

AN EXPOSITION OF UNDERSTANDING IN GADAMER'S
PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS AND ITS APPLICATION
TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

By

Julius Wambua Mbithi (B. Ph., M.A.)

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DECLARATION

**This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree
in any other University.**

Signed: Julius Wambua Mbithi.....Date:.....

**This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as
university supervisors.**

Signed: Prof. Joseph M. Nyasani Date:.....
Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Signed: Dr. Oriare Nyarwath.....Date:.....
Senior Lecturer of philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Signed: Dr. Patrick Nyabul..... Date:.....
Lecturer of philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Mother, Rebecca Mwikali Mutunga who is a philosophic sage. I also dedicate this work to my family members.

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ABSTRACT

This work is in the main, an exposition of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its application to African philosophy. The goal is to expose the nature of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics focusing on Gadamer's critique of epistemological conception of understanding and his reevaluation of this concept in terms of ontology.

The problem, therefore, this work set out to address is to investigate and determine the nature of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and how it is applicable to African philosophy. The general objective of this work, as already been mentioned, was to develop an exposition of understanding in Gadamerian approach to philosophical hermeneutics and how it's applicable to African philosophy.

I posit, as the finding of this research, that Gadamer's theory of understanding rests on the fundamental distinction of hermeneutics and philosophical hermeneutics. The study in following Gadamer, pointed out that hermeneutics as a classical discipline focused on rules and methods of interpretation of biblical, legal or philological texts in order to facilitate understanding. Gadamer's interests in hermeneutics were no longer on texts but were phenomenological description of understanding. In essence, Gadamer's theory of philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding is an event which is universal, ontological and philosophical. Philosophical hermeneutics, therefore is a theory which deals with understanding. According to him, philosophical hermeneutics

deals with understanding as embedded in art, history and language as its models as demonstrated in this thesis.

The thesis dealt with the exposition and discussion of the contemporary approaches to African philosophy. This work was able to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This was necessary for the application of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding to African philosophy. It opened up new horizons and so in our study, it was argued that philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding is applicable to African philosophy especially as illustrated in art, history and language.

This work recommends further research of Gadamer's theory of understanding and its application to African philosophy.

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Contemporary African philosophy has some philosophically defining moments which have been crucial in its developmental process because evaluations made in this period have redirected scholarship in these areas. These evaluations have taken place in a variety of approaches or various schools of thought which have championed various positions with regard to the most suitable form of explaining and understanding what is African philosophy. Some of these schools of thought are Ethno-philosophy, Professional philosophy, Nationalist-ideological philosophy and Sage philosophy trends. These four trends of African philosophy were initially categorised by Odera Oruka. The other trends namely Hermeneutic philosophy and Literary or artistic are now acknowledged in the African philosophy scholarship. The following is a brief overview of the approaches in African philosophy.

Ethno-philosophy regards African philosophy as a group philosophy as well as a set of values, categories implicit in the language, cultural practices, and beliefs of African cultures. Some of the main advocates of this approach are Placide Tempels, John S. Mbiti, and Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia among others.

Professional philosophy in African philosophy is regarded as a professional and academic endeavour. For this school of thought, African philosophy exists in the strict sense and technical usage, that is, critical reflection and logical inquiry and as well as in the loose sense of the term philosophy. The main characteristics of professional philosophy according to its advocates should be a universal, rigorous, critical, individual, systematic activity. This approach rejected the position of the ethnophilosophers.

Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin J. Hountondji, H. Odera Oruka, and Peter Bodunrin are some notable representatives of the professional approach to African philosophy.

Another approach is the philosophic sagacity. Sage philosophy is associated with the thought produced by persons considered wise in communities. Further sense of sage philosophy is that it also refers to the body of beliefs and practices of people in a given culture. Sage philosophy comprises of folk sagacity and philosophic sagacity. Folk sagacity refers to the thoughts or wisdom of the persons who well know beliefs and practices of the people in a given culture but they do not give their individual critical perspective on them. Philosophic sagacity refers to the thoughts or wisdom of the persons who go beyond mere articulation of their world-views by demonstrating individual philosophical foundation for ideas and concepts used to describe it. This is so done by critically examining the justification of those ideas and concepts regarding the world-view. The late H. Odera Oruka is the founder of this approach.

Nationalist-Ideological philosophy has been concerned with the search for African political liberation Ideology. This trend focused on the speculative conditions of African liberation from colonial and neo-colonial impacts. They sought to establish an African political ideology inbuilt with African values such as socialism and humanism. Some of the thinkers whose thoughts fall within this approach include Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Jomo Kenyatta, and Tom Mboya both from Kenya among others.

The artistic or literary philosophy is also acknowledged in African philosophy. It consists of analysis of artistic or literary works for their philosophical import. Some of the advocates of this trend are Soyinka, Okri and Okot among others.

Hermeneutics of African philosophy is another approach to African philosophy. This approach focuses on interpreting African lived experiences. Here this work examines some of the scholars and their works on African philosophical hermeneutics.

Theophilus Okere in *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility*, sought to develop hermeneutics of African philosophy. One outstanding fact is that Okere:

is one of the earliest advocates of a hermeneutical approach to African philosophy. A starting point he shares in common with most hermeneutical philosophers in and of Africa generally is the conviction that European imperialism and colonialism violently and profoundly disrupted Africa's social, cultural, and political continuity and integrity.¹

From the above, it is plausible to infer that, for Okere, hermeneutics should be the approach for African philosophy for this would ensure a meaningful philosophy relevant within the African context.

Tsenay Serequeberhan in his books, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourses*, and *Our Heritage: The Past in the Present of African -American and African Experiences*, focus on African philosophical hermeneutics. The starting point of the hermeneutic approach in African philosophy by Serequeberhan is lived experience. The argument is that lived experiences of the people in Africa revolve around a struggle to cope with the ubiquitous effects of the cultural and economic imperialism of Europe. As such, for Serequeberhan, the principle objective of the hermeneutics of African philosophy is the quest for liberation from the injuries imposed by European hegemony. His works appropriates key insights of Gadamer to develop his African philosophical hermeneutics.

In his hermeneutical endeavours, Serequeberhan, in following Gadamer, applies the notions of history, fusion of horizons and effective-history to hermeneutics of African philosophy.

Raphael Okechukwu Madu in *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny*, in following Ricoeur's hermeneutics regards hermeneutics as a tool of knowledge. For Madu, hermeneutics is an analytic approach that focuses on the symbolic structure, and the world-view of African culture. Madu makes his contributions to hermeneuticity of African philosophy following Paul Ricoeur's approach. In our study we will follow the Gadamer's approach and apply it to African philosophy.

In his paper entitled *Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics*,² Okonda Okolo focuses on hermeneutics and African philosophy. Hermeneutics is an indispensable tool for liberating Africans from colonial cultures. The hermeneutics in question must be grounded on African tradition. Hence the notions of tradition and destiny were fundamental for Okolo in developing his African philosophical hermeneutics theory as he likes to call it.

One fundamental credit to the above scholars is the attempts to apply some aspects of the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy and these attempts have opened up new horizons. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a description of the event understanding. Gadamer contends that "when I [Gadamer] sought to develop a philosophical hermeneutics, it was obvious to me from prior history of hermeneutics that the discipline based on "understanding" formed my starting point."³ Here some explanation of what is meant by understanding is appropriate. Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics made understanding the object of philosophical reflection.

His philosophical hermeneutics therefore focuses on understanding. In this respect, philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding is not the methodology of the human science as Dilthey advocated nor is it a universal theory of understanding as Schleiermacher argued. Further this is contrary to classical hermeneutics as methodology for understanding religious, legal and literary texts. In following Heidegger, understanding for Gadamer, is an ontological event of the being, of the finite being and not methodological clearly establishing a new dimension to hermeneutics. It is an event of the human being. This event is always situated for human beings are historically situated. Linguisticity is another aspect of understanding. For Gadamer understanding takes place in language as the medium through which we live and have our being. Further Gadamer argues that art is another aspect of understanding. The experience of art facilitates understanding and truth according to Gadamer.

From the above, the study infers that art, history and language are models of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding. We understand linguistically, historically and from experience of art. One fundamental issue is that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding embedded in art, history and language has not been applied in African philosophy. It is this gap that we sought to bridge by applying Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding modelled on art and historical experiences and language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gives an account of various topics and in the analysis so far, this work has showed how several African scholars have applied Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy. As it demonstrated, they have followed some aspects such as prejudgments, history and tradition of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and how they can be applied to African philosophy.

However one fundamental aspect that they have not utilised in their hermeneuticity is, understanding. Understanding is the core theme that runs through Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics focuses on understanding. Here some explanation of what is meant by understanding is appropriate. Gadamer's concern was not on classical hermeneutics which focused on rules, norms, art and method of understanding. His hermeneutical explorations were focused on understanding. In other words "how is understanding possible?"⁴ In doing so, he moved away from classical hermeneutics to philosophical hermeneutics which was no longer an art for understanding religious, legal or literary texts. Further his hermeneutics as a theory of understanding was no longer a methodology for the human sciences or a universal doctrine of understanding as advocated by Dilthey and Schleiermacher respectively. "My [Gadamer] philosophical hermeneutics,"⁵ Gadamer asserts, "is a theory of understanding and of reaching understanding."⁶ Philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer writes that, "only describes what always happens wherever an interpretation is convincing and successful."⁷ This is to mean that for Gadamer, his concern was on the phenomenon of understanding and not the art of understanding and interpretation as the classical hermeneutics sought.

In this respect, the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics subject matter of reflection focused on understanding modelled on art, history and language. Gadamer affirms the tripartite scheme of the philosophical hermeneutics of the ontological event of understanding when he writes that:

Just as in the experience of art we are concerned with truths that go essentially beyond the range of methodical knowledge, so the same thing is true of the whole of human science: in them our historical tradition in all its forms is certainly made the *object* of investigation, but at the same time *truth comes to speech in it*.⁸

In so doing, Gadamer criticises the modern scientific understanding that only asks reductionist questions, based on mathematical expectations. The modern view of understanding which is scientific, mathematical and controlling is not based on the models of art, history and language.

It follows that the application of philosophical hermeneutics in African philosophy so far has not employed understanding as understood by Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics. Therefore, the study seeks to apply philosophical hermeneutics as understanding to African philosophy.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This work sets out to pursue the following:

1. To analyse Gadamer's critique of epistemological conception of understanding and his reevaluation of this concept in terms of ontology.
2. To examine the concept of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.
3. To evaluate understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as embedded in art, history and language.

1.4 Justification and Significance of the Study

Since the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* in 1960, Gadamer's ideas have appealed to various academicians. African philosophers have adopted some aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a key approach to African philosophical inquiry: (Serequeberhan 1994, 2000, Theophilus Okere, 1983, Okonda Okolo, 1980). In particular, they appropriate Gadamer's notions of historicity, fusion of horizon, (Serequeberhan 1994, 2000), and 'tradition and destiny', (Okonda Okolo, 1980). However, one notices that the above works have not used understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as embedded in art, history and language as reflected in the literature review. Further and in particular, the scholars of the hermeneuticity of African philosophy have not properly appropriated Gadamer's notions of art, history and language as models of understanding as Gadamer understands them and more so their application to African philosophy.

These, then, are, as it were, the *lacunae* or gaps, in the research on, and knowledge of, African philosophy, that the researcher intends to bridge.

Hence this will be the starting point of our research. The study therefore, undertakes to offer more than a cursory treatment of this subject arising from a reflection on the research conducted in libraries. The present study takes off from and is grounded on the premise that understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is modelled in art, history and language. Further, this study will review understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and clearly distinguish classical hermeneutics from philosophical hermeneutics. It identifies Gadamer's position on art, history and language as models of understanding. In doing so this work will demonstrate how understanding in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is applicable to African philosophy. The study therefore, focuses on understanding as imbedded in art, history and language as advocated by Gadamer and its application to African philosophy.

Furthermore, an exposition of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding contributes to the ongoing intellectual process of concretising the discipline of African philosophy. This is to say that the need to expose Gadamer's approach is vital for the development of African philosophy. And it is expected that this exercise would enhance and contribute to the content of African philosophy. This work is important for at least being part of that process. Finally, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a contribution to knowledge in general. Therefore, this work, being on his works, is also necessarily a contribution to knowledge in general. Significantly, the insights and remarks factored in this work may make a remarkable contribution to African philosophy.

1.5 The Scope and Limitation of the Study

The focus of the study will be on understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. More specifically I am concerned with understanding in philosophical hermeneutics as understood by Gadamer in the models of art, history and language. Again the study focuses on various approaches in African philosophy demonstrating their strengths and weakness and how understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics would be applicable. The study is somewhat limited by the fact that I had to rely on translated works because the primary sources in this rather little known field are largely in German language which I do not understand.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

We need a theoretical framework out of which we can develop a solid philosophy to demonstrate the application of philosophical hermeneutics as an ontological event of understanding in African philosophy. The aim is to offer a foundation on which the study will be anchored. The discussion of theories is not a theoretical exercise in itself but rather a means of clarifying theoretical issues with a view of coming up with a theoretical framework to guide the study. In this regard, this section covers a range of theories and introduces a number of theoretical concepts relating to hermeneutics. These include: biblical hermeneutics or Exegesis; Schleiermacher's Universal Hermeneutics; Dilthey's hermeneutics as a Method for the Humanities and Social Sciences; Heidegger's hermeneutics of Dasein as existential interpretive horizon of Being; Paul Ricoeur's

hermeneutics as theory of interpretation of symbols; Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and African philosophical hermeneutics.

Biblical hermeneutics or exegesis theory signifies the art of scriptural interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics or exegesis is concerned with the interpretation of biblical texts. Principles and guidelines for scriptural interpretation are laid down. This is fundamental objective of biblical hermeneutics.

Dilthey's hermeneutic theory propels the premise that hermeneutics is a methodology for all the Humanities and Social Sciences. For Dilthey, understanding is an important and fundamental structure in human being and as such occupies a central place in philosophy. He lays the foundations for existential and interpretative re-conceptualisation of philosophy. He views interpretation as an artful understanding of expressions of life. He then locates his hermeneutics within an epistemological methodology.

Schleiermacher's Universal hermeneutics theory does not view hermeneutics as a science for the solution of specific problems with text interpretation. Over against this, Schleiermacher's "general hermeneutics," perspective dealt with the "art" of understanding. The theory of hermeneutics developed by Schleiermacher focuses on understanding hence a shift from biblical exegesis.

Heidegger's 'hermeneutics of Dasein,' points out that understanding is not merely a function of the intellect but a constituent of being, the being of the Dasein, which includes 'thrownness' or 'facticity' is itself hermeneutical. Moreover, it follows that interpretation which leads to the development of understanding is an essential moment of the being of Dasein.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding breaks with the development of hermeneutics as a general theory dealing merely with the methods of understanding and interpretation of texts and historical sciences as represented by the tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is a theory of understanding.

Paul Ricoeur advocates a theory of hermeneutics as a system of interpretation of symbols. Hermeneutics theory of interpretation focuses on the rules of textual exegesis and symbols. Ricoeur's hermeneutics has to do with the interpretations of symbolic texts in order to decipher the deeper implications.

Another theory of hermeneutics is the 'African philosophical hermeneutics' The proponents of this theory include Tsenay Serequeberhan, Okondo Okolo, Theophilus Okere, and Lucius Outlaw among others. What is common in this African hermeneutical theory is the starting point of the lived experience of Africans. The theory advocates that the life of Africans revolves around a struggle to cope with the omnipresent effects of the cultural and economic imperialism of Europe. As such, the principal objective of African philosophical hermeneutics is how to realise liberation from the injuries inflicted by European hegemony due to colonisation and neo-colonisation.

This study will apply the philosophical hermeneutics model adapted from the ideas expounded by Hans-Georg Gadamer. This model has been adapted to this study because it focuses on the relationship between Being (ontology), art, history, language, and understanding and how these relationships are relevant to social systems. The theoretical framework based on Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is not a methodological one but an ontological one. In this respect, understanding is no longer conceived of as a way of knowing but as a mode of being, and as a fundamental characteristic of our own *being-in-the-world*. Understanding, therefore, becomes the way of being of humans, in Gadamer. This model, based on Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is helpful in this study because it justifies the investigations of the application of philosophical hermeneutics in African philosophy.

In this respect, the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as an ontological theory of understanding provides a theoretical framework adopted in this study.

1.7 Literature Review

The literature review for the problem of this work is, in the main, deals with the major philosophical works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and African philosophy. This was necessitated by belief that, given the nature of the research problem, major works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and African philosophy are appropriate in outlining the nature of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its application to African philosophy.

Theophilus Okere, in his work, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility*, developed a hermeneutical approach to African philosophy. He argued that the first and foremost issue to be addressed is the proper relationship between such a hermeneutic approach in African philosophy and Africa's cultural heritage. This is vital to relate hermeneutics and African philosophy. His hermeneuticity focused on the issue of colonisation. Okere argues that colonialism disordered and derailed Africa's social, cultural, political continuity and integrity. Hence the role of the hermeneutical approach, therefore, is to outline the elements of the African cultures to be valued and reaffirmed as relevant for a progressive African social, political and cultural heritage that will be a worthy mark of respect. Okere then contends that philosophy is really a manufacturing from raw materials. It is a forging out of thought from the materials of culture.⁹ It is plausible to assert from this quotation that for him the ideal route for African philosophy is hermeneutical. This is because "...philosophy is an act of intellectual creation where the new creation is a meaning born from melting of one's total experience."¹⁰ It is not an act of explicating cultures and beliefs as is the case with the ethnophilosophy approach.

Further to this issue regarding the question of the existence and non-existence of African philosophy, Okere writes that:

Whether there is some black African Philosophy or not, can be decided only after an exhaustive examination of every individual in the culture concerned. We have to allow for illiterate and unrecorded lovers of wisdom. More practically, we have, on examination of the current literature, objected not so much to the fact they claimed the existence of philosophy in Africa to what they claimed to be philosophy.¹¹

From this passage, he contributes to the debate regarding the nature of African philosophy by refuting the position of the ethnophilosophy as not philosophical.

Further for him, all philosophical discourse is first and foremost an answer to problems and questions raised within a questioning horizon which means always, a culture.¹² It is plausible to contend that Okere criticises the professional school for it is not rooted in an African culture. Therefore hermeneutics for Okere is the middle position between ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy. Okere's insights have made a remarkable impact on the African philosophical landscape and scholarship. It is worthwhile to note that his idea of the applicability of hermeneutics to African philosophy is noble.

In his paper, *“Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics”* Okonda Okolo, argues that the developments of hermeneutics in Western philosophy and in African philosophy were based on identity crisis. The hermeneutical approach for Okolo is necessitated by foreign culture which results to identity crisis as stated above.

In Africa, the interest in hermeneutics also arises out of the reality of crisis: a generalized identity crisis due to the presence of a culture-a foreign and dominating tradition-and the necessity for a self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition.¹³

Hence hermeneutical approach is necessary emancipatory process from inauthentic culture to authentic culture and tradition. Okolo argues that the imperious need for an authentic and African philosophy, hermeneutics seems to give a positive response. But is this response unique and definitive?¹⁴ Okolo accordingly attempts to propose and provide an African oriented hermeneutical theory; It is the African hermeneutic theory and practice that we need to question if we are to obtain a point of view that is a little more conclusive.¹⁵ He then defines his boundaries thus:

For our part, we want to test there sources but also the limits of our hermeneutical models and practices, by examining the two notions that encompass our interpretative efforts in an unconquerable circle-the notions of Tradition and Destiny. These notions simultaneously define the object, the subject, the horizons, and the limits of interpretation. To

interpret is always to close the circle of the subject and the object. We cannot, however, make this circle our own if we do not lay it out beyond the thought of the subject and the object, toward a thinking of our horizons and the limits of our interpretation defined by the reality of our traditions and the ideality of our destiny.¹⁶

For Okolo, our quest for a general theory of hermeneutics results in demonstrating that hermeneutics exists only in particular traditions.¹⁷ In this respect, Okolo incorporates hermeneutics with African tradition. Okolo acknowledges that his analysis is not a mega system:

But given the rapport between comprehension, interpretation and application, and between reading and retaking the theory formulated here has, we believe, an exploratory virtue for African hermeneutics that is still not properly developed and adequately theorised. This theory, faced with a new tradition, instigates, as one will see, a recasting of on even greater generality.¹⁸

Okolo's hermeneutics of African philosophy will be taken into consideration in our research. This study therefore sees the need to research further into role of hermeneutics in African philosophy.

Tsenay Serequeberhan in his book, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, points out that this title understood in its most literal and abstract sense, points to the interpretative character of contemporary African philosophy.¹⁹ Serequeberhan's hermeneutics of African philosophy is concerned with the colonial and post colonial impacts on the lives of Africans. It is on the basis of this concern that he asserts that:

Thus, the hermeneutics of African philosophy refers to the interpretive and reflexive presuppositional reflections grounded in and on the actuality of post-colonial present. To say something about the hermeneutics of African Philosophy one at least has to explore how this discursive practice establishes itself within the horizon of post-colonial Africa.²⁰

This is to say that what provokes African philosophical hermeneutics is the politico-existential crisis interior to the horizon of post-colonial Africa which brings forth the concerns and originates the theoretic space for the discourse of contemporary African philosophy.²¹ The struggle for independence coloured with the hope of good life and the contrast to the lived experiences in Africa calls for a new reflection on freedom according to Serequeberhan. Serequeberhan captures this when he asserts that: "It is in this painful gap between ideality and actuality that the hermeneutics of African philosophy finds its source and locus of its concern."²² What he means is that the hoped life style in Africa following independence has never been realised. Following this scenario, he further points out that:

It is this felt anxiety, this absence, this gap between actuality and ideality which today calls forth and motivates the struggle, at various levels and in differing forms, against neo-colonialism and simultaneously, out of the exegesis of this struggle, provokes the reflections of African philosophical hermeneutics.²³

Serequeberhan refers to this as an "emancipatory hermeneutics" or rather, a philosophy of liberation. Succinctly he asserts that "to this extent and specifically, the hermeneutics of contemporary African philosophy or African philosophical hermeneutics is a critical appropriation of the emancipatory possibilities of this discourse."²⁴ Hence for Serequeberhan, the only solution of this malaise is to be realised on reflections coming from African philosophical hermeneutics. This is vital contribution and assertion that issues in African can be addressed hermeneutically.

In another book titled, *Our Heritage: The Past in the Present of African-American and African Existence*, Serequeberhan continues his campaign against European imperialism and colonialism asserting that; "the heritage of the struggle beyond the defeat of colonialism, this "new humanity" ... this is what Fanon calls us to."²⁵ Serequeberhan

asserts that we are, at the close of the twentieth century, at a point in time when the dominance of the indigenous of the universe of European singularity is being encompassed or engulfed by the *multiverse* of our shared humanity. The colonizer, self imperial Europe is dead.²⁶ Serequeberhan then argues that this process of liberation requires a unique and special philosophy. Of special interest in the book, *Our Heritage: The Past in the Present of African-American and African Existence*, is the question of heritage and identity. According to Serequeberhan, the relationship between existence (identity) and violence is grounded on the notion of heritage. Serequeberhan succinctly asserts that this (non) identity, is the ambiguity of our heritage. For we are the ones-in one way or another who live and have experienced this ambiguous adventure and feel, in the very depth of our being, the unnerving experience of being two in one, Europe and non-Europe.²⁷ Here Serequeberhan contributes an important aspect from an African philosophical hermeneutical perspective, as he likes to call it, on how to recognise and construct identity. According to Serequeberhan, identity is rooted in culture or heritage.

In this respect, Serequeberhan is against the notion of a relativised African identity as manifested in Appiah's idea of usable (African) identity²⁸ which is more of use and put away.²⁹ This philosophy for Serequeberhan is the hermeneutics of African philosophy. Serequeberhan develops further his notions of emancipatory hermeneutics from which violence is inseparable. Serequeberhan in these books suggests that violence is a vital component of African philosophical hermeneutics. Serequeberhan calls to attention the significance of history, the notion of encounter as the colonised and the coloniser. Serequeberhan sees hermeneutics as relevant to African crisis which for him, is as a result of the foreign encounter

A vital contribution to our study is the defence Serequeberhan makes against the use of hermeneutics, a western or Eurocentric category, in his works of African philosophy. He points out that:

The effort of these last two chapters is not merely to restate ideas, but to think further the concerns incarnated in these ideas by critically and eclectically pressing into service, for this purpose, insights derived and culled from the European philosophic tradition. The reader should thus not be surprised to find, throughout this study, positive references and appropriations, as well as critical rejections of the European philosophic tradition.³⁰

The study further acknowledges that Serequeberhan focuses on the African traditional society (social and cultural aspects) maintaining his colonial and post-colonial hypotheses (political dimension) in the approach to African philosophy from a hermeneutical perspective. It is this very contribution by Serequeberhan to African philosophy from a hermeneutic perspective that gives the thesis its impetus for further research into African philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics.

Raphael Okechukwu Madu in *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny*,³¹ regards hermeneutics as a means to knowledge. Madu is largely influenced by Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Madu writes that:

The choice of the hermeneutic principles of Paul Ricoeur as philosophical method is based on the ònewò relevance it gives to culture by providing a very profound yardstick of interpreting religious symbols and mythical languages that characterize most cultures... Previously archaic and oriental symbolism was regarded as important only as a datum in the development of human consciousness. Such was the disdain philosophers felt about symbolic thought, that symbols were regarded as òprimitive and lacking the cogency of reasoning.³²

His concern was to justify that symbols deserve a philosophical appreciation and that hermeneutics, as a method, was the handmaid for this job. For Madu then hermeneutics has to extract philosophical thought in culture. Therefore, hermeneutics for Madu is a method which makes it possible to decipher meanings in African Culture.

In his book, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit* 1927),³³ Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics took a radical twist from theories of interpretation and epistemological questions of knowing to the ontology of being and understanding. This was inevitable for his quest was to re-examine "the question of being."³⁴ In this respect, being in Heidegger acquired a new dimension from the accustomed meaning from classical Greek and Medieval philosophies. Heidegger writes that:

If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since.³⁵

This new dimension of being as "being in the world," as everyday existence, over against being as the "image and likeness of God"³⁶ in Heidegger is significant in our study. This is so because, Heidegger's new ontology, an investigation into the structures of being, takes a hermeneutical perspective. This is to say that in Heidegger, the question and the meaning of being requires interpretation and the interpretation in question is not hermeneutics as rules or methodologies. In developing this ideas, Heidegger's hermeneutics offered an understanding of being as a mode of "being-in-the-world" and hence a questioning being. Therefore, in the hermeneutics of Heidegger, understanding becomes a mode of being-in-the-world. This is to say that, in Heidegger's hermeneutics, beings are constituted by and engaged in interpretive understandings. In this respect, Heidegger elevates hermeneutics from methodology and epistemology, that is, from the logic and art of understanding texts to a philosophical level. Heidegger hence never engaged in traditional problems of hermeneutics.

Nevertheless, he invented a new perspective in hermeneutics. It is this Heideggerian achievement that is, hermeneutics of lived experience, which will be of relevance to our study.

With the publication of his book, *Truth and Method* (first German edition: 1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer extolled the self-esteem of hermeneutics as a philosophy. Gadamer's attitude to hermeneutics is philosophical rather than epistemological or methodological. He glorified the distinction of hermeneutics as philosophy. Gadamer affirms this when he writes that "my [Gadamer] real concern was and is philosophic."³⁷ What he meant is that hermeneutics as philosophy was no longer the classical discipline concerned with issues on texts interpretation. Gadamer points out that:

The hermeneutics that I characterize as philosophic has not introduced as a new procedure of interpretation or explication. Basically it only describes what always happens wherever an interpretation is convincing and successful.³⁸

From this citation, this work infers that according to Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics is philosophical in character because it is concerned with phenomenological description of what happens when we understand. Furthermore his philosophical hermeneutics concerns were not on methods of the human sciences:

The hermeneutics developed here is not, therefore a methodology of the human sciences, but an attempt to understand what the human sciences are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of the world. If we make understanding the object of our reflection, the aim is not an art or technique of understanding, as traditional literary and theological hermeneutics sought to be.³⁹

Gadamer is asserting that his philosophical hermeneutics is not a methodology. Neither is his concern the general art of interpretation of biblical, literal or legal texts. His concern is philosophical analysis of understanding as an event that happens to us.

