ON PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE RELIGIOUS OTHER: RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE IN HERMENEUTICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to elucidate the task of philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer in clearing the ground for a global dialogue on the issue of inexpressible alterity, a form of religious transcendence that would integrate the great world religions. In order to satisfy the paper's humble attempt, the discussion would be divided into three sections: First, is to situate the ethos of philosophical hermeneutics by providing insights on how philosophical hermeneutics and its habit of thinking deal with the other. Second, is to deal with the notion of religious transcendence and how Gadamer's religious turn gives us an insight on how we can prepare for a global dialogue by discovering the limits of our existence, and the common expressions in all religions, "an expression of transcendence that describes what touches us all." Lastly, the paper proceeds on how religions should deal with others by laying the structure of the ethics of dialogue as illuminated by the hermeneutic consciousness provided by Gadamer himself. This portion touches the challenges posed by the idea of religious transcendence in hermeneutics and how challenges are to be dealt using the ethics of dialogue, thus allowing us to examine the applicability of hermeneutic tools in preparing for a global inter-religious dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a pluralistic world. More often than not, this pluralism is evidently experienced in religion, culture, worldviews, languages and norms (Pandikattu 1). One phenomenon that describes the late 20th century is the dramatic rise of religion after it was put into periphery by modernism. Ironically, the secular age has been marked by the return or revival of religion in the international arena (Merlini "A Post Secular World"). Calano in his article entitled Religious Pluralism in Philippine Democracies mentions that "our time is characterized, not by the rise of either religious orantireligious views, but by religious pluralism (Calano 31)."

The resurgence of religion in the public life amidst secularism was an unexpected turn of event. Many have thought that the project of secularism will pave the way for the marginalization of any religious activities and related events. Contrary to this popular supposition, Huntington pointed that the re-emergence of religion has been the most distinct phenomenon that ever happened in the late 20th century (Huntington 64). However, the re-emergence of religion in the public life has been contentious for it opened the floodgates of every religious tradition into a form of militant piety known as fundamentalism, such resurgence has taken many observers by surprise (Armstrong ix).

The unexpected turn of events was largely driven by the major religious traditions in the world in which abhorrence and opposition to values propagated by modern secular society has been the driving force to restructuring the society on the basis of religious belief and practice. One cannot really deny the prominence of religion in human affairs, by regaining its centrality in public life, it poses a major

implication in the 21st century. One of these is the problem of religious fundamentalism and religious motivated conflict (Zimmerman "The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence' 50).

Major religious traditions may have been driven by their desires to restructure the society through the re-evaluation of religious values and practices that were mostly taken for granted by the modern secular society. The common desire for restructuring may be a source of concern as well since every major religious tradition is shaped and is defined by truths that transcend the historicity of every society and culture. This could further lead to future religious motivated conflicts in establishing societies based on such truths and thus seemed to hinder the possibility of peaceful co-existence.

It is necessary therefore to address this peculiar cultural context and how can philosophical hermeneutics address the current need for an inter-religious dialogue that enable each of us to maintain a society that "inhibits a context within each of which the default option may be different from others, although the dwellers within each were very aware of the options favored by the others, and could not just dismiss them as an inexplicable exotic error" (Calano 31).

The question has been the taken up by Hans-Georg Gadamer during his final years as he was trying to establish a task and a model of knowledge that would address the undeniable resurgence of religion in the public life. Gadamer did not fail to leave us something that we can rely on. Zimmerman believes that Charles Taylor has regarded Gadamer's legacy as having successfully provided the century a kind of model of knowledge whose acknowledgement of human finitude enables a philosophical hermeneutics to deal with intercultural understanding within a

pluralistic world, a world of increasing heterogeneity (Zimmerman "Ignoramus: Gadamer's Religious Turn" 203).

What Gadamer has left for our generation is his model of knowledge which can assist us in dealing with the most challenging phenomenon of the 21st century: understanding other most especially the religious other as the world is increasingly becoming religious.

