"Being and Becoming": A Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutic for Comparative Theology

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Abstract

The "new wave" of comparative theology, heavily influenced by Francis Clooney and others alike, is understanding, learning from, and engaging with other religious traditions comparatively and theologically to seek fresh theological insights that may apply to the comparative theologian. This thesis claims that the new wave of comparative theology can be strengthened by wider terms of reference by using a Gadamerian hermeneutical method that helps guide through the process of interreligious hermeneutics. This wider scope recognizes that truth is determined by the unveiling embodiment of an event or experience in which we are engaged and transformed.

This thesis summarizes philosophical hermeneutics closely associated with Hans-Georg Gadamer and leads to an application of his philosophy to comparative theology. Using various comparative moments this research explores interliturgies to demonstrate the applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. The findings from these comparative moments involve the necessity of prejudices and tradition of the interpreter, the process of dialogical participation, the engagement with reflective outcomes, and the fruitfulness of fusion of horizons. This leads to understanding comparative theology as an ontological mode of "being," transcending a largely "textual" field into an ontological sphere and opening the horizons for better understanding of the religious Other. The perpetual rhythm of being and becoming continually influence the prejudices of the comparative theologian who seeks understanding, therefore forming and informing their "becoming." In this way, and shown through this research, comparative theology becomes the process of "being and becoming."

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted personally, professionally, and theologically to Revd. Dr. David Cheetham, to whom I owe a great deal of thanks. It has been a pleasure being supervised by you and I will always be grateful for the mentorship you have provided. I appreciate the kind and diligent work of my editor Dr. Jeremy South.

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To my church, Trinity Lutheran Church of Fresno, which has played a significant role in my faith development and theological understandings that have situated me in a place where I can freely explore faith and religious traditions outside of my own.

Finally, to my family, who have missed my presence for several years because of my commitments to this thesis. Johnathan, you have been the most encouraging presence. Much of this work would not have been accomplished without your undying support. Connor, my son, your ongoing patience and support have pushed me through some of the most difficult pieces of this research. I dedicate this research to you in the hope that you will feel inspired one day to fulfill the calling you have received.

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PART I: FINDING GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICAL INFLUENCE

Part I of this thesis seeks to introduce and lay the foundation for comparative theology as an approach to interreligious engagement. This is achieved by setting the scene of comparative theology, by putting to question relevant approaches and methodologies currently informing the discipline. Specifically, this part critiques the simplistic description of "faith seeking understanding" and the insufficient method of "passing over and coming back" to define comparative theological endeavors. Insisting that the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer can inform a more complete approach for comparative theology, this part seeks to review Gadamer's main philosophical influencers of Platonic and Enlightenment thought as appropriately connected with his main philosophical concepts. Furthermore, a review of Gadamer's philosophical horizon as informed by contemporary philosophers like Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and others allows a deeper understanding of Gadamer's philosophical thought. It is claimed through this part of the research that Gadamer's philosophy is a successful partner in the pursuit for an interreligious hermeneutical approach that will be explored more in the next part of this research.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

> "It is the work of a philosopher who knows himself to be also a theologian and whose conviction is that one cannot philosophize in the present situation without being at the same time a theologian."[1]

> "Theology is faith seeking understanding..."[2]

Saint Augustine's (AD 354 – 430) quote above expresses the hermeneutical shift in theological studies by showing renewed purpose for theology and the interplay of faith in understanding. This quote was also reiterated by Anselm of Canterbury (AD 1033-1109) in *Proslogium,* meaning "A Discourse."[3] Sometimes this quote is mistakenly understood as if one were replacing faith with understanding, which is not the case. However, what is certain is this approach is meant for believers as it begins with faith. The question Augustine and Anselm leave us with is how faith seeks understanding in the theological enterprise. This is the same question I have had in my own interreligious experiences and what this thesis addresses.

1.1 Reasons for Study

As the world becomes more and more religiously pluralistic, encountering another religious tradition is becoming more common. As Christians have interacted more with other religious traditions over the last several decades, it has given rise to new theological questions

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Philosophy and Religion of Judaism," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 162.

[2] Frank M. Magill, *World Philosophy: Essay-Reviews of 225 Major Works*, (N.J., Englewood Cliffs: Salem Press, 1982), 571. Referencing Aurelius Augustinus from "The City of God."

[3] The title of *Proslogium* was previously titled *Faith Seeking Understanding.* See more from: Saint Anselm, *St. Anselm: Proslogium; Monologium*, trans. Sidney N. Dean (London: Opencourt Publishing Company, 1903), 1.

especially related to the area of study known as comparative theology. There will be times throughout this research where my reader will recognize that I am speaking from a particular faith horizon, and at other times I may alternate my language to include the many, to mean a general audience of varying faith or religious backgrounds. Part of this is due to the varying audiences I may have and another part is my own religious horizon that I bring fully into my research project. In no way am I working towards an all-inclusive approach to interreligious hermeneutics. I am merely pointing to what "seems to be." Therefore, as you will learn, I will approach these topics as a Christian, specifically, a Lutheran (ELCA) comparative theologian seeking fresh theological insights by exploring useful modes for interreligious hermeneutics. I am aware that some modes that I will employ may not be as useful to other scholars.

This research comes out of my own practical application of comparative theological methodology used in the comparative theological field. The balance between *theoria* and praxis in the contemporary field of comparative theology struck me as convoluted, conflicting, and indirect, which led to my frustration with comparative theological application in real life experiences. This frustration was due to an egregious issue within comparative theology, that "Comparative work is marked by a kind of improvisational indeterminacy."[4] The hermeneutical process of "passing over and coming back"[5] is used often to describe the experience of

[4] Martha L. Moore-Keish and Christian T. Collins Winn, "Introduction," in *Karl Barth and Comparative Theology*, ed. Martha L. Moore-Keish and Christian T. Collins Winn (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 2.

[5]"Passing over and coming back" is explored in chapters 4 and 5 of John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998); Amos Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian Reason and Theological Method in the Third Millennium* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 225. Paul Knitter attributes the venture of "passing over and coming" originally to John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972); Paul Knitter, "The Vocation of an Interreligious Theologian: My Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue," *Horizons* 31, no. 1 (2004): 136. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001134. Knitter claims, "Dunne's prediction turned out to be true for me: 'Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time (136)." See also Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, ix. Paul Hedges, more recently, has highlighted

interreligious encounters, but I have found it to be insufficient to describe the hermeneutical process that exists between the comparative theologian and interreligious encounter.