It is plausible to acknowledge that since the publication of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* philosophical hermeneutics is increasingly an influential current of modern thought. The concern then of philosophical hermeneutics is not the methods of understanding but in understanding understanding as Gadamer likes to put it. Gadamer contends that understanding proves to be an event, and the task of hermeneutics, seen philosophically, consists in asking what kind of understanding, what kind of science it is, that is itself advanced by historical change.⁴⁰ Hence in his book, *Truth and Method* he propelled hermeneutics into philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer points out that:

I [Gadamer] did not 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 for the human sciences.⁴¹

Here again Gadamer emphasizes the fundamental difference of his approach on philosophical hermeneutics over against classical hermeneutics. He asserts that my [Gadamer] real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.⁴² Philosophical hermeneutics acquired a philosophical inclination in Gadamer. It was a philosophical project unlike its previous inclinations which were either a methodology of the human sciences, a universal method or art of interpretation or method for clarifying texts. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* has discussed and given accounts of understanding especially as illustrated in art, history and language. The Gadamerian central theme of understanding in his hermeneutics pays homage to language as its pillar. The fundamental assertion is that language is the universal ontological structure of being;

The being that can be understood is language. The hermeneutical phenomenon here projects its own universality back onto the ontological constitution of what is understood, determining its own relation to beings as interpretation.⁴³

Language, according to Gadamer, is the central concern of his philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer seeks to highlight the fundamentally linguistic nature of understanding. Gadamer regards as an essential task of giving phenomenological description of the human activity of understanding as embedded in language. Further in this book, he also develops philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding based on artistic and historical experiences. These are the major Gadamerian themes which will guide this research.

In the book, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Edited by David E. Linge, is a collection of translations of various works of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The editor, in the introduction, points out that:

The essays contained in this volume continue to develop the philosophical perspective that Gadamer originally set forth in his systematic work, *Truth and Method* (Wahrheit und Methode 1960), a perspective he has called philosophical hermeneutics.⁴⁴

Linge writes that the hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer is not primarily concerned with hermeneutics as a method or skill of interpretation but over against this, "the task of philosophical hermeneutics, therefore is, ontological rather than methodological."⁴⁵ This is say to that philosophical hermeneutics according to Linge as he understands Gadamer, "seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific and non-scientific alike and that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not preside."⁴⁶ The text would be of value in exposing Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Another book by Gadamer which is edited and translated by Richard E. Palmer is *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflection and Commentary*.⁴⁷ The book comprises conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer on key issues of his thought and especially on philosophical hermeneutics. According to this text, hermeneutics as a terminology was not associated with philosophy or a philosophical term.⁴⁸ It is only in the works of Gadamer that the term hermeneutics was associated with philosophy. In this text, it is pointed out to Gadamer that:

The term 'hermeneutics,' generally associated with your path of thinking, was not originally a philosophical term. When one looks up 'hermeneutics' in a dictionary, the definition is basically 'the art of interpretation' or teaching about interpretation.⁴⁹

The study will appreciate the fact that in Gadamer hermeneutics matures into a philosophical hermeneutics. It is for these reasons that this text is indispensable for our research.

Richard E. Palmer edits the book, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the later Writings*⁵⁰, in which various works by Gadamer are translated. The works are on philosophical hermeneutics. In this book, one article of vital significance for our study is 'Classical and philosophical hermeneutics.' Palmer writes that 'Gadamer's hermeneutics article not only presents us with a fairly detailed history of traditional hermeneutics from ancient times to the present, it also offers an account of the development of his new philosophical hermeneutics and its reception history, both positive and negative, from 1960 to 1975.'⁵¹ It is therefore an important scholarly reference source for it gives a detailed account of the topic under research. In this respect, it is a vital resource for our study for it concisely defines Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding.

According to Palmer, as an introduction to Gadamer's article "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," Gadamer begins with an overview of the history of Western hermeneutics. Palmer writes that:

To summarize this article briefly, then: Gadamer moves beyond previous encyclopedia articles on hermeneutics to propose and defend a new philosophical discipline. He first goes back into the etymology of the word hermeneutics at its beginnings in ancient Greece, which hold significant dimensions for a philosophical hermeneutics. He then discusses hermeneutics in various forms since ancient times. But starting with 18th century aesthetics and Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, he offers a critical history of hermeneutics up to his *Truth and Method*. Thus, this article can serve as a short introduction to his masterwork. But it goes beyond it in time to take up the reactions to it since its publication in 1960 and offer his reply to them. He considers critics like Emilio Betti, E. D. Hirsch and Hans Albert, who bitterly attacked that work and wrote in favour of the philological tradition. He also expresses his reservations about the current of German literary criticism that offered aesthetics of reception as a response to his work. For Gadamer, this response represented a rather truncated reading of his philosophical hermeneutics. And he notes Derrida's deconstructionist critique of philosophical hermeneutics. And he takes up the criticisms by Habermas and the critique of ideology. At the end, he reaffirms the universality of his hermeneutics as a theory of the praxis of understanding that needs to be defended against the narrowness of many forms of scientific understanding.⁵²

From the above quotation, Palmer clearly brings to our attention for the first time a terminological point that there is a difference between Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" and the "classical hermeneutics" that comes down to us in history. Palmer writes that this book "succinctly defines his (Gadamer's) philosophical hermeneutics and replies to its principal critics."⁵³ The distinction between classical hermeneutics and philosophical hermeneutics will be important in this study. This study will be clear about the use of the term "hermeneutics" as the general art of interpreting texts as not interchangeable with Gadamer's [philosophical] hermeneutics which deals with understanding.

This distinction is crucial and central aspect to this study. Hermeneutics viewed as a philosophy and hence philosophical hermeneutics in this text will be of help to our research.

Richard E. Palmer's book, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, serves as a guideline to the hermeneutic works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer for the following reasons:

Because the primary sources in this relatively unknown field are largely in German, I have been obliged to give considerable exposition of them and because the very definition of the term *hermeneutics* has become the subject of vehement controversy, it has been necessary to go into the definitional problem at some length discussing the four major theorists.⁵⁴

In this study we need an adequate understanding of hermeneutics itself and how it later evolves into philosophical hermeneutics. In the quest of that understanding, Palmer in his book, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, begins with the Greek roots of the modern word 'hermeneutics', then traces the development of certain conceptions of hermeneutical theory (insofar as it has called itself hermeneutics) in modern times, and finally explores in some details the issues that have concerned four principal thinkers on the subject.⁵⁵ The text asserts that hermeneutics undergoes a transition from the art or rules of text interpretation to philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of Understanding. Palmer writes that 'the constant effort to deal with the phenomenon of understanding as it goes beyond mere textual interpretation gives hermeneutics a potentially broad significance for all those disciplines customarily called humanities.'⁵⁶ Hence this text is relevant to this research.

Jean Grodin in his book, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, presents us with a fairly detailed history of hermeneutics from ancient times to the present. The most crucial aspect of the text is the exposition of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Grodin writes that "the present introduction is an attempt to depict philosophical hermeneutics" of Gadamer. This text is therefore indispensable for this very reason.

Grodin writes, "specifically, my concern-independent of Gadamer, on my own responsibility, and in the context of the present state of philosophical conversation is to introduce readers to the philosophical dimensions of hermeneutics." In this respect, the

text is vital in exposing the transformation of hermeneutics into philosophical hermeneutics. A fundamental point as advocated by Grodin manifests itself when he

asserts that "philosophical hermeneutics, by comparison, is of recent date. In the ordinary, narrow sense, this term refers to the philosophical position of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and sometimes that of Paul Ricoeur." This is not to deny that "significant

forms of hermeneutics undoubtedly existed before then, but they hardly presented themselves as fully developed philosophical conceptions." Another crucial aspect in

Grodin's book is evident when he asserts that:

Within the context of the *verbum interius*, I shall attempt to reconstruct the historical problematic of philosophical hermeneutics as faithfully as possible and so will be referring to authors seldom read today. Of course, this makes it necessary to show that the perspective of the *verbum interius* is in fact central.⁶¹

This is vital for exposing the advocates of hermeneutics and how later, in Gadamer, it transforms into philosophical hermeneutics.

In *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, Jean Grodin's text is an ideal general introduction to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. That "the claim that Hans-Georg Gadamer must be considered one of the important figures of twentieth century thought

hinges on the hermeneutics that he developed⁶² writes Grodin. The text takes off with the question: "what is hermeneutics?"⁶³ This is vital in our research in understanding what hermeneutics is, and hence helping to demonstrate its difference from philosophical hermeneutics. It is important to note that this book is "Gadamer's intellectual biography"⁶⁴ and the quest is Gadamer's intellectual growth over against his purely personal life. Therefore, the book will be relevant in exposing Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

The study will concentrate on these hermeneutical insights, which will be the fundamental starting point for subsequent development of the relevance of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in African philosophy and hence relevant to the research problem. The use of "western philosophy" serves as a means to demonstrating the application of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy. In this respect, I am attempting to utilise and not to replace or re-invent the "Western philosophy of hermeneutics." The contributions along the line of hermeneutics are indispensable guide in our research. This, again, demonstrates the fact that the study is not a repetition of what other scholars have done but an effort in an attempt to demonstrate the application of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as embedded in art, history and language to African philosophy.

Therefore, the literature review presented in this section calls for a closer examination of the nature of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its application to African philosophy.

1.8 Hypotheses

1. To show that hermeneutics as an art or science or method meant for understanding of texts, that is, providing interpreters with rules and principles for overcoming ambiguities of classical texts.
2. To analyse Gadamer's critique of epistemological conception of understanding.
3. To show that philosophical hermeneutics as understanding as embedded in art, history and language is applicable to African philosophy.

1.9 Methodology

As a theoretical and analytical study, the study's methodology will be library-based research. It will concentrate on core texts on philosophical hermeneutics for its literature. The library research guides and facilitates a critical reflection and an account of what has been published on the topic by various scholars and researchers conveying knowledge and ideas that have been documented on the topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are.

The study uses a logical and conceptual analysis. The conceptual analysis facilitate in the clarification of meaning of concepts while the logical analysis involves the examination of presuppositions in arguments and how the presuppositions are used to justify certain positions advanced by the arguments. Therefore the method of philosophical analysis facilitate in the determination of the tenability of arguments advanced. The conceptual and logical analyses make it possible to map out the various topics that are dealt and hence determining their philosophical tenability.

1.10 Notes

- ¹ Barry Hallen, *A Short History of Philosophy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 61.
- ² Okonda Okolo, "Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics." Translated by Kango Lare-Lantone, in *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, Edited by Tsenay Serequeberhan, (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 201ff.
- ³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. (Edited and Translated by Richard E. Palmer), (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 23
- ⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (2nd rev. ed.), (Wahrheit und Methode 1960). (Translated by Garrent Barden and John Cumming). (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1989), xxvii.
- ⁵ Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op. cit., 67.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*,
- ⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxii.
- ⁹ Theophilus Okere, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility*, (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1983), xiv.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*,
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 64.
- ¹³ Okonda Okolo, "Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics," In *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, op. cit., 201.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*,
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*,
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.
- ¹⁹ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, (New York: Routledge Publishers, 1994), 1.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 8.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ²⁵ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *Our Heritage: The Past in the Present of African-American and African Existence*. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 12.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-53.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ³⁰ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy*: op.cit. 10-11.
- ³¹ Madu, Okechukwu. Raphael, *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny*. (New York & Frankfurt a.m.: Peter Lang, 1992)
- ³² *Ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii.
- ³³ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Sein und Zeit 1927), (Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson). (U.S.A.: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1962).
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxv.
- ³⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, (Translated by Fredrick G. Lawrence), (Cambridge: MIT Press), 90.
- ³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., 308.

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- ⁴⁰Ibid. xxii.
⁴¹Ibid., xxv.
⁴²Ibid. xxvi.
⁴³Ibid., 470.
⁴⁴Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Translated by David E. Linge), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xi.
⁴⁵Ibid.,
⁴⁶Ibid.,
⁴⁷Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflection and Commentary*, (Edited and Translated by Richard E. Palmer), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
⁴⁸Ibid., 36
⁴⁹Ibid.,
⁵⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. (Edited and Translated by Richard E. Palmer), (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).
⁵¹Ibid., 41.
⁵²Ibid., 43.
⁵³Ibid.,
⁵⁴Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, op. cit., xiii.
⁵⁵Ibid., 11.
⁵⁶Ibid., 10.
⁵⁷Jean Grodin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), xiv.
⁵⁸Ibid.,
⁵⁹Ibid., 2.
⁶⁰Ibid. xiv.
⁶¹Ibid.,
⁶²Jean Grodin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, op.cit., 2.
⁶³Ibid.,1.
⁶⁴Ibid., 7.

CHAPTER TWO: AN EXPOSITION OF UNDERSTANDING IN GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

2 Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to conceptualise understanding and its philosophical foundation in Gadamer's hermeneutical explorations. Such a treatment is needed to establish the way in which, first and foremost, it will be applicable to African philosophy.

2.1 The nature of Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

In this section, the study focuses on exposing the nature of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Hence we are guided by Gadamer when he asks; 'what was this philosophical hermeneutics?'¹ and 'with what justification could my [Gadamer] own endeavor be called a 'philosophical' hermeneutics?'² It is plausible to infer that from this quotation that Gadamer refers to his own intellectual endeavour 'philosophical hermeneutics'. Hence, my main intention is to focus on exposing the nature of understanding in his philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer points out that 'when I [Gadamer] sought to develop a philosophical hermeneutics, it was obvious to me from prior history of hermeneutics that the discipline based on 'understanding' formed my starting point.'³ What Gadamer is saying here is that his interest in the hermeneutical explorations is on understanding. Gadamer asks 'what is understanding really?'⁴ and 'how is understanding possible?'⁵ In taking these

questions as the point of departure for his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer seeks to explore the notion of understanding

Therefore, the quest and pure desire to know, in the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, focused on understanding. This is evidenced further when Gadamer writes that "if we make understanding the object of our reflection, the aim is not an art or technique of understanding, such as traditional literary and theological hermeneutics sought to be."⁶ This shows that the hermeneutic phenomenon for Gadamer was not concerned with a method of understanding by means of which texts are subjected to scientific investigations. This work infers that the concern and interest of the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is on the notion of understanding. Succinctly put:

In taking up the topic of understanding, Gadamer was dealing with a central issue of hermeneutics since Friedrich Schleiermacher, who redefined hermeneutics as a "general theory of understanding," when it had previously been focused on the task of overcoming difficulties in understanding texts in various disciplines, such as theology, literature, and law.⁷

From this passage, it is plausible to infer that philosophical hermeneutics is the approach that Gadamer takes which focuses on the notion of understanding and not hermeneutics defined as the interpretation of texts of law, literature, or bible in establishing his philosophical hermeneutics perspective. Gadamer aimed at extending the scope of hermeneutics from the limited area of textual interpretation to the area of understanding. Here, as reflected in the above quotation, we note that he was influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Heidegger who dealt with the topic of understanding.

Gadamer further argues that his philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding "is not at all a matter of a doctrine about a technical skill that would state how understanding ought to be."⁸ Prior, understanding was defined as a technical

discipline. In addition, Gadamer views classical notions of understanding as "all efforts at trying to understand something begin when one comes up against something that is strange, challenging and disorienting."⁹ What Gadamer is implying is that understanding is regarded as a technical discipline or as a tool. Over against this, Gadamer states:

What I [Gadamer] therefore want to maintain is that if we really want to bring into view clearly the place that the process of understanding has in the whole of our being as human beings, and also on our social being as human being, we must consciously separate the general phenomenon of understanding from the overemphasis on disturbances in understanding.¹⁰

What is reflected here is that there is fundamental difference between his views on understanding as in built in his philosophical hermeneutics from prior or classical conventional perspectives. In addition Gadamer implies that the event of understanding is of importance in the whole of our being as human beings, and also on our social being as human beings. Further this passage demonstrates that Gadamer sought to develop philosophical hermeneutics as an approach, a description, a phenomenon of understanding. For Gadamer, "the problem of understanding, which we find discussed in so many of its dimensions, especially in all the disciplines where exact methods of verifications are available, consists basically in the fact that there we have merely inner evidence of understanding."¹¹ This quotation reflects that the conventional notion of understanding is a method, technique and more so a deliberate product of self-conscious reflection. Here Gadamer is demonstrating that the notion of understanding is based on verification and certainty. The point of argument for Gadamer is that this is not the only way to perceive understanding. For Gadamer, understanding was viewed as something that has to do with knowledge that is theoretical, epistemological and mental.

Understanding in build in these theoretical, logical and epistemological aspects was a science or a doctrine that could produce rules, guidelines, principles, etc. While these guidelines are significant and fundamental indeed, for example, in avoiding contradiction, seeking clarity, ensuring preciseness and coherence, Gadamer seems to question whether understanding is properly understood when it is perceived in such a theoretical, logical and epistemological dispositions. For Gadamer therefore, "traditional hermeneutics has inappropriately narrowed the horizon to which understanding belongs."¹² From the above it is plausible to infer that Gadamer is questioning the classical hermeneutics, epistemologies and logic which related understanding with a certain and particular procedure. Therefore the gist of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is on the fundamental question: How is understanding possible?

2.2 Understanding in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

In the former section, this work argued that prior conceptions of understanding bring with them association quite different from Gadamer's definition. This section intends to clarify the nature of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

For Gadamer, understanding is an event or process. Gadamer writes that, "to understand, we may say is itself a kind of happening,"¹³ and further "understanding is always an event."¹⁴ The philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer therefore implies that understanding or its failure is an event that occurs to us. These quotations emphasises the event character of understanding. Hence the fundamental dimension of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics of the event of understanding is "what happens to us over and

above our wanting and doing.¹⁵ This implies that understanding becomes something which happens to us and not an act of consciousness. Here we see that Gadamer redefines understanding from an epistemological discipline to ontological and practical event. For him therefore, the purpose of his hermeneutical explorations is to picture understanding comprehensively. In the analysis this work notes that the fundamental contribution by Gadamer to hermeneutics is found in his clarification of understanding as an event. This study therefore finds it plausible to assert that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics takes the event of understanding as its starting point. In this respect, Gadamer's concern is on the phenomenon of understanding as a happening, a moment, an event. For Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is dedicated to the nature of the task and event of understanding. In this way, thinking is directed to an event in all its concreteness and therefore becomes a phenomenology of the event of understanding. It is therefore plausible to infer that this phenomenology of the event of understanding for Gadamer contributes to a fuller grasp of what and how understanding occurs.

Thus Gadamer sees his essential task as giving proper phenomenological description of the event of understanding. It is therefore accurate to see Gadamer as a phenomenologist and his approach, phenomenological. Hence, Gadamer perceived and developed positive and fruitful implications of phenomenology of event of understanding. In this respect therefore, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, is a type of a phenomenology of the act of understanding. Gadamer captures this when he contends that 'fundamentally I am [Gadamer] not proposing a new method; I [Gadamer] am describing what is the case.'¹⁶ Further, Gadamer emphasizes his position when asserts that:

In other words, I [Gadamer] consider the only scientific thing is to *recognize what is*, instead of starting from what ought to be or could be. Hence I [Gadamer] am trying to go beyond the concept of method held by modern science (which retains its limited justification) and to envisage in a fundamentally universal way what *always* happen.¹⁷

From the above quotations it is plausible to infer that Gadamer's aim is phenomenological description of understanding. Further, the study infers that Gadamer's point of argument is that his objective is descriptive and that he does not propose a new method. Hence the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics comprises of all phenomena involved in reaching an understanding, the phenomena of understanding and misunderstanding.¹⁸ Gadamer therefore, seeks to clarify what happens when understanding occurs in real experience. For Gadamer therefore, the paradigm of philosophical hermeneutics is on understanding. Hence Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics redefines the nature of understanding in contrast to the usual definition.¹⁹ Accordingly, philosophical hermeneutics is a descriptive or phenomenological account of understanding. That is to say that it makes clear to us what happens to us when we understand. This is because philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer tries to picture what happens to us when understanding occurs in us.

This phenomenological effort is ontological inasmuch it attempts to answer the question, "what is understanding?" In the tradition of philosophy, issues of understanding do not take the ontological dimension. Over against this norm, Martin Heidegger, sought to develop a new notion of understanding, which was ontological in character, which in turn influenced Gadamer. Gadamer captures this when he remarks that, "Heidegger's unfolding of the existential structure of understanding in *Being and Time*," offered me conceptual help in placing the problematic of "understanding" in its proper breadth."²⁰

The study noted that in Heidegger, understanding is a way or mode of being and Gadamer follows this line of thought. Gadamer rightly captures this when he observes that in:

Heidegger's temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviours of the subject but the mode of Dasein itself. It is in this sense that the term 'hermeneutics' is used here. It denotes the basic being-in-motion of Dasein that constitutes its finitude and historicity, and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world. Not caprice or even an elaboration of a single aspect, but the nature of the thing itself makes the movement of understanding comprehensive and universal.²¹

This passage reflects that it is this Heideggerian thesis which influenced Gadamer's endeavour to come up with the ontological aspect of understanding of his philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer took the philosophical challenge of conceiving ontology of the process or event of understanding. Gadamer opened up a new dimension of philosophical reflection on human understanding when he emphasized the ontological aspect of understanding. For Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics seeks to substantiate understanding as an ontological event or process of the human person. In this context, understanding is not conceived as a subjective process of the human person over against an object as classical epistemology advocated, nor is philosophical hermeneutics to be defined as a general help discipline for the humanities, art or rules or methods for understanding but as an ontological philosophical quest. What is being asserted here is that understanding, therefore, becomes the way of being of man, in Gadamer. Here one may demonstrate the context with the following quotation that according to Gadamer 'understanding too cannot be grasped as a simple activity of the consciousness that understands but is itself a mode of the event of being.'²² Here what it means is that understanding is no longer a subjective act but a basic way of man in the world.

Therefore in Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is not concerned with methodological or issues of interpretation but ontological understanding. In Gadamer, hermeneutics is a philosophical effort to account for understanding as an ontological process of the human person. According to this Gadamerian view, understanding is essentially part of the ontological structure of the human person.

Following this line of thought, philosophical hermeneutics for Gadamer, is a universal and general theory of understanding and of attaining understanding. Philosophical hermeneutics is of "the greatest possible generality and universality [Allgemeinheit],"²³ according to Gadamer. The universality of philosophical hermeneutics then acquires a phronesis orientation. Gadamer affirms this when he writes that "hermeneutics understood in this wider universal sense moves into the region of "practical philosophy..."²⁴ Therefore, it remains a theory and not a practice of understanding which is neither a technique, methodology nor a scientific project. Gadamer says that "a theory of the praxis of understanding is obviously theory and not practice, but a theory of praxis is still not some kind of "technique," nor an effort to make societal practice more scientific."²⁵ Over against this, Gadamer states that "hermeneutics offers a philosophical reflection on the limits of all scientific and technical control of nature and of society."²⁶ Thus philosophical hermeneutics is universal and practical philosophy for Gadamer. Gadamer insists on the universality of hermeneutics and "by this he means that his philosophical analysis of understanding applies everywhere that understanding takes place as an event in human life."²⁷ As a universal ontological theory of understanding, Gadamer insists that his primary objective is the process of arriving at

understanding and the truth and not developing a methodology for arriving at both. It is this remark that the study focuses on, in the next section.

2.3 Truth versus Method

In his analysis of philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer, understood understanding as an event or process as well as fundamentally ontological phenomena. The grounding of understanding to ontological status refuted the classical theories of truth as representationalism, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatism. Gadamer's idea of truth negates these theories and versions of propositional truth. Hence in his work, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer discusses the relationship between truth and method in relation to understanding in his philosophical hermeneutical explorations. For Gadamer, the question is: "to what extent is method a guarantor of truth?"²⁸ Or put slightly different, "how far is a method a guarantor of truth?"²⁹ In raising these questions, the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding continued to take issue with the notion of method as employed in epistemological theories in their quest to discern truth. As a philosophical hermeneutician, Gadamer laid emphasis on understanding and truth zeroing in on the point that both are much broader than methods and methodologies.

Just like Heidegger questioned radically traditional metaphysics and epistemology, Gadamer challenged the conventional methods of arriving at the truth and understanding in the human sciences. The methods and the claims of the human sciences that truth is arrived via methods was for Gadamer a dogmatism which he challenged.

Gadamer writes "we shall not be able simply to accept the human sciences own understanding of themselves but we must ask what their mode of understanding truth is."³⁰ Gadamer takes issue with the human sciences that they are limited in knowing the truth via method on the basis of verification and certainty. What it means here is that Gadamer argues that the idea of method in the human sciences is limited as the basis of verification and certainty for truth and understanding. In my view, the universal claim of scientific method is, for Gadamer, resisted by the experience of a truth and understanding.

For Gadamer then, it is imperative for philosophical hermeneutic to describe truth. A fundamental question to Gadamer is: How then do we obtain truth? To put it in Gadamer's words: "but what kind of knowledge and what kind of truth?"³¹ For Gadamer "given the dominance of modern science in the philosophical elucidation and justification of the concept of knowledge and the concept of truth, this question does not appear legitimate."³² What it means here is that the focus of philosophy and scientific inquiry seeks to develop reliable methods that allow us to be sure of truth and understanding. The practice is to perceive understanding and truth as something that has to do with knowledge, which is theoretical, epistemological and mental. For these theoretical, epistemological and mental tendencies there would be a science or a doctrine that produces rules, guidelines, principles, for arriving at understanding and truth. This work notes that these guidelines are necessary, essential and fundamental indeed for example in avoiding contradiction, seeking clarity, but the fundamental and the basic question, following Gadamer, is whether understanding and truth are properly understood when it is perceived in such a theoretical, epistemological and mental mood.

Gadamer's view is the opposite of this. This is to imply that the Gadamerian understanding of truth is beyond methods, norms and rules. Human sciences, Gadamer asserts, are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found and to inquire into its legitimacy.³³ What it means here is that the experience of a truth goes beyond the assertion of the scientific method. The claim that real knowledge is obtainable only through methodical inquiry is challenged by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

The question still stands: how do we arrive at the truth? The human sciences, according to Gadamer, arrive at the truth via experience. Gadamer himself acknowledges this when he writes that "this is the reason I [Gadamer] have suggested that the ideal of objective knowledge which dominates our concepts of knowledge, science and truth, needs to be supplemented by the ideal of sharing in something, of participation."³⁴ From the above context, Gadamer's distaste for modern technological reasoning within which the subject employs method to control and manipulate the object in order to bring it within his grasp is evident. Gadamer is a critic of modern technological thinking based on subjectivism, that is, knowledge is grounded on subjective and certainties of reason such as Cartesian philosophies advocated. This is to say that knowledge for Gadamer is not to be perceived as subjective self-certainty but as participation. Further, for Gadamer knowledge is not something that an enquiring subject possesses through method but something in which the subject participates. Gadamer is unmistakably in favour of this approach of participation. The participation in question concerns the events of artistic, historical and linguistic aspects of human person according to Gadamer.

He writes that "we participate in the essential expressions of human experience that have been developed in our artistic, religious, and historical traditions..."³⁵ For Gadamer, the humanities and social sciences go beyond science and the scientific method or certainty.