Hence, this paper attempts to elucidate the task of philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer in clearing the ground for a global dialogue on the issue of inexpressible alterity, a form of religious transcendence that would integrate the great world religions. In order to satisfy the paper's humble attempt, the discussion would be divided into three sections: First, is to situate the ethos of philosophical hermeneutics by providing insights on how philosophical hermeneutics and its habit of thinking deal with the other. Second, is to deal with the notion of religious transcendence and how Gadamer's religious turn gives us an insight on how we can prepare for a global dialogue by discovering the limits of our existence, and the common expressions in all religions, "an expression of transcendence that describes what touches us all" (Zimmerman "Ignoramus: Gadamer's Religious Turn" 208). Lastly, the paper proceeds on how religions should deal with others by laying the structure of the ethics of dialogue as illuminated by the hermeneutic consciousness provided by Gadamer himself. This portion touches the challenges posed by the idea of religious transcendence in hermeneutics and how challenges are to be dealt using the ethics of dialogue, thus allowing us to examine the applicability of hermeneutic tools in preparing for a global inter-religious dialogue.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE HERMENEUTIC ETHOS

Does philosophical hermeneutics have an ethics? If we are to revisit Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in one way or another, we are able to have a grasp of the intrinsic orientedness of his philosophic project to other. His philosophical hermeneutics is fundamentally crafted as a philosophy of address by the other as the possibility of understanding comes not from the thinking subject but from the other that addresses the subject, that addresses me so to speak (Risser 208). In Gadamer's landmark philosophic project, Truth and Method, he lays out a kind of philosophic hermeneutics with a supposition that "all aspect of human understanding presupposes a hermeneutical dimension; in this sense hermeneutic is universal" (Lawn 44).

Hermeneutics is not at all novel as it can be traced back to classical antiquity which was derived from the Greek term *hermeneuein* which means interpretation. More often than not, hermeneutics is applied in situations in which we encounter meanings and texts that cannot be simply deciphered thus requiring an intensive interpretive effort (Gill 11). "The art or technique of understanding and interpretation developed from analogous impulses along two paths – theological and philological" (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 174). The Protestant theology of the 17th century developed a theological hermeneutics which aimed to understand the scripture in a less allegorical fashion as contrary to the principles used by most Catholic theologians during those times (Lawn 45). Hermeneutics in this sense comes only into

play when obscurities and incomprehensibility take place thus alienating the interpreter from the meaning of the text. Thus, to limit hermeneutics on scriptural and theological tasks is a myopic and a limiting activity of what it can really offer to us in understanding things amidst obscurities. Schleiermacher in this regard is right when he extends the application of hermeneutics to any human affairs that confront the problem of understanding. The move from textual interpretation to a more general one, to any event that "requires effort to understand whenever there is no immediate understanding" (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 179), is central to the development of a systematic hermeneutics offered by Schleiermacher. Hence, the problem of understanding is no longer confined to ancient, biblical texts or any foreign language but is extended to all situations where the danger of alienation of the subject from the meaning may occur. Gadamer speaks of the same thing when he acknowledged the shift in understanding how hermeneutics should be extended beyond interpreting ancient texts:

Schleiermacher's idea of universal hermeneutics starts from this: that the experience of the alien and the possibility of misunderstanding is universal. It is true that this alienation is greater, and misunderstanding easier, in artistic than in non-artistic utterance, and it is greater with written than with oral utterance, which is, as it were, continuously interpreted by the living voice. But precisely Schleiermacher's extending the hermeneutical task to "meaningful dialogue," which is especially characteristic of him, shows how fundamentally the meaning of alienation, which hermeneutics is supposed to overcome, has changed in comparison to the task of hermeneutics as hitherto conceived. In a new and universal sense, alienation is inextricably given with the individuality of the Thou. (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 179)

In this sense, hermeneutics can be applied even to the situations where individuals engage in dialogue or conversations, where misunderstanding is also a possibility as it is a feature of any encounter that necessitates interpretation (Gill 11).

Furthermore, Gadamer in his magnum opus Truth and Method reiterated that his philosophical hermeneutics is not a methodology or a technique but a theory of the real experience that thinking is (Gadamer "Truth and Method" xxxvi). He claims that hermeneutic poses an ontological significance as it allows the human person to engage with the world who is conscious of his finitude and temporality. Hermeneutics therefore is not a method which can limit the possibilities of understanding as a dialogical, practical and contextualized activity (Gill 11).

Gadamer was successful in showing us the incommensurability of the rational method adopted by the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) with the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). He claims that one cannot adopt the disciplinary matrix of the natural sciences in interpreting the human affairs. Human activities cannot be just reduced into mere methodological applications that seek to discover a truth independent of time and history. Gadamer is coming from his mentor, arguably the most influential philosopher of postmodernity, Martin Heidegger. Understanding can never be a presuppositionless understanding as man is basically a contingent being that is shaped and influenced by his historicity and temporality. It is

therefore an impossible task to arrive at a truth that is understood and grasped by a presuppositionless consciousness as advocated by the rational or scientific method.