In other ways, by searching for a method to practically explore interreligious encounters, I was led toward hermeneutical processes to aid my interreligious ventures and help me reflectively understand the experiences I was encountering. In my dissatisfaction, I turned to leading contemporary comparative theologians, specifically Francis Clooney, Marianne Moyaert, Paul Hedges and others. It was in my exploration of their interreligious endeavors and research that I realized there is a serious lack of attention to hermeneutical frameworks and methodologies that are increasingly needed as the field gains more popularity as an academic enterprise.[6] In the same breath, comparative theology has received serious criticism from scholars in the field of religions due to their lack of methodologies and focus on specificity.[7]

1.2 Models of Interreligious Engagement

First, I will explore the various popular models of interreligious engagement commonly understood within the field of theology of religions. Introduced by Alan Race (1983)[8] and

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the use of the hermeneutical verbiage of "passing over and coming back," in Buddhism. Paul Hedges, "Lived Religion as Hermeneutical Comparative Theology: Employing Shiva Natarja (Lord of the Dance) Imagery in Christian Art and Music," *Cross Currents* 71, no. 2 (June 2021): 239.

[6] Thomas Cattoi, "Rainbow Body and Resurrection: Spiritual Attainment, The Dissolution Of the Material Body, and the Case of Khenpo a Chö by Francis V. Tiso," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2020): 467. https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2020.0026. Kristin Bloomer, "Comparative Theology, Comparative Religion and Hindu-Christian Studies: Ethnography as Method," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 21, no. 10 (2008): 1.

[7] Reinhold Bernhardt, "Comparative Theology: Between Theology and Religious Studies," *Religions* 3 (2012): 965-967. See Bernhardt's historical description and development of the disciplines of religious studies and comparative theology. In describing comparative theology Bernhardt states, "The problem of such a method of relating the 'other' to the 'own' lies in transferring tradition-specific concepts like 'ontology' or 'salvation' to the other tradition to which they do not comply. The result may be better understanding of the one's tradition but at the cost of possibly misunderstanding the other (966-967)." It is the hope of Bernhardt that comparative theology may be a bridge between comparative religious studies and theology.

[8] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1983).

followed by Gavin D'Costa,[9] the three major paradigms within the theology of religions typology include exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. These were shared as a Christian response to theology of religions. There are many objections to the paradigms that contribute to their ineffectiveness. Although some comparative theologians outright object to the threefold typology, there are others who affirm or side with it.[10]

James Fredericks attempts to place comparative theology within the various categories of theology of religions in his work, *Faith Among Faiths*.[11] The three major categories that Fredericks emphasizes are: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. *Exclusivism* is a belief that one's own religion is the only true path and all other religions are insufficient and it is "the view that another religion is lacking any kind of saving or redeeming force..."[12] As Schmidt-Leukel articulates, "[e]very truth-claim is in a sense exclusive."[13] But McCutcheon argues some have failed to see that one cannot be both exclusivist and pluralist because both are deeply rooted and committed to religious values.[14]

Inclusivism is the idea that one's own religion is the reality which allows the inclusion of other religions and "recognizes certain elements of truth or rays of the light in another

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[9] Gavin D'Costa, "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 211-224.

[10] Bernhardt emphasizes the different responses from comparative theologians who are rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition like Clooney, Fredericks, and von Stosch, versus how Ward responds as an Anglican. See, Bernhardt, "Comparative Theology: Between Theology and Religious Studies," (2012).

[11] James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

[12] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (London, U.K.: SCM Press, 2009), 41.

[13] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," in Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 21-22.

[14] Russell T. McCutcheon, "The Category of 'Religion' and the Politics of Tolerance," in *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Arthur L. Greil and David Bromley (Amsterdam: JAI, 2003), 155. See also Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003), 192.

religion."[15] This does not suggest those who hold to the inclusivism paradigm agree with the theological foundations and affirmations of the religious Other. A strong point of tension is what Diana L Eck highlights in *Encountering God*, "[f]or those on the receiving end of the inclusivist's zeal, it often feels like a form of theological imperialism to have their beliefs or prayers swept into the interpretive schema of another tradition."[16] She goes further to suggest that the dangers of inclusivism are being unaware of the existing power dynamics and that these are not being confronted by interreligious dialogue.

Pluralism is the understanding that all religions express a common reality. "Pluralism takes a further step and acknowledges that another religious tradition, despite differing from one's own, is equally valid, equally redemptive or liberative."[17] Within pluralism, there is a wide sense and use of the term "tolerance" as a proponent for this paradigm. The term "tolerance" has gained a negative impression with some theologians. In Eck's *Encountering God*, for instance, understands tolerance to be the acceptance of criticized or disapproved theological understandings and is from a position of privilege.[18] Pluralism demands more than "mere tolerance of difference: one must *participate* within (e.g., encounter, engage, dialogue) a plurality to count as a pluralist, and the scholar of religion is in the forefront of those who have skills to bring about such participation and understanding."[19] According to Schmidt-Leukel, the category of pluralism within the typology does not automatically suggest relativism. He suggests

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[15] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 41.
[16] Eck, *Encountering God*, 184.
[17] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 41.
[18] Eck, *Encountering God*, 18.
[19] McCutcheon, "The Category of 'Religion' and the Politics of Tolerance," 154-155.

that "the pluralist option is precisely understood as a value judgement on other religions – a

judgment that acknowledges theologically their equal value as ways of salvation."[20]

Schmidt-Leukel adds an additional category claimed as, "atheism/naturalism: Salvific

knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by none of the religions (because a transcendent

reality does not exist)."[21] This is an important categorical addition for those who do not see

themselves fitting in with the other categories in the threefold typology.

There are various critiques of the threefold typology in theology of religions. Even an

original proponent of the paradigms, Gavin D'Costa, suggests that they are not feasible and

hinder the path to interreligious dialogue and engagement.[22] Schmidt-Leukel highlights eight

objections. They range from being too narrow, to being too broad, and they all are "subtypes" of

exclusivism because they all flow from an exclusive response. The categories are also criticized

for being too abstract as they do not involve degrees of complexity, difference and diversity of

religious systems and theologies. To Schmidt-Leukel, the typology is offensive and even

pointless, because we lack the ability to choose from the varying possibilities.[23]According to

Hedges, the paradigms are more like guiding principles for descriptive purposes than bounded

categories.[24] He highlights the danger of the paradigms as the determinate understandings of

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[20] Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," 22.

[21] Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," 19.

[22] D'Costa explains that the typological framework shares political alongside religious motivations and there is a need for a fresh typological framework that provides a more thorough approach for answering new interreligious questions. Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter, and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 95. See also Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," 23-27.

[23] Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," 17.