Gadamer writes that:

The human sciences are connected to modes of experience which lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history, itself. These are all modes of experience in which truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.³⁶

Here Gadamer is referring to art, history and language as where the experience of truth and understanding is realized which is not confirmed by the methods and methodological means proper to science only. This is to say that the experience of truth and understanding surpass the realm of scientific method. Therefore, the specific nature of truth and understanding is not to be a problem of method only. In this respect, methodological approach is not the only way to achieve truth according to Gadamer. Gadamer writes that "this is a basic truth that we need to honor and restore, after having endured several centuries in which the concept of method posited in modern science as the absolute starting point of our self-understanding."³⁷ Methodological approach to truth is limited. Here what it means is that the event of understanding and truth transcend the ideal of method.

Further, the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics of the ontological event of understanding has art, history and language as its models. Gadamer affirms the tripartite scheme of the philosophical hermeneutics of the ontological event of understanding when he writes that:

Just as in the experience of art we are concerned with truths that go essentially beyond the range of methodical knowledge, so the same thing is true of the whole of human science: in them our historical tradition in all its forms is certainly made the *object* of investigation, but at the same time *truth comes to speech in it*.³⁸

Here, Gadamer emphasized the fact that art, history and language are models of understanding in his philosophical hermeneutics. There are experiences of understanding and truth that lie beyond the conceptual and methodological limits and are expressed in the domains of art, history and language. The study examines these three models of understanding and truth.

2.4 Art

Gadamer does not provide an account of art in any traditional sense. His approach to art runs against conventional philosophical expectations. He does not treat the question of art in the manner of the analytic tradition of modern philosophy, nor does he concern himself with individual aesthetic pleasure. His approach to the experience of art is rooted in the phenomenological tradition: he is dealing with the place of art as the disclosure of truth and our perception of the world. Hence philosophical hermeneutics as an event of understanding, according to Gadamer, gets its trust from the experience of art.

The starting point is: what is art? By art, Gadamer has in mind literature, visual arts, architecture and music which he holds that they are the basic of metaphysical legacy of the western tradition. Art, he holds that they claim a philosophical authority of their own when looked at from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer seeks to relate his understanding of philosophical hermeneutics as an event of understanding with the experience of art as a model and the source of hermeneutical truth and understanding.

It is plausible to contend that the Gadamerian approach to art is deconstructive and constructive. He deconstructs, for example, the elements of the Platonic and the Kantian aesthetics and offers a phenomenological reconstruction of the experience of art. From the above context we see in Kant's account of art divided it into "feeling" and "form" elements but neither of them could claim truth. Also in Plato art had aesthetic element. This is to say that for Gadamer art transcends its classical realm of aesthetics; that is, it goes beyond pleasure value. Earlier positions, for example the Kantian perspective, viewed art purely from aesthetics, due to the assumptions of methodical sciences and therefore it had nothing to do with truth and understanding. Prior to Gadamer's approach, art was seen as copy of reality. However, for Gadamer, he goes beyond the idea that the image of art as a copy of something. This was concealing the aesthetic experience and limiting its mandate for Gadamer. This means that in art, there is something one can think about. In following the phenomenological tradition Gadamer is principally concerned with the place of art in our experience of the world.

By transcending the views of both Plato and Kant due to the aesthetic experience, Gadamer, following Heidegger, can be said to pioneer the radical claim which suggests that artwork can also be a locus of "truth". Now this work will try to grasp what art entails in relation to truth and understanding for Gadamer. For him,

The question of truth of art in particular can serve to prepare the way for this more wide ranging question because, the experience of the work of art includes understanding, and thus it presents hermeneutical phenomenon-but not all in the sense of a scientific method.³⁹

What is important here is that prior to this, science and method dominated the entire field of truth and understanding. However, Gadamer's position is that the concept of truth is much broader than the concept of truth accounted for by the notion of science and method. Here we see that Gadamer seeks to validate the claim of truth and understanding in art from the ideal of method. Gadamer is reacting to the idea of method which sees art as not facilitating truth. For Gadamer, art is no longer a finished product produced by its author in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Art incorporates understanding and truth. Gadamer remarks that "the fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalise it away."⁴⁰ What it means here is that the truth we encounter in art experience discloses itself in ways we can never fully grasp. For Gadamer, the experience we are concerned with truths that are broader than methodical notion of truth. This is an attempt by Gadamer to protect the experience of truth in art from trivialisation forced upon it by the authority of methodical knowledge. Hence for Gadamer, the experience of truth concerns the artistic experience. This is to say that in art, truth is arrived via experience and not limited to and guided by any rules or norms or art of understanding. The study infers that for Gadamer there are no rules to follow in order to reach understanding and truth in the sphere of art. Art is not grasped by the process of science for example through measurement or information technology. The experience of art reproaches science for it is not based on the concept of the validity of scientific method. On the contrary, it demonstrates the limits of science and its method. Here we see that scientific methodology for Gadamer does not allow art to be in its own right. Gadamer understands the presentation of an art work as the disclosure of truth.

This is to say that in art, the truth unconceals itself, it opens itself and brings forth itself. But he asserts that "the experience of art acknowledges that it cannot present the full truth of what it experiences in terms of definitive knowledge."⁴¹ What Gadamer describes here is a truth we cannot fully account for in the ideal of certainty. This is to say that there is no established standard for certainty in knowledge or ideal knowledge to explain the truth derived from the experience of art.

Gadamer writes that from the experience of art, "we hope to better understand what kind of truth it is that encounter us here."⁴² What Gadamer implies is that his quest and understanding of truth is no longer the same thing that existed before. Hence his analysis leads to a different view of truth. In following Heidegger, Gadamer offered a view of truth that is radically different from the traditional theories of truth in philosophy. Gadamer's idea of truth refutes the classical theory of truth and does not have any connection to other versions of propositional truth. In order to understand Gadamer here, it is necessary to look at the traditional and modern theories of truth. In philosophy, there is the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic or utilitarian theories of truth. The correspondence theory implies a verbal description matches the fact; the coherence theory means that a statement is true if it coheres with other beliefs that are held to be true while the pragmatic or utilitarian theory of truth implies if it works, it is true. These theories are compatible with empirical science, but Gadamer's view of truth is not. Gadamer offers objection to these views of truth giving alternative to them, that truth, is an "ontological disclosure," a disclosure of things as they are. Truth "come outs," and the experience of a work of art can itself be an event of the "emergence" of truth, a disclosure of truth. This is a shared or participated truth according to Gadamer.

Gadamer gives ontological status to art in hermeneutical explorations. This means that art holds a special ontological status. Gadamer observes that the "experience of art (*Erfahrung*) and thus the question of the mode of being of the work of art that must be the object of our examination."⁴³ This is to say that for Gadamer, there is a fundamental connection between ontology, experience of art and philosophical hermeneutics of the event of understanding. Hence in Gadamer, art is ontological, that is it discloses being. By this, he means that art grips our entire being, it engages us such that there is no demarcation between the art work and us. Hence in coming across the same work is equally encountering oneself. For Gadamer, "rather understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself, and so this belonging can be illuminated only on the basis of the mode of being of the work of art itself."⁴⁴ Therefore for Gadamer, understanding in art has ontological dimension. Further art is transformative and this is evidenced when Gadamer writes that "in the experience of art we see a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) induced by the work of art, which does not leave him who has it unchanged, and we inquire into the mode of being of what is experienced in this way."⁴⁵ For Gadamer there is a fundamental link between the subject of the experience of art and the work of art as an object. What it means here is that the true being of the work of art is that it transforms the person experiencing it. The person experiencing art is engaged, absorbed and transformed by it. This is to say that art addresses the person whose is experiencing it. This means that when in encountering artwork, there are transformative effects that change one's view of life and one's self-understanding.

Gadamer brings in the notion of *play* and *game* to explain the mode of being of artwork in the hermeneutical exploration of truth in the experience of art. Gadamer observes:

When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play but the mode of being of the work of art itself.⁴⁶

This passage reflects the analogy of the play and game as an attempt by Gadamer to support his theory of understanding. Hence the mode of being of play becomes important. *For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play,*⁴⁷ according to Gadamer. Gadamer observes that *the players are not the subject of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players.*⁴⁸ The audience, as it were, derive the meaning or understanding as Gadamer likes to put it from the play. The players only present the play to the spectators who, in turn, get absorbed, as it were it, by the play. Therefore the analogy points out that understanding of human actions involves a critically alert participant as distinct from that of a critically detached observer or objective analyst.

Gadamer's argument here is that art work has its authentic being. Precisely that point is what lasts in the artwork experienced and not the subjectivity of the one who experiences the art work. This is a radical position against the epistemological primacy given to the consciousness. Gadamer asserts that:

For when one plays a *game*, the game itself is never a mere object; rather, it exists in and for those who play it, even if one only participating as a *spectator*. In this context, I think, the inappropriateness of the concept of *subject* and *object* is evident, a point which Heidegger's exposition in *Being and Time* has also made clear.⁴⁹

It will be important here to explicate Gadamer's standpoint with respect to the concept of subject-object ontology so that Gadamer's view of the mode of being of play becomes clear. Here what it means is that Gadamer following Heidegger challenges the epistemological concept of 'subject' and 'object' dichotomy and sees them as inappropriate. Here Gadamer is further rejecting the subject-object relationship as advocated by modern epistemology.

Gadamer has achieved some important points from his analogies between the art work and play/game and more so in taking the structure of play/game as the guiding model. For example, the analogy points out that understanding of human actions involve a critically alert participant as distinct from that of a critically detached observer or objective analyst. In understanding, a meaning of the art is realised by the observer. In this respect, understanding is not a method to be followed but an everyday activity in the event of understanding. In understanding, as illustrated in the art experience, the meaning is realised not through rules and procedures but as an event. The analogy further implies that a meaning is realised from the game or play. When it comes to art, what is realised is truth. Therefore truth in art is arrived via experience not arrived at from a methodological perspective. Hence from the analogy, art work goes beyond pleasure to present truth.

Gadamer writes that 'the question of the truth of art forces us, too, to undertake a critique of both aesthetic and historical consciousness, inasmuch as we are inquiring into the *truth* that manifests itself in art and history.'⁵⁰ Thus in the next section we seek to understand Gadamerian understanding of truth in history in his philosophical hermeneutics.

2.5 History

In the former section, this work has stressed Gadamer's attempt to relate art, truth and understanding. It has also emphasized the Gadamerian fundamental assertion that art can also be the locus of truth. Now we try to grasp the nature of understanding which stems from history as explicated by Gadamer.

By historicity of understanding, Gadamer does not imply history and understanding in their ordinary, current conventional meaning. This means that the Gadamerian approach does not provide an account of history in any usual sense. His approach to history runs, in many ways, against conventional expectations. Over against this conventional perspective, Gadamer's approach to historical experience follows the phenomenological tradition. He is primarily concerned with the place of history in our experience of the world. Particularly, Gadamer's approach is chiefly concerned with the cognitive dimension of historical experience. What it means here is that according to Gadamer, understanding is historically grounded. The question we ask is: how is understanding historically grounded? In order to address this question, we follow the Gadamer's view on understanding and history. Particularly important for Gadamer's starting point in philosophical hermeneutics are the notions that understanding and history are inseparable. This is to say that there is no understanding without history. Simply put, understanding itself is historical. This implies that we understand historically because we are historical and we belong to history so to speak. In this respect, one fundamental model of understanding according to Gadamer is history. For Gadamer, truth and understanding is arrived at via history.

Further, in order to clarify the concept of historicity of understanding, we now turn to an analysis of how Gadamer describes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle. He outlines various aspects such as prejudice, tradition, and fusion of horizon among others as elements of the historicity of understanding. Here Gadamer seeks to develop an historical theory of philosophical hermeneutics as an ontological event of understanding that legitimises prejudice and tradition. According to Gadamer prejudice connotes a predetermined judgement. Gadamer writes that "the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its thrust."⁵¹ Here in using the term prejudice, Gadamer evokes a sense of the problem he is dealing with. In essence, he is questioning the possibility of understanding which is assumptionless. Further, what he implies is that understanding is always fore-understanding of understanding. Therefore prejudices are not obstacles to understanding but actually they make understanding possible and he further asserts that prejudices do not necessarily distort the truth and understanding.

Gadamer further writes that "hermeneutic reflection merely uncovers the conditions under which understanding always already operates—as our 'pre-understanding'—conditions which are also operative when we concern ourselves to understand..."⁵² Here some explanation of what is meant by this quotation is appropriate. What Gadamer means is that understanding is possible when one brings one's own prejudices into play. Understanding therefore involves the concept of presuppositions in philosophical hermeneutics for Gadamer. What Gadamer describes here is that prejudices as conditions of understanding facilitate understanding when we experience something.

In the context just mentioned above implies that presuppositions do facilitate positively the event of understanding. We understand because we do have fore-understanding. Furthermore, Gadamer is reconsidering the place of prejudices in the event of understanding. Gadamer further observes that:

A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meaning that are borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by things themselves is the constant task of understanding.⁵³

This is to say that for Gadamer, there are presuppositions we have to accept as conditions in the event of understanding. Prejudices do not promote a closed-minded but an open-minded approach to understanding. Gadamer, following Heidegger, questions the possibility of a judgment-free atmosphere and in doing so, he re-evaluates the place of prejudice in his philosophical hermeneutics as the historical event of the ontological understanding. The concept of fore-understanding grounds the presence of prejudice in the historicity of understanding. Here a basic strength of Gadamer's argument is that he takes preconceptions as facilitating historicity of understanding. That is to say that historicity of understanding is always based on presuppositions. Gadamer notes that "understanding realises its full potential only when the fore-meaning that it begins with are not arbitrary."⁵⁴ What it means here is that some prejudices are legitimate hence facilitate understanding while others are illegitimate hence serve as obstacles to understanding. Hence the validity of genuine fore-meaning must be taken into account in the process of understanding. The claim prejudice and understanding in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics has been challenged and therefore it is important to note that concept of prejudice is controversial.

However in this study we see that it is significant to relate prejudice and understanding. A basic strength here is that it is not possible to argue that we are not prejudiced when we understand.

According to Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics explorations, tradition is prejudiced. What it means here is that tradition is the source of assumptions. This is to say that tradition as prejudiced is one of the conditions of understanding in the philosophical hermeneutics. For Gadamer, tradition has hermeneutical implications and therefore constitutes the historical event of understanding in his philosophical hermeneutics. This understanding, in the understanding of tradition, is inseparable from prejudices. Gadamer asserts:

We stand in traditions, whether we know these traditions or not; that is whether we are conscious of these or are so arrogant as to think we can begin without presupposition—none of this changes the way traditions are working on us and in our understanding.⁵⁵

This a basic strength of Gadamer's argument for it means that the presupposition in traditions facilitate understanding. The implication is that tradition belongs to the philosophical hermeneutic event of understanding. The interpretation of tradition is a new creation of understanding.

For Gadamer, the event of understanding mediates the past and the present. This means that the -in-between- the past and the present, is understanding, according to Gadamer. Therefore for Gadamer, people constantly define and reshape their futures by reinterpreting and redefining the events of their past. He makes the observation that:

In fact, the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence, the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past.⁵⁶

What he means here is that understanding is an event in the transmission of tradition in which the past and the present mediate. According to Gadamer, understanding is based on the constant strain between the work of tradition and the demands of the present situation. Furthermore understanding is participating in an event of tradition, an event of transmitting whereby the past and present are constantly act as a go-between and thereof it is to thought of less as a subjective act. Understanding as an event is the process of making the past present. The past shapes and guides the present and hence an event of understanding. This is to say that tradition facilitates understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Tradition has the indispensable gap of the present and the past. This gap is bridged according to Gadamer by temporal distance.

Following our line of thought, the tension between the past and the present is significant. The gap in between, as Gadamer likes to put it, has hermeneutical relevance. The notion of temporal distance facilitates wider perspective from which understanding occurs in relation to the past and the present. This is to say that temporal distance makes understanding possible of events that are separated by time. Gadamer writes:

Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. Hence temporal distance is not something that must be overcome..... In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.⁵⁷

This passage shows that the experience of time acquires a new significance for Gadamer. Further the passage draws attention to a different concept of time for Gadamer which aims to explain how temporal distance links the past and the present and in doing so facilitates understanding as an event.

What it means here is that time is hermetically useful for with passage of time we understand the past and the present better. The duty of understanding therefore is to link the events separated by time. In doing so, it separates what is essential from what is not. It eliminates presuppositions which are but obstacles to understanding and allows only the positive ones which facilitate understanding.

In his analysis and hermeneutical explorations, Gadamer introduces the notion of effective history, that is, the concept of the consciousness of the historical effect. The Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding seeks to demonstrate that efficacy of history is indispensable. Gadamer observes that:

A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall [Gadamer] refer to this as *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.⁵⁸

A basic question would be: what is the principle of effective history? By the principle of effective history Gadamer means that understanding comprises both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. This is to say that effective history determines in advance what seems to us to be knowledge, truth and understanding. Furthermore what it means here is that an event is always useful and therefore, understanding should seek to unveil this. What Gadamer is describing is that in understanding a historical phenomenon from the historical distance we are always affected by history which is the typical of our hermeneutical situation. This is to say that:

In all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work. When a naive faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge.⁵⁹

What Gadamer means here is that effective history is an event in the process of acquiring truth and it contributes to understanding which downplays naïve faith in science.

Using the imagery of horizon, Gadamer seeks to develop his philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding following a historical perspective. Gadamer says that “horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.”⁶⁰ From this understanding of horizon, Gadamer advocates for the image of separate horizons to differentiate the world of the present from the world of the past. In this context, when there is fusion of horizons of the past and present happens, understanding occurs. Gadamer implies that understanding is thus a fusion of horizons happens between the present and the past. He captures this when he writes that:

In the sphere of historical understanding, too, we speak of horizons especially when referring to the claim of historical consciousness to see the past in its terms, not in terms of contemporary criteria prejudices but within its own historical horizon. The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring the appropriate historical horizon, so that what we are trying to understand can be seen in its true dimension.⁶¹

From this context, understanding for Gadamer is the fusion of these horizons. At this point we ask: why should Gadamer in philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding does consider understanding as a fusion of horizons? For Gadamer when it comes to understanding we should speak of fusion of horizons of past and present in view of the continuity of history. He notes:

The projecting of the historical horizon, then, is only a phase in the process of understanding; it 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 a real fusing of horizons-which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded.⁶²

Here some explanation of what is meant by the above quotation is appropriate. For Gadamer, there are two horizons and that there is no such thing as a closed and bounded horizon for the present or for the past. The horizons in question are in constant change. Hence we project historical horizons different from our own and recognize that this projection is a stage in the event of understanding. In the context just mentioned above horizons imply a wide view an interpreter must have. From the above quotations, we infer that Gadamer sees understanding and truth as the experience of history.

In the context discussed above whatever is understood, according to Gadamer whether in art or history is always understood in and mediated by language.

2.6 Language

In the former section, this work has shown why history facilitates understanding for Gadamer. Further it has explained why Gadamer gives history a hermeneutical overtone. In this section, we expose the fundamental connection between language and understanding for Gadamer.

Gadamer in his quest to develop philosophical hermeneutics focuses on language, understanding and truth as having a fundamental relationship. He writes "that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually achievement of language."⁶³ Here one may demonstrate the context by asserting that according to Gadamer the universal medium through which understanding takes place is language. Therefore he sought to highlight the fundamentally linguistic nature of understanding.

Understanding and language are one for Gadamer and that whatever is understood is expressed in language. He discusses and gives an account of philosophical hermeneutics as an event mediated by language in the process of understanding and arriving at the truth. What he describes is that the central theme as understanding in his philosophical hermeneutics pays homage to language as its pillar. Gadamer's view is that the event of understanding is a problem that takes place in language as its medium.

As he says, "all the phenomena involved in reaching an understanding and misunderstanding which constitutes the central focus of what we call 'hermeneutics,' clearly involve language."⁶⁴ Gadamer therefore, regards as an essential task of giving phenomenological description of the human activity of understanding as embedded in language. This implies that as fusion of horizons, understanding is a linguistic phenomenological process. Gadamer himself acknowledges that in asserting "all understanding is linguistic in character is admittedly provocative"⁶⁵ for it is contrary to the classical definitions of understanding and language. What he meant is that language in the event of understanding is limited in conveying fully what has been understood from understanding. However, Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics, states that "it is not so much an objection to the linguistic character of understanding; instead, it is the linguistic character of understanding that assures its breadth and universality."⁶⁶ Even the case of silent agreement, Gadamer argues that language is involved. Language for Gadamer is the medium of conveying what has been understood in the process or event of understanding. Therefore, for Gadamer, understanding is not a process that can be separated from language. Linguistic rules and methods do not apply in the hermeneutic event or process of understanding according to Gadamer.

This Gadamerian understanding of language is contrary to the usage of language in the methodical science. The methodical sciences envision language as a theoretical set of statements on matters of facts that are verifiable independently from art, tradition and history. In its technical construction of language, the methodical science envisions language as a tool or an instrument that would enable us to master the world. This is an ideal language but Gadamer wonders if this is a language we can participate and understand. Gadamer argues that language is not as much of a tool or an instrument. Over against this, language is the model, horizon and mode of awareness of our understanding and our being-in-this-world.

Gadamer asks, "but why is understanding, when it comes into the open, linguistic in character?"⁶⁷ He responds by saying that "the question posed, carries the answer implicit in itself. Language is what is constantly building up and bearing within itself this commonality of world-orientation."⁶⁸ What it means here is that language represents or discloses our world. Man understands his world which is linguistic in character.

For Gadamer, tradition serves as a model for illustrating the fundamental relationship between language and understanding. According to Gadamer, "the essential relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that it is the essence of tradition to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one."⁶⁹ Language is the warehouse of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and relate with the world. It is through language as the medium that a phenomenological description of understanding of the tradition occurs. This is to imply that according to Gadamer, tradition is an event of understanding in philosophical hermeneutics and whatever is understood, is conveyed in language.

What it means here is that language entails clarification and unambiguousness in understanding in relation to tradition.

Therefore, the conversation with tradition is genuine linguistic event of understanding and it is passed from one generation to another through language.

Gadamer captures this when he points out:

What has come down to us by the way of verbal tradition is not left over, but given to us, told to us⁷⁰ whether in the form of direct retelling, in which myth, legend, and custom have their life, or through written tradition, whose signs are, as it were, immediately clear to every reader who can read them.

Gadamer asserts that tradition has full hermeneutical relevance when it comes to fact that tradition is linguistic in nature. The form and content of linguistic passed in tradition is inseparable from philosophical hermeneutics as understanding. In doing so a new realm is opened up by language through which tradition is passed on to the living generation. We belong to particular traditions and we must listen to them and what they express in language.

Dialogue is essential component of language and understanding for Gadamer. For him, dialogue is the basic model of understanding. Conversation or dialogue according to Gadamer permeates the event of understanding and truth. To contextualise, what Gadamer implies is that dialogue or conversation is an event or process of understanding. This is to imply that for Gadamer understanding is dialogical in character. Conversation or dialogue is a verbal event and therefore mediated by language. In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer implies that the only possible way to approach the phenomenon of language is in the experienced context that persons have in dialogue or conversation. This is to imply that to be a human person, for Gadamer, is to be able to communicate with other people.

-We are in conversationø to paraphrase Gadamer assertion, implies that we belong to a linguistic context which is manifested by dialogue. What it means here is that for Gadamer dialogical understanding means sharing or to use his word, participating. For Gadamer a genuine conversation involves equal participation. Gadamer captures this when he contends that:

As we know only too well, a conversation is not possible if one of the partners believes himself or herself to be in a clearly superior position in comparison with the other person, and assumes that he or she possesses a prior knowledge of the erroneous judgments in which the other is entangled. But if one does this, one actually locks oneself into the circle of one's own prejudices. Reaching an understanding dialogically is impossible if in principle one of the partners in a dialogue does not allow himself or herself to enter into a real conversation.⁷¹

In having a dialogue with someone, it is necessary that one allows their own ideas to be influenced and corrected by the thoughts of others. In this context, in a dialogue or conversation one tries, according to Gadamer, to get inside the other to understand his/her views. Attaining an understanding in a dialogue takes for granted that the parties involved are ready for it and are trying to be aware of the full value of what is strange and opposed to them. It necessarily follows that in a dialogue, every act of understanding according to Gadamer is geared towards agreement. This consensus or agreement for him is realised in a dialogue. This dialogue humbles one to listen to the other on the basis that he/she might be right. This means that dialogue operates on the basis of listening and openness. When this happens, Gadamer asserts that understanding takes place. Conversation takes place if and only if there a common ground uniting two parties. A dialogue must have something determinate, that is to say a focused subject matter is inevitable. The subject matter is the core factor of the parties involved hence it guides and directs dialogue facilitating understanding.

Gadamer says:

When one enters into a dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back and exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other. Hence, when a dialogue has succeeded, one is subsequently fulfilled by it, as we say.⁷²

The subject matter a matter that is placed before one as Gadamer likes to put it, must guide the dialogue and not the parties involved. Gadamer summarises his thinking on dialogical understanding as follows; for this reason the thesis is justified which asserts that all extra-verbal forms of understanding go back to an understanding that unfolds in speaking and I speaking with another person.⁷³ From the above, Gadamer is describing is what he sees as a genuine dialogue. Further, we see that according to Gadamer, understanding and consequently agreement in a dialogue is mediated by language. Language therefore has its true being in conversation between two persons leading to understanding.

This conversation or dialogue does not follow any rules or procedures but just takes place and continues to direct itself word after word. Conversation just takes place and flows by itself in willing subjects. Therefore, the truth arrived in dialogical understanding does not adhere to particular norms or rules. The rules of grammar, syntax and laws of consequential logic for Gadamer, are logical structures which, however, seldom are adequate to the really lived context of speaking.⁷⁴ In this respect, speeches and conversations do not adhere to the rules of logical assertions. This Gadamerian perspective parts ways with the focus on propositional language and propositional logic. Accordingly, the language of propositions is limited in participation.

This implies that the logical valence of propositions is not the issue in conversation in the event of understanding. Words and concepts are not utilised in strict demands of logic or philosophy of language but in the event of dialogical understanding in a conversation, they just occur. Here we see a transition beyond the logical content of the statement as necessary in the process of understanding in the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer points out that "assertions occur in a communication process and in this process the monologue of scientific speaking or demonstrating something scientifically constitutes only a special case."⁷⁵

The study at this point notes the ontological significance that Gadamer gives to language. According to Gadamer, understanding is directed towards the universal ontological structure. This universal ontological structure of being is language. Here we see that there is an ontological turn of the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics following the guide of language. In following Heidegger, the treatment of language in Gadamer becomes ontological. Within the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, the ontological orientation is evident when his theory of hermeneutics concentrates on the question of being. When Gadamer seeks theoretical clarifications of being, his project becomes an ontological quest. His ontological orientation commences in being and ends in being. Gadamer therefore in his analysis embraces being as accessible in language. The fundamental assertion is that language is the universal ontological structure of being.

Gadamer asserts that:

The being that can be understood is language. The hermeneutical phenomenon here projects its own universality back onto the ontological constitution of what is understood, determining its own relation to beings as interpretation.⁷⁶

For our thesis, the meaning of this dictum is that the nature of being that can be understood is language. The meaning of this dictum is that language mediates experiences of being. This dictum also for Gadamer implies that in the language of the things themselves (their being) understanding is derived. Language is that which can be understood. The nature of language is that it is understandable. Again it implies that things other than language are expressed in language itself. Language has a speculative structure, hence demonstrating its universal ontology. In a nutshell 'being that can be understood is language' implies that full understanding in the event of understanding is possible only because of language and in language. 'Being that can be understood is language' according to Grondin,

Hardly means that with language everything can be understood or that everything that has to be intelligible has to be expressible in words. The dictum is meant as a limitation: we understand only in so far as we find words for what has been understood.⁷⁷

'The principle of hermeneutics simply means that we should try to understand everything that can be understood. This is what, Gadamer declares that he, 'meant by the sentence: being that can be understood is language.'⁷⁸ Language is always in the event of understanding. Hence it implies a phenomenological orientation.