Furthermore, Gadamer, through his philosophic project, had elevated into discourse the necessity for a re-evaluation of the rational method. A scientist cannot just simply impose his disciplinary matrix in developing the self-understanding of the human sciences to elevate them into fields of knowledge worthy of being called scientific. "The human sciences have no method of their own" (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 7-8). Cultural products, including art are not objects of rational investigation because these are voices within the fabric of interminable conversation. What Gadamer contributed to the ongoing discourse is the successful attempt of Truth and Method in re-evaluating the authority of rational method in showing the truth, far from being revealed by such, is in fact even obscured and overshadowed by it. The scientific method if it is applied in the human sciences can have major consequences as it is trying to impress a misplaced optimism and triumphalism. For the rational or scientific method, sciences are wholly looking forward and see past decisions and knowledge of scientific inquiries and investigations as part of the dark chapters of human ignorance. It is a quaint epoch of the infancy and innocence of the human mind of antiquarian value on the origins of the human thought but has no direct value to contemporary thought. This attitude of the methodological approach on the natural sciences does not accept the fact that the understanding of the world is and will always be affected by the shifting sands of historical truth. Moreover, what Gadamer was asserting is that human understanding, has ontological significance and cannot be just reduced into mere methodological applications (Gill 11).

For Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics that of interpretation, acknowledges the temporal and situatedness of the knowing character. The task cannot be done by a knowing subject who can invoke anonymity and thus remove himself from the process. Gadamer asserts that it is impossible for the knowing subject to detach himself on the process because humans are always finite and temporal. The consciousness of the knowing subject is always contingent and always in the process of being shaped by factors such as historicity and tradition (Gill 12).

Understanding always takes place into the oscillating process of the mediation of the past and the present (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 274). The interpreter or the one who does hermeneutics is always aware of the boundedness of his/her understanding within a tradition. Thus, by doing so, he is able to see and realize that understanding takes place within the interplay of the perspectives within the tradition, of which these various worldviews are postulated by other individuals who are also driven by the desire to overcome their finitude through hermeneutical enterprise.

Dialogue then is an imperative for somebody who wishes to understand his facticity and his throwness-in-the-world. This task then is a clear departure from traditional ethics that deals with the set of "oughts" in dealing with the other. This defines the hermeneutical ethos of Gadamer as his work is characterized by an attempt to interpret the meaning of Heidegger's throwness (Geworfenheit) as determination by

the other. Gadamer spoke of this in an interview conducted by Riccardo Dottori:

What I had already tried to show Heidegger in Marburg and later developed further in the Lisbon lecture and in other essays was, as I have already said, that the genuine meaning of our finitude or our "thrownness" consists in the fact that we become aware, not only of our being historically conditioned, but especially of our being conditioned by the other. Precisely in our ethical relation to the other, it becomes clear to us how difficult it is to do justice to the demands of the other or even simply to become aware of them. The only way not to succumb to our finitude is to open ourselves to the other, to listen to the "thou" who stands before us. (Gadamer "A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori" 29)

However, many critics of Gadamer point that his interpretation of the other seeks to suppress the difference and the radical alterity of the other. Gadamer refutes this dismissing that dialogue cannot be just the avenue for mere consensualism and the means to balance the differences of interlocutors. Rather dialogue is an avenue for each of us to learn "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" (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 305). When one engages in a dialogue, the hermeneutic task of overcoming our finitude becomes an avenue for an encounter which allows us to broaden our perspective through the fusion of horizons. This encounter allows us to penetrate others not through mere resignation but by allowing our points and perspectives to be open and be challenged for us to be able to recognize the particularity of our own horizon and the uniqueness and richness of the other for a greater universality.

What is implied therefore in line with this reasoning is that the hermeneutic ethos returns from the notion of Aristotle's logos as the very basis of human understanding. In a defense to the critic of Gadamer's dialogical understanding, hermeneutics as it deals with the other "claims that the reason as embedded in language itself allows the necessary reflective distance that prevents total integration of the other. The essence of language in other words, is reason working in conversation" (Zimmerman "The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence' 51).

Thus, the hermeneutic ethos is the ability and orientation to enter into a conversation, that of listening to the other. The Gadamerian understanding of Aristotelian logos is seen as the basis of human understanding by allowing oneself to engage in a dialogue where in openness and transalatability of languages and cultures occur without even negating the particularity and foreignness of the other.

