagai Jendela Being: Menelusuri Metafisika Gadamer Dalam Hermeneutika Filosofisnya" in *Filsafat Barat*, Jogjakarta: Ar-Ruzz, 2007, p. 168-170

²³ Edi Mulyono, "Hermeneutika Linguistik-Dialektis Hans Georg Gadamer", in Nafishul Atho' & Arif Fahrudin (ed.), *Hermeneutika Transendentanl: dari Konfigurasi Filosofis menuju Praksis Islamic Studies*, Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2002), p. 138

understanding possible, is completely situated within the horizon of praxis. Starting from Heidegger's definition of being as time, and understanding as the mode of being or Dasein, Gadamer comes to an insight that the historical character of every understanding is a principle of hermeneutics. He seeks something that is common to every understanding, and it is its definitive and historical character. Understanding is always temporary and, therefore, belongs to the field of praxis. This claim is outlined by a detailed explanation of a whole network of notions, which Gadamer uses to define hermeneutical experience. Here are some main principles of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

a. Prejudices

Prejudice is the foundation of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics; it is perhaps the most controversial concept in his philosophy. Prejudice is a soil where our judgment is grown, e.i. judgment made before the final examination of all moments that determine a thing.²⁴

To make an interpretation, according to Gadamer, there must be prejudice or presupposition for the interpreter. Prejudice is very important, for that he opposed the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher or Dilthey that tried to eliminate prejudice. To him, knowledge is not only free from prejudice, but even requires it. Logos or ratio not only contains a prejudice but it is even possible by the existence of prejudice itself.

Since prejudice is very important for Gadamer, then he raised the concept of rehabilitation of prejudice. According to him, prejudice is no need to be eliminated but should be allowed to arise in the interpreter. Any effort to understanding and interpreting cannot escape from the prejudice. On the basis of rehabilitation of prejudice, understanding becomes inseparable from effective-history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*),

²⁴ Duska Dobrosavljev, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics As Practical Philosophy*, Facta Universitatis, Vol. 2, No. 9, 2002, p. 608

namely the fact that the action of researcher and the actor are both a historical act located in historical continuity.

With this prejudice or presupposition then will be able to awaken a dialogue or dialectic of question and answer between the interpreter and the interpreted text or allow the fusion of horizons (fusion between horizon of text and horizon of interpreter).²⁵

Gadamer boldly states that understanding is always prejudiced, inasmuch as it is defined by culture and the community which define our language and our lives.

b. Effective-Historical Consciousness

The prejudices and fore-meanings in the mind of the interpreter which make understanding possible, are not at the free disposal of the interpreter, but linked to a “horizon” and an “effective history” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). “*Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused.*”²⁶

Gadamer argues that the “true” historical object is not “an object” at all, but a relationship which comprises both the reality of history and the reality of historical *understanding*. This he calls the “principle of effective-history”.

Whenever we conduct a research on, for example, prehistoric monuments, the aim could therefore never be to reconstruct later meanings of the monuments, but only to make them intelligible as *what* they are today, in our own horizon and in the light of the effective-history of these (and other) monuments. All interpretations of historic objects are necessarily undertaken from a particular effective-historical position that determines our prejudices about these objects and enables

²⁵ Edi Mulyono, *Op. Cit.*, p. 142.

²⁶ Gadamer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 258

us to understand them in the first place: “*Understanding is, essentially, an effective-historical relation.*”²⁷

Hence, an interpretation can be made richer not only by continuous study of the object, but also by a better understanding of the themes and issues of its effective-history. This is one important rationale for investigating the reception history of monuments.²⁸

Every situation is characterized by a certain horizon. Gadamer explicitly denotes the concept of horizon positively as a possibility to adequately comprehend and compare close and distant things. To have a horizon means to be able to clearly measure and understand the importance of things within their frame. Yet, concerning this issue, philosophic hermeneutics asks an important question: how do we approach different horizons, so that we could understand them?