[24] Hedges contends nuances within the framework of the typology and utilizes the terms in the plural form (exclusivisms-inclusivisms-pluralisms-particularities). The perspective Hedges supports is connecting the typological framework to "radical discontinuity, radical fulfilment, radical openness, and

one's theology or the encountered religious tradition.[25]

Additionally, Fredericks argues these former categories are inadequate for two main reasons. First, these categories lack respect for the tradition doing the comparative work. For example, theologians do not seek to enhance and/or hold true to their home tradition. Second, these categories can fail to live "creatively" with their neighboring faiths. Nicholson adds that the threefold approach, "overlooks the fact that many comparative theologians ally themselves with an inclusivist theology."[26] In addition, the inclusivist model that comparative theologians associate with differs greatly from the category defined by theology of religions. This is defined by Knitter as the "acceptance model" or "particularism model" where many comparative theologians honor the particularities within their own traditions while engaging with other traditions. Although these categories are helpful, they are merely categories and it is impossible to fit rich, diverse, and timeless religious traditions and individuals into these categories.[27] A few concerns involving the particularist model are the universal truth claims: "... Particularists draw a daunting conclusion: all universal truth claims, or all attempts to announce what is true always and everywhere for everyone, are inherently, incorrigibly, unavoidably dangerous."[28] There is

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radical difference." Paul Hedges, "Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions," in *Controversies in Contextual Theology Series* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 6. Hedges uses the plural form of these typological framework to convey the diversity that exists within their distinctive categories (Hedges, *Christian Approaches*, 11). "It is intended that this will point to the open and fluid nature of the typology as a framework which can be used to explore a range of ideas, rather than as a straitjacket containing fixed or determined essences." Paul Hedges, "A Reflection on Typologies: Negotiating a Fast-moving Discussion," in *SCM Core Text Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Paul Hedges and Alan Race (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., 2008), 27, E-book.

[25] Paul Hedges, "Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue," 20.

[26] Hugh Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 3 (2009): 622.

[27] As Paul Hedges argues, Alan Race "admitted ... people didn't neatly fit the categories." Hedges, "Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue," 18.

[28] Paul Knitter, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue,* ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 137.

also the critique that there becomes no common ground for dialogue, for "it is impossible to grasp and assess one in the light of the other."[29] And finally, there is the critique of authentic commitment, for Knitter asserts, "[u]nless a religious believer wants to simply abandon her own religion and culture and migrate to another, she is challenged to be fully committed to the religion in which she stands."[30] The critiques highlighted here are valid concerns shared by Knitter and others and yet,

> It is true that the serious study of another religion may lead to a significant widening and transformation of one's own religious horizon and hence may introduce a new terminology within one's own religion. But it seems to be an inevitable hermeneutical law that in every process of understanding something new has to start from one's own conceptual framework.[31]

Comparative theology and associated theologians can engage with various religious traditions without the sense of being bounded by the threefold categories within theology of religions. For example, instead of entering the great debate within the classical typology of theology of religions, Catherine Cornille offers several virtue ethics for entering into interreligious dialogue. These include humility, commitment, trust in interconnectedness, empathy, and hospitality.[32] Although these ethical benefits for pursuing comparative theology are captured through the model of particularisms portrayed through comparative theology, this approach does not come without its critiques.

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[29] Knitter, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," 137.
[30] Knitter, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," 137.
[31] Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," 22.
[32] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2008).

The main debate concerns "...which one of these models succeeds in formulating the most appropriate theological answer to the challenge of religious pluralism."[33] Some comparative theologians assert that comparative theology only fits within the inclusivism and pluralism categories, while others hold that comparative theology does not fit within the categorical typology.[34] Although some theologians argue about where comparative theology fits within the threefold typology of theology of religions, the benefits of the categories can be seen as helpful. For example, Cornille supports that the typology allows for opportunity to experience some form of interreligious understanding within comparative theology and may still be useful.[35] Eck also resonates with the same sentiment as she asserts, "...we speak of exclusivists, inclusivists, and pluralists as if they were entirely different groups..."[36] As Marius van Hoogstraten demonstrates, "the dominant approaches in theology of religions are insufficiently capable of embracing the difficulty of interreligious encounters, and… theory needs to turn to philosophical hermeneutics in order to find an approach that appreciates and embraces this unsettling as a means to open up the conversation and let it flourish."[37] This illustrates that one of the major challenges (especially with Christian interreligious engagement) theology has

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[33] Marianne Moyaert, "Comparative Theology in Search of a Hermeneutical Framework," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People,* ed. David Cheetham, Ulrich Winkler, Oddbjorn Leivik and Judith Gruber (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2011), 162.

[34] Paul Hedges and Paul Knitter have both advanced the typology to better fit comparative theology within its framework. See Paul Hedges, "Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue;" Paul Hedges, "The Theology of Religions Typology Defended: what it can and cannot do," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and New Frontiers,* ed. E. Harris, P. Hedges and S. Hettiarachchi (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2016), 76-92; Paul Knitter, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," 133-48.

[35] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 44, 70.

[36] Eck, *Encountering God*, 170.

[37] Marius van Hoogstraten, "Restoring Difficulty: How Theology of Religions Seeks to Avoid the Fragility of Encounter and Why We Need to Reclaim It," *Anabaptist Witness* 2, no. 1 (2015): 11-30.

encountered in postmodernity is being exclusive in a pluralistic world. However, comparative theology may offer an alternative answer to these challenges.

Nicholson argues that comparative theology offers two features that counter the approach of theology of religions. First, comparative theology offers an empirical method with serious engagement within the other religious tradition. Second, comparative theology seeks to avoid generalizations and focuses on particularities of religious traditions. These features offer a fresh approach to interreligious theological engagement. [38]

Comparative theology also distinguishes itself from other academic theological ways of respecting and understanding religious diversity. Francis Clooney's ethos for interreligious hermeneutics is grounded in "faith seeking understanding… for the sake of fresh theological insights."[39] Therefore, Clooney's method understands interreligious interpretation as similar to the process of "passing over and coming back."[40] Therefore, one studies another religious text, theology, or practices and then comes back to their home religious tradition. This then, can lead to enriching the home tradition and deep interreligious studies and engagement. However, in recent years, comparative theology has seen a shift in application and this application is primarily concerned with methodological approaches.

1.3 Comparative Theology as a Model for Interreligious Engagement

Before the onset of comparative theology, theologians understood and made meaning of other religious traditions in several ways. The 19th and 20th century comparative theological research – now noted as the "old wave" of comparative theology – furthered academic

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[38] Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," 619.

[39] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10-11.

[40] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, 10-11.

understanding primarily by concentrating on the dichotomy of similarities and differences between religious doctrine and practices.[41] This discipline systematically contrasted religious traditions to gain knowledge of other religious traditions. Since then, a new wave of comparative theology has arrived.