David Tracy affirms this by claiming that the key to dialogue is the logic of question and answer, that dialogue is a clear shift from the self to the other – the person, the text, the symbol or event - the driving forces of all questioning in dialogue. The hermeneutic ethos is directed not for the self but for the other whose self is not even in control like that of the concept of play that Gadamer had explicated. The self should immerse itself fully and be critically intelligent as possible but cannot be the only force in control in the dialogue. Thus, the self in a dialogue with the other through

the "game" of conversation is always in the process of change – self-interpreting, discovering, constituting but not inventing – an ever changing self. This activity is dialogical and it is an event that happens which is a stark blow to the ordinary self-reflective consciousness (Tracy 1).

Moreover, the reception of Aristotelian logos by Gadamer allows us to reflect in our own human finitude and temporality that through the particularity of our own existence, a reflection also of our linguistic differences, opens us up to the infinite conversation to our common journey towards truth. Thus, we can surmise that the basis of global religious conversation or inter-religious dialogue is based on the universal common logos. One cannot really understand the Good in its entirety if it is not demonstrated on its applicability in human affairs. Gadamer pointed out that the good manifest itself beyond the conceptual and theoretical notion of it. It manifests itself in language in its dialogical nature as wisdom, as practical knowledge as seen in the Aristotelian notion of phronesis. (Zimmerman "The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence' 51).

Hence, given this background we can faithfully deal with the religious others as they allow us to draw out ourselves from the narrow and myopic understanding shaped by our historicity and temporality. It allows us then to widen our horizons and our self-understanding. It then gives direction to the hermeneutic ethos that of given the increasingly resurgence of religion in our public lives, we can have a better grasp of understanding of the phenomenon in the hope of establishing a global polis. A polis that allows each citizen to address the other concretized by his/her historicity, seen as part of a greater community in which we all participate in whose common horizon is logos.

GADAMER'S RELIGIOUS TURN: ON RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE IN HERMENEUTICS

One of the aspects of Gadamer's philosophic project that has been largely neglected is the religious and theological dimension of his thought. Given the resurgence of religion in the late 20th century fueled by the desire to re-structure modern secular society based on religious values, it is but necessary for us to consider the neglected religious dimension of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Our previous discussion of hermeneutic ethos gives us an insight on how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics will be able to aid us in our present and future challenge in understanding each other given the plurality of beliefs and concerns.

During the final years of Gadamer, his preoccupation on the religious feeling of transcendence becomes integral to his philosophic project. His hermeneutics extended religious transcendence and that by adding such, religious and cross-cultural human understanding will be possible as it places religion an integral part of humanity. His late pre-occupation on the need to incorporate religious transcendence in hermeneutics affirms the need to have a serious global-inter-religious conversation, kind of global solidarity in trying to counteract the fragmentation of humanity which finds it source in the amalgamation of ethnic re-entrenchment, social inequality, and the resurgence of religious fundamentalism which is somehow used as the driving force behind religious

motivated conflicts and attacks (Zimmerman "Ignoramus: Gadamer's Religious Turn" 206).

Following our discussion, we can say that hermeneutics is indeed fit for a global dialogue concerning matters of faith and beliefs. It is therefore a form of understanding communication between religion and cultures across our pluralistic spectrum. Gadamer claimed during an interview that:

Having said that, I am also of the opinion that philosophy is preparing the ground for a global conversation, and we must take advantage of this opportunity and develop a dialogue, or we will be lost. (Gadamer "A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori" 73)

We cannot deny the fact that religion has been, in one way or another, marginalized by the attractive scientific epistemology of Enlightenment. Religion has been regarded as something that must be kept and private but this was a mistake since religion is a fundamental part of being human. Religion is also a factor in which our consciousness is being shaped by it and understanding religion can be of great help in understanding a wider spectrum of things. The late preoccupation of Gadamer into religious transcendence is not to be seen as a conversation, or coming back to the fold of the faith. This was an effect of his phenomenological analysis in the language of gratitude.

The re-turn to "religious" is not a return to dogmatic religion but an avenue to explore the notion of religious transcendence which is common to all of the world's great religions. Transcendence is the fundamental acknowledgement of our human finitude by admitting the limits of our human understanding. Gadamer acknowledged the one-sidedness and the possible catastrophic consequences of scientism as it still fails to answer some fundamental questions on human existence like birth, death, life and history. He thus raised the exigency for a global conversation through the dialogical metaphysical discourse between various world religions. For him, philosophy is in the best place to prepare for it discovers within everyone a chain of that binds world religions: transcendence (Gadamer "A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori" 74).