We cannot place ourselves in parenthesis if we want to meet the Other. We cannot remove all prejudices, even if we could, all paths of understanding would be inevitably closed. Gadamer’s analysis of aesthetic and historical consciousness shows what difficulties these attempts imply. By the fusion of horizons we encounter the Different, enabling it to speak freely.²⁹

Understanding will only occur in historical context or horizon that constantly changing. This has been one of the reasons why interpretation is never monolithic, or has one single aspect, rigid and static. If the horizon of history is constantly changing, understanding will follow its contour and also its shape. Finally, understanding itself is a fusion of different horizons, reciprocal relationships between various contexts. Gadamer argued that a text, either it is a legal code or a holy book, should be understood at all times, in specific situations, and in

²⁷ Gadamer, *Ibid.*, p. 267

²⁸ Nick Szabo, *Loc. Cit.*

²⁹ Duska Dobrosavljev, *Op. Cit.*, p. 610

new ways that different from old, if we want to understand both as they should be understood.³⁰

c. Fusion of Horizon

An essential part of the “hermeneutical situation” in which we find ourselves understanding is the “horizon” which limits our very possibility of hermeneutical vision, or *understanding*. Gadamer uses the concept of horizon to speak of how comprehension takes place. The horizon is defined as, “...*the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point*”.³¹ A horizon defined *physically*, such as in the phrase, “the horseman disappeared into the horizon”, alludes to dimensions of time and distance that are apparent from a certain vantage point. However, a vantage point can also be defined as the belief system, desires, and imaginings of an individual. Within this conceptual sphere the horizon is formed by history both personal and socio-cultural. This is the range of vision that an individual brings to comprehension.

*“The horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of that testings is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come... In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other.”*³²

However, Gadamer does not argue that for historical understanding, ultimately, we need to place ourselves into the different horizon of a particular historical situation, because this would be an impossible and absurd task. We can neither leave our own horizon, nor would it be desirable, as the effective-history of a continuing tradition

³⁰ E. Sumaryono, *Hermeneutika: Sebuah Metode Filsafat*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1995, p.

³¹ Gadamer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 269

³² Gadamer, *Ibid.*, p. 273

depends on constantly new assimilations and interpretations. Gadamer denotes this boundedness to the contemporary hermeneutical situation by the much-(mis-)quoted expression of the “fusion of horizons”:

“The projecting of the historical horizon, then, is only a phase in the process of understanding, and does not become solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizons, which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously removed.”³³

Gadamer states that it is possible to speak of the “*narrowness of horizon, or the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening of new horizons, and so forth*”. The horizon is “...*something into which we move and moves with us*”. Thus to speak of a closed horizon or a fixed horizon is a *mere* abstraction, for as we live and participate in the hermeneutical conversation with the events that occur in our lives our horizons can be transformed.

But Gadamer also speaks of those who have no horizon and overvalue that which is closest to them. The concept was expanded on those who do not move but remain stationary. This individual does not see beyond his limited perspectives and does not understand that there are multiple perspectives about the same event. This situation can occur when an individual is isolated, associating only with people of his region, race, culture or social class.

Comprehension, therefore, is not awakened whilst the individual is surrounded only by the known and familiar. In order for there to be comprehension, it is necessary that there be an encounter with that which is strange. For philosophical hermeneutics these two terms—familiar and strange—describe how we situate ourselves in relation to the events that occur. The familiar is defined existentially as that which brings us feelings of comfort and security. The strange, on the other

³³ Gadamer, *Ibid.*, p. 273

hand, is that which brings us feelings of loss and disorientation. Since we live within the polarity of the familiar and the strange, it is in this tension that the hermeneutic task is undertaken. The hermeneutic task is not to ignore the strange or abolish the different, but to encounter and deal with the unfamiliar, and the rupture that it brings. In Gadamer's words, "*only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening of our own experience of the world*".³⁴

At the moment when there is comprehension, Gadamer speaks of the fusion of horizons. This fusion is dynamic and self-transcendent, and creates new perspectives and rules that are used to make up a new horizon. Fusion is not the same as empathy for the other, nor is it synthesis with the other. It occurs as a result of the strange, for it is exactly what is different that causes a new comprehension. The different or, in other words, the voice of the other is respected in the fusion of horizons. In empathy, one speaks for the other; in fusion one speaks with the other. Synthesis is based on a one-voiced discourse; the fusion of horizons is based on a multi-voiced discourse. The fusion of horizon is continuous. It is not a progression through various steps to a complete knowledge, but it is a state of being open to new experiences.³⁵

Gadamer's hermeneutic concept *fusion of horizons* can also be used to extend this practice of critical inquiry into a sense of being and belonging. There is an access of being in the same way as when, in a genuine conversation, something occurs to both partners that had not occurred to either of them before. When they come to understanding, something new is conceived. Something new happens, and what occurs in hermeneutic conversation is being. We come to realize that belonging is an ontological way of talking about the condition achieved

³⁴ Dilys Karen Rees, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2-4

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3

by the fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, “*to acquire a horizon (of critical understanding) 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, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.*” To critically understand something is to “*understand it as the answer to a question,*” not as a steel-edged rhetorical weapon. A fusion occurs when personal horizons merge with the horizons of texts or other interlocutors. In a reciprocal exchange, perspectives and prejudices are altered as all involved in the “game of understanding” place themselves “at risk” in pursuit of a truth that is greater than the wisdom possessed by any single “player.”