This new wave of comparative theology is now a process of understanding, learning from, and engaging with other religious traditions both comparatively and theologically for the purpose of seeking fresh theological insights that may be applicable for the comparative theologian. As Clooney observes,

> Comparative theology – comparative and theological beginning to end – marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered traditions as well as the home tradition.[42]

Nicholson refers to Clooney's description of comparative theology as "new comparative theology" since Clooney argues this learning process is for the sake of the fresh theological insights which occur when engaging in and with other faith traditions.[43] The new wave of comparative theology is a theological practice that builds on a comparative study of religion with

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[41] Reid B. Locklin, Hugh Nicholson, and Paul Hedges refer to Old Comparative Theology (OCT). See Paul Hedges, "The Old and New Comparative Theologies: Discourses on Religion, the Theology of Religions, Orientalism and the Boundaries of Traditions," *Religions* 3 (2012): 1120-1137; Reid B. Locklin and Hugh Nicholson, "The Return of Comparative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (June 2010): 477-514.

[42] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, 10.

[43] Hugh Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," 619-624.

the purpose of reflecting back upon one's own religious tradition from the insights gathered from another religious tradition.[44]

David Tracy explains comparative theology relates to the comparison of different doctrinal and religious traditions.[45] This process is part of the general category of religious studies in the academic field. In this way, comparative theology is non-theological and non-confessional, relating only to the systems of religious traditions. This form of comparative theology has been heavily influenced by Cartesian enlightenment ideals.[46]

The new wave of comparative theology offers a remedy to the challenges, explained above, that are posed by the typological frameworks as a genuine way to appreciate and understand other religious traditions without leaving behind one's own beliefs.[47] Fredericks affirms that living "creatively" with our religious neighbors is more than being tolerant and peaceful. Living "creatively" with our religious neighbors is to live life together on a deeper, personal, and committed level that strives to care, respect, and grow together through each other's uniqueness.[48] Therefore, comparative theology seeks to live "creatively" with our religious neighbors.

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[44] Francis X. Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 6.

[45] David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Mircea Eliade (Pennsylvania: MacMillan, 1987), 9133.

[46] Hugh Nicholson suggests two strategies implemented by the Enlightenment specifically applicable to comparative theology; liberal universalism and theological communitarianism. *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Additionally, James Fredericks argues, "The early Liberals were driven by twin theological requirements. First, they felt the need to defend Christianity from the rationalism of the Enlightenment and its 'cultured despisers.' Second, the early Liberals needed to come to terms with the new awareness of religious pluralism associated either with historicism or the increased accessibility of Asian (especially South Asian) religious texts (69)." In "A Universal Religious Experience? Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions," *Horizons* 22, no. 1 (1995): 67-87.

[47] Richard Hanson, *The Hermeneutics of Comparative Theology* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2006), 2. Comparative theology offers a creative approach for interreligious engagement that moves beyond the theology of religions typology.

[48] Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 139.

There are a few distinguishable characteristics of today's new wave of comparative theology that categorize this discipline differently than its predecessor. First, the new wave of comparative theology is gained through dialectical efforts. Comparison begins with critical and careful research of another religious tradition. For example, this can be accomplished by means of reading religious texts, personal dialogue with practitioners of the religious tradition, and practicing religious rituals. Then, the dialogue becomes a conversation within the home religious tradition where the objects of discussion, (e.g., texts, art, aesthetics, rituals) are reinterpreted through the scholar's study of the other religious tradition.

Through the work of comparison, the results of the study may be positive or negative when correlating and contrasting the findings with the home religious tradition. Some findings may be simply recognition of similarities or differences, which can be valuable to research but also limiting. For example, Fredericks emphasizes the theological interests of indifferences suggesting that they are important in order to resist the need for religious relativism and to reduce religions to being uniform and homogenous.[49] Focusing just on similarities and differences can also lead to indifference because of its uncritical nature which begs the question, "If all religions are ultimately expressing the same ultimate, ineffable truth, why need theology interest itself in the complexities of other religions?"[50]

Next, the new wave of comparative theology highlights interreligious hermeneutics as an intrinsic, fully formed aspect of Christian theology and not simply a supplementary reflection. Interreligious hermeneutics interprets theology through other religious traditions. The most

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[49] Hugh Nicholson adds to this point in connection to comparative theology, especially in Christian-based comparative efforts. "...it is only when a group seeks to repress the differences upon which its sense of identity essentially depends that it is tempted to construe the other as somehow deviant and therefore unworthy of respect." In *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry*, 80.

[50] James L. Fredericks, "A Universal Religious Experience?" 76

common form of interreligious hermeneutics is achieved through dialogue. Through dialogue, one may encounter the religious Other and theologically process their own religious tradition. This is why the new wave of comparative theology must be incorporated into the practices of contemporary Christian theology because it is a theological reflexive process.

Finally, the hermeneutical issues raised by comparison are not restricted solely to soteriological questions that typically dominate interreligious conversations like former comparative projects focused on salvation. The new wave of comparative theology incorporates every aspect of the home tradition's dogma and practice into interpretation of other religions and theologies. "Doing theology comparatively, therefore, is theology in the broadest sense of the word: the intellectually rigorous interpretation of the classic texts, doctrines and practices of one tradition in its entirety."[51] Therefore, the new wave of comparative theology relies on specific comparisons made between religions, instead of the vast sweeping general theological claims. Thus, comparative theologians usually have a sophisticated understanding of both the home and other religious traditions.

At its core, the new wave of comparative theology encourages commitment to the theologians' home tradition while being vulnerable to the truth of another religious tradition. This vulnerability allows for a space to be created for comparative theology to occur. Therefore, loss of commitment to the home tradition does not allow comparative work to be theological.[52]

But why comparative theology? Comparative theology is used for several different reasons. Scholars engage in comparative theology for peace building, mutual understanding, or even social unity. Although comparative theology allows for these to take place, the primary aim for many scholars is for one's own religious tradition to be enriched through interreligious

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[51] Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology,* xii.
[52] Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology,* xi.

dialogue with the religious Other.[53] For example, Bagus Laksana, a Catholic comparative

theologian in Indonesia, studies Muslim-Christian religious traditions through comparative

theology. He states that comparative theology is a theological learning process achieved through

a close study of the religious Other. This leads to "a real religious pilgrimage to God and His

saints where on various levels I learn more about God, my own self, and my religious tradition,

from the richness of the Muslim tradition as it is found in the pilgrimage practice in Java."[54]

Comparative theology is a constructive project in which theologians interpret the

meaning and truths of one tradition by correlating with the classics of another religious tradition.

Generally, comparative theology is a confessional enterprise.[55] The goal of comparative theology

is not just learning and meaning making, it is primarily truth-seeking. Comparative theologians

understand their field of research to be more than a form of religious studies; it is theology.