Gadamer summarises his thinking about philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding by asserting that 'this is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.'⁷⁹

2.7 Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

Before focusing on the application issue, it is necessary to draw one's attention to critique of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In short: in a rough formulation, the critique is related to the attitude that philosophical hermeneutics, regarding the central place of understanding may be inevitably outside the paradigm of philosophy. The questions, which will be elaborated here in short, are: is philosophical hermeneutics a philosophy? And if it is, what kind of philosophy is it? The problem is the following: Does Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics has the right to be a philosophy?

Gadamer himself is concerned as to whether his approach to truth and understanding from philosophical hermeneutics' perspective can withstand the yardstick of philosophy, when he writes "but it is quite a different question how far the truth claim of such modes of experience outside science can be philosophically legitimate."⁸⁰ The issue is whether the phenomenological description of understanding as imbedded in the experiences of art, history and language constitute to what is understood to be philosophy. Put differently; I have spoken of philosophical hermeneutics in terms of phenomenological description of understanding and one may ask whether this qualifies as philosophy especially when Gadamer talks of the experiences of art, history and language. Importantly, prior to the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, hermeneutics as a terminology was not associated with philosophy. Gadamer himself acknowledges that his philosophical hermeneutics "needs to be justified philosophically."⁸¹ This work finds it imperative to examine the meaning, nature and role of philosophy.

This attempt to look at the concept of philosophy in a broad sense would constitute a perspective from which Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a philosophy would be interpreted, understood and appreciated.

Philosophy has been defined as the love of wisdom. Any human being seeking to understand is a philosopher since philosophy is the activity of the human being. The human being as a philosopher may work in different fields such as human conducts (ethics), with assumptions that underlie religious or scientific beliefs, or with tools and methods of thinking (Logic and critical thinking). A philosopher seeks to understand things which vary from complexity to the meaning of a word such as "either/or". The outcome may be ground breaking or relatively insignificant. One fundamental aspect of the nature and role of philosophy is that it is reflective and aims at understanding. Further philosophy attempts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the world.

Aristotle's came with the division of philosophy into theoretical, practical (*praxis*) and poetical (*poiesis*). The differences between the first and the second one is that theoretical philosophy which includes mathematics, physics and the first philosophy (metaphysics) is occupied with knowledge as such while practical philosophy (ethics, politics, economy) pursue knowledge as a means to conduct, action and praxis. In practical philosophy, there are no universals given in advance that could be cognized and afterwards in an unchanged form utilized for the field of *praxis* depends on concrete situation. The purpose of practical philosophy is not comprehension of the thing-in-itself, but learning how to relate to things. The poetical sciences are concerned with the aesthetics that is, knowledge is subordinated to artistic creation.

I believe that this clarification by Aristotle is of great significant then and even today. In this study, it helps to demonstrate that Gadamer is engaged in philosophy.

Following the substantive exposition, it is plausible to infer that philosophical hermeneutics is the heir of an older tradition of practical philosophy. Its main question, how is understanding possible, is completely situated within the horizon of practical philosophy. Gadamer comes to an insight that understanding modeled in art, history and language is the principle of his philosophical hermeneutics. He seeks something that is common in understanding, and it is artistic, historical and linguistic in character. Understanding is always temporary, linguistic 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 as exposed above.

From the above line of thought, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding imbedded in the experiences of art, history and language therefore qualify as philosophy. One it focuses on the problem of understanding. Further it seeks to understand and answer human predicament and hence it is a critical and practical philosophy. It is not after mere search of wisdom and discovering facts but seeks to know how these facts for example; the experiences of art, history and language are to be used. Thus philosophical hermeneutics as understood by Gadamer examines critically the essential notions and presuppositions of understanding as inbuilt in art, history and language. For example Gadamer explains critically the essential notions and presuppositions of understanding what they mean, on what grounds they are selected and to what end they are utilised.

Another example is that Gadamer gives a detailed critical analysis of earlier thinking on understanding, method, art, history and language among other issues. This is by and in itself doing philosophy and its philosophical.

The most fascinating aspect of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is that it is concerned with human being. He seeks to relate human being and understanding. Philosophising about man is Gadamer's business. Gadamer seeks to locate man in our social world. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is philosophy and philosophical and its critical point lies in understanding and how it is embedded in art, history and language. Besides the above understanding of the nature and role of philosophy, Gadamer himself seeks to answer his own question by asserting that, 'the current interest in the hermeneutic phenomenon rests, I [Gadamer] think, on the fact that only a deeper investigation of the phenomenon of understanding can provide this legitimation.'⁸² What he means is that further analysis on the phenomenon of understanding will demonstrate that he is engaged in doing philosophy.

I have explained, I believe adequately, the very meaning and nature of philosophy. So it would suffice here to briefly consider some African philosophers like Odera Oruka and his views on the nature and meaning of philosophy in general. For Oruka there are various missions of philosophy such as the truth, aesthetic, communicative and the moral. The truth mission seeks to discern the truth about man and nature. Oruka notes that 'philosophers have had more disagreement than censuses on any philosophical claim to truth.'⁸³ Oruka correctly holds that there is no a definite view on the nature of truth. The aesthetic mission for Oruka sees art as significant. He observes that 'any philosophical understanding of human beings that ignores the aesthetic mission

of philosophy would be incomplete.⁸⁴ The communicative mission of philosophy stipulates that philosophy entails dialogical or conversation role of informing all. If one reads carefully Oruka, one finds lucid explanations of Gadamer's notion of dialogue. Finally the moral mission which calls for philosophers to help reorganise and rationalise the available knowledge in order to improve human understanding and the welfare of mankind.⁸⁵ In our times, Oruka points out that moral mission of philosophy is more urgent than the concern, say, to develop new methods for solving classical metaphysical paradoxes.⁸⁶ Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics reflects these four mission stipulated by Oruka. It deals with issue of truth, art, dialogue and ethics. From the above I infer that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a philosophy. As I have explained, a comprehensive understanding of philosophy incorporates the factual and the normative roles. If one reads and understands Gadamer, then one would see that the two inextricably related functions run throughout his philosophical hermeneutics in such a way that the factual role serves as means to the normative role.

Furthermore, Gadamer, largely in his book *Truth and Method*, explores the relationship between hermeneutics and philosophy, a perspective he called philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer himself asserts that my [Gadamer] real concern was and is philosophic:⁸⁷ It is plausible to infer that Gadamer's interest in hermeneutics was philosophical. The study therefore, infers that Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics had a philosophical impulse and that the hermeneutic phenomenon for Gadamer is a way of doing philosophy.⁸⁸ Accordingly, Gadamer moves to propose and defend a new philosophical discipline.⁸⁹ Thus for Gadamer, hermeneutics is a philosophical theory.⁹⁰ Finally, Gadamer's work has provoked debate.

Major scholars like Betti, Hirsch, Habermas, Vattimo, Rorty, Ricoeur, Apel and Derrida among others have reacted to the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. This again is a reflection that his work is philosophical. The debates and issues raised by these scholars on Gadamer cannot be addressed comprehensively in this study.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has given an exposition of a philosophical perspective that Gadamer called philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding. It has presented a fairly detailed history of classical hermeneutics from ancient times to the present and has offered an account of the development of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and some of its reception. The chapter represents substantiation both with regard to the history of hermeneutics and also with regard to what hermeneutics had transformed as a result of Gadamer's masterwork, *truth and method* of 1960 and other works. In doing so, this work concisely defined and explained Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding.

As a theory of understanding, philosophical hermeneutics transcends classical hermeneutics, that is, the juridical, rhetorical, and theological hermeneutics, which is treated both as it is classically defined and understood, that is, dedicated to the task of text interpretation. It is worthwhile in this conclusion to note that Gadamer though influenced by the general hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, he also rejects their views in his quest to propose and defend a new philosophical discipline that he

called philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding and profoundly influenced by Heidegger.

To recapitulate Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding, the study has focused on the fundamental aspects of art, history and the language as models in event of understanding. The Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding largely focuses on discrediting traditional epistemological theories in their position of understanding as based on a method. Gadamer follows Heidegger in making an attack on modern thinking since Descartes, Kant and he sees the reductionism in science as a problem. Basically, modern scientific thinking is too reductionistic in its questioning and only gets the answer to the questions it asks. This is a fundamental element in Gadamer--the answer we get is the answer to our question, and the question may be too narrow. What Gadamer criticises is the modern scientific understanding for it is not based on historical, artistic or linguistic experiences but on mathematical expectations. Gadamer was not concerned with the methodological issues and scientific methods pertaining to scientific understanding. This methodological understanding does not permeate all spheres of life. This according to Gadamer is more shallow than an understanding that is based on history, language and that frames artworks embedded in experience. For example, the 'modern view of understanding' which Gadamer criticises is not based on the richness contained in language. Language is rich in cultural ways of seeing and experiencing, Gadamer says, and therefore, he has a richer view of understanding than the 'traditional', modern, scientific, mathematical and controlling understanding. The critical and scientific self-control is limited in human life and hence the process of understanding as understood by Gadamer comes in to bridge the

gap. Gadamer based on Heidegger, poses a challenge to the modern European modes of understanding. His challenge is in part due to his criticism of the static structures of modern European thinking and its feeling of superiority. On the other hand, in following Heidegger, Gadamer view of the process understanding sees it as an event that happens in time.

From the above line of thought, I uncovered the ontological foundations of philosophical hermeneutics theory of understanding. Gadamer influenced by Heidegger related understanding and being. Understanding was no longer a methodological but ontological. This ontological event of understanding has nothing to do with classical hermeneutics which focused on rules or methods of understanding. Over against this, philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is not a methodology but description of the event of understanding which seeks to demonstrate the limits of a method as I elucidated in our analysis. This led to the conclusion that understanding as the foundational event in human existence is the basis of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is an event that is always already on, that is, understanding. Following this line of thought I demonstrated how understanding is a universal event.

Then the fundamental question was: how is this understanding realised? The study followed Gadamer's argument that through experience and participation we come understand and realise the truth. For Gadamer, he demonstrated this through analysis of art, history and language. The Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics looks at the event of understanding and notes that in the event of understanding or process of understanding, we understand on the historical basis of what we already know, and

also through language and art. And we understand on the basis of what we see the future as needing and ourselves as needing for the future.

One of the strengths and important of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is to relate art to truth and to the event of truth announcing itself in our experience of works of art. Art is not just a pleasure as Plato and Immanuel Kant understood it as we argued earlier, but for Gadamer following Heidegger, it is an ontological experience of truth. The truth of art announces itself through itself and not on the basis of an author's intention. Here he is indebted to Heidegger's view of truth and art in Heidegger's famous 1935 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art." This new truth, the ontological disclosure, a disclosure of truth, as we have demonstrated challenged the classical, traditional and modern theories of truth. Further art, we saw, facilitates self understanding. Art provides ontological disclosure of ourselves.

In the thesis, it emerged that, Gadamer emphasised on the historicity of understanding. This work followed Gadamer's line of thought that understanding has to do with the historicity of human experience and life, an influence he got from Dilthey. In this chapter I analysed his account of how the historicity of understanding is part of the ontological structure of human existence. It showed that, philosophical hermeneutics theory of understanding demonstrates how historicity constitutes the mode of being and knowing. In doing so, the study has shown how the subject-object dichotomy of the epistemological theories was rejected by Gadamer. The thesis demonstrated that the notion of historicity is be related to understanding. Further we argued how, for Gadamer, the historicity of understanding and the truth revealed through language belong to tradition and ontological conditions of human existence.

The study also followed the argument of philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding which is a Gadamerian project as appropriating under the influence of Heidegger the finite and historical nature of human experience of the world. The concept of prejudice was also discussed in relation to understanding. I demonstrated that in Gadamer, prejudgements are conditions which need to be factored in the event of understanding. This chapter has shown how Gadamer argues that there is no presuppositionless understanding.

Finally, Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics shows a fundamental relationship between understanding, art, history and language is not simply one of opposition, but of mutual interference. Gadamer emphasises that language plays a positive role and permeates understanding, and indispensable in art and history. In this respect they have a unique relationship.

The following chapter deals with the exposition and discussion of the contemporary approaches to African philosophy demonstrating the strengths and weakness of each. In doing so, this study will be in a position to apply understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy.

2.9 Notes

¹ Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, (Ed. and Translated by Richard E. Palmer). (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 22.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev ed.), (Wahrheit und Methode 1960). (Translated by Garret Barden and John Cumming). (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1989), xxvii

⁶ Ibid., xxii.

⁷ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op. cit., 89.

⁸ Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as practical philosophy", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op. cit., 244.

⁹ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. op.cit., 93.

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., 251.

¹³ Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection (1967)", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Edited and Translated by David E. Linge), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxvi.

¹⁶ Ibid., 512.

¹⁷ Ibid., 513.

¹⁸ Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. op.cit.,

¹⁹ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op.cit. 89.

²⁰ Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op.cit., 23.

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxvii.

²² Gadamer, "On the problem of self understanding (1962)", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, op.cit., 50.

²³ Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. op.cit. 63.

²⁴ Ibid., 71.

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Ibid.,

²⁷ Gadamer, "The universality of the hermeneutical problem", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. op.cit., 72.

²⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics*. In H.G. Gadamer *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (Translated by R.R. Sullivan), (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1985), 190.

²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*, op.cit., 23.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., xx.

³¹ Ibid.,

³² Ibid.,

³³ Ibid.,

³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, op.cit., 40.

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxi.

³⁷ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. op. cit., 94.

³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op.cit., xxii.

³⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁰ Ibid., xxi.

⁴¹ Ibid., 86.

⁴² Ibid.,

⁴³ Ibid., 103.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 87.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 86.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 102.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 103.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.,
- ⁴⁹ Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op. cit., 23.
- ⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., 161.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 272.
- ⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. op. cit., 62.
- ⁵³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. 270.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.,
- ⁵⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, op. cit., 45.
- ⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., 305
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 297.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 299.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 300
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 301.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 302.
- ⁶² Ibid., 387.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 371.
- ⁶⁴ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. op. cit., 92.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 94.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 96.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., 391
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. op. cit., 70.
- ⁷² Gadamer, "Man and Language", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 66.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *The Reader: A bouquet of the Later Writings*. op. cit., 63.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., 470.
- ⁷⁷ Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, (Translated by Joel Weinsheimer), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 289.
- ⁷⁸ Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection (1967)", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, op. cit., 31.
- ⁷⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., 291.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., xxi.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., xxii.
- ⁸² Ibid.,
- ⁸³ H. Odera Oruka, *Practical Philosophy: In Search of Ethical Minimum*, (East African educational publishers, Nairobi), 94.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 97
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 99.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.,
- ⁸⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. , xxv.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., xxii.
- ⁸⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op. cit., 43.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 66.

CHAPTER THREE

AN EXPOSITION AND DISCUSSION OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

3 Introduction

Contemporary African philosophy has various approaches and as a consequence various topics and issues. The attempt is to expose, discuss and philosophically reflect on the question of the meaning and nature of African philosophy. In doing so, this work will be in a position to argue how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding modeled in art, history and language is applicable for African philosophy.

3.1 The meaning and nature of African philosophy

The question: What is African philosophy? has been central in the debate about the nature and existence of African philosophy. The meaning and the nature of African philosophy is itself a philosophical problem. This is to imply that the definition of African philosophy has remained a perennial philosophical problem and there is little agreement as to what it is. Attempts have been made by various trends in African philosophy to explain the nature and existence of African philosophy. Here I examine ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy, philosophic sagacity and the hermeneutic philosophy in relation to the nature and meaning of African philosophy.

The starting point is by looking at the origin of the debate on African philosophy which was as a result of the charge of irrationality leveled against the Africans.

3.2 The Western classical conception of the African mentality

It is also referred to as the Conventional Concept of the African mind and this is not an approach or methodology in African philosophy. It is a conception in the Western discourse that depicts Africans as both unique and inferior in their mode of mental operation to that of the general Western. The gist of this perspective is the claim that there is a difference in rational capacity. It should be mentioned that the Western classical conception of the African mentality was that the later were incapable of abstract thinking. The classical Western discourse on Africans was predominantly misinformed and made misleading claims about Africans. The African response to this conception resulted to the birth of contemporary African philosophy. This is to say that the thoughts within the Western classical discourse on Africans formed the background to the debate on contemporary African philosophy. The core issue of the debate was the question of reason. This is to say that reason took the centre stage in this philosophical debate.

Masolo captures this when he asserts that:

The birth of the debate on African philosophy is historically associated with two happenings: Western discourse on Africa and the African response to it....At the centre of this debate is the concept of reason, a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilised and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical...To a large extent the debate about African philosophy can be summarised as a significant contribution to the discussion and definition of reason or what Hegel called the spirit. Indeed, it is commonly referred to as the rationality debate.¹

From this passage, we infer that the history of contemporary African philosophy has been characterized by the debate on reason. The gist inferred has been the claim that reason was seen in light of colour hence racial connotation was manifested.

The challenges faced by African over their capacity to reason provided the direct stimuli of the philosophical enterprises of the character and present state of academic philosophy in Africa. The implication was that the ðconventional concept of African mentalityø school of thought regards Africans as incapable of philosophising, civilisation and scientific invention. It will suffice here to mention that accordingly, Africans' capacity to philosophize or abstract or logical thinking was doubtful. Therefore:

The term ðpre-philosophyø is of course a logical consequence of the culture and life of the primitive man. It leaves the hope that this culture might one day evolve into scientific and reason oriented culture. Yet, Levy-Bruhl and the anthropologists of his kind left no such hope: for them, the situation was that of unphilosophy rather than pre-philosophy. What they claimed to have established in Africa were (1) the impossibility for a philosophic dialogue and (2) an obvious nonexistence of a tradition of organized philosophical systems. The second claim is a logical consequence of the first, while the first follows as a tautology from the fact of the nature of the black man's mind, a ðprimitive mentality.²

This legacy of denigration advocated by the ðconventional concept of African mentalityø places the African and Africa outside the field of philosophy. What I am trying to bring to the awareness, here, is that many narratives of Europeans on Africa, have tended to create the impression that Africans were devoid of philosophy. The denial of the existence of African philosophy came from writers in devastating ways and did not do service to the understanding of African philosophy as it is.

Ochieng & Odhiambo captures this when he writes that:

More accurately, before the publication of Placide Tempels' pioneering work in the area of African philosophy, entitled *La Philosophie Bantoue* in 1945 (later translated in English *Bantu Philosophy*), Africans (or in general, Blacks) were in many circles considered to lack the capability of engaging in any form of systematic, rigorous, dialectical and independent (individual) inquiry.³

Therefore, Africans were incapable of any philosophical activity. Regardless of what signification one would give the concept philosophy, for a long period of time one hardly finds African philosophy being grouped with the later. Specifically the argument advanced was that the terms African, Africa and philosophy were mutually exclusive. This accordingly is the conventional Conception of the African Mentality which viewed the African mind as lacking logic, pre-logical, pre-scientific, pre-knowledgeable and uncivilised. It is for these reasons that effort spent on this thesis is to set the record right and demonstrate how understanding contributes towards a better understanding of African philosophy. By way of substantiation of what has been highlighted in this section, some scholars will be cited, in their writings in which they regarded anything African in disparaging way possible. Some of the rationalists and proponents of the Western classical discourse include David Hume, Immanuel Kant, F.G.W. Hegel, Diedrich Westermann, John Colin Carothers and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl among many others.

In his book, *The philosophy of History* (1956) F.G.W. Hegel, addressed History of the world as core of his philosophy:

The subject of this course of Lectures is the Philosophical History of the World. And by this must be understood, not a collection of general observations respecting it, suggested by the study of its records, and proposed to be illustrated by its facts, but Universal History.⁴

Therefore Hegel was concerned with the nature of history. In the process, he argued that there is a fundamental relationship between history, reason and man. Hegel states that goal of *The Philosophy of History* is to bring to "the completion of History...the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process."⁵ It is arguable that for Hegel history is a rational process. This spirit led him to discuss the issue of reason, history and the African. Specifically, F.G.W. Hegel, addressed the question of history and of the rational capacity of the African. In doing so he denied the African humanity, religion, culture, civilisation, and history. His view on the African was racial, derogative, provocative and inaccurate. Hegel exclusion and bracketing the African from rationality was based on a misconception of geography. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel argued that Africa was divided into three regions:

One is that which lies south of the desert - Africa proper - the upland almost entirely unknown to us with narrow coast traits along the sea; the second is that to the north of the desert - European Africa (if we may so call it) - a coastland; the third is the river region of the Nile, the only valley land of Africa, and which is in connection with Asia.⁶

For him therefore the three segments of Africa are; Africa proper, European Africa and the river region of Nile. According to Hegel,

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained-for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World-shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself-the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition.⁷

From this point of view, it is plausible to infer that within Africa proper, the inhabitants are incapable of reason due to their geographical conditions which were hot and harsh

while the other two regions, that is, European Africa and the river region of Nile, for him depicted rational qualities. It is noticeable how Hegel decrees to give the picture of the African World without the slightest hint that his might represent a misunderstanding of the African world. From what I have demonstrated so far it should be noticeable that Hegel's views are based on racism, misunderstanding and not on understanding of Africa.

David Hume in his essay on, *National Character*, exhibited his racial perspective of the black man and the issue of reason. For him reason and civilisation depends on racial descent. Consequently, only the white race produced individuals capable of abstract thinking. It is logically for him that the African race was and is incapable of logical thinking and hence intellectually unproductive.

Immanuel Kant in his work titled, *ŃVarieties of the different races of men”* argued that there are four races of human beings; the whites (Europeans), the yellows (Asians), the blacks (Africans) and the reds (Americans). These races as reflected by their skin colour have different mental dispositions. Following this line of thought, Kant, like Hume, ascribed to skin colour (white or black) the evidence of rational and therefore human capacity or the lack of it. Categorically therefore, the outstanding mental capacities are found among the whites, followed by the yellows, then blacks and finally the reds. The difference between the mental capacities of the whites and blacks are fundamental and distinct such that he argued that being black is synonymous to being stupid.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl was not left out of the rationality debate. In his book, the *Primitive Mentality* (1923), he held the view that the African mind, a primitive mentality, was not capable of logical analysis, discursive argumentation and hence it could accommodate contradictions. According to him:

... the mentality of these undeveloped peoples which, for want of a better term, I call *prelogical* does not partake in that nature. It is not *antilogical*; it is not *alogical* either. By designating it *prelogical* I merely wish to state that it does not bind itself down, as our thought does, to avoid contradiction...it does not expressly delight in what is contradictory(which would make it merely absurd in our eyes), but neither does it take pains to avoid it. It is often wholly indifferent to it, and that makes it so hard to follow.⁸

By prelogical, Levy Bruhl does not mean alogical or anti-logical. Prelogical, applied to primitive mentality, means for Levy Bruhl that it does not go out of its way as the Europeans do, to avoid contradiction. By *pre-logical* Levy Bruhl, means little more than unscientific or uncritical, that primitive man is uncritical. He further emphasises that the primitive mentality does not make use of discursive reason as the European when he contends that:

The Africans are not familiar with its operations: the slightest abstract reasoning tires them and becomes immediately harassing. Why? Because they do not have at their disposal the indispensable logical material which makes these operations simple and reasoning easy; they lack the hierarchies of concepts which allow the subsuming of some things under others, and by operating on the concepts to obtain without great difficulty results which are valid for objects.⁹

In his book, *The African Today*, first published in 1934 with a second edition in 1969, Diedrich Westermann argued that the African mentality is emotional over against been logical.

He observes that:

...the negro is more dominated by unconsciousness or half-conscious impulses than we are; for him emotional thinking outweighs logical thinking, and when emotion is the guide, ideas and actions may result which are not in conformity with logic.¹⁰

It is plausible therefore to infer that for Westermann the predominant characteristic of the African mentality does not entail serious consciousness. It is rather emotional and lacking in logic. In the same line of thought, John Colin Carothers in his book *The Mind of Man in Africa*, (1972) depicts that literature about Africans by all means was a true picture of the African mentality. Hence he arrived at the conclusion that the African mentality is highly inclined to physical and emotional inspiration. Succinctly put:

The best known trait of the normal psychology of the Africans are, above all, the importance of the physical needs (nutrition, sexuality); and a liveliness of the emotions which is counter-balanced by their poor duration.¹¹

Further according to Carothers, the mind of man in Africa is intellectually wanting, logically unsound, unstable and more so unreliable. Concisely put in the field of intelligence, an inaptitude for what appears to be its essential function: co-ordinating the parts of a whole, perceiving abstract relations particularly mathematical.¹²

The above-cited examples create the impression that Africans were incapable of philosophy, logic and reason. One running theme is that the scholars cited above misunderstood over against understanding Africa, the Africans and African philosophy. Their misunderstanding stemmed from racial prejudices. For example, they associated reason with skin colour which logically, it is not correct. I have attempted to reject the postulations of these scholars, which were largely anthropological, psychological and sociological as the philosophy of the primitive Africans.

However, it is worthwhile to note that this continues to be a major paradigm of relation between Africa and the West which justifies our input to the issue from a Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics perspective. Hence in following the Gadamerian line of thought based on understanding, this work attempts to offer counter-position to the conventional European conception of the African mentality.

The approaches in African philosophy highlighted in our chapter one, were responding to the above claims made by the ðclassical conception of the African mentalityö. It is on the basis of the counter-arguments that the study gives expositions of the various approaches to African philosophy. We start with Ethnophilosophical approach.

3.3 Ethnophilosophy

In spite of the creation of the situation that reflects a superiority complex and an inferiority complex, scholarship response, resulted in an irrevocable recognition of African philosophy. And as a result, a factual setting forth of a situation where by a gradual understanding of what African philosophy, in reality was to be developed.

The view that there is indeed an African philosophy which is founded on African way of thinking is referred to, in African philosophy, as Ethnophilosophy. The major proponents of this approach and their works or books are: Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), and Martin N. Nkemma, *African Vitality* (1999).

It is these writings by ethnophilosophers that have constructively stood as a reaction, response and challenge to the conventional conception of the African mentality. As an approach in African philosophy, Ethnophilosophy;

í is basically aimed at systematizing and documenting the differing worldviews of African peoples, which are viewed-by the proponents of this trend-as properly constituting African philosophy. For the proponents of this trend, African philosophy is incarnated in the mythical/religious conceptions, worldviews, and lived ritual practices of ethnic Africans, which can and should be documented by Europeans and Africans with a Western education.¹³

This passage shows that Ethnophilosophy presents the documentation and records of African traditional thoughts, beliefs and world-views as African philosophy. Therefore Ethnophilosophy is a spontaneous collective thought system or world views. From the Ethnophilosophical approach, African philosophy is regarded as an African particular dimension of thinking or as a product of its people's distinct mode of thinking and a unique African approach to life. Ethnophilosophy therefore is seen as articulating those factors that make African people unique and different. It follows that Ethnophilosophy describes a world view or thought system of a particular group of people or whole Africa based on an all-embracing metaphysics, religion or culture. Consequently, an understanding of what African religion(s) or culture (s) was developed. This is to say that the African system of religious beliefs, ritual and cultural practices, and thought, incorporated a philosophy for Ethnophilosophical approach as African philosophy.