Gadamer also speaks of the fusion of horizons as “a partial rapprochement between our present world, from which we can never hope to detach our restrictive selves, and the different world we are seeking to appraise.” To understand a strange text, conversation, or society does not require that we destroy our own horizons in order to locate ourselves in another’s place or in another’s frame. We can put our relationships with tradition (horizons) “into play” without entirely relinquishing them.

d. Application

Traditional hermeneutics divides the hermeneutical problem into understanding (*subtilitas intelligendi*), interpretation (*subtilitas explicandi*) and application (*subtilitas applicandi*). The concept of subtleness (*subtilitas*) implies a sophisticated skill and distance from purely intellectual method. It adequately corresponds to the complexity of practical *Lebenswelt* that includes the illogical and temporary part of soul.

The three mentioned elements—understanding, interpretation and application—are always in an unbreakable unity. The way of approaching the other, described as the fusion of horizons, shows that

understanding is always interpretation. Understanding presupposes a particular horizon and prejudices and therefore corresponding restrictions as well. Thus, we always interpret the other, never meeting the thing-in-itself. The unity of understanding and interpretation is the most apparent in the case of translation from foreign languages. Every translator is forced to interpret the sense of a text given in another language, due to the limits imposed by his own language and his own understanding of the text, and to either highlight or neglect some elements of the text. There is no identical and neutral translation. It is clear to everyone who ever tried to translate anything. Gadamer adds that a good translation is always simpler than the original.

Application, as an integral part of understanding, implies the above-mentioned concept of situation. We can never have an “objective” knowledge of situation, since it is always open. The inclusion of application into understanding means that the hermeneutical situation is essentially practical: we cannot gain a general knowledge from which we would deduce singular cases. “The whole must be understood from its parts and the other way round”. Hermeneutical knowledge is always given in an outline, as a direction, since it is the only way not to lose a singular case in the universality of principles. By means of application, understanding is transformed into historical events. Encountering singular cases, it becomes history. Therefore, it can never turn into science. Understanding is a form of experience.

Application is where the “rubber meets the road”: where the tradition demonstrates its value, or lack thereof, when applied to contemporary life. An application is the “end use” of a traditional text, such the judge applying the law to a case, or a preacher writing a

sermon based on a verse from Scripture. An application is also a new interpretation, a new construction of the tradition.³⁶

The integration of application into understanding indicates that knowledge and action are essentially interrelated and that subsequent application of principles to life is inadequate. What makes understanding possible is application, its interrelatedness with the *Lebenswelt*.³⁷

D. The Relevancies Between Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Qur'anic Hermeneutics

The endeavor of Qur'anic "hermeneutics" is as old as Islam. It is often described in Arabic as *ta'wi>l*, a term that describes the intellectual task of ascertaining the hidden meaning of the language in texts. *Ta'wi>l* can be concerned with texts other than the Qur'an, although the Qur'an is the preeminent text in the Arabic language. Thus, *ta'wi>l* can also be applied to poetry, literature, and perhaps even art or music. Another term used to denote a hermeneutical task is the word *tafsir*. The use of this term is now almost synonymous with the idea of Qur'anic hermeneutics and is used in that sense in this Article. Traditionally, there was great debate among the scholars as to whether the proper approach to interpretation of the Qur'an should be described as *ta'wi>l* (focusing on hidden meanings) or *tafsir* (focusing on explanations and commentary on the text).

When associated with Islam, according to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, there are three areas of study that must be distinguished. *Firstly*, original texts of Islam, i.e. The Qur'an and authentic Hadith of the Prophet. *Secondly*, Islamic thought that regarded as a form of interpretation of the original texts. It can be found in four main disciplines of Islamic thought, namely law, theology,

³⁶ Dilys Karen Rees, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Duska Dobrosavljev, *Op. Cit.*, p. 611

philosophy and mysticism. *Thirdly*, the realization of socio-political practice of Islam in Muslim societies within various socio-historical backgrounds.³⁸

Within the framework of hermeneutics approaches to understanding the language of religion seems the second and third not much to see complex problems. The problem becomes complicated and controversial when discussing the hermeneutics of religious language in the first sense. Yet as something interpreted regardless of its complexity and controversy, someone should have positioned scripture on reasonable position. However, scripture so have codified then he has been physically presented textual and sit parallel with the other books. It has been a historical fact. What then distinguishes the attitude and response of readers? Likewise in understanding the language of religion, then any reader is very important.³⁹