Specifically, within the Christian tradition, "Comparative theology is the attempt to understand

the meaning of the Christian faith by exploring it in the light of the teachings of other religious

traditions."[56] Comparative theologians seek to learn about another religious tradition not just so

they can write about it, but also so it may be something that the researcher can integrate into their

own lives and traditions. At its basic level, comparative theology is learning to include a set of

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[53] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 4 (2016): 1-27.

[54] Bagus Laksana, "Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations through Java," *Ashgate Studies in Pilgrimage* (Farnham, U.K.: Routledge, 2014), 191.

[55] Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology*, xi. In terms of "confessional" verses "comparative," see Keith Ward's distinction between the two types of theology. "One is confessional theology; the exploration of a given revelation by one who wholly accepts the revelation and lives by it. The other may be termed 'comparative theology' – theology not as a form of apologetics for a particular faith but as an intellectual discipline which enquires into ideas of the ultimate value and goal of human life, as they have been perceived and expressed in a variety of religious traditions... Comparative theology differs from what is often called 'religious studies,' in being primarily concerned with the meaning, truth, and rationality of religious beliefs, rather than with the psychological, sociological, or historical elements of religious life and institutions." Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 40.

[56] Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 139.

new texts and meanings that have been thought to be outside of their theological horizon and integrate them into their tradition.[57]

1.4 Some Critiques of Comparative Theology

It is important to highlight that comparative theology does not come without potential weaknesses. Within some of its essential strengths there are hidden challenges. The specific challenges we will explore involve the hyper focus on text, specificity and particulars, and the lack of a clear methodology.

In an interview at KU Leuven, Clooney states, "[s]ome worry about the textual focus that theology has typically had in the past and instead try to focus on non-textual elements..."[58] Several other comparative theologians have also pointed to this same internal critique of comparative theology. However, on the other hand, many are supportive of the textual basis of comparative theology. For Catherine Cornille, there are strong reasons for a textual focus in the discipline because written texts "offer a continuous basis for reflection."[59] Connected, written texts also offer an accessibility to theologians that cannot be surpassed lightly.[60] These two reasons stand as strong reasons not to easily throw away textual analysis. Cornille also notes that "[t]here is also an intimate and complex connection between sacred texts and religious

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[57] Francis X. Clooney, "When Religions Become Context," *Theology Today* 37 (1990): 37.

[58] Francis X. Clooney, "Interview: Comparative Theology through the Eyes of Francis X. Clooney, SJ," interview by Theology Research News, June 19, 2019, https://theo.kuleuven.be/apps/press/theologyresearchnews/2019/06/19/interview-comparative-theology-through-the-eyes-of-francis-x-clooney-sj/.

[59] Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney, & KV Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 28, E-book.

[60] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 94.

practices..."[61] Even with the strengths that textual focus has for the discipline of comparative theology, there are also weaknesses.

Moyaert shares her concerns for the future of comparative theology especially as she believes it relies too heavily on textual engagement. She claims, "I am concerned that this textual focus may limit our understanding of religion..."[62] Moyaert has given weight to move beyond texts, especially into the realm of ritual. She achieves this by utilizing a philosophical hermeneutical approach inspired by Paul Ricœur.[63] This approach leads her to expand her horizon to include various modes of religious encounters and she specifically aligns herself with religious rituals as a mode of engagement. In the same manner, John Maraldo calls attention to the nonlinguistic realities present in religious practices as they "do not depend on the employment of language, [and] are particularly exemplary of the alternative sense of understanding."[64] This sense of understanding is based on a wider notion of understanding with a philosophical foundation, a foundation that, according to Maraldo, is seen through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[65]

Along with the hyperfocus on textually-based comparative engagement, others have noted that comparative theology has too narrowly pivoted itself by its way of particularism and therefore is not in a place to address (or avoid) larger theo-ontological questions. Perry Schmidt-

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[61] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 94.

[62] Marianne Moyaert, "Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (2018): 1, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000360.

[63] Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2014).

[64] John Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Form of Understanding" in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Cornille and C. Conway (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 113.

[65] More recently John Maraldo has reattributed and critiqued the relationship between Gadamer's philosophy of dialogue and interreligious hermeneutics. John Maraldo, "The Limits of Interreligious Hermeneutics and the Need for Alternative Understanding," in *Hans-Herbert Kögler's Critical Hermeneutics*, Kurt C. Mertel and L'ubomir Dunaj, eds. (London, U.K.: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 166-175.

Leukel argues that comparative theology often focuses too closely on the specifics and particulars of the religious Other, and therefore fails to grasp the religious Other's theology as a whole. In response to this, comparative theologians like Francis Clooney and James Fredericks assert they are more concerned with close conversation and the recognition of our inability and finitude to fully grasp the general, overarching theological understandings of the religious Other.[66]

I argue that contemporary comparative theology often heavily focuses on textual hermeneutics over hermeneutics of orthopraxis, ritual, and interreligious dialogical partners, as well as other modes used in place of texts. This ostracizes a majority of theologians who may not have the capability to interpret other religious texts due to a linguistic barrier, and texts are often privileged over other ways religions are expressed (practices, rituals, symbols, prayers) resulting in the neglect of non-textual theologies and religious traditions. And as John Maraldo claims, moving beyond text "not only increase the amount of content understood, it can change the very way one understands."[67] Therefore, there is a future hope for moving beyond texts in comparative theology.

It also can be difficult for the reader to correlate their home religious tradition with the hermeneutical findings of their comparative study due to their personal experience of dialogue. Therefore, it begs the question, "How does one express and apply their interreligious theological findings to their whole religious community?"

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[66] David Cheetham, "Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies," in *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM, 2011), 57.

[67] Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Understanding," 114.

According to Moyaert, comparative theology lacks a clear methodological framework due to being "a deeply ambiguous discipline."[68] Paul Hedges supports this as well stating, "a number of authors have voiced a concern that interreligious encounters, including comparative theology, may lack a really robust methodology grounded in deep philosophical concerns, awareness, and concepts."[69] Hedges and Moyaert share a common interest while addressing the critics of methodology. The responses of both of them to this critique are found in their methodological approach to comparative theology through the use of philosophical hermeneutics.[70] These are relevant concerns regarding comparative theology and key weaknesses I will seek to answer through this research as well as refining a methodological approach informed by philosophical hermeneutics.

1.5 The Methodology

Finally, what this research illustrates is the ontological nature of comparative theology and how this moves the comparative theological agenda above and beyond specificity and particularism, all thanks to the foundational work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and contemporary comparative theologians. I hope that this research would be encouraging to contemporary

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[68] Marianne Moyaert, "Comparative Theology in Search of a Hermeneutical Framework," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People,* ed. David Cheetham, Ulrich Winkler, Oddbjorn Leivik and Judith Gruber (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 161. See also Hugh Nicholson, "Comparative Theology after Liberalism," *Modern Theology* 23 (2007): 229.