This conception of Ethnophilosophy as African philosophy is for example, found in the works of John Mbiti, who writes that:

What, therefore, is 'African philosophy' may not amount to more than simply my own process of philosophizing the items under consideration: but this cannot be helped, and in any case I am by birth an African. Philosophical systems of different African peoples have not yet been formulated, but some of the areas where they may be found are in the religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals of the society concerned. I have incorporated some of these areas into this study, but proverbs in particular deserve a separate treatment since their philosophical content is mainly situational. We do not however have many comprehensive collections of African proverbs out of which an overall analysis of this type of philosophy could be undertaken. 'African philosophy' here refers to the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life.¹⁴

For Mbiti therefore, there is a particular logic, philosophising and understanding attributable to all Africans. What the study brings to the awareness here is that, for Mbiti, this particular philosophy in question is found in myths, customs, poems, taboos, religion, songs and dances of all Africans. Mbiti further argued that philosophy and religion in Africa were inseparable. This is to say that according to Mbiti, religion and philosophy permeates every aspect of life of all Africans and therefore, he treats the two as a unit:

In this study I have emphasized the unity of African religions and philosophy in order to give an overall picture of their situation. This approach does not give room for the treatment in depth of individual religious and philosophical systems of different African peoples.¹⁵

From this passage, it is therefore, plausible to infer that for him then to understand the religion of the African was equally to understand the philosophy of the same. This Mbitian inference follows his assertion that:

Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.¹⁶

What this implies is that for, for Mbiti, religion permeates all aspects of all Africans. The religion in question was an ontological phenomenon. Mbiti observes that Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religions, we must permeate that ontology.¹⁷ According to Mbiti, therefore, religion is an ontological phenomenon for the African for it necessarily pertains to the question of being, of existence. This religious ontology has five categories namely; God, spirits, man, animals and plants and inanimate objects. For Mbiti therefore, being, ontology and religion were interrelated. It is plausible to argue in this study that it positive to understand religion philosophically and not view philosophy and religion as one. We therefore suggest the religion and culture has to be at the centre of philosophical debate in Africa for it might provide answers to some philosophical questions in African societies as to why they take a religious form.

In developing his ontology, the concept of time as a two dimensional was advocated. The Africans concept of time in question is only two-dimensional with the past and present, but no future. Thus, John Mbiti in his *African Religions and Philosophy*, writes that:

Time is a two dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually *no future*. The linear concept of time in western thought, with indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realised and cannot, therefore, constitute time.¹⁸

For Mbiti therefore, there is a particular unique concept of time attributable to all Africans. Mbiti's time orientation implies that the western concept of time is not similar to the African.

The western orientation of time has three dimensions namely; the past, the present and the future while the African is two dimensional namely; the past and the present with hardly any future. The two dimensions of African orientation of time, that is past and the present, are named in Kiswahili by Mbiti as *‘-zamani’* and *‘-sasa’* respectively, and they are the key to understanding the nature of the individual, community and the universe.

Mbiti captures this when he asserts that:

This time orientation, governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominates African understanding of the individual, the community and the universe which constitutes the five ontological categories mentioned above.¹⁹

It is plausible to infer that this time orientation is the major aspect leading to the understanding of African philosophy for Mbiti. This time orientation is measured in terms of events and not in abstract terms for it is not of any value for the African people.

Mbiti is very assertive on this point and states in no unclear terms that:

The question of time is of little or no academic concern to African peoples in their traditional life. Time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of *‘-No-time’*. What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or potential time.²⁰

Further, it will suffice to infer that the concept of time for Mbiti establishes an essential difference from conventional conception.

Mbiti further articulates in his African philosophical quest the interdependent nature of the African community. He asserts that:

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. the individual can only say: *‘I am , because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’*. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.²¹

This shows that for Mbiti the community is marked by communal interdependence. The individual owes his or her existence to other people, including those of past generations and his or her contemporaries in traditional African life. This implies that for Mbiti the individual cannot exist alone: rather, one is part of the whole community. This aspect of significance to date for one lives always in a community. In my effort to clarify this issue I draw on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in the next chapter.

These issues advocated by Mbiti formed what he described as African philosophy. As it will be expounded later, it will suffice here to mention that Mbiti misunderstood African philosophy.

In the similar line of thought, Fr. Placide Tempels in his book, *Bantu Philosophy*, published in 1959, argues that the language of the Bantu people reflect the metaphysical categories that shape their world view. This metaphysical notion, according to Tempels informs the beliefs and practices of the Bantu philosophy. Tempels writes that:

I believe that we should most faithfully render Bantu thought in the European language by saying that the Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force.²²

What it implies here for Tempels is that he considered the African concept of a being as based on force. In asserting the above, Tempels came up with the vital force and sought to define African identity in terms of ontology as the metaphysical aspect of the Bantu philosophy. It is worthwhile to note that Tempels's *Bantu Philosophy* provided the form and conceptual matrix for the development of African philosophy and has remained a central reference of the African philosophical debate. As another example and in a similar line of thought is Father Alexis Kagame of Rwanda who argued that embedded in language, beliefs and practices in cultures are philosophical principles.

Ethnophilosophy therefore gives descriptions of the African world view as a system of religious beliefs, ritual practices, and thought, as philosophical. These descriptions have subjected African philosophy to a state of being minimized and marginalised. What I am trying to bring to the awareness, here, is that by minimization, in this case, becomes the action of reducing African philosophy to the least possible amount of judgement. As a result of the above, African philosophy became an object of misunderstanding. The idea of African philosophy that stands out here is a system of religious beliefs, ritual practices, and thought. It is not surprising therefore that such a state of affairs results into misunderstanding of African philosophy. Hence from the above, African philosophy as understood from Ethnophilosophical dimension is regarded as something inconsequential and hence marginalised.

It is worthwhile to note that this conception of African philosophy has been challenged by Oruka, Wiredu, Bodunrin, and Hountondji to mention a few. For example, Oruka addresses the Ethnophilosophy approach as African philosophy and argues that it is not philosophy. According to Oruka, Ethnophilosophy identifies with the totality of customs and common beliefs of a people. It is a folk philosophy. It forms a sharp contrast with philosophy developed by reason and logic.²³ What Oruka implies is that Ethnophilosophy parades particular world views as philosophy. Hence the works of the ethnophilosophers are regarded as mythological and hence lacking philosophical input. Oruka in his 1972 article, "Mythologies as African Philosophy", called for the separation of philosophy from mythology for they are different. Hence for Oruka, what Ethnophilosophy argues as philosophy is not so in the strict sense of the term philosophy. It only qualifies as philosophy in a debased or loose sense.

Another topic of the critique is that the objective of Ethnophilosophy from a political and religious dimension is to expose the mentality of the African to the European missionary or to those engaged with the task of "civilizing" /colonizing and/or modernizing the African.²⁴ As an example, Paulin Hountondji in his book *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983) follows this line of thought that the politics behind Ethnophilosophy and particularly Tempels' book, *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), was to expose the African mind to the Europeans.

The works of Tempels and Mbiti served this goal. Tsenay asserts that while lacking Tempels's colonialist orientation, Mbiti's aim is to expose the interiority of the African to the subversive gaze of the Christian, Muslim, or modernizing Europeanized African.²⁵ The critics of this approach cited above, argue that Ethnophilosophy serves the purposes of civilizing the African mentality so to speak. While these criticisms may be valid in demonstrating the marginalization and minimization of African philosophy, I argue that, there are more than religious and colonial objectives in the works of the ethnophilosophers. For example, the works of the ethnophilosophers helps us understand the principles and patterns of a given culture. Further, in their research, the aim was not to demonstrate a primitive mentality but to counteract it as advocated by the conventional conception of the African mentality.

The attempts by Ethnophilosophy as African philosophy created a perspective that African philosophy could not be separated from religion. This issue is captured by Oruka, when he asserts that the professional philosophy approach is a critical one it urges that African philosophy should not be confused with African religion or ethnography.²⁶ From the above-citation regarding Ethnophilosophy, the issue is that there was close

association of philosophy with religion. For example Mbiti sees that term philosophy and religion as mutually inclusive when he argues for African philosophy. As this work has demonstrated, this orientation is found, for example, in the works of Tempels and Mbiti who cannot delineate philosophy from religion. Hence the argument here is that there a fundamental conceptual difference of philosophy from religion. Further it is argued that both have different methodologies, approaches and subject matter.

The central issue then is whether what Ethnophilosophy seeks to do, qualify as philosophy. This issue is based on the assumption that philosophy has some basic universal characteristics. Therefore what it means here is that African philosophy must be tailored along the stereotyped and paradigmatic sense of the term philosophy. What seems to be coming out is the question of the meaning and nature of philosophy and more so African philosophy. This has been the perennial question in the African philosophy debate. Therefore whatever Ethnophilosophy comes up with, is not philosophy in the proper strict sense of the term. Peter Bodunrin captures the issue at hand when he observes that:

The pity is that ethnophilosophers usually fall in love so much with the thought system they seek to expound that they become dogmatic in the veneration of the culture to which the thought system belongs. They hardly see why others may refuse totally to share their esteem for the system they describe. They do not raise philosophical issues about the system (because for them no problems arise once we 'understand' the system); therefore they do not attempt to give a philosophical justification of the belief system or of issues that arise in it. It is for these reasons that we find their works philosophically unsatisfactory;²⁷

The gist of the matter has been the nature and the meaning of philosophy in relation to the works of the Ethnophilosophy.

Communal or group thought is one of the peculiar features of Ethnophilosophy as philosophy. In this respect, Ethnophilosophy presents as African philosophy a communal or group system. Oruka stress this point when he contends that Ethnophilosophy is the philosophy of everybody; it is understood and accepted by everyone.²⁸ He further and categorically asserts that philosophy here is treated as a general communal activity in which ready-made beliefs and emotions rather than reflection decide the outcome.²⁹ The advocacy for group philosophy implies that there are no individual thinkers or any philosophy identifiable with any particular individuals(s). What Ethnophilosophy therefore describes as African philosophy is a lived communal philosophy, a world view lacking individual philosophers and it is practised as a group philosophy.

At this point it is worthwhile to address the issue of the etymology of the term Ethnophilosophy. The central concern been that Ethnophilosophy uses a methodology that resembles the one used in cultural anthropology in its quest to get to the African principles of reality and behaviour which are then described in philosophical language. This is clearly advanced in Paulin Hountondji's African Philosophy: Myth or Reality (1983). The issue coming up again is the nature and meaning of philosophy and in particular African philosophy. There are some standard measurement as to what is that nature and role of philosophy and in particular within African philosophy scholarship. For example, Paulin Hountondji explains the strict or theoretical sense of the term philosophy when he contends that:

In the stricter sense of the word, one is no more spontaneously a philosopher than one is spontaneously a chemist, a physicist or a mathematician, since philosophy, like chemistry, physics or mathematics, is a specific theoretical discipline with its own exigencies and methodological rules.³⁰

Further, Kwasi Wiredu outlines this paradigmatic sense of the nature of philosophy when he asserts that:

In the first sense, philosophy is a technical discipline in which our (i.e., the human) world outlook is subjected to systematic scrutiny by rigorous ratiocinative methods (ideally, that is). In the second sense, philosophy is that way of viewing man and the world which results in a world outlook in the first place. It might be said, then, that philosophy in the first sense is the second-order enterprise, for it is a reflection on philosophy in the second sense. If so, philosophy in the first sense is a doubly second-order character, for that on which it reflects ónamely, our world outlook óis itself a reflection on the more particularistic, more episodic, judgement of ordinary, day-to-day living.³¹

These passages show that philosophy has a method of inquiry, which for example, Ethnophilosophy does not adhere to, according to its critics. Therefore it is on the basis of this lack of critical and analytical inclinations that the possibility of African philosophy in Ethnophilosophy is denied.

The issue of documentation has not been left out. Tsenay asserts that óí documenting the traditional philosophies and worldviews of African peoples is fruitful only when undertaken within the context of and out of an engagement with the concrete and actual problems facing the peoples of Africa.ö³² This is limited credit to the Ethnophilosophy. Documentation cannot be limited to post colonial Africa as Tsenay puts it. The past needs to be documented and in doing so it is preserved and raw materials for philosophical inquiry are available.

Here I have attempted to reject ethnophilosophy attempts to present a purely descriptive, conjectural account of the African worldview as African philosophy. However, on a positive note, Ethnophilosophy counteracted the view that African was incapable of philosophising. That is to say that it positively reacted to the legacy of denigration that portrays Africans as incapable of philosophical thought.

Ethnophilosophy contends that Africa is not a blank cheque as far as philosophy is concerned. Further, this conception of African philosophy provoked challenge and without doubt whatsoever contributed to the debate on African philosophy.

It is vital to note that one running theme that manifests itself here is that Ethnophilosophy deals with problems and solutions from particular historical and cultural situations. Hence in African traditional thoughts, beliefs and world views as understood in Ethnophilosophy imply that there is work for philosophers. Therefore African philosophy can still be seen as growing from African traditional thoughts, beliefs and world views signifying that the value of Ethnophilosophy cannot be ignored. I argue that they have consummate philosophical significance and therefore, cannot be brushed off. In nutshell, it will suffice to assert that Ethnophilosophy may contribute to African philosophy and philosophy in general. This is a theme I address while acknowledging merits and the major criticisms of the Ethnophilosophy approach in the next chapter as I seek to apply Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding to African philosophy. Hence I will attempt in the next chapter to demonstrate that African philosophy consists of philosophic hermeneutical appraisal of the African traditional thought in the light of contemporary global events.

3.4 Professional Philosophy

Professional philosophy is another trend in African philosophy that constitutes works by Africans and non-Africans who are trained in formal philosophy. Some of the main advocates of this trend include H. Odera Oruka, Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji and Peter Bodunrin.

As a school, they share certain basic positions and assumptions. What it means here is that for this school, philosophy whether African or not must satisfy some standard and universal criteria. For example, they concur that African philosophy must be rational, independent, discursive, critical study of which argumentation and clarifications are indispensable characteristics. Further they advocated for conceptual analysis as a method of philosophical inquiry. According to this approach, there is African philosophy in the strict sense or second order sense and first order sense. The second sense involves critical reflection and logical inquiry while the first order sense is the collective thought system.

When it comes to the professional philosophy trend, one fundamental issue is the question regarding the nature of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. At some point, this school was seen as preoccupied with definitional issues about the nature of African philosophy. They raise the questions: 'Is there African philosophy?' and 'What is African philosophy?' Oruka notes that:

Current African professional philosophy is predominantly a meta-philosophy. Its central theme is the question 'What is philosophy?' And a corollary of this question is 'What is African philosophy?' In actual practice this philosophy is a discussion of the claim to the effect that some given thoughts or beliefs qualify or do not qualify as philosophy. And so it becomes a philosophical analysis and interpretation of the general concept, 'philosophy'.³³

What Oruka implied is that these questions dominated African professional philosophising. For him, little had been devoted to the search and development of the conditions for an African philosophy by the professional philosophy beyond definitional issue. From the above, it is plausible to infer that this metaphilosophical issue of the nature of African philosophy has been the central aspect of the professional philosophy. I argue that in engaging in definitional issue, professional philosophy was doing philosophy. The enterprise of defining the nature and existence of African philosophy is therefore, definitely philosophical and justifiable. However, it worthwhile acknowledging that contemporary professional philosophy has transcended this realm to other issues. This means that African philosophy has transcended the metaphilosophical question of its existence nature to other philosophical issues of development, epistemology, philosophical anthropology just but to mention a few.

That problem aside, another topic of the critique that is raised against professional philosophy is that African philosophy must be viewed from the paradigmatic sense peculiar to western philosophy. For example, in its endeavours, professional philosophy comes up stating "that authentic African philosophy can and must only be a scientific (i.e., systematic) and /or written philosophy."³⁴ As an example, Hountondji represents African philosophy as a reflection on science and regards it as a significant aspect of culture. For him philosophy has to be at par with the progress of science. Africa lacked a scientific culture which according to him slows the African philosophical activity. Hence what professional philosophy advocated for as African philosophy does not have its roots from Africa. For the professional philosophy, African philosophy must be custom-made along western philosophy. It is worthwhile to note that Hountondji moved from his

earlier narrow conception of philosophy, to viewing it with pragmatic lenses within the African context. He sought to understand the scientific aspects, the question of modernization, public policy, and social practice in relation to philosophy in Africa. According to Hountondji the role of philosophy includes "the analysis of the collective experience with a view toward a critique of everyday life."³⁵ This practical understanding of African philosophy was a major transition from the issues of definitions and methodology. It is therefore plausible in this study to assert that philosophy in general, and African philosophy in particular, is and must be practical within the African context.

That problem aside, another issue arising from the professional philosophy is the vehement attack on Ethnophilosophy. The issue has raged principally around the criticisms by Paulin Hountondji in his book, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983). In this work, he argues that African philosophy has been paraded as a myth over against a reality. He contends:

I must emphasize that my theme is African philosophy, myth *and* reality, whereas one might have expected the conventional formula, myth *or* reality? I am not asking whether it exists, whether it is a myth *or* a reality. I observe that it does exist, by the same right and in the same mode as all the philosophies of the world: in the form of a *literature*. I shall try to account for this misunderstood reality, deliberately ignored or suppressed even by those who produce it and who, in producing it, believe that they are merely reproducing a preexisting thought through it: through the insubstantiality of a transparent discourse, of a fluid, compliant ether whose only function is to transmit light. My working hypothesis is that such suppression cannot be innocent: this discursive self-deception serves to conceal something else, and this apparent self-obliteration of the subject aims at camouflaging its massive omnipresence, its convulsive effort to root in reality this fiction filled with itself. Tremendous censorship of a shameful text, which presents itself as impossibly transparent and almost nonexistent but which also claims for its object (African pseudo-philosophy) the privilege of having always existed, outside any explicit formulation. I therefore invert the relation: that which exists, that which is incontrovertibly given is that literature. As for the object it claims to restore, it is at most a way of speaking, a verbal invention, a *mythos*.³⁶

Hountondji's zeal is to demonstrate that this is a mythology conceived as African philosophy. For him African philosophy is paraded as a myth. Hountondji writes:

When I [Hountondji] speak of African philosophy I mean that literature, and I try to understand why it has so far made such strenuous efforts to hide behind the screen, all the more opaque for being imaginary, of an implicit 'philosophy' conceived as an unthinking, spontaneous, collective system of thought, common to all Africans or at least to all members severally, past, present and future, of such-and-such an African ethnic group. I try to understand why most African authors, when trying to engage with philosophy, have so far thought it necessary to project the misunderstood reality of their own discourse on to such palpable fiction.³⁷

This is the case because according to him Ethnophilosophy is not philosophical in the strict sense but second order sense of the term, philosophy, because it is not articulated in the form of explicit and systematic exposition. The issue again is the nature of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. He observes that:

Let us therefore tackle the problem at a higher level. What is in question here, substantially, is the idea of *philosophy*, or rather, of *African philosophy*. More accurately, the problem is whether the word 'philosophy' when qualified by the word 'African', must retain its habitual meaning, or whether the simple addition of an adjective necessarily changes the meaning of the substantive. What is in question, then, is the universality of the word 'philosophy' throughout its possible geographical applications. My own view is that this universality must be preserved-not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another, but because these differences of *content* are meaningful precisely and only as differences of *content*, which, as such, refer back to the essential unity of a single discipline, of a single style of inquiry.³⁸

Ethnophilosophy lacks the discipline of philosophy in the strict sense since what it terms as philosophy is philosophy in the second order sense. Philosophy in the second order is not tenable. The reason why African philosophy is paraded as a myth according to Hountondji is because:

Words do indeed change their meanings miraculously as soon as they pass from the Western to the African context, and not only in the vocabulary of European or American writers but also, through faith-ful imitation, in that of Africans themselves. That is what happens to the word 'philosophy': applied to Africa, it is supposed to designate no longer the specific discipline it evokes in its Western context but merely a collective worldview, an implicit, spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans are supposed to adhere. This is a vulgar usage of the word, justified presumably by the supposed vulgarity of the geographical context to which it is applied. Behind this usage, then, there is a myth at work, the myth of primitive unanimity, with its suggestion that in 'primitive' societies-that is to say, non-Western societies-everybody always agrees with everybody else. It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief. The word 'philosophy' is then used to designate each belief-system of this kind, and it is tacitly agreed among well-bred people that in this context it could not mean anything else.³⁹

Accordingly, there is equivocal use of the term philosophy. When prefixed with the western, it means something different from when prefixed with African. What ethnophilosophy defines as African philosophy is not philosophy as understood from the western usage of the term philosophy. Ethnophilosophy advocate for collective thought system hence a loose usage of the term philosophy. Hence the usage of loose sense of philosophy should be destroyed. For Hountondji if this is not realised then what ethnophilosophy is engaged in pre-philosophy and not metaphilosophy.

He captures this and summarises his distaste for ethnophilosophy when he writes that:

Here we must note a surprising fact: while they were looking for philosophy in a place where it could never be found-in the collective unconscious of African peoples, in the silent folds of their explicit discourse-the ethnophilosophers never questioned the nature and theoretical status of their own analyses. Were these relevant to philosophy? There lay the true but undetected problem. For if we want to be scientific, we cannot apply the same word to two things as different as a spontaneous, implicit and collective worldview on the one hand and, on the other, the deliberate, explicit and individual analytic activity which takes that worldview as its object. Such an analysis should be called 'philosophology' rather than 'philosophy' or, to use a less barbarous term, 'metaphilosophy' -but a metaphilosophy of the worst kind, an inegalitarian metaphilosophy, not a dialogue and confrontation with an existing philosophy but a reduction to silence, a denial, masquerading as the revival of an earlier philosophy. For we know that in its highly elaborated forms philosophy is always, in a sense, a metaphilosophy, that it can develop only by reflecting on its own history, that all new thinkers must feed on the doctrines of their predecessors, even of their contemporaries, extending or refuting them, so as to enrich the philosophical heritage available in their own time. But in this case metaphilosophy does not rely on an exploitation of extra-philosophical data or on the arbitrary over-interpretation of social facts which in themselves bear no relation to philosophy. Metaphilosophy signifies, rather, a philosophical reflection on discourses which are themselves overtly and consciously philosophical. Ethnophilosophy, on the other hand, claims to be the description of an implicit, unexpressed worldview, which never existed anywhere but in the anthropologist's imagination. Ethnophilosophy is a pre-philosophy mistaking itself for a metaphilosophy, a philosophy which, instead of presenting its own rational justification, shelters lazily behind the authority of a tradition and projects its own theses and beliefs on to that tradition.⁴⁰

In his attack on the mythology of unanimity, Hountondji views ethnophilosophy as lacking consensus. He asserts that:

It would seem at first sight that this theoretical consensus postulated by ethnophilosophy among all members of each 'primitive' community should produce a parallel consensus, at the level of results if not of methods, among all ethnophilosophers studying the same community. But, curiously enough, instead of an ideal consensus, a fine unanimity whose transparency would have revealed the spontaneous unanimity of

all those 'primitive philosophers', ethnophilosophical literature offers us a rich harvest of not only diverse but also sometimes frankly contradictory works.⁴¹

These have been hard criticism to the Ethnophilosophy approach and have taken up by Hountondji among other contemporary African philosophers. They centered on the meaning and the nature of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. The study notes that some significant responses have been done notably by Gyekye, K. (*An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*), and Gbadegesin, S. (*African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*). In their books, they give detailed philosophical expositions of African traditional philosophy. Finally we assert that the split of African philosophy between the schools of Ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy definitely implies the involvement of philosophical issues. For example, as earlier noted technical and proper sense of African philosophy was emphasized by the professional philosophy as the nature of African philosophy over against the debased, loose sense argued for by the Ethnophilosophy. This technical and proper sense attributes necessarily created the myth that only modern Africa was capable of philosophy while the traditional African was philosophical tabula rasa. Notwithstanding this myth, the professional philosophy against the Ethnophilosophy, argued the later was a philosophy without individual, critical and independent philosophers.

It is against this background that philosophic sagacity as another trend in African philosophy emerged.

3.5 Philosophic Sagacity

This approach is associated with H. Odera Oruka who initiated, defined, advanced, and more so defended it against its critics. Oruka was reacting to the views regarding the nature and meaning of African philosophy. As already noted, philosophy was regarded as a peculiar activity of the European and Africa was perceived as lacking philosophical activity in the strict sense of the term. Because of this prejudice, Oruka sort to demonstrate that in African traditional societies, there was philosophy in the proper and strict sense of the term. His quest further was to show that African philosophy existed in the proper and strict sense. Within the debate and discussion regarding the nature of African philosophy, this is referred to as philosophic sagacity. One issue against professional philosophy in the debate on the nature and existence of African philosophy is that its advocates have been trained in western philosophy. Hence there approach is not purely African philosophy. As an approach to, or trend in, philosophic sagacity comes to address this issue by demonstrating that there is African philosophy in the proper and strict sense of the term with little influence of Western philosophy.

According to Oruka, sagacity consists of thoughts demonstrating good judgement or insight. Sagacity therefore comprises of the thoughts of people recognized as wise by their respective society or community. In another sense, sagacity implies a body of basic principles and tenets that lay the foundation and justify the beliefs, values, practices and customs of a given culture. This second definition implies the first. Therefore sagacity and sage philosophy are synonymous.

There is the need to demonstrate the difference between philosophic sagacity and sage philosophy. The two terms in Oruka had different meanings and therefore it is vital to make clear the distinction. Sage philosophy implies:

The expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom (well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths). While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set up and popular wisdom.⁴²

From the definition Oruka makes clear that within sage philosophy, there is popular or folk sagacity and philosophic sagacity. According to Oruka as reflected and implied in the above quotation, popular sagacity or folk sagacity constitutes the well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths while philosophic sagacity well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths. Therefore, there is a fundamental distinction between, folk sagacity and philosophic sagacity.

In what follows, this work explores philosophic sagacity within the debate and discussion regarding the nature and meaning of African philosophy. It plausible to assert that philosophic sagacity was a response to the view by the ethnophilosophy trend that African philosophy was communal or group philosophy lacking independent and critical thinkers. Oruka in his philosophic sagacity quest, aimed to challenge to this philosophical status or view. According to Oruka, philosophic sagacity demonstrated that within African traditional societies, there are individuals who are independent, critical, logical thinkers and have not been schooled in the western educational system or western philosophy.

Within philosophic sagacity, there is a distinction between folk sages and philosophic sages. Therefore, it is important to appreciate that Orya had definite ideas about who qualifies as a philosophic sage and how such persons are to be distinguished from folk sages. According to Orya, as an individual, a sage knows well wisdoms and traditions of his people, and people applaud and acknowledge this fact about him. However, a cautionary remark by Orya is that a sage is not necessarily a philosopher. For Orya, some sages go beyond this level of sagacity and hence he regards them as philosophic sages. For one to qualify to be a philosophic sage, one must possess at least the following two attributes, be (1) sage and (2) thinker. As a sage, is versed in the beliefs and wisdoms of their people. As a thinker or philosopher, a philosophic sage manifests a high tendency to offer individual evaluation and justification of beliefs and wisdoms which satisfy their rational scrutiny. The philosophic sages raise questions regarding their culture. They do not just report back but go beyond to criticize their culture. As philosophic sages they exercise their rational capacity for they are not closed minded but open minded to see alternatives contrary to commonly accepted positions. What it means here is that the philosophical sages give conceptual and analytical input of their world view. The philosophic sages are able to realise that there are many aspects of culture that are not rationally acceptable.

Oruka captures this when he contends that:

Findings in Kenya show that there are two main divisions of sage philosophy. One is that of the sage whose thought, though well informed and educative, fails to go beyond the celebrated folk-wisdom. Such a sage may not have the ability or inclination to apply his own independent critical objection to folk beliefs. He is, therefore, a folk sage in contrast to the second type of sage, the philosophic sage. The former is a master of popular wisdom while the latter is an expert in didactic wisdom. The philosophic sage may know, as the folk sage does, what the cardinal beliefs and wisdoms of his community are, but he makes an independent, critical assessment to what the people take for granted. Thus while the sagacity of the folk sage remains at the first order level of philosophy, that of the philosophic sage is a second-order philosophy, that is reflection on and a rationalized evaluation of what is given in the first order. What is given in the first order is a mixture of conventional-cum-customary beliefs and practices.⁴³

To substantiate this, philosophical sages know the cultural justification and rationalisation of the beliefs and practices of their culture. But they manifest a high tendency to offer their individual evaluation and justification of the beliefs and practices beyond the culturally given justifications. This means that their knowledge and wisdom are dictated by the power of reason. Philosophical sages are person able to engage in second-order thought, that they are capable of rational critique of the beliefs of the society and that their thoughts can transcend the cultural philosophy and question it.