Philosophical hermeneutics is seen by Gadamer as the best discipline to prepare the world for this inter-religious dialogue since it is less concerned with any form of dogmatism as compared to any institutionalized religions. Institutionalized religions have also an attitude which somehow effects narrowmindedness and defensive posture on the part of their believers as strengthened by the presence of their respective dogmatic and systematic theologies.

Religious Transcendence is the affirmation of the limits of our human understanding and consciousness. This is an experience that points us to something that is greater than us, something mysterious than ourselves (Zimmerman "Ignoramus: Gadamer's Religious Turn" 208). For Gadamer, philosophy should come up with a common understanding of transcendence, as it emerges in conversation, with the great world religion, can pull humanity back from the brink of self-destruction brought by our failure to listen to what others can offer us (Gadamer "A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori" 75).

Moreover, Religious Transcendence as an expression of

the finitude of our understanding, brings us back to the infamous term Ignoramus. Gadamer's notion of Ignoramus characterizes the experience of religious transcendence as the ongoing metaphysical barrier for any attempt on philosophical and theological dogmatism. This notion and our experience of transcendence is not a mere intellectual activity, it is not a mere nothingness. This is a clear attempt to do justice to every human desire for something greater and mysterious. This is the humanity's last hope in effecting a global inter-religious dialogue, inseparable from the task of hermeneutics, from our efforts at self-understanding (Zimmerman "The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence' 52).

By the very nature of Ignoramus, that which we do not know, allows to be more careful in treading the path towards truth. We cannot therefore separate this truth to the hermeneutic consciousness and ethos as our understanding of our common desire for something greater cannot be just reduced into mere linguistic applications, thus compelling us to bind ourselves together with such kind of religious experience.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND ITS CHALLENGES: A COROLARRY TO HERMENEUTIC ETHOS AND RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE

In preparing and seeking for a global inter-religious conversation, the idea of Ignoramus presented by Gadamer himself is arguably promising that it allows serious thinkers to begin to understand one another. However, this notion with all its nobility has also its limitations. One contentious idea that may arise from such notion is that it grounds itself from radical openness at the price of religious particularity (King 171-176).

The notion of Ignoramus entails that world religions have to abandoned their dogmatic presuppositions and attitude in order to pave way for each and every human being into the fold of dialogue where all seek the same thing and all may respect the limits of human understanding. Hence, religion has to admit that its experience to the limitations of understanding should lead in to the abandoning of dogmatism and should be grounded from a common experience of transcendence, that which we do not know but do not necessarily mean that it does not exist as well.

Not all religions, presumably, will give up their dogmatic pretensions. World religions cannot just throw away and abandon all positive revelations in favor of treading into a non-descriptive religious track. Every religious founder's religious experience of the revelation of the Divine is necessary and such insight are often shared with the followers.

Moreover, the notion poses also questions regarding to the possibility to a global inter-religious dialogue since genuine hermeneutic conversation requires radical openness to the other. The radical openness to the other does not mean on the other hand that the present supposition or view must be renounced to remain objective in the field of conversation. This openness directs the religious interlocutor to risk one's own view and hold it as the driving force for the motivation with the other with the radical possibility of revision and even to the point of giving up one's position and self-

understanding. This model of hermeneutic conversation involves the self-exposure of the positive theology of every religion and the risk which can come to a certain point of a possibility of radical change and initially unwelcome change (Tracy 8).

This model of conversation can be a difficult path to take for it requires a total and genuine self-criticism of the limits and prejudices of one's thought interwoven in a particular tradition (Hedges 18). It would not be easy for a particular religion to unmask and challenge its theology from excessive fideism and dogmatic pretensions, for each religious interlocutor tend to overvalue their tradition and assume its uniqueness over the other. "To be sure, in interreligious dialogue one must stand within a religious tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, healthy self-criticism. Without it there can be no dialogue—and, indeed, no integrity" (Swidler 130).

Inter-religious dialogue can only be possible if there is a genuine desire to understand the other. In Gadamer's words: "reaching an understanding in conversation presupposes that both partners are ready for it and are trying to recognize the full value of what is alien and opposed to them"(Gadamer "Truth and Method" 387).