[69] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective." *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Issue 1 [1-89]. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 23.

[70] See Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 6. Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 7 (2016), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007; Paul Hedges, "Deconstructing Religion: Some Thoughts on Where We Go From Here — A Hermeneutical Proposal," *Exchange* 47, no. 1 (2018): 5-24, https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341465; Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (2012); Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters*.

comparative theologians to move the research agenda beyond the mere theoretical pressures of modernism by embracing and embodying interreligious ontological ambiguity and leaning into interreligious hermeneutics as explained with the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle that is fully developed in this research.

The restraints of contemporary trends in scholarship have weighed heavily on comparative theology. This can be specifically seen in the research agendas of contemporary comparative theologians. One significant indicator of modernity's authority over comparative theology is the heavy use of and importance of text. I share Moyaert's sentiment that comparative theology should not do away with its focus on text, and that we can move beyond text to include other religious modes such as interreligious symbolism and liturgy. Therefore, the methodological approach I will employ will rely on the liturgical nature embedded in theology as shown through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle.

1.6 The Method of "passing over and coming back"

Clooney's approach, more recently enacted within the last 30 or so years, is described as a method of "passing over and coming back." Clooney attributes this approach to being informed by John S. Dunne. In, *The Way of All the Earth*, Dunne describes the phenomenon as:

> ...passing over from one culture to another, from one way of life to another, from one religion to another. Passing over is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion. It is followed by an equal and opposite process we might call 'coming back,' coming back with new insight to one's own culture, one's own way of life, one's own religion.[71]

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[71] John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), ix. Francis X. Clooney explains: "As comparative, its distinguishing feature is that here faith, though grounded in a particular tradition and enacted for the sake of a particular community, seeks understanding across religious borders, learning with respect and humility

Within this methodological approach, the interpreter crosses over, figuratively through research and deep intentional study or physically through immersion exposure of otherness for the purpose of deep theological reflection. In this respect Clooney suggests, "The full meaning of a theology, then, is no longer contained entirely within its own religious tradition. Significance is established across the boundaries of traditions, and conclusions are decided only in the back-and-forth dynamic of a theological conversation across religious boundaries."[72]

Comparative theologians assert that Clooney "does not attend as much to theory as to practice" and that Clooney's method can be shown through his comparative work.[73] However, what Clooney misses by not elaborating on his methodological approach is the potential for the application of comparative theology, which also leads to the speculation of Clooney's approach.

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from one or more other religious traditions and theological traditions. Its dynamic can usefully be imagined in terms of John S. Dunne, CSC's metaphor of *crossing over and returning home*, as the comparative theologian ventures to learn deeply in another tradition, and brings that learning back, to include it in some way in a refashioning of her or his home identity." Francis X. Clooney, "Introduction to Comparative Theology in Australia and Asia," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 3, no. 2 (2020): 129-138, https://doi.org/10.1163/25424246-00302002. A note to my reader, comparative theologians use "crossing" and "passing" synonymously to indicate an active movement between studying one's own religious tradition and one or more other traditions. See how Clooney uses the term "passing" to reference Dunne in "The Vocation of the Interreligious Theologian: Paul Knitter's Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 58 (2003), 103.

[72] Francis X. Clooney. *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford Publishing, 2001), 14. Clooney resonates with an intellectual and reasonable approach that is embedded within the study of religious texts and their languages. Clooney suggests, "If faith positions are accessible to reason, even interreligious arguments will inevitably draw theologians into a broadened religious conversation (Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God,* 60.)" And although it is the desire that interreligious arguments may draw theologians into dialogue, it is not necessarily the case that is due to access to reason. This understanding by Clooney, deemphasizes the prejudice and tradition of the interpreter that are part of the interreligious encounter that cannot be ignored or passed over.

[73] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 23. This critique is less based in a dissatisfaction of Clooney's methodological approach and more due to the desire and yearning for more. For example, Hugh Nicholson asserts that this approach "remains a vaguely understood and marginal discipline within theological studies." Nicholson, "A Correlational Model of Comparative Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 191.

Hedges argues that Clooney's "theological method does not necessarily explicate the reasons as to how and why such new learning should be seen as possible, certainly not in philosophical terms."[74] The implications for this are relevant because they contribute to the scholarship and shared interests of the field as a whole, while also impacting the particular comparative moments that occur on an individual level. What Clooney does elaborate on regarding method is insufficient because it does not address the particular needs within methodology that comparative theology should be attune to due to its nature. This insufficiency is a missed opportunity for other scholars and the future of the discipline.

Clooney paints broad strokes when describing his methodology, stating: "[w]e cross over as we are, but do not return unchanged…"[75] Before Clooney coined his famous methodology, John S. Dunne understood it as, "'[p]assing over and coming back'… is the spiritual adventure of our time."[76] Dunne describes his own development of a method by claiming,

> I have developed… a method of 'passing over,' as I call it, to other lives. It is a method of entering sympathetically into another person's autobiographical standpoint, seeing the whole world anew as that person sees it, and then coming back enriched to one's own standpoint and to a new understanding of one's own life.[77]

Clooney's methodology has specifically been criticized as being, "identical to Max Müller's Old Comparative Theology, which is Eurocentric, hegemonic, and homogenous in

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[74] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," 6.

[75] Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theological Learning as an Ordinary Part of Theological Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 16, no. 4 (2013): 326.

[76] Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, ix.

[77] Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, 53. See also John S. Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (London: Sheldon Press, 1975).

nature, as well as guilty of relativizing and universalizing tendencies..."[78] In a related but different context, *Theologies Without Walls*, an enterprise that seeks to understand the ultimate religious reality through "a theology without confessional restrictions," understands the metaphor of "passing over" and "returning home" but does not insist that "returning home" is necessary.[79]

Hedges crafts a strong argument, stating: "What does crossing mean when no 'natural' border is perceived to exist? To which community does this relate?"[80] Hedges makes this argument because of the complexities in religious and cultural identities, and suggests utilizing the Mahāyāna Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, to develop a decolonized theory for interreligious understanding that is not reliant on Aristotle, and is outside of a dialectic hermeneutic, without undermining a Gadamerian hermeneutic.[81]

As shown here, the methodological metaphor of "passing/crossing over" and "coming back" is not shared amongst comparative theologians, partly because the metaphor is merely one way of understanding the deep learning that occurs within the interreligious context. Other metaphors may help us understand what takes place when we dive deep into interreligious hermeneutics. Although the metaphor of "passing over and coming back" is at an initial glance what occurs within the interreligious context, other metaphors may be more helpful in explaining how understanding occurs. The "passing over and coming back" metaphor is directional; it highlights movement but does not give description and depth to the learning that transpires. It

[78] Pravina Rodrigues, "A Critique of Comparative Theology," *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 3, no. 1 (2017): 68-90.