Oruka refers to culture philosophy as the first order. Succinctly put:

The first order is that of the culture philosophy. It is absolute in its ideas and truth-claims and has an ideological war with anything to the contrary. Ordinary sages (the nonphilosophic sages) are specialists in explaining and maintaining this order. They may even distinguish themselves in various aspects of the system. Some may be poets, herbalists, medicine men, musicians, fortune tellers, etc., etc. The common thing they have is that their explanations or thought do not go beyond the premises and conclusions given by the prevailing culture.⁴⁴

The non-philosophic sages or folk sages accept the beliefs and practices of their culture wholesome without any critical and reflective evaluation.

The folk sages are persons who are aware of and well versed in the cultural norms of a society. They are usually recognized as having a gift in this regard by the people and they are conversant with the *mythos* of the culture. This is folk sagacity hence Oruka calls it the first order sense. For Oruka then philosophic sagacity characterised by critical analysis of the first order is the second order. Philosophic sagacity as the second order stems from culture philosophy which is the first order. The difference between is that the second order is critical and reflective over against the first order.

It is plausible to infer that one the objective of Oruka is to demonstrate that philosophic sagacity:

í shows that the problem in traditional Africa is not lack of logic, reason, or scientific curiosity, since we can find many sages there with a system of thought employing a rigorous use of these mental gifts. It shows that communal consensus, a fact typical of most traditional societies, should not be seen as a hindrance for individual critical reflection. Just as religion and all kinds of dogmatic fanaticism did not kill philosophy in the West, traditional African folk wisdoms and taboos left some room for real philosophic thought.⁴⁵

Oruka's quest was further to demonstrate that even in traditional and contemporary African societies, there are individuals capable of critical and independent philosophic activity. For him, within the group thought as the ethnophilosophers held, he demonstrated that there are individual philosophic sages. What Oruka aimed at was to separate the thoughts of individual thinkers at the traditional level from the group traditional beliefs. The criterion set by Oruka to separate the two was philosophical thinking. The philosophic sage was capable of theoretical account and foundation of the communal beliefs. Again he points out that logic, reason and scientific activity are not foreign to the African mentality.

The project of philosophic sagacity has significantly influenced the discourse on African philosophy. First, Oruka was reacting to the conventional concept of the African mentality which portrayed Africans as incapable of any philosophical activity. As I have demonstrated, one of the main arguments of the conventional concept of the African mentality arose out of the implicit belief that philosophy is the privileged activity of certain races such as the Greeks or Europeans. Consequently within the privileged races, Africans were left out. Oruka contrary argued that this myth of the conventional concept of the African mentality was wrong and misleading. As a reflection of Oruka's influence on African philosophy, many works have been done on African philosophy modelled on his perspective. One notable influence by Oruka within the debate and discussion of African philosophy is the issue of its nature and meaning. Oruka reacted to the views regarding the nature and meaning of African philosophy. The debate in question as earlier alluded has focussed on what qualifies to be African philosophy from what does not. Philosophic sagacity qualifies as philosophy since it uses rational and critical analysis. It is evident that philosophic sagacity deals with theoretical or speculative, ethical and empirical issues which are central in philosophy. Philosophic sagacity which deals sagacity as a quality of the human person transcends the academic discipline to other central issues of the society of perspectives of life as Oruka likes to put it.

Further within the debate and discussion of African philosophy regarding the nature and meaning of African philosophy, philosophic sagacity comes in to fill the gaps of ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy school. The professional philosophy school argues that there exists African philosophy in the strict and technical usage of the term.

The issue raised against this school is that African professional philosophers have been trained in the western formal education and philosophy hence what they advocate for is not African philosophy. Philosophic sagacity demonstrates that there is African philosophy in the technical and strict sense of the term with little influence of the western formal education and philosophy. On the other hand, ethnophilosophy depicts the picture that African philosophy as system of thought lacking individual thinkers or philosophers. Implied is that African philosophy is distinct from western philosophy. Philosophic sagacity demonstrates that contrary to the ethnophilosophy approach, there is African philosophy in the technical and strict sense of the term. Besides arguing for and showing the existence of African philosophy, philosophic sagacity shows that even in traditional African societies, there individuals who are capable of independent and rigorous thought contrary to the insinuations of ethnophilosophy. The philosophic sagacity demonstrates the relevance of sagacious reasoning or wisdom in addressing some pertinent issues in the society. The project underscores the relevance of ethics or morality, practical knowledge and experience.

From the above we learn that the philosophical sagacity enterprise implies that there is work for philosophical engagement in every culture.

3.6 Nationalist-Ideological philosophy

Nationalistóideological approach or philosophy had the quest not only for political independence but also mental liberation of the Africans from the intoxications by the western colonial governments. Since this approach is basically concerned the issue of

emancipation of African nation-states, the debate and the discussion regarding the nature of African philosophy is its major concern. In this respect, the Nationalist ideological approach or philosophy subject matter revolves around cultural, social, political, educational and economic problems in Africa. The Nationalist ideological approach or philosophy comprises of thoughts and writings of former and current statesmen and also scholars are or have had social-political interests. Some of the main proponents of this approach are Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Tom Mboya of Kenya among others.

It is vital to note that the nationalists argued for a system of governance deriving from their understandings of African traditional thought and practice. This is to say that the nationalists advocated for ideologies and theories with an Africa input. One finds a highly philosophical approach to their ideologies based on an analysis of the traditional communalism of society and its contemporary condition. For example, Nyerere in his essay "Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism," traces the idea of socialism to its foundation, which he finds in the principle of *Ujamaa* and equality. He further argues that Socialism entails applying the principle of human equality to the social, economic and political organization of society.⁴⁶ This leads Nyerere to advocate for socialism as the basis of development over against capitalism which he views as an exploitative ideology. Accordingly, for Nyerere, socialism is a distributive dispensation which is not exploitive. This is the case because the structure of African traditional societies was such that there was equal distribution of resources. Nyerere contends that, "... it was because the organisation of traditional African society-its distribution of wealth it produced was such that there was hardly any room for parasitism."⁴⁷ Therefore, socialism inbuilt with

African roots has social control of the means of production. This is an important political implication for the social embodiment of human equality. Consequently, socialism is exercised by a people enjoying equality of freedom and participation hence democratic and follows the rule of law.

Another example is Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana who again incorporated African socialistic values in his philosophical consciencism. In his work, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation*, he argued that modern African had three competing segments or ideologies namely; the African, Islamic and Euro-Christian. He, therefore, felt that there was need to articulate a philosophy that could harmonize the African traditional culture and from Islamic and Euro-Christian that were competing segments. Hence he came up with philosophical consciencism as the synthesis or ideology which was according to him, a new social cum intellectual revolution:

Consciencism is the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism is that philosophical stand point which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out the conflict in that conscience.⁴⁸

For Kwame Nkrumah, the essentials of the African traditional social worldview such as humanism and the principle of egalitarianism were indispensable for his philosophical consciencism.

Another example is Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in his work, *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to its Implementation*, advocated for the humanistic principle which he argued had been destroyed by colonialism.

As a revolution against colonisation, imperialism, and exploitive capitalistic system, Kaunda argued for humanistic revolution. Africa traditional society was humanistic in nature. The human values came first over against the capitalistic tendencies which were introduced by foreign religions and colonisation. As such in a humanistic society, the human person was an end and not a means to an end.

Following the same line of thought was Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal who also built his political ideology on African socialism. Like the above statesmen, he incorporated African social cum communal values in his quest to come up with a political ideology. For Senghor, "Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individuals, more on solidarity than activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society."⁴⁹ African socialism, therefore, entailed that the group takes precedence over the individual. For him, the African or the individual realises himself in society. Close to Nyerere, Senghor appreciated the significance of the family for it plays a central role in socialism. Therefore, Senghor advocated for the communal characteristic of African society. For example land was held in common.⁵⁰ According to Senghor, African socialism was a classless system with social groupings. With his support for African socialism, he was against capitalistic system.⁵¹ Capitalism was an exploitive system.

From the proceedings, it is plausible to infer that the nationalist-ideological philosophy or approach does not engage with the metaphilosophical question of the definition and the existence of African philosophy. It takes for granted that African philosophy exists. Its main objective was to search for ideology that should inform social theory required for post-colonial African reconstruction.

For this trend, this work has shown that there was philosophy in built in egalitarianism, socialism, humanism among other values in the pre-colonial Africa by which human life and social institutions were guided. Hence it is imperative for African philosophy to be established on these principles of the pre-colonial African philosophy. It is therefore, an attempt to reconstruct an African philosophy from the injuries of colonisation and new colonisation. The argument is that African philosophical foundation ensures this reconstruction. In this enterprise, the nationalistóideological approach had a clear objective and concern which was the search for an ideology as reflected above in the works of Nyerere, Kaunda, and Senghor among others.

3.7 Hermeneutical approach

This section reviews the hermeneutical approach in African philosophy. The hermeneutic approach in African philosophy attempts to base African philosophy on an interpretive foundation often akin to hermeneutics.

One of the early advocates of hermeneuticity of African philosophy is Theophilus Okere. According to Okere, the hermeneutical orientation is the best direction for African philosophy for it to be of relevance to African context. He, therefore, attempts to link hermeneutical philosophy with African philosophy. In his work, *African philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its possibility*, argues that ðall philosophical discourse is first and foremost an answer to problems and questions raised within a questioning horizon which means always, a culture.ö⁵² From the above it is plausible to infer that African philosophy ought to stem from a particular culture or

cultures. Unlike the ethnophilosophy approach which merely explicated cultures and beliefs of the African cultures and practices in order to justify a philosophy within African, for Okere, "philosophy is really a manufacturing from raw materials of culture."⁵³ This is contrary to the professional school which has for African philosophy which is not rooted in African culture but according to Okere is "dictated by western cultural and historical background."⁵⁴ This shows that Okere transcends the limitation of ethnophilosophy regarding the nature of philosophy for his approach is not merely documenting of cultural practices. Ethnophilosophy should provide the raw materials for hermeneutical philosophers to make them philosophical. The hermeneutical approach moves beyond ethnophilosophy by making the raw materials of ethnophilosophy relevant for African's present situation. As to whether Africa has or had African philosophy, Okere writes that "whether there is some black philosophy or not, can be decided only after an exhaustive examination of every individual in the culture concerned."⁵⁵ Here he insists on culture as the source of philosophy. He further argues that the non-philosophical features of lived experiences and its expression, whether that is religion, culture, or even the irrationality of certain prejudices which becomes the object of philosophy. This is a fundamental strength in Okere's hermeneutical explorations for he argues that within African cultures, the possibility of hermeneutical philosophy is possible.

Another exponent of the hermeneutical approach is Tsenay Serequeberhan. Serequeberhan, in *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, and in *Our Heritage: the Past in the Present of African-American and African Existence*, engages hermeneutical explorations into African philosophy.

In *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*, Serequeberhan points out that this title understood in its most literal and abstract sense, points to the interpretative character of contemporary African Philosophy.⁵⁶ He implies that purpose of Africa philosophy is to be analytic of the African situation. Serequeberhan writes that the hermeneutics of contemporary African philosophy is the case with the hermeneuticity of philosophical discourse as such consists of the interplay of horizon and discourse.⁵⁷ Here horizon means the historical, hermeneutical, political and cultural background of discourse. Discourse implies the articulations of a particular period. He goes further to assert that this interplay is grounded on the concrete and lived historicity of a specific horizon.⁵⁸ From the above citation, it is plausible to infer that the hermeneutics of Serequeberhan takes into consideration the lived experiences as the source of his hermeneutical explorations. This is a positive contribution from the African philosophical dimension. The hermeneuticity of contemporary African philosophy has to be viewed by solidly researching the way about which philosophic discourse itself comes from and is purely associated with the concrete life practices and conditions of lived existence as the horizon within and out of which it is derived. This is a positive and fundamental strength of the hermeneutical explorations of Serequeberhan for African philosophy.

Serequeberhan articulates that this hermeneutical undertaking cannot but be a politically committed and historically specific critical self-reflection that stems from the negativity of our post-colonial present.⁵⁹ Here we see that the African philosophical hermeneutics of Serequeberhan is philosophical reflection of present political situation in Africa and necessarily situated.

He advocates positively that African philosophical hermeneutics has something to offer to African cultural, political and social world view. A substantive question is: What is African philosophical hermeneutics for Serequeberhan? For him,

...the hermeneutics of African philosophy or African philosophical hermeneutics is a thinking of new beginnings born out of the enigmatic political emancipation and historical and political crisis of European modernity-the long-awaited weakening, if not the demise, of our subjugators.⁶⁰

The call here is that Africa must transcend beyond the confines of Eurocentrism. According to Serequeberhan, the discourse of African philosophical hermeneutics should be linked to the demise of colonialism and neo-colonialism. African philosophical hermeneutics should be reflective endeavour to transcend European hegemony. Serequeberhan captures this when he contends that:

The hermeneutical orientation in contemporary African philosophy or African philosophical hermeneutics is thus thematically and historically linked to the demise of direct European colonial dominance and is aimed at the deconstructing of the persistence of neo-colonial hegemony in contemporary African existence.⁶¹

These passages show that the task of African philosophical hermeneutics is to liberate the African from the impacts of colonisation and neo-colonisation. The argument is that African lacks freedom due to the colonial and post-colonial influences and thus it is imperative for African philosophical hermeneutics to address this malaise. Serequeberhan asserts that:

The discourse of African philosophy has to be grasped explicitly as a radical hermeneutics of the contemporary African situation. This historically specific situation is that out of which African philosophical hermeneutics spins the tread of its reflexive reflections.⁶²

Serequeberhan argues that his hermeneutics focuses on issues of colonial and post-colonial Africa and history becomes the operating matrix for hermeneutical explorations.

Since we see a problem, that is, colonial and post colonial predicament, which has been identified by Serequeberhan for African philosophical hermeneutics, then it is necessary to understand what he deems as the solution. Violence for Serequeberhan is the way out of this colonial and post colonial predicament. This is the case because violence was part of the historicalness of Africa. The violence in question emanated from the encounter with the European through slave trade and colonisation. Consequently, Serequeberhan asserts that:

Violence is not a choice. It is the condition of existence imposed on the colonised by the coloniser, which enforces the colonised status of being a *ōnativeö*, a thing, a historical being forcefully barred from history.⁶³

For Serequeberhan colonialism used violence and hence it is an indispensable tool for hermeneutics of liberation or emancipation as he likes to put it.

In *Our Heritage: the Past in the Present of African-American and African Existence*” seeks to show the commonalities between African and America from hermeneutical perspective. He singles out oppression and the quest for liberation in both. Serequeberhan incorporates the notion of heritage which is a crucial contribution to hermeneuticity of African philosophy.

Finally, it worthwhile to note that, Serequeberhan attempts to apply certain aspects of hermeneutics to African philosophy.

In *Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Okonda Okolo, in his paper, traces the origins of, and necessity for, hermeneutics in both Europe and African to identity crisis. In Europe he notes that:

The birth and current revival of the hermeneutic movement seem to be linked to crises: the crisis of self-identity in German romanticism; the crisis of Europe confronted with a technicized [technicises] world and language.⁶⁴

Okolo is pointing to the fact that Europe faced an identity crisis which gave rise to hermeneutics. On the hand, African, according to Okolo, is facing a similar crisis, that is identity, which gave rise to African philosophical hermeneutics. Okolo captures this when he writes that:

In Africa, the interest in hermeneutics also arises out of the reality of crisis: a generalized identity crisis due to the presence of a culture-a foreign and dominating tradition-and the necessity for a self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition.⁶⁵

From this passage, I infer that African philosophical hermeneutics for Okolo was a result of an identity crisis resulting from foreign dominating cultures and traditions. Consequently, Africans are and have been subjected to live in unauthentic culture and tradition. Therefore Okolo takes the notion of identity crisis resulting from cultural and traditional colonisation and asserts that it is the spring board for African philosophical hermeneutics. One outstanding observation by Okolo is the manner and validity of African philosophical hermeneutics. He writes that "to the imperious need for an authentic and African philosophy, hermeneutics seems to give a positive response. But is this response unique and definitive?"⁶⁶ From this quotation, it is credible to infer that the correct path for African philosophy is hermeneutics according to Okolo. He further asserts that "it is the African hermeneutic theory and practice that we need to question if we are to obtain a point of view that is a little more conclusive."⁶⁷ Here we note that the issues he raises are a positive direction for African philosophical hermeneutics which the study develops further in the next chapter.

Okolo acknowledges trying his hands on African philosophical hermeneutics and seeking to develop its framework by writing that:

For our part, we want to test the resources but also the limits of our hermeneutical models and practices, by examining the two notions that encompass our interpretative efforts in an unconquerable circle—the notions of Tradition and Destiny.⁶⁸

Further he states that:

These notions simultaneously define the object, the subject, the horizons, and the limits of interpretation. To interpret is always to close the circle of the subject and the object. We cannot, however, make this circle our own if we do not lay it out beyond the thought of the subject and the object, toward a thinking of our horizons and the limits of our interpretation defined by the reality of our traditions and the ideality of our destiny.⁶⁹

From the above citations it is plausible to infer that tradition and destiny for Okolo comprises the necessary matrix that will define and develop his African philosophical hermeneutics. His authenticity of the African philosophical hermeneutics has to do with the fact that these notions are purely within that African historical and cultural context. For him tradition and destiny is the basis of interpretation. Hence for him, tradition is not merely transmission of the past from one generation to another. Over against this, tradition involves interpretation, change and hence new meaning. He captures this when he that writes “the tradition, essentially defined as transmission, constitutes a hermeneutic concatenation of interpretations and reinterpretations,”⁷⁰ and hence “we realize then that tradition and interpretation are intimately linked.”⁷¹ This is a positive understanding of tradition by Okolo which we develop further in the next chapter. Okolo then argues that his understanding of “hermeneutics” cannot be separated from tradition. In Okolo African philosophical hermeneutics explorations, it involves situatedness of the people. This calls for people to understand and be in control of their society. Hence his African philosophical hermeneutics is built in these two elements.

He draws the conclusion that the òtheir dialectical relation ensures the inseparability of hermeneutical theory and practice.ó⁷² It is the above that Okolo describes his general theory of hermeneutics as:

í an integral part of hermeneutical practice. Here, theory is not added to practice as a luxurious supplement; it illuminates practice, which, in turn, provokes it in a dialectical manner. From all this, we can draw a rather important methodological consequence: A true hermeneutical practice must be one that can also be enunciated as theory.⁷³

Okolo notes that òenunciating a theory enables the hermeneutist to properly assume his task of creation and actualization, and to be aware of the resources and the limits of the practice he is engaged in.ó⁷⁴ He then criticises, following his understanding of hermeneutics as a general theory the African philosophical hermeneutics and its practitioners. He asserts that:

The failure to enunciate a theory has led a good number of African and Africanist hermeneutists-among them, the ethnophilosophers-away from their proper task. They have ignored their resources, and their affirmations have gone beyond the limits permitted by their practice. A hermeneutical critique of ethnophilosophy still remains to be undertaken.⁷⁵

Okolo's criticism is directed towards the ethnophilosophy approach which presents African culture as unphilosophical. He sees genuine relevance of African culture which has been criticised and also portrayed as not worth of any philosophical attention especially by the ethnophilosophy approach and even if it has some philosophy it is in the second sense of the term philosophy as discussed earlier. Therefore there is the need to give a hermeneutical critique of ethnophilosophy approach according to Okolo.

It is notable that Okolo has made viable contributions to Africa philosophy in his hermeneutical endeavours.

Raphael Okechukwu Madu in *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny* regards hermeneutics as an analytic method and therefore a means to knowledge. In his hermeneutical explorations, He follows Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Madu grapples with the issue of what kind of hermeneutics is appropriate for African philosophy. In this respect he sees Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics as the appropriate hermeneutical method for African philosophy. He therefore justifies his choice of hermeneutics when he contends that:

The choice of the hermeneutic principles of Paul Ricoeur as philosophical method is based on the relevance it gives to culture by providing a very profound yardstick of interpreting religious symbols and mythical languages that characterize most cultures... Previously archaic and oriental symbolism was regarded as important only as a datum in the development of human consciousness. Such was the disdain philosophers felt about symbolic thought, that symbols were regarded as primitive and lacking the cogency of reasoning.⁷⁶

From this passage, it is plausible to infer that Madu follows Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Further, hermeneutics for Madu is the analysis of the symbolic structure of African culture. He wants to demonstrate that symbols, proverbs, mythology are philosophical and that they are not pre-rational. According to him, symbols, proverbs, mythology are not merely worldviews as ethnophilosophy presented them, but they are philosophically relevant. In doing so, He goes beyond ethnophilosophy hence to demonstrate their relevance in philosophy. For him, hermeneutics allows access to the significance of culture. And the method to do so is hermeneutics as a means to come up with philosophical thought within culture in line with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. From the above, the study establishes that Madu contributes to African philosophy from hermeneutical orientation.

The study in the next chapter suggests further possibilities for its use in conceptualising African philosophy.

3.8 Universalism versus particularism

So far, this work has outlined and discussed five main approaches to, or trends, in African philosophy namely ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy and the African philosophical hermeneutics.

It is plausible to infer that the ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, philosophic sagacity and nationalist-ideological philosophy approaches discussed concerned with either on documenting the world views of Africans or on philosophically engaging Africa problems and concerns. From this one can group this trends into two categories namely, the particularism and the universalism regarding to the meaning and nature of African philosophy. In what follows, we explore the distinction between universalism and particularism.

In contemporary African philosophy, the universalist position asserts that philosophy has some irreducible basic characteristics and features. There are various considerations upon which the universalist thesis defends its position. First, the universalist contends that what qualifies as philosophy must manifest what universally constitutes as the meaning and nature of philosophy. This is to imply that any discipline or intellectual activity must be done and documented along the stereotyped and paradigmatic sense to western philosophy, that is, it must manifest what constitutes as philosophy universally. In a nutshell, it must be in line with the very nature and meaning of philosophy.

Further, a philosophical discipline must use a method of inquiry which entails analytical, rational, and argumentation as essential features. The mode of operation for this method of philosophy is conceptual analysis which entails principles, meanings and explanations of reality. Finally, the universalist perspective entails to the fact that philosophy seeks the truth and hence this is arrived at by objectively valid methods and principles. So far, what this study has tried to disclose about the universalist position is its connectedness with method; a discipline cannot be philosophical, in other words cannot be accepted as objective and universal, without having a method. This universalist view, which conceives method as the only way of having knowledge by subsuming the particulars under the universals, is the opposite of the particularist position.

Philosophy viewed as an explanation of the problems and proposed solutions of a people within a specific historical and cultural context is the particularist dimension. Philosophy is not universal but particular since problems and solutions of a people are contextualised historically and culturally differing from time to time and place to place. Therefore the method of inquiry for the particularist dimension is not philosophical. From the above, it is plausible to infer that what qualifies as African philosophy must be philosophy in the universalist sense and not in the particularist sense. This chapter infers that professional philosophy and philosophic sagacity hinge on the universalist thesis while ethnophilosophy is anchored on the particularist dimension.

As earlier noted, the debate on African philosophy centered on the concept of reason. It is worthwhile to note that early 20th century philosophy pivoted on the notion of reason. The continental and analytic philosophy pivoted on the question of reason and both movements contributed to the discourses on African philosophy.

The fundamental difference has been that the analytic tradition calls for the application of analytic tools as a philosophical method while the phenomenological ó existential - hermeneutical sought to discern meaning in our lived experience devoid of impersonal objectivism manifested in science. This work has shown that the hermeneutical orientation follows and appropriates phenomenological ó existential ó hermeneutical tradition. Further, this work demonstrated the fundamental difference between the universalist and the particularist dimensions in Africa philosophy debate as incorporating a disjunction (either/or) understood in the exclusive sense. This implies that either one or the other but not both. The African philosophical hermeneutics challenges the universalist and particularist dimensions. At best African philosophical hermeneutics occupies a middle position. Here in lies the rationale of the hermeneutical orientation. The hermeneutical orientation incorporates the universalist and particularist dimension. There are various considerations for this assertion.

First, the universalist position ignore Africanness in their discourse while the particularist regard Africans as primitive and inferior. The hermeneutical orientation focuses on the lived historicity of Africans which comprises of colonialism and neo-colonialism as the object of reflection for African philosophical discourse. The hermeneutical orientation is a philosophic reflection of the emancipatory possibilities given that domination and hegemony are the major aspects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It focuses on the damage done to Africa by colonialism and neo-colonialism and seeks emancipatory possibilities from a philosophical angle.

Second, the hermeneutical orientation starting point is reverence for African traditions but unlike the particularist stance, it subjects them to critical, analytical and reflective analysis.

Third, it focuses on how tradition, history and language may serve as the framework for African hermeneutical discourse within the African philosophical discipline transcending the universalist and particularist dichotomy.

In this study, the important agenda is how Gadamer's theory of understanding as imbedded in art, history and language is applicable to African philosophy discourse and more so could further the hermeneutical agenda for hermeneutical orientation.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the major approaches taken to African philosophy namely: ethno-philosophical, nationalistic-ideological philosophy, professional philosophy, philosophic sagacity and hermeneutical. The issues, themes and positions reviewed in this chapter provide the major lines of African philosophy which have inspired a current of philosophical activity in Africa. In doing so the chapter has given an exposition and evaluated criticisms of ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy and hermeneuticists and therefore, the study is in a position to argue for application of the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding for African philosophy. In addressing the continuities and gaps in these approaches, opens up more nuanced explication of traditions and peoples that African philosophy stand for and more so a self-critical capacity of this philosophy.

It is an agenda to give an exposition and evaluation of contemporary African philosophy in relation to classical African philosophy. Another fundamental aspect is to synthesizing any insights that might be from the study of Western philosophy with the contemporary African philosophy debate. Since I have done the first agenda in this chapter, I turn my attention to the second by focusing on the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and it is of relevance to African philosophy. In our discussion we did not find much application of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding as inbuilt in art, history and language. It is this gap that this work seeks to fill in the next chapter in relation to African philosophy.

3.10 Notes

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- ³F. Ochieng-Odhiambo, *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 1997), 1.
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- ⁶Ibid., 99.
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- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Ibid.,
- ²¹Ibid., 108-109.
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- ²³H. Odera Orika, *Sagacity in African Philosophy*, in African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 48.
- ²⁴Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy: The point in question*, In African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 17.
- ²⁵Ibid., 18.
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- ²⁷Peter Bodunrin, *The question of African philosophy*, In African Philosophy: the Essential Readings, op.cit., 79.
- ²⁸H. Odera Orika, *Sagacity in African Philosophy*, in African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 48.
- ²⁹Ibid., 49
- ³⁰Hountondji, P. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 2ed., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 47.
- ³¹Kwasi Wiredu, *On defining African Philosophy*, In African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 87.
- ³²Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy: The point in question*, In African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 19.
- ³³H. Odera Orika, *Sagacity in African Philosophy*, in African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, op.cit., 48.
- ³⁴Ibid. 49.
- ³⁵Hountondji, P. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 2ed., op.cit., 359.
- ³⁶Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, in The Essential Readings, op.cit., 111.
- ³⁷Ibid., 112.
- ³⁸Ibid.
- ³⁹Ibid., 117.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid.53
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.,50.
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- ⁴⁸ Kwame Nkrumah, Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization, (London: Panaf Books, 1970), 68.
- ⁴⁹ Leopard Senghor, On African socialism (New York : Frederic A. Praeger, 1964), 93-94.
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- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *Philosophy and Post-colonial African*, in *Postcolonial Africa: (A critical reader*, oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 15.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 17.
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- ⁶⁴ Okonda Okolo, ö*Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics*”, In *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, op.cit., 201.
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- ⁶⁶ Ibid. 200.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
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- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 205.
- ⁷² Ibid.,
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CHAPTER FOUR

UNDERSTANDING IN GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS AND ITS APPLICATION TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

4 Introduction

In our analysis so far, this work focused on the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding. The study has also dealt with the exposition and discussion of the contemporary approaches in African philosophy. Hence this chapter attempts to show the application of Gadamer's view of understanding to African philosophy. As demonstrated, one fundamental theme we have maintained in our study is, understanding. This theme of understanding is developed and explicated in three models namely, *art*, *history* and *language* in the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding. It is on the basis of this new understanding by Gadamer that the study attempts to demonstrate the application of philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy. In this respect, this work will demonstrate the application of philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy from the perspective of understanding. In doing so, it will demonstrate that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding as imbedded in art, history and language is an area of engagement for African philosophy. It suggests that this approach would make a modest contribution to the intellectual growth and be of relevance to African philosophy.