In order for us to ground the possibility of inter-religious dialogue, we can consider ethical considerations that can be surmised in Gadamer's thought regarding dialogue. As a corollary to the hermeneutic ethos, the first condition of hermeneutics is an encounter with the otherness (Gill 15). The recognition of the otherness allows us to become aware of the situatedness of our own understanding and prejudices, that the other is perceived as somebody or something that can offer us something alien and different from what we already know. This can be an ethical consideration when dealing with the religious other as our openness to otherness implies our capacity to value the other by attending and listening to what they can offer us. In following Kant, hermeneutics therefore does not objectify the other and treat them as means to an end. This attitude shows the necessary moral worthiness of each interlocutor, religious other in this case, who is an end-in-itself and not mere means to it (Gill 15). In an inter-religious dialogue, the partners involved are seen to be the co-interpreters of what is being inquired and shared. The ethos here lies on the acceptance of the other as a fellow subject and not just a 'Thou'.

Gadamer in this regard respects the radical and inexpressible alterity, an understanding based on Aristotle's idea of logos for the linguisticality of our situatedness in the world and the nature of truth that does not allow for any assimilative metaphysics that disregards the complete asymmetry of the other in the conversation (Zimmerman "The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence" 51).

In other words, Gadamerian notion of alterity lies on the view that "the other appears as a partner, a mutual co-self, an other who is both different and close enough to be understood, to be taken seriously, to be taken into account" (Kogler 10). The project of inter-religious dialogue therefore can be grounded on this notion of radical alterity, that the religious other is seen as a partner who is always in the process of continuing presence situated in a never-ending

hermeneutical process.

Furthermore, the corollary of hermeneutic ethos to inter-religious dialogue can be characterized on the process of the fusion of horizon which does not seek to disregard oneself nor making the religious other as another self, projected self so to speak. Gadamer speaks of this transposition as:

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of "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, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer "Truth and Method" 305).

What is therefore achieved in the fusion of horizons is a higher truth which allows us for a greater self-cultivation and a superior breadth of vision for interlocutors in a dialogue.

This hermeneutical activity is the same to the concept of Bildung which Gadamer discussed in the first part of his magnum opus, Truth and Method.

Gadamer does propose a world-oriented ethics of self-cultivation as Bildung is understood as an endeavor that seeks to arrive at a universality through elevating one's consciousness in a dialogue. This hermeneutic approach allows religious interlocutors to transform themselves in manner by which they are able to transcend their determinancy and allow their culture, perspective and self-understanding to develop and evolve into something which they can call as a shared universal.

Notwithstanding the present challenges to inter-religious dialogue, we have seen how hermeneutics can be applied to our present concerns most especially the call for dialogue amidst the resurgence of religion in the modern secular society as conflicts are often religiously motivated. Philosophical hermeneutics hoping that it can mediate in the global conversation between different cultures and religion, must be also exercised with the integration of ethics that the philosophical activity must not be limited to a mere understanding but how one can relate things to the world. This dialogical understanding helps us to recognizes our differences that allows us to reach out to others and engage in a fruitful dialogue. Dialogue arising from the hermeneutic consciousness enables us to develop a wider sense of what humanity is and a broader perspective of the necessity for solidarity. In this way, philosophical hermeneutics can serve as a mediating factor that allows each other to address the perennial problems of religious motivated conflicts.

We can surmise that this form of dialog that hermeneutics is proposing is transcending beyond the project of interpretative disclosure. The conversation that is taking place within this model is an adventure with the logos. The adventure allows us to open each religious interlocutor to the event that activates that which binds all of our religious experiences. This only shows the ontological aspect of the dialogical movement present in a hermeneutic conversation and if applied in religious terms, it "discloses something that was previously hidden; what was invisible to one's eye is suddenly manifest and visible" (quoted in Raschke 42).

Hence, conversation leads us to this fundamental truth that we cannot be religiously monolingual. Inter-religious dialogue frees us from the limitations of our own religious language, and this dogmatic slumber brings us into a forgetfulness of the limitations of our own language and of our understanding. If we are to succumb at a single religious language, it is as if the Divine speaks only one language, or that the Divine speaks "Christian" much better than God speaks "Islam" (Knitter 456). Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" (Horizontverschmelzung) invites us to open ourselves to others, in this sense the religious other, that we may continue to tread the path of a fuller understanding. Gadamer clearly puts it as:

Where the goal is not (unilateral) mastery or control, we are liable to experience the otherness of others precisely against the backdrop of our own prejudgments. The highest and most elevated aim we can strive for in this context is to partake in the other, to share the other's alterity. We may then learn to experience otherness and human others as the "other of ourselves"" in order to partake in one another. (Gadamer "The Heritage of Europe" 34)

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