[79] Jerry L. Martin, "Introduction," in *Theology Without Walls: The Transreligious Imperative*, ed. Jerry L. Martin (London: Routledge, 2020), 1.

[80] Paul Hedges, "Theorising a Decolonising Asian Hermeneutic for Comparative Theology," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 3 (2020): 160.

[81] Paul Hedges, "Theorising a Decolonising Asian Hermeneutic for Comparative Theology," 164-165.

illustrates a dry course of action that the comparative theologian is in charge of. However, it does not speak to that which occurs to the comparative theologian and their tradition through the hermeneutical process within comparative theology, nor does it effectively express the multitude and pluralities that exist in the comparative moments of theologians. It is this dissatisfaction that led to my appropriation of the term, "being and becoming."[82]

The comparative work of Clooney has left comparative theologians yearning for more. Nicholson affirms Clooney's approach to comparative theology and suggests, "it remains a worthwhile task to formulate a general conceptual model of comparative theology...[which] effectively challenges the presumption that comparative theology is a marginal, optional, and perhaps, for some, even suspect theological endeavor."[83] In response to this need for more on how comparative theological methods are approached, comparative theologians search for methods and approaches to understanding. These approaches vary from the appropriation of methodologies from other disciplines like biblical theology, anthropology, and systematic theology. These approaches have left a gaping hole in their approach to comparative theology – especially relating to hermeneutical and ontological appreciations. My own way of understanding, "being and becoming" is closely aligned with dialogue, symbol, festival, and liturgy because of the rhythmic and dialogical nature, and approaches the methodology of fusion that occurs in the event of understanding. Additionally, in defense of comparative theology, Gadamer's work on prejudice significantly applies to the inclusion of one's own religious

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[82] Inspired by how Carl Olson uses the term with myth in *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: Seeking the Centre* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 30. I lean more into using this phrasing to describe a process that occurs in which meaning is developed through an event-like experience.

[83] Nicholson, *A Correlational Model of Comparative Theology*, 193. Nicholson uses metaphor theories informed by Paul Ricœur to aid the methodological approach of comparative theology is driven by the recalling of imagination that is invited by metaphorical discourse (205).

tradition as the starting point for understanding religious otherness.[84] The critique of

particularism in comparative theology by theology of religions is unsatisfied with the support of

Gadamer's work.

1.7 Why Philosophical Hermeneutics and Why Gadamer?

       The search for methodological help in comparative theology from philosophical

hermeneutics is not a new venture. David Tracy, nearly 45 years ago, shared about the vitality of

philosophical hermeneutics and its use through the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and

Paul Ricœur.[85] Since then, several studies have included philosophical help in interreligious

hermeneutics in prominent studies for the intervention of philosophy in comparative theology.[86]

In Moyaert's hermeneutical work, she elaborates on the hermeneutical circle through Ricœur's

theory of interpretation that "focuses on the moving *back and forth* between one's own familiar

perspective and the strange."[87]

       Additionally, philosophical hermeneutics allows for a broader use of interpretation for

varying traditions, interpreters, and interpretive modes. Therefore, philosophical hermeneutics

allows us to interpret a broader range, allowing the net to be cast wider. This is why

philosophical hermeneutics assists in interpreting phenomena. As Tracy notes, "To interpret

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[84] See specifically Muhammad Akram, "Beyond Dichotomies: The Import of Gadamer's Hermeneutics for the Debate of Relationship between Theology and Religious Studies," *Islamic Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 137-153.

[85] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (2010): 1-43; David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 78-81.

[86] Marianne Moyaert "Ricœur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (2017): 173. https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491. See also Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2014).

[87] Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," 41-42.

religion one must also, consciously or unconsciously, interpret these other phenomena in order to understand the difference which is specifically religious."[88]

In *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Approach*, Hedges highlights specific markers of philosophical hermeneutics that have proven fruitful for interreligious hermeneutics. These entail the relationship bridging the gap between understanding and interpretation, the fruitfulness of prejudice, the linguistic nature of human understanding, translation as a mode of being, and Gadamer's great metaphor of "fusion of horizons" as "opening of horizons."[89] Hedges affirms that "a hermeneutical or philosophical view demonstrates that communication across linguistic and cultural worlds is a possibility."[90] Within comparative theology, he also suggests that "theorising has arguably been quite thin."[91]

Moving Paul Hedges' agenda and platform forward, I propose to detail the benefits of a Gadamerian informed hermeneutic for interreligious engagement, an engagement centered on understanding and seeking fresh theological insights through the horizon of the religious Other. Wanting more from Hedges on Gadamer's potentiality for comparative theology, I extend Hedges' work further and uncover specific ways from various texts throughout Gadamer's career that not only support the efforts of comparative theologians but can help move the needle forward in areas that comparative theology has shied away from or not adequately explored. These include prejudice, "fusion of horizons," and symbol and festival as related to interreligious liturgy. The aforementioned modes are shared for their potentiality within the field and are encouraged to be explored even further by comparative theologians. These modes, moving the

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[88] David Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," *Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs* 1 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990): 52.

[89] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 23, 63-64, 69.

[90] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 66.

[91] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 58.

comparative theological agenda beyond religious text, are explored through the use of what I have coined the *Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle*.

It was in my exploration of Moyaert's work on hermeneutics and Ricœur's influence, and Hedges' introduction of Gadamer that I noticed the potentiality of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for the field of comparative theology. Gadamer's hermeneutics gives way to other modes of religious engagement that open pathways for opportunities for fresh theological insights.

There are several reasons Gadamer is beneficial to interreligious hermeneutics. However, it is necessary to highlight why Gadamer is not utilized more often. Gadamer has been neglected and misunderstood for years in academia, which can be attributed to Gadamer's use of the High German language and complicated philosophical concepts, thus making Gadamer's philosophy difficult and challenging to understand. Gadamer's radically conservative thoughts surrounding the rethinking of the categories of tradition and pre-understandings put him in a place of resistance in liberal academia and thought because there is natural resistance to rethink these terms. However, if we are able to see beyond these obstacles and lean into Gadamer's work more we can certainly find benefits for comparative theology.