In regard with the modern hermeneutics approach to The Qur'an, it needs to note three things that become the basic assumptions in interpretation, namely:

1. The interpreter is human. Everyone who interprets scriptural texts, he remains a human being attributed with all their inadequacies, their strengths, and their temporariness that bound by space and time. This assumption is expectedly understood that human are not going to get away from their historical ties of life and experiences where the bond more or less will bring influence and colorize style of interpretation. This assumption is intended not to provide a right or wrong "absolute" verdict to some interpretations, but more directed to conduct a critical understanding and analysis of an interpretation. Interpreters are human beings who bring their humanitarian "elements". Each of Muslim generation since in the Prophet Muhammad era, while holding the "elements", had been producing their own commentaries on The Qur'an. It is not surprising if ultimately there are a variety of interpretations in each generation.

³⁸ M. Muhsin Jamil, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92

³⁹ M. Muhsin Jamil, *Ibid.*

2. Interpretation cannot be separated from language, history and traditions. All of interpretation is basically participation in the process of prevailing historical-linguistic and traditions, where such participation occurs within a certain time and space. Muslim's struggle with al-Quran is also within this "confinement". A person cannot possibly escape from language, culture, and traditions in which they live. Reformist thinkers have often claimed that the crisis of the Islamic world and the inability of Muslims to provide a useful contribution to the contemporary world are because of tradition. The way out proposed by the reformers is often by leaving traditional ties and to "return to The Qur'an". The statement is actually not in harmony with the fact that a new interpretation could not be fully independent to merely base on the text, but definitely related to the historical context, either with the historical context when it appears or when it is interpreted.
3. There is no text in which its territory is for itself. Socio-historical and linguistic nuance in the revelation of The Qur'an appears in contents, forms, purposes and language used by the Qur'an. This is apparent also, for example, in the distinction between the Makky verses and the Madany verses. In regard with the process of revelation, language and content in one hand, and the people who received it on the other hand, The Qur'an is not "unique". Revelation is always a comment to, at least be understood in terms of, specific conditions of the people in which the revelation came down.⁴⁰

If the framework of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is drawn into *Ulu>m al-Qur'a>n*, we will find urgent and radical relevancies. The Qur'an, as a normative text that gradually revealed 14 centuries ago with the peculiarities of traditions surrounding it needs productive dialogues with the traditions that cascade around the lives of Muslims in various parts of the world today. Especially if we realize how the reality of global world now that certainly raises new phenomena that clearly not all are covered by normative

⁴⁰ Fahrudin Faiz, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16-17

treasure generated by previous *mufassir* generations. To become a living word, the word of God should continue to evolve and not make a stop on the dimensions of legal study only. It cannot only be “parked” on theological problems. Indeed, it needs to develop adaptive capacity, elasticity, and flexibility in a progressive way in line with demands of the times. It should not be given a narrow meaning with its standardity. In this process and this project, hermeneutics intended to offer an alternative way of understanding in order to revive the religious texts.

No one denies that The Qur’an is the result of the process of metamorphosis from oral texts becomes a written text. This metamorphosis shows that The Qur’an is a linguistic text, which uses “language” as its medium. Any text is a historical phenomenon and has a specific context, and The Qur’an is not an exception. As word of the human, The Qur’an was not emerge in a cultural vacuum, but in a cultural loaded space and time. On this basis, the text of The Qur’an, like other linguistic texts, is historical text.

With the textuality of the Qur'an confirms Abu Zayd returned to linking science study of The Qur’an to study the context of literary criticism. This means that like other texts of The Qur’an may be approached by various method of modern textual studies. As it is said by Abu Zayd, the Qur’anic text is a language text that can be described as a central text in Arab civilization. If so, sat as a historical text does not mean reducing his divinity. Precisely the historicity of the text is the very thing that makes The Qur’an as the subject of understanding and *ta’wi>l*. Thus the socio-historical analysis is needed in the process of understanding The Qur’an, and the use of modern linguistic methods into something that would in practice *ta’wi>l*. This is where the importance of textuality and historicity of the Qur’an. Ignoring the textuality of the Qur'an will only lead to freezing of the meaning of the message. When the meaning of the message (in) frozen, then he will very easily prostituted on the direction and ideological interests of the reader.⁴¹

⁴¹ M. Muhsin Jamil, *Op. Cit.*