4.1 **Understanding in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and its application for African philosophy**

In this study our concern is with the relevance of applying Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding to African philosophy. Philosophical hermeneutics is centrally relevant for African philosophy because it focuses on a human event or process, that is, the event or process of understanding. The event of understanding is universal and foundational for human existence and the relevance of this for African philosophy cannot be over emphasized. Gadamer captures this when he contends that:

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its tasks the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in the society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection.¹

Here some explanation of what is meant by the above quotation is appropriate. What it means here for African philosophy is that philosophical hermeneutics deals with understanding as the basic experience of the world in which understanding itself is oriented to the whole of human life. This is to say that philosophical hermeneutics as understanding permeates contexts that determine human existence in the world. The implications of this for African philosophy cannot be over looked. The reason for our argument here is that what is African philosophy, the very existence of such a discipline forms an important topic of discussion.

Hence the central problem has been whether there exists African philosophy. This aspect introduced one fundamental criticism against African philosophy; that is the question of thought and practice. The fundamental issue has been whether African philosophy can be practical. From our discussion we see that African philosophy acquires practical orientation when we apply Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. This is to say that Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding dimension addresses some pertinent issues relevant to Africa. Gadamer's view of understanding may be of help as a possible model for solutions to contemporary African philosophical problems such as issues of intellectual discrimination, culture, governance, political and social issue, and ethics among others. Gadamer contends that

The problem of understanding is increasing interest in recent years. Certainly this is not unrelated to our very uneasy social and world-political situation and the sharp increase in tensions at the present time. Everywhere one looks finds that effort to reach an understanding between zones within a nations, between nations, blocks of nations, and between generations, are falling. It would seem that a common language is lacking and the concepts that generally serve as guidelines for discussion ó I have in mind, for example, concepts like "democracy" and "freedom" ó only function as emotional appeals that make oppositions more rigid and the tensions more extreme-the very tensions one is seeking to reduce.²

Following this line of thought, Gadamer's philosophy is important for African philosophy because it seeks to understand social and political attitudes. His philosophy is practical in our world as human beings for it seeks to understand the changing attitudes which are constantly changing in economic, political, social, and even scientific. We need to understand the challenges that are inbuilt in the changes taking place in the world.

Thus the necessity of being-in-the-world as Heidegger likes to put it makes us recognise the practical value and relevance of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding for African philosophy. We are living in a time when Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding counts. What it means here is that understanding is an ever present and necessary event that every human being uses in every moment of one's existence, of one's being-in-the-world as Gadamer, following Heidegger, likes to put it. Philosophical hermeneutics is a description of an event, that is, understanding, that occurs always and everywhere in human existence, hence universal. This would be useful for African philosophy indeed and would certainly respond to widespread desideratum in this world in which we are. In existing, we understand what is going on in our world. This makes understanding indispensable for African philosophy. Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is in this respect relevant for African philosophy for it should seek to describe the on going process of human existence. African philosophy following the universality of understanding should seek to understand the world and more so self understanding and of human beings. African philosophy should strive to understand the meaning of our lives. The question of meaning of life presupposes that life is viewed from philosophical hermeneutics lens. How are we to understand ourselves? becomes crucial for African philosophy from philosophical hermeneutical perspective. Understanding the questions raised in life and to lead man to have a better understanding of himself, his fellow man and the world in which he lives naturally, socially, metaphysically is an indispensable task for African philosophy. This has nothing to do with methods or a particular methodology.

There are no skills, guidelines, principles, rules, arts, methodologies or methods for understanding 'who we were' and more so understanding our human existence. This is the approach needed in African philosophy to address the question of 'being-in-the-world' as Heidegger likes to put it.

As earlier noted, the debate on the nature and existence of African philosophy has been around the issue of finding a method for philosophising. As an example, both Ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy have preoccupied with the issue of method. Even sage philosophy attempts to come up with a method for philosophising. Each attempt whether ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, sage philosophy or hermeneutic philosophy has its own inbuilt issue. What it means here is that the issue of method has been central in the debate on the nature and the existence of African philosophy. While method may be necessary, we argue that it is not the only way to philosophise. This is way we have at length demonstrated the fundamental difference between the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as an approach and not a method of doing philosophy. Hence here we argue that there is another way besides the method aspect to think about in African philosophy from the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding which is an approach and not a method.

This is to say that one of the central threads that run through Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the emphasis on understanding as not based on any particular method but in built in art, history and language. It is important at this stage to understand the difference between method and methodology in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. According to Gadamer, method dominates the body of knowledge.

Gadamer writes that "modern science, which arose in the seventh century, is based on thought about method and the progressive accumulation of knowledge assured by method."³ The criteria or methodic assurances are limited when it comes to truth and understanding according to Gadamer.

Gadamer views that methods of the sciences insinuate themselves into popular thinking to the extent that, even if individuals recognise that the kind of knowledge that the human sciences seek differs from that of the natural sciences, "one will still be tempted to describe them in a merely negative way as the 'inexact sciences'."⁴ The human and social sciences are seen as less significant than the natural sciences. The method of the "exact sciences" has been taken as the authority when it comes to arriving at understanding and truth. The yard stick for humanities and social sciences becomes the natural sciences. According to this prejudice, African philosophy and other humanities and social sciences are pursued merely for pleasure. They are not cogent as the natural sciences. Understanding and truth have to do with the exact sciences so to speak, a claim questioned by the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. The methodologies and methods of the natural sciences according to Gadamer are limited in the quest for truth and understanding. This is fair for humanities since methods of the natural sciences are limited and are not the only sole source of arriving at truth and understanding. To follow the exact sciences and its methodical approach to knowledge is to deny how truth and understanding is arrived in the humanities. By restoring and exhorting the position of the humanities, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding and its relevance to African philosophy cannot be over emphasized.

Further, Gadamer argues that method implies specific techniques, tools, or procedures applied to achieve a given objective and as the basic model of reason. Again Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not a method or a methodological investigation. Gadamer writes "that hermeneutics as philosophy is not some kind of methodological dispute with other sciences, epistemologies or such things."⁵ Over against this, Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics is a phenomenological theory of understanding. His aim was to "demonstrate the limits of the scientific concept of method,"⁶ when applied to the human sciences. For Gadamer, what he "sought to show was that the concept of method was not an appropriate way of achieving legitimation in the human and social sciences."⁷ To understand or not to understand is not limited to any method, procedure or rules. Understanding for Gadamer, is not something that is teachable and controllable. Philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding criticises this by asserting that "this form of science has uniquely changed our planet by privileging a certain form of access to our world, an access that is neither the only nor the most encompassing that we possess."⁸ Philosophical hermeneutics points out that "it is this access to the world by means of methodical isolation and conscious interrogation "in the experiment" which has enabled particular realms hold on our ways of doing things."⁹ The scientific out fit "as a specific methodical way of gaining knowledge arose, whose success brought about tension between our methodical knowledge of the world, which encompasses our whole experience of life, and the scientific knowledge that brought it about."¹⁰ This is to say that there are many spheres of life that knowledge based methods or procedures do not and cannot permeate.

Again there is the need to appreciate the fact that human phenomenon seeks little justification for the immense effort devoted to substantiate laws of understanding, logic and philosophy in general. This does not imply that human phenomenon is unphilosophical. It seeks to demonstrate that a method or procedure is limited and inadequate to address whole of human phenomenon. Gadamer captures this when he contends that "it is enough to say that we understand in a *different way if we understand at all.*"¹¹ The relevance of this for African philosophy cannot be over emphasized.

According to Gadamer, understanding is a philosophical activity and encompasses more than "the epistemological and methodological pretensions of scientific procedures."¹² This is to say that the understanding in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics challenges by "method" the classical epistemological theories and epistemological picture that grounds scientific research as advocated by Descartes and Bacon. This epistemology focuses on developing scientific methods that guarantee knowledge of reality. The methods serve as guarantee for accurate predictions. Further the epistemologies in question advocates for the notion of the human person as the knowing subject based on subject-object ontology. Gadamer observes that "perhaps, but only perhaps, this might suffice as a European standard for arriving at an agreement on what understanding is. But such a standard is far too narrow,"¹³ an insight that is of relevance to African philosophy. The modern philosophical reasoning based on subject-object ontology is rejected by philosophical hermeneutics as understanding. In following Heidegger, Gadamer contends that there is indissoluble unity between the notion of understanding and the human person.

As a theory of understanding, philosophical hermeneutics transcends the epistemological dualisms that permeate classical epistemological theories. The conventional conception of the African mentality applied the Newtonian-Cartesian and Baconian epistemologies in declaring that the African mentality is primitive. Cartesianism advocates for reason as the sole authority in the method of understanding. A crucial consequence of the Newtonian-Cartesian and Baconian epistemologies is that it denies understanding and in general philosophical activity to the African mind. Philosophical hermeneutics was a critique to these theories. Hence as a philosophical activity, it is ontological in nature, that is, an activity of man. Gadamer writes that "understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production."¹⁴ This implies that, to understand is not a skill as the conventional conception of African mentality understands, understanding. According to the conventional conception of Africa mentality, method of understanding pins and describes what is philosophical from what is not.

Philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding refutes and transcends this perspective. Gadamer writes that "I [Gadamer] am trying to go beyond the concept of method held by modern science (which retains its limited justification) and to envisage in a fundamentally universal way what *always* happen."¹⁵ Hence understanding as a philosophical activity is not based on some dogmatic assumption but is a universal ontological activity of the human person. The subject-object ontology in the light of philosophical hermeneutics does not adequately permeate all spheres of life if it does at all.

Gadamer contends that:

For when one plays a *game*, the game itself is never a mere object; rather, it exists in and for those who play it, even if one only participating as a *ōspectatorō*. In this context, I think, the inappropriateness of the concept of *ōsubject and ōobjectō* is evident, a point which Heidegger's exposition in *Being and Time* has also made clear.¹⁶

This is to imply that there is indissoluble unity of the notion of understanding and the human person. Again the phenomenon of understanding seeks little justification over against the concerted efforts to demonstrate the laws of understanding by the conventional conception of the African mentality. Gadamer asserts that *ōit is the role of philosophy to make us aware that science and its method have a limited place within the whole of human Existenz and its rationality.ō*¹⁷ According to philosophical hermeneutics, this event of understanding is not at all, a scientifically controlled. It is plausible to infer that method can account for understanding and truth but to some extent. Over against method of dealing with texts, or humanities and social sciences as Dilthey advocated, for Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is a description of the existential process that one undergoes in dealing with our world and our existence in it. This is a significant and relevant point for African philosophy needed to be made at the outset. This is to imply that philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is central and universal. It is universal as phenomenal description of what happens when we understand due the fact that it is ontological.

Furthermore, understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is applicable and significant to African philosophy because it follows the radical, post-metaphysical thinking of Heidegger. For Gadamer, his thinking is beyond metaphysics and poses a challenge to the modern European modes of understanding.

The significance and application of the Gadamerian challenge to the static structures of the modern European mode of understanding and its feeling of superiority because it can control other cultures to African philosophy cannot be over emphasised. It transcends the substance-based, static thinking both of Aristotle and of empirical science and the philosophy that thinks in timeless categories adding 'time' as a dimension of essences that are unchanged by time. Gadamer, following Heidegger, on the contrary made time the basis of thinking. For Gadamer, time is no longer a timeless universal concept but is finite. African philosophy should criticise the static structures that overlook the event of understanding that happens, as a process that occurs in time, as an experience that happens in time. In following Gadamer, African philosophy has chosen to function in time. In functioning in time, African philosophy seeks to understand events as experienced. African philosophy should transcend the foundation of static assumptions of metaphysical thinking and even criticize it. African philosophy guided by Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding should leap beyond the metaphysics of modernity. African philosophy therefore becomes post-metaphysical and postmodern in terms of philosophy. This is to say that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding encounters new things that are ignored by static, substance-based thinking, an essential insight for African philosophy.

The relevance of Gadamerian concept of prejudice for African philosophy is lucid when he argues that understanding is based on a prior understanding. Gadamer anchors his philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding on pre-judgements or presuppositions. This is to say that understanding is presupposed or prejudged.

This fact that understanding is based on assumptions makes it indispensable for African philosophy. This is of relevance and important for African philosophy in that it should appreciate and criticise the basis of the other modes of understanding. There is no assumptionless understanding because understanding is based on prior understandings and anticipations. The fore-understanding of understanding underlines the significance of the assumptions and expectations inherent in the process of forming questions about the world. For example, it is naive to argue that one can ever be truly detached from preconceived ideas about the significance of events. Here Gadamer's philosophy is important for African philosophy, in that we understand in terms of what we already know, and we are surprised by what alters our expectations. African philosophy should view prejudice as a positive dimension and that they do contribute to understanding. This perspective points out that there is an anticipation of understanding. The goal is not to eliminate prejudices but rather separate false and true prejudices. The truth of our prejudices is verified through their ability to produce a coherent and harmonious perspective of the whole that is offered to our understanding. If this is not the case, then the falsehood of our prejudices is manifested. This is relevant for African philosophy.

For Gadamer as we have seen, that understanding has to do the experiences of *art*, *history* and *language*. Gadamer asserts that human and social sciences "...related to experiences that have nothing to do with method and science but lie beyond science ... like the experience of art and the experience of culture that bears the imprint of its historical tradition."¹⁸ Therefore we see the need to apply understanding in African philosophy using the three Gadamerian parameters.

It is these three models, namely *art*, *history* and *language* of philosophical hermeneutics as understanding that we now follow in demonstrating their applicability for African philosophy.

4.2 Art

The argument here is that understanding and the artistic principle in Gadamerian philosophical thought deserves the attention to African philosophy. The study has demonstrated that art is a fundamental component of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and truth. Further in our analysis, we developed the Gadamerian view that artwork is an experience of disclosure of truth. According to Gadamer, art contributes to the event of understanding and truth.

Gadamer argues that understanding and truth is manifested in various forms of art when he asserts that "the question of truth also arises in other forms of art: in music, dance, theatre, and especially in architecture,"¹⁹ a vital relevance for African philosophy. Prior to this, the notion of truth was shadowed by the assumptions of science and method. As we demonstrated, the methods of science were regarded as more appropriate to coming up with the truth. In this respect, art was seen from the perspective of beauty, of aesthetics. The German idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant had argued that art is basically about pleasure following the Greek philosophers, notably Plato.²⁰ Gadamer transcends the epistemological approach to truth and aesthetic model of art as explicated in this study. What it means here is that while its artistic aspect is highly valued, it has more than purely aesthetic significance.

Contrary then, Gadamer offers a new way to look at the experience of art as an ontological disclosure of truth. Hence the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics perspective seeks to understand the experience of art as a way that truth and understanding emerges. This is to say that the experience of art is an encounter with truth and understanding for Gadamer. This new truth and understanding inbuilt in art and its relevance for African philosophy cannot be over emphasized. Following the above, African philosophy ought to bring truth to the masses, not just pleasure of the art. This is to say that the aesthetic principle is not the specific element in art but, there is a philosophy of truth to discern. This is of relevance to African philosophy since art can be used to convey truth and understanding. This view of truth contextualises reality as it is. Therefore in following Gadamer, we argue that art discloses the way things are. Hence art as model of understanding and truth in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is of relevance for African philosophy. This is the case because it makes us rediscover the world not from the aesthetic perspective but as it is, that is, the experience of a work of art discloses truth about the world. African philosophy ought to discern the truth in art over against the classical aspect that art is for beauty or aesthetics. Art discloses the way things are for Gadamer which has an important implication for African philosophy. This is to say that art acquires a new and more important meaning for African philosophy since it gives a new significance for the life of human being as being-in-the-world. Art discloses the truth of human life, the meanings and relations of our human world. This truth is not a scientific truth, over against this, it is disclosure of the way things are which in turn transforms the life of human being as being-in-the-world.

Another significant aspect is that Gadamer describes truth experienced as an event of meaning that takes us into play. This experience of art involves our being, hence it is ontological. This is to say that when we experience a piece of art, we become part and parcel of it. In experiencing art, truth is disclosed and accordingly, one encounters the self in the event. Art can lead us to rediscover ourselves. The subject-object epistemological model to truth is countered by art as ontological disclosure of the item at hand. Accordingly our subjectivity does not come to play as it were but we become part and parcel of the work of art been experienced. The epistemological and methodic models of understanding have a limited place in this ontological experience of art, truth and our being-in-the-world. This ontological aspect of art leading to self-understanding and self knowledge becomes central for African philosophy. As an example, the intellectual background that surrounds us from early childhood, the style of thinking that permeates aphorisms, legends, proverbs, folk sayings, tales and songs, the paintings and sculptures we have admired, the music we have heard, the view of the world and humanity that we have absorbed thanks to our contact with art, has contributed to the formation of our individual self. We learned to think philosophically and perceive and transform the world aesthetically and more so lead to our self-understanding. This leads us to evaluative role which is a necessary feature of art. Such a feature is indispensable for African philosophy since art is man's evaluative attitudes towards reality. Therefore, the value of art for African philosophy is the evaluative view of the world, a true and large-scale review of events, a rational, reasoning orientation of man in the world around him, a true assessment of his own self. Hence art is philosophical and relevant for African philosophy to philosophically about it.

In the context just mentioned above, that is, art as play is an ontological encounter with truth in the event of understanding for Gadamer; this is important for to encounter art, is to encounter a truth which is transforming. This understanding of art provides a new justification for African philosophy to engage with art. This view of art as transforming, play and ontological provides new perspective and arguments for African philosophy. This is due to the fact that the experience of art captures one more than scientific and philosophical arguments. This is the case because art conveys complex abstractions closer to the perceptual level, enabling people to understand. In adopting the aesthetic principle, African philosophy ought and therefore should be, closer and more understandable to the masses of the people, an insight we learn from Gadamer. Hence as earlier argued, a considerable number of African philosophical works ought and should be written in poetic and artistic form. In African philosophy we argue that this aesthetic principle leads to a powerful and full expression of philosophical thought in a very easy and accessible manner. For we argue that these provides more understanding than serious philosophical arguments. However, it is worthwhile to note that philosophical thoughts expressed as poetry is not the same as poetry. Art is not a mere copy as Gadamer remarks, that is, it is not just concretizing the abstraction by merely copying an instance of it. Over against this, art attempts to personify the abstraction for understanding is selective and abstractive. The relevance of this for African philosophy is incalculable for there is integration and understanding of art by the perceiver.

Our discussion of art has a special significance for African philosophy in relation to its place in human life. Art can be used to express the reality of the human life of society in music, satire, images, and poems among other artistic aspects.

Artwork has an effect to the quality of the life of the people. Art works has the power to draw and influence the lives of people. Art shapes the styles and realms of people. Art has special role in human interaction with each other, their surrounding, and communication in which human life plays itself out. Art plays a special role in shaping style and representing it and more so disclosing truth. All this is not without special relevance for African philosophy. The implication here for African philosophy is that it should discern the above since art is no longer about luxury for there is something about art that really means something to us. A true philosopher can be compared to a poet. He or she ought to have the aesthetic power. Creative thought necessarily implies that the philosopher must be aesthetically influenced. In the western tradition of philosophy we see many philosophical figures who were deeply influenced by art and they also wrote in various art forms such poems. Notably Plato, Augustine, Einstein, Darwin, Hegel, Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel among others were largely influenced by art and wrote in art forms. In short, these great philosophers appreciated the world aesthetically with philosophical lens. Art for them was a powerful catalyst for philosophical thinking and communication of the same. This is vital for African philosophy and philosophers to embrace aesthetic appreciation of the world.

As an example, in the literary-artistic approach of African philosophy, philosophers in Africa and African philosophy in general, this aesthetic appreciation of the world is of indispensable value. Therefore, African philosophy ought to take as one of its features the artistic comprehension of the world with a philosophical perception. This blending of the philosophical and the artistic can be seen in the sayings, proverbs, aphorisms, tales and legends, which abound in vividly expressed wisdom, a vital

relevance for literaryóartistic, ethnophilosophy and the sage approaches in African philosophy.

As a summary, we note that African philosophy gets a new meaning of art as a disclosure of truth. This is to say that art is highly significant for African philosophical analysis. The significance unfolds on the levels of truth and communication as we have demonstrated above. Further, art work is relevant, not for the restricted questions of aesthetics, but for the basic questions concerning man, nature and being as elucidated above. Hence there is a principal obligation on Africa philosophy to take into account the insights which come from the artistic experience as understood by Gadamer. Its relevance would be one of the hallmarks for African philosophy. African philosophy should follow art from the outset of the philosophical enterprise and with reference to the prime themes. From the above, we argue from the perspective of communicating the outcomes of philosophical reflections, African philosophy will establish a unique relation with art. African philosophy will explore the border line between abstract analysis and concrete expression, aiming to find general meaning within the particular beings of experience and art. It follows from the above that African philosophy will use art as vehicle for the quest for understanding the meaning of, the existence of man and society.

Therefore, art is applicable for African philosophy because it is profoundly philosophical, cognitive, moral, transformative, and of social substance. However, we point out that this in not reducing African philosophy to a form of art. It is simply seeing art as philosophically relevant for African philosophy from the Gadamerian view point.

4.3 History

Here this work seeks to demonstrate that history and historicity in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is important and applicable for African philosophy.

For Gadamer, there can be no understanding without history, and we understand on the basis of history. This is significant for African philosophy. This is to be seen in relation to the past, present and the future. The past should not be evaluated on the basis of the present but rather we should strive to revive and understand the past. In doing so we understand the past and this helps us to improve the future and also understanding the events or happenings of the past helps one to avoid the pitfalls of the present and the future. Here the study stresses that the importance of fusion of horizons in history is in its capacity to help one to understand from the past events. Furthermore, African philosophy should follow the insight that history illuminates the past upon the present, thus helping one to understand oneself, by making one acquainted with other people and the world. By historical understanding one understands why things are they way they are right now. Many of the past events and histories in the world have shaped the present and inevitably the future.

Another application of understanding and history for African philosophy becomes pronounced when understanding of historic facts is necessarily undertaken from a particular effective-historical position which enables understanding. Hence understanding 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 significance for African philosophy for it means that an awareness of the crucial importance of effective-history and our present-day horizon make understanding possible.

Understanding and history is of immense value for African philosophy when Gadamer asserts that tradition hands to us assumptions which help us understand the world and ourselves. Tradition not only supplies us with anticipations, it helps us understand how to be in the world. This is one important rationale for African philosophy to engage with understanding and history as explicated by Gadamer. For African philosophy to explore and make use of them will enrich our understanding.

Further, tradition and historical understanding is of immense value for African philosophy in that it does not negate the critical and argumentative enquiries, but offers sources of truth and understanding way above the scientism. Tradition supports and opens us to understanding our situatedness or our being-in-the-world. Tradition has an outstanding mark of being, meaning and morality laden and these features are not immediately discernable. Since the days of Socrates and Plato, philosophy begins with wonder. Philosophy stems out of the need to provide answers to the basic question posed by man and his environment like death, the seen effects of invisible force, birth, growth, sickness, change of weather, the concept of time among other issues. The issues at hand are found in tradition. Since Ethnophilosophy or philosophic sagacity as approaches to African philosophy, searches to unravel or demystify some puzzles in nature and to provide answers to some fundamental questions about man and his environment, the importance of tradition and philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is relevant. Again, a dialogue with tradition and history involves an active use of understanding to find answers to questions. It is not an unquestioning acceptance. Furthermore sometimes the answers can come from a forgotten aspect of an older tradition, because the tradition is a rich resource.

The relevance of understanding and history is not without a special place for African philosophy in relation to preservation. According to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a philosophy of openness and listening, of retaining what is valuable in the historical culture. This is significant for African philosophy more so when Gadamer calls for retaining what is valuable in a tradition. He succinctly asserts that:

...reversing the enlightenment's presupposition results in the paradoxical tendency toward restoration- i.e. the tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth.²¹

What it means here is that philosophical hermeneutics as inbuilt in understanding and history should preserve the traditional and cultural values. For example in African philosophy, myths, customs, and rituals are to be preserved as wisdoms of a past age. Gadamer seeks this by advocating going back to the past's way of looking at things, hence restorative tendency of the past. There are many traditions in Africa and this need to be transcribed and what is good in them preserved. Preservation is necessarily for even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated. It is essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change.²² Even where life changed violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create new value.²³ For example here, the immediate task is transcribing the history of the nation, or tribe, or linguistic group as it occurs. We infer that understanding, in philosophical hermeneutics, when applied to African philosophy aims at the preservation of traditions, culture and languages. It looks for what is good in the language and stories and belief structures of the indigenous culture.

While some things may shock us today, we must be open to preserving what is distinctive, unique, and valuable. African philosophy would retrieve what is good in the previous cultures by preserving and transmitting them.

The application of understanding in philosophical hermeneutics for African philosophy is also substantiated when Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding focuses on a radicalisation of the priority of tradition over reason. Reason depends on tradition and not vice versa. Gadamer argues that we belong to history and not vice versa. What he implies is that when one understands historically, you understand basic concepts and ideas. One for example learns about cause and effect, relationships and human nature. Since understanding is historically grounded then it is mainly about what causes the next event or action and people can clearly understand how things are related to one another. To understand the working of human society and formation of the intricate bonds of relationships and dependence, we need to understand historical evolution of human society. This is possible by understanding historically human society and cultures. Gadamer captures this when he contends that, "long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live."²⁴ Tradition has authority. "That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what is clearly grounded has power over our attitudes and behaviour."²⁵ For example, African philosophy should seek to expose and enrich itself from the ethical issues as grounded in African traditions and cultures.

It should make us understand the principles and patterns of a given culture. Gadamer asserts that "the real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition they are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reason."²⁶ Hence this is an ontological and not epistemological quest as we are historical and in traditions.

One promising point in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as it is embodied in his philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding is a critique of the 18th century continental Enlightenment philosophy, which provides a philosophical foundation and justification for colonialism and neo-colonialism, where the horizon of the colonial power is projected as superior to the native (African) philosophy, as in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where the colonial religion "has put a finger on the things that have held us together and now things fall apart". Gadamer's view is the opposite. It demonstrates contrary to the colonizing standpoint respect for other tradition and history, suggesting that there is something to learn from another culture. This very respect we must accord a person from another tradition, an indispensable insight for African philosophy. Here we learn from Gadamer when he asserts that:

"and while our young people today in their own stressful years of development find a Guru from India fascinating, it is still essential that they should learn to understand the other ways of life as wholes, that they understand all that comprises the basis of these cultures: the view of the family, of ancestors, death, and the living on the ancestors within us, and also in these cultures such a decisive concept as their evaluation of human life."²⁷

Here some explanation of what is meant by this quotation is appropriate. As human persons, we are linked in a continuous thread with the past, traditions and ancestors.

We live in traditions handed down to us which are the sources of who we are and how we shape our lives in spite of the fact that we live in different times and ways. The past constantly invite us into past and influence news ways of being in the present.