Foremost, Gadamer's attention to the prejudice of the interpreter is profound for comparative theology. It supports the work of the comparativists as they wrestle through the newness of the religious Other through their own religious concepts and worldview. A critique that comparative theology receives often is the use of fresh theological insights as appropriation in "returning home."[92] Gadamer's conversational model has contributed significantly to

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[92] J.R. Hustwit, "Dialogue and Transreligious Understanding: A Hermeneutical Approach," in *Theology Without Walls: The Transreligious Imperative,* 160.

interreligious dialogue and "Although he did not engage philosophical hermeneutics with a view to interreligious dialogue, reflection on interreligious dialogue is greatly indebted to Gadamer."[93]

The metaphor of "fusion of horizons" is one of the greatest strengths of Gadamer's hermeneutical work as it provides a helpful way to comprehend the process of understanding. The purpose of this metaphor is not to illustrate to us what methodologically (step by step) happens within the interreligious encounter but how understanding occurs. I argue throughout this thesis that there is a point in which "fusion" does occur in the process of understanding and that is when new understandings become part of the interpreter's "new" pre-understandings. Gadamer gifts us with a metaphor that better connects the relationship between the comparative theological project and interreligious hermeneutics.

Gadamer also provides an opening for interliturgies as a new pathway for interreligious engagement. As Clooney states, "[t]o understand another tradition, to learn from Hindu wisdom, we need to practice it – in some deliberate way, with some selected text or image or practice..."[94] In order to achieve this, however, we need a more robust framework than just "passing over and coming back."

Lastly, all of these benefits from Gadamer's hermeneutics are driven by his unique interpretation and therefore philosophical reaction to the Cartesian conflict.[95] Gadamer does not

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[93] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations,* ed. David Cheetham, D. Pratt, D. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 206.

[94] Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu Wisdom for All God's Children* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 17.

[95] A term I use to reference the conflicting notions of western thought, especially related to Platonic dualism that is taken in the extreme in Descartes' work. Although it is unfair to critique the whole of Enlightenment thought based on the influences of Descartes, nonetheless it has been referenced that Cartesian emphases have greatly and directly influenced the Enlightenment. See more Peter A. Schouls, *Descartes and the Enlightenment* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 1989). For a thorough overview of Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment, see David Detmer, "Gadamer's Critique of the Enlightenment," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* vol. XXIV, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1997), 274 – 286.

hold back his critiques of Descartes and Enlightenment's stronghold on the subjects of methodology and truth. The Enlightenment faults, aided by Cartesian rational doubt, are what drive Gadamer's *prima materia* and the reparations he seeks to amend involve a reinterpretation of Platonism. Therefore, with Gadamer, we start with Plato because Gadamer claims himself to be a "Platonist."[96]

1.8 The Cartesian Conflict

The Cartesian conflict exists due to the understanding of humans as thinking things before understanding humans as beings existing in the world, experiencing and embodying the events of understanding that occur.[97] As Tracy highlights, "the hope for methodological controls (either historicist or formalist) that will 'guarantee' correct understanding seems seriously misplaced."[98] This understanding in religious studies is rooted in Cartesian thought. French scientist and philosopher René Descartes' concept of *cogito* or the need for absolute truths, and scientific proofs of religion have heavily influenced the "old wave" of comparative theology. The Enlightenment was shaped by Descartes' *cogito* as laid out in his *First Meditations* in 1637. Descartes' *cogito* expressly states that in order for understanding to occur, one must deliberately clear away all preconceived notions and prejudices for true knowledge to unfold. In other words, radical doubt must occur for real understanding to take place.[99] Descartes' *cogito* significantly

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[96] Brice R. Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology,* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999)*,* xi.

[97] As Cheetham, et al. share, "[James K.A. Smith] perceives a lingering Cartesian rationalism in this: construing human beings as thinking things... To remedy this, Smith argues for more attention to be given to religion as a form of life and to the complex practices involved." David Cheetham and Rolfe King, "Editors' Introduction," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

[98] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 61.

[99] Robert C. Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Owners Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 234.

influenced Enlightenment and modernist thought.[100] As Andrew Bowie suggests, "The *Neuzeit* –

the term Heidegger uses for what we have termed modernity – begins with Descartes, when the

'certainty of all being and all truth is founded on the self-consciousness of the single ego: *ego*

cogito ergo sum.'"[101] This led to the assumption in western theology that one could not properly

interpret religious texts without eradicating one's own convictions. Therefore, the *cogito* could

be seen as the central driving force of modernism in theology.

Gadamer, however, worked against Descartes' doctrine of *cogito*, truth, and hermeneutics

in his magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1960). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer understands

hermeneutics to be a "fusion of horizons." Gadamer explains horizons to be a combination of

perspectives, prejudices, experiences, and worldviews that are shaped by one's own tradition. It

is the understanding of Gadamer that one's horizon is in constant transition and that everyone

has a different perspective based on their limited horizon. Therefore, when two horizons meet, a

fusion of horizons may take place. This happens because two perspectives, worldviews,

prejudices, and/or experiences collide.[102]

Gadamer's fusion of horizons concept demonstrates the transformative power of texts

and the impactful interaction that occurs between reader and text. Understanding the historical

context of a religious tradition is key to understanding the perspective of the tradition and text.

Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics influenced the new wave of comparative theology that is

a confessional discipline in which one religious tradition dialectically correlates with another

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[100] Gadamer claims, "Only when our entire culture for the first time saw itself threatened by radical doubt and critique did hermeneutics become a matter of universal significance." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. F.G. Lawrence (Cambridge, U.K.: The MIT Press, 1983), 100.

[101] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2003), 9. E-book.

[102] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 363.

religious tradition.[103] I am also sharing with comparative theologians the usefulness of

Gadamerian philosophy for our own purposes and agendas. This is present in my use of

Gadamer's philosophical horizon, strategic application pieces for the comparative project, and

addressing how philosophy can help serve interreligious hermeneutics.

1.9 Why do theology comparatively?

It is a valid question to ask whether interreligious understanding is done by way of

comparison. Clooney claims that there is a dire need for comparative theology in our ever-

increasing globalized world.

> The general situation in which any theologian does theology today may also
> provide some warrants as to why one would want to take up comparative work.
> Though richer, the world of religion is now smaller; the encounter with other
> religions is not the special experience of those who travel to far-off places; the
> problems facing the human race are increasingly global. If religion is to contribute
> to their solutions, it is unconvincing to suppose that only one religion will make
> this contribution, or that religions best make their contribution in isolation from
> one another.[104]

Outside of Clooney's claims for comparative theology above, the new wave of

comparative theology offers several major implications for interreligious hermeneutics.[105] First,

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[103] Clooney directly applies Gadamer's hermeneutics in Francis X. Clooney "A Fusion of
Horizons: H.-G. Gadamer and the Meditation on Fullness (*Chandogya 7*), in Ralf Elm, Hrsg., *Horizonte
des Horizontbegriffs