This view is contrary to the western colonial dominance of other traditions, culture and language. Thus the hermeneutics of culture calls for the fusion of horizons and whenever one tries to understand a particular culture, one must reformulate his or her prejudices in order to overcome the strangeness of a different cultural horizon. Through this event, understanding is expanded. The understanding ascribed to the new culture is revised, and the understanding of the otherness of the other is improved. Moreover this recuperates the dimension of listening and openness. The most fundamental aspect of this hermeneutic of culture is, in fact, the passion for the other. It is through the contact with the otherness of the other that our prejudices are gradually conquered and deprived of their distorting character. In Gadamer's work we find therefore something applicable for African philosophy and which is crucial to a hermeneutics of culture. This is hermeneutical openness and humility to other cultures and traditions. Unfortunately, the colonial philosophy did not embrace tolerance in its mission and therefore sought to replace the existing traditions, cultures and languages with their own. In today's world, such intolerance still persists and for example, Ethnophilosophy and philosophic sagacity guided by philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding have something to offer to other cultures. This is important for African philosophy.

Tradition is historically given and unquestionably conditions people. This is relevant to African philosophy. This is to say that we are who we are, due to our history. Our mind set and thinking is conditioned by history.

African philosophy should demonstrate that in any given human social practice, there is an understanding from the historical perspective. The understanding that the present as new is always a reconstruction of the past becomes indispensable for African philosophy. In this respect we cannot, according to Gadamer, free ourselves from the past for we are always part and parcel of history and tradition. Epistemology and its methods must appreciate that tradition and history is a basis of understanding. Our understanding always reflects the traditions and history we live both the present and the past. For Gadamer, then, historical consciousness is inseparable from tradition. "Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. It is present only in the multifariousness of such voices: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have part."²⁸ Therefore, understanding is simply an event as Gadamer likes to put in his philosophical hermeneutics and hence it is not to be thought of so much as a subjectivity of action. Rather, as one finds himself or herself within the process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused this constitute this event of understanding. This is crucial in the articulation of African philosophy.

This work emphasize that African philosophy should be strengthened by this Gadamerian view in quest to philosophise for understanding itself is historical. African philosophy should appreciate that history is the horizon of understanding.

4.4 Language

The application of understanding and its attendant contribution for African philosophy is articulated when Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics takes language as its model in its quest to argue for understanding. In following Heidegger, Gadamer argues that language and understanding are inseparable. It is this dimension of defining language and understanding that makes philosophical hermeneutics applicable for African philosophy.

Gadamer emphasises the descriptive ordinary usage of language as facilitating understanding. As we demonstrated, he is reacting to the usage of language that follows some strictly controlled pattern. Outside this technical and strict sense, the usage of language is paraded as primitive, illogical and unreasonable. In other words, any other usage of language is not regarded as worthy of the title 'philosophy'. For example, as we have seen in the previous chapter, ethnophilosophy as African philosophy would fall victim to this criticism. The point of contention here is that ethnophilosophy does not make use of language in the regimented and strict sense. That is to say that the technical, formalized and specialized usage of language is not manifested in the ethnophilosophy approach. It is on the basis of this non non-development of analytical inclinations that the possibility of ethnophilosophy as African philosophy is denied.

Contrary to this, what the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics suggests is that this strict and technical use of language, which is the feature of the mainstream philosophy, is not the only way of doing philosophy. As earlier argued, language is a medium through which a people's beliefs, thoughts, traditions, customs, etc., are acknowledged.

Hence, languages count if we are going to understand them. In this respect, African philosophy would still accommodate description of beliefs, thoughts and tradition as facilitating understanding. The universalists conception of African philosophy, in which philosophy general, and African philosophy in particular, is construed as a systematic, rigorous, universal, and rational discipline of conceptual analysis, we argue that while these features, though acceptable standards and confirm the evidence of the paradigms of philosophy, they are not final, following Gadamer. We argue, and justifiably, that ethnophilosophy as African philosophy and African philosophy in general has right to describe, to analyse and to define issues as they relate to Africa's intellectual heritage, for this event contributes to understanding. For example, what this implies is that, for African philosophy, in languages, are a number of overarching themes in specific areas of philosophy such as theodicy, epistemology, ethics, logic and metaphysics. Further, in making source materials derived primarily from oral literature such as proverbs, parables, divination verses, sage philosophy and ethnophilosophy as approaches in African philosophy should seek to understand the meanings inbuilt in African languages and that this would be of philosophical significance. The point here is that without recourse to the rigorous, critical and scientific approach of the West, which Gadamer criticizes, African philosophy would understand and describe the metaphysical, epistemological, and moral views among others found in languages.

Further we argue that language discloses the thoughts and thought forms of any given culture. In incorporating understanding, African philosophy as hermeneutical event would seek to understand thought forms as in built in African languages. What is significance for African philosophy is that understanding is found in language.

These thoughts and thought forms are to be understood and contextualised. Hence we see that philosophical hermeneutics as understanding and language is of significance for African philosophy.

Furthermore, the application of understanding and language and its attendant contribution to African philosophy is articulated when language for Gadamer is radically different from scientific views of language which are abstract, in terms of the contextless assertions of logic. Gadamer's insight is indispensable when he asserts that:

Is it not the case that many social scientists are more interested in using the sedimented truisms inherent in linguisticity (so as to grasp scientifically the real structures, as they define them, of society) than in really understanding social life?²⁹

From the above quotation what is significance for African philosophy is that language and understanding have social, moral, ethical aspects that are lost in the use of regimented or strict sense of language and even in isolating and abstract way that analytic philosophy generally deals with language. What is important in understanding social life is not abstractness of scientific treatment of language for it is limited. Over against this, shared understanding in language lead to understanding social life. This is to say that language and understanding in a social community should seek social understanding to overcome its tensions and disruptions. Following this line of thought we argued that shared understanding in language make the background for social solidarity. This is contrary to the abstractness of scientific approach of language and understanding. Thus this is relevant for African philosophy for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics seeks to liberate the understanding of society from the imperialism of science and even analytic philosophy. For society is complex beyond the methods and methodological understanding as inbuilt in modern science and analytic tradition of philosophy.

For instance, in social reality the life of society and the life of the individual as linguistically constituted calls for hermeneutical appraisal.

The relevance of understanding and language and their applicability for African philosophy is manifested when Gadamer writes that "in the social sciences, one finds linguisticity deeply woven into the sociality of human existence, so that the theorists of the social sciences are now becoming interested in the hermeneutical approach."³⁰ In this study, we are not left out by this Gadamerian insight. This is to say that understanding and language becomes relevant to address aspects of social reality of human existence. The issues of social reality of human existence cannot be addressed through teachable and controllable ways or methods. Therefore, the research regards hermeneutical theory of understanding as embedded in language as indispensable for African philosophy. Gadamer succinctly captures this when he asserts that:

I [Gadamer] do venture to say, however, that if we do acquire hermeneutical virtue—that is, if we do not realise that it is essential first to *understand* the other person if we are ever to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together—it we do not do this, then we will never be able accomplish the essential tasks of humanity, whether on a small scale or large.³¹

The solidarity of humanity and society is the final analysis in the hermeneutical philosophy of human integration.

Another fundamental aspect of the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as understanding is "dialogical understanding." Philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding embraces dialogue as its model. This is to say that dialogue according to Gadamer contributes to mutual understanding. This can be applied to African philosophy. For example, political differences can be addressed by dialogical understanding as imbedded in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics.

Lack of common ground as Gadamer likes to put it is one of the fundamental challenges and can be addressed through the event of dialogical understanding. Gadamer asserts that "the real event of understanding goes continually beyond what can be brought to the understanding of the other person's words by methodological effort and critical self-control."³² To understand as the study affirms is neither a method nor does it adhere to a methodology but is an event of understanding in addressing, example, political problems. This is implying that political issues call for dialogical understanding. Pathological breakdown of inter-human understandings and contradictions in social interests are hindrances to dialogue according to Gadamer.

Here for example, we see the relevance of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as relevant to African nationalist-ideological philosophy as an approach for African philosophy. Dialogue is a model in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics of the ontological event of understanding. Further when applied to philosophic sagacity, for example, we appreciate that it is through dialogue which facilitates understanding and truth of people and their culture. These are vital insights we learn from philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding according to Gadamer. The model of dialogical understanding as explicated earlier, grounds our position.

The application of understanding for African philosophy becomes pronounced when Gadamer relates language and being in his hermeneutical explorations. An understanding of the nature of the human being is a necessary prerequisite for any inquiry into the nature of human rights. The ontological foundations for basic rights must be accorded to human beings insofar as they are human. Thus it becomes an ontological question about the nature of the human being.

In Gadamer this ontology is linguistic in character. The study argues that in dialoguing we discover the inherent dignity of the human person. Thus from the Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as a linguistic event of understanding we relate the dignity of the human person and dialogue (language).

The implication is that the question of human dignity is, more fundamentally, a question of how one in a dialogue manifests to the others, humanness. If to be is to be in dialogue as Gadamer claims, then any understanding of human dignity cannot be indissoluble from his account of the nature of dialogue. Language is essential to the dialogical understanding of the dignity of the human person. The dignity of the human person cannot be a property of the human being unless it is ontologically grounded. In this respect, Gadamer provides a new dimension of the human dignity which is ontologically grounded in language. We imply that human person have dignity as a happening or an event of the truth of being. We further imply that dignity is an experience of being in its truth. This is all linguistically bound events. We imply that to affirm one's dignity is to have an experience of human person in a dialogue. The hermeneutical obligation as human persons is to retrieve the dignity of others, respect for fundamental human rights and we can only do so by looking into that which is ordinary. We interact with people in our everydayness and in doing so we are able to discover their dignity. This shows that the dignity and rights of human person is in their ability to use language to discern and protect truth in dialogue. In dialoguing with others, Gadamer claims that it makes human person to be a human person. The study understands human dignity as what makes us to be human, which means that dignity is fundamentally a dialogical structure.

Another application of understanding for African philosophy is common ground as inbuilt in language. Gadamer writes that:

When one follows the approach oriented to [my] hermeneutics, every effort at grasping a meaning is in principle directed toward a possible consensus, a possible agreement in understanding; indeed, it must already rest on a general agreement in understanding that is binding, if it is to come about that one understands and is understood. This is not some dogmatic assumption but a simple phenomenological description of coming to an understanding. When there no common ground linking two parties together, no conversation can succeed.³³

This is very important today for African philosophy as the basis for the authenticity of negotiations. Thinking in terms of common grounds, yields understanding. This is thorough constant questioning and answering. This entails hermeneutical acceptance of the other and involves self-criticism of the parties. Further the prejudices of both parties should not be hindrance to the dialogue but with openness and listening hence in built in hermeneutical dialogue of Gadamer should lead to better understanding of the subject matter at hand.

We summarise here by pointing out that the quest has been to place language at the centre of understanding human predicament. We see no academic harm in incorporating linguisticity of understanding into African philosophy to understand human predicament. We note that language can be philosophical and hence more research is necessarily.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the application of Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding for African philosophy. It was interested in what can Gadamer's thought contribute to African philosophy. Hence the major focus has been Gadamer's description of the event of understanding and its application for African philosophy.

Since African philosophy seeks to provide answers to fundamental questions of our whole being as human beings and more so as social human beings, the application of understanding for it cannot be over emphasized. The study contended that in whatever approach to African philosophy, the role will be to understand the questions raised in life and to lead to self understanding of the man, his world socially and even metaphysically. I argued that the concept of modern science cannot lead us to achieve the above hence this fact makes understanding indispensable in African philosophy. We noted that philosophical hermeneutics as understanding has nothing to do with methods or procedures. African philosophy should follow this anti-positivists position.

The diversity in culture, religion and social environment significantly make the society pluralistic and therefore, African philosophy should seek to understand the people's philosophy taking cognisance of their socio-cultural milieu, their lived experience or their being-in-the-world and their peculiar problems and challenges. In following Gadamer, the study argued that the scientific outfit is limited. It does not address the human phenomenon which is not guided by rules or methods. It was asserted that these are important ingredients, as it were, from the view of philosophical hermeneutics as understanding for African philosophy.

The work demonstrated, following Gadamer that, African philosophy should condemn the use of the same standard of valuation to judge people of all cultures. The conventional conception of the African mentality is a good example of understanding in European terms, which makes African culture, mentality and understanding inferior. The relevance of understanding for African philosophy could not have been over accentuated here.

The discussion of art was not merely an appendix to the investigation but to demonstrate the philosophical relevance of art as understood by Gadamer for African philosophy. The study also sought to show how art as a model in the theory of understanding, is of relevance to African philosophy. Art as a model in philosophical hermeneutics as understanding has relevance for African philosophy was the objective. It was argued that art goes beyond methods or rules or skills and more so aesthetic goals to disclosing the truth and the world as is experienced. Art and its place in life and self understanding were discussed in details and more so how it shapes it. Indeed, we have emphasized that this is vital for African philosophy for art gives it a new thrust for truth, understanding the world as it is and more so self understanding.

The work sought to demonstrate that Gadamer's theory of understanding has something to offer for African philosophy from the perspective of historicity of understanding. There are things in the traditions of ancient Africa that need to be preserved. And discovering this will be good for the future generations. Our key point was that history facilitates paradigms of understanding as explicated by Gadamer in various aspect such as fusion of horizons, effective-history, temporal distance, prejudice and tradition.

This work has also shown the relevance of philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and language for African philosophy. The study has emphasised on the social significance of language and understanding. I have seen how solidarity is achievable as hermeneutical event and demonstrated its relevance to social network and shared understandings. This common social world makes social solidarity, respect of human rights and dignity possible. The study emphasised that this is contrary to the abstractness of scientific treatment of language and understanding. The conclusion was that shared understandings form the background for social solidarity and peace.

In the next chapter, this work summarises and concludes the thesis.

4.6 Notes

¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Edited and Translated by David E. Linge), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 18.

²Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, trans. and ed. by Richard E. Palmer, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 92.

³Ibid., 95.

⁴Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev ed.), (Wahrheit und Methode 1960). (Translated by Garret Barden and John Cumming). (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1989), 5.

⁵Gadamer, "From Word to Concept", *The Gadamer: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, op. cit., 120.

⁶Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, (Edited and Translated by Richard E. Palmer), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 37.

⁷Ibid., 40.

⁸Gadamer, "Language and Understanding", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op.cit., 94.

⁹Ibid.,

¹⁰Ibid., 95.

¹¹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. op.cit., 296.

¹²Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op. cit., 24.

¹³Gadamer, "From Word to Concept", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op. cit., 119.

¹⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. op.cit., 296.

¹⁵Ibid., 513.

¹⁶Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op .cit., 23.

¹⁷Ibid., 24.

¹⁸Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, op .cit., 27.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 1-157.

²¹Ibid., 275.

²²Ibid., 282.

²³Ibid., 283.

²⁴Ibid., 278

²⁵Ibid., 281

²⁶Ibid.,

²⁷Gadamer, "From Word to Concept", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op. cit., 119.

²⁸Ibid., 285

²⁹Ibid., 27

³⁰Ibid., 20.

³¹Gadamer, "From Word to Concept", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op. cit., 119.

³²Gadamer, "On the problem of self understanding", *Philosophical Hermeneutics* op. cit., 20.

³³Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical hermeneutics", *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, op.cit., 68.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5 Recapitulation

This thesis aimed at conceptualising understanding in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I have presented the research problem. The question guiding our inquiry has been whether understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is of any relevance to African philosophy. I introduced a schematic account of my thesis by stating the problem, objective, reasons for the study, hypothesis, surveying the relevant literature and the methodology used in data collection and analysis.

In an attempt to achieve the objectives of the study, the thesis examined the intellectual chronology of hermeneutics to its transformation into philosophical hermeneutics in Gadamer. The intention was to demonstrate the difference in meaning of philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutics. Here the study demonstrated that philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer is contrary to traditional hermeneutics which focuses on the set of problems involved in understanding written texts.

In Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics becomes ontological as hermeneutic project. This is to say that philosophical hermeneutics' concern is, understanding, as an ontological event.

We also, following Gadamer, saw how philosophical hermeneutics is a universal theory of understanding. Gadamer does not present the hermeneutic ontology of understanding of his theory in order to establish a foundation of knowledge. Neither does he offer us a system based on *a priori*, absolute foundations as Kant did. Rather, he keeps the immanent and external analysis separate distinguishing the effort of describing the phenomenon of understanding from the method of the application of phenomenon of understanding to particular cases of understanding in human sciences.

The thesis demonstrated that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as understanding aimed at criticising the modern scientific understanding that only asks reductionist questions. This modern view of understanding according to Gadamer is not based on historical experiences but on mathematical expectations and thus is shallower than understanding that is modelled on language and that frames artwork embedded in experience. This study attempted to clarify how Gadamer argues that his perspective he calls philosophical hermeneutics is a richer view of understanding than the traditional, modern, scientific, mathematical controlling understanding. Succinctly put, Gadamer's approach as he likes to call it, challenged the modern European modes of understanding.

The philosophical hermeneutics involves analysis of understanding through art, history and language. The Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics' concern is understanding, as an event or process which is based on historical, artistic experiences and linguistically mediated. In this respect the study examined the Gadamerian description of understanding as conditioned by the pre-given conditions and indissoluble from language.

According to Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics understanding and being are not two distinct activities but rather are separate dimensions of the same activity. He therefore, following Heidegger, identifies the common sphere of understanding as -being-in-the-world of the human world. Philosophical hermeneutics deals with the inquiry into understanding the nature of human self-understanding as a mode of being.

The thesis examined the notion that understanding is not only a problem of method and that philosophical hermeneutics concerns the linguistic ontological structure of the experience of understanding. When Gadamer speaks of the linguisticity of understanding and tradition, he does not appeal to the maxim that every human person belongs to a tradition. Rather, he means that the contents of tradition are not something objectified within a single consciousness, but are constantly expanding through language involving a community. The continuity of tradition and the meaning that encompasses this continuity are not experienced by a single individual consciousness, but have a social significance as demonstrated in our chapter four.

It focused on the linguistic ontological structure of understanding, that is, -Being that can be understood is language as Gadamer likes to put it. In this sense, inquiry into the linguistic nature of understanding is an investigation of the very structure of being of life. In this respect, philosophical hermeneutics of the event of understanding, I drew the conclusion that the study strongly recognises language as the ontological ground of Gadamer's theory. Accepting the dependence of understanding on language is a major feature of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. This is to imply that our views on how language and reality are related are always the fundamental matter.

The obvious fact that language is the condition for understanding and communication is affirmed by the additional claim that understanding itself is a linguistic process.

Art as model of understanding in Gadamer was examined in this chapter. The findings of this study have revealed that according to Gadamer, truth in art is not arrived via methods or rules or procedures but is an event of disclosure. One of the strengths of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is to relate art to truth, to the event of truth announcing itself in our experience of works of art. Here, the importance of the truth of art is important. The truth of art announces itself through itself and not on the basis of the person behind the art. The appearing of the truth in the experience of art is important in Gadamer, and following Heidegger introduces a new view of truth and the event of experiencing an artwork. The experience with artwork, I noted that according to Gadamer, is an ontological encounter with the being of truth.

The thesis demonstrated the historicity of understanding as understood by Gadamer. This is to say that for Gadamer, the concept of historicity is indispensable from the event of understanding. Historicity for Gadamer signifies understanding. Hence the subject-object ontology is preceded by this new perspective of historicity of understanding. Understanding is not based on absolute foundations but arises from the everydayness of human experience. To understand according to Gadamer is to be situated. Again we see the distaste of a method and methodological criteria of knowledge in Gadamer when he advocates for historicity of understanding. The principle of effective history that is the relationship which comprises both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding was discussed.

The implication of this principle is an awareness of the effects of history on the contexts where human understanding takes place and the effects affect understanding. I further showed that 'effective history' contributes to event of understanding thus as a fusion of horizons between the present and the past.

Following Gadamer, I tried to point out the fact that scientific outfit of understanding is subject to criticism when understanding becomes historically grounded. Philosophical hermeneutics therefore looks at the event of understanding and notes that in the event of understanding or process of understanding, we understand on the historical basis of what we already know. This was the objective in the chapter two of the thesis.

The study demonstrated that contemporary African philosophy has various approaches and as a consequence various topics and issues. It showed that the contemporary African philosophy refers to diversity of approaches. The chapter evaluated the major approaches in African philosophy which include the ethnophilosophical, professional philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological and hermeneutical approaches. That is to say that the chapter dealt with the exposition and discussion of the contemporary approaches to African philosophy. The chapter sought to demonstrate the strengths and weakness of each approach and finally helped to demonstrate how understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics would be applicable to African philosophy in chapter four.

The fourth chapter showed that understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is applicable to African philosophy. In other words, the question of the application of understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to African philosophy was the central focus in this chapter.

The question guiding our inquiry has been whether understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is of any relevance to African philosophy or philosophising within an African context. The thesis argued that philosophical hermeneutics is centrally relevant to African philosophy because it focuses on a human event, the event of understanding.

The study demonstrated that the event of understanding is universal and foundational for human life. Philosophical hermeneutics is a theory of understanding this world, of understanding our existence in this world or understanding our being-in-the-world as Martin Heidegger likes to put it. This is to say that at the outset I distinguished philosophical hermeneutics as a process of understanding that always and everywhere occurs in human existence. In the event of existing, we understand our world and our human life. I showed that the philosophical hermeneutics as an event of understanding is not a methodology but an ongoing event. Hence the relevance of this to African philosophy could not have been over emphasized. It is an event that takes place in day to day activity. The relevance of philosophical hermeneutics as an event of understanding was further corroborated by that fact that it is a description of an existential event in dealing with our world and our existence in it.

Of application for African philosophy was the fact that philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding follows the post-metaphysical thinking of Heidegger. The study drew attention that for Gadamer, following Heidegger, his philosophical hermeneutics as a theory of understanding is beyond metaphysics and poses a challenge to the modern European modes of understanding.

The relevance of the Gadamerian challenge to the static structures of the modern European mode of understanding and its feeling of superiority because it can control other cultures for African philosophy could not have been over accentuated. Its significance for it transcends the substance-based, static thinking both of Aristotle and of empirical science and the philosophy that thinks in timeless categories adding "time" as a dimension of essences that are unchanged by time. However it was that demonstrated in Gadamer, on the contrary made time the basis to thinking. For Gadamer, time was no longer a timeless universal concept but is finite. From the above context, it was argued that this applicable in African philosophy for criticising the static structures that overlook the event of understanding that happens, as a process that occurs in time, as an experience that happens in time. In following Gadamer it was demonstrated that African philosophy will have chosen to function in time. In functioning in time, African philosophy seeks to understand events as experienced. What was argued for as relevant for African philosophy is that in following this line of thought, it should transcend the foundation of static assumptions of metaphysical thinking and even criticize it. African philosophy guided by Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding should leap beyond the metaphysics of modernity. This of relevance for African philosophy for it becomes post-metaphysical and postmodern in terms of philosophy. What I concluded was that African philosophy guided by understanding encounters new things that are ignored by static, substance-based thinking.

Following Gadamer, we drew attention that pre-judgements or presuppositions as conditions of understanding in philosophical hermeneutics was applicable to African philosophy.

The idea of pre-judgements or presuppositions was argued plays a prominent role in facilitating understanding in the debate on African philosophy. Further, the study attempted to emphasise the significance of Gadamerian concept of prejudice for African philosophy for it is lucid when he argues that understanding in the world is based on a prior understanding. Since there is no assumptionless understanding because understanding is based on prior understandings and anticipations it was argued that Gadamer's approach is important for African philosophy, in that we understand in terms of what we already know, and we are surprised by what alters our expectations. The study concluded by asserting that African philosophy should view prejudice as a positive dimension and that they do contribute to understanding. The challenge for African philosophy would be not to eliminate prejudices but rather separate false and true prejudices. The truth of our prejudices is verified through their ability to produce a coherent and harmonious perspective of the whole that is offered to our understanding. If this is not the case, then the falsehood of our prejudices is manifested. This is relevant for African philosophy.

Within the horizon of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, art, history and language perform a significant role.

The application of art as a model of understanding in philosophical hermeneutics was demonstrated to be applicable in African philosophy. Gadamer questioned the epistemological approach to truth and aesthetic model of art as explicated in our study. He then offered a new way to look at art as an ontological disclosure of truth in the experience of art. So how this is applicable to African philosophy occupied our discussions.

The starting point was his view that the experience of art involves our being, hence it is ontological. This is to say that when we experience a piece of art, we become part and parcel of it. In experiencing art, truth is disclosed and accordingly, one encounters the self in the event. Art can lead us to rediscover ourselves. This work argued is of significance for African philosophy. In his quest Gadamer questioned the subject-object epistemological model to truth is countered by art as ontological disclosure of the item at hand. The epistemological and methodic models of understanding have no place in this ontological experience of truth and art and our being-in-the-world. This ontological aspect of art leading to self-understanding and self knowledge was argued should be central for African philosophy. Finally it was argued that our discussion of art has a special significance for African philosophy in relation to its place in human life that is; it gives a new significance for the life of human being as being-in-the-world; art discloses the way things are; discloses truth about the world and contextualises reality as it is; that the experience of art captures one more than scientific and philosophical arguments; In understanding the meaning of a piece of art, one goes beyond the notion of pleasure to the level of experiencing the ontological disclosure of truth as it comes to play.

The thesis drew attention that history and historicity in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is applicable to African philosophy. According to Gadamer, there can be no understanding without history and tradition, and we understand on the basis of our personal sense of history and tradition. It was argued that this is important for African philosophy. The work demonstrated that the relevance of understanding for African philosophy becomes pronounced when all understanding of historic facts is necessarily undertaken from a particular effective-historical position which determines our prejudices

about these facts and enables us to understand them in the first place. Hence an understanding 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. As a summary, the thesis argued that understanding in philosophical hermeneutics, when applied to African philosophy aims at understanding of cultural situatedness, the preservation of traditions, culture and languages, respect for other cultures, that tradition hands to us assumptions which help us understand the world and ourselves, demands a non-foundationalist conception of culture, radicalisation of the priority of tradition over reason and that tradition is historically given and unquestionably conditions people.

This work has shown that there is fundamental redefinition of understanding and language by Gadamer which makes the study to argue that understanding in philosophical hermeneutics is applicable to African philosophy. The argument has been that understanding as fabric, is a network of understanding out of which we understand when we understand. That is to say that language functions in the ordinary event of understanding and reaching understanding and this is of fundamental relevance for African philosophy. The thesis emphasized that language for Gadamer is radically different from scientific views of language which are abstract, in terms of the contextless assertions of logic, as vital for African philosophy. The key argument here was that the strict and regimented usage of language is not the only way of doing philosophy, a significant point for African philosophy. It demonstrated that language and understanding have a social significance; that the relevance has to do with the issue of solidarity and language; that language is the repository of culture, that language reveals the thoughts and thought forms of a culture and that language is continuously developing and

redirecting itself to the world orientations. This shared orientation, network of understanding, social world that makes social solidarity possible. This is contrary to the abstractness of scientific approach of language and understanding. Further the study argued that shared understanding in language make the background for social solidarity and finally, language and understanding have a social, moral, ethical aspects that are lost in the use of science, technology and even in isolating and abstract way that analytic philosophy generally deals with language and all this calls for African philosophy to go back to the living reality of language.

The thesis therefore conclude that understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not eclectic, but is based on some profound philosophical ideal running through his major philosophical works as demonstrated in this study. This is why I have felt both the need and duty to address this theme for when looked at, from a holistic conception of philosophy and its major roles, understanding in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is tenable and applicable to African philosophy.

5.1 Recommendations

From this work I would like to make the following recommendations.

First, an exposition of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which deals with understanding would contribute to the ongoing intellectual process of concretising the discipline of African philosophy. This is to say that the need to expose Gadamer's approach is vital for the development of African philosophy. And it is expected that such exercise would enhance and contribute to the content of African philosophy. Furthermore, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a contribution to knowledge in general. Therefore, further research is also necessarily a contribution to knowledge in general.

The second recommendation is that there is need for scholars to research on the two important but opposed perspectives of African philosophy that is, 'particularism' and 'universalism', from the hermeneutical perspective. This would ensure that philosophy is both practical and theoretical over against leaning in one dimension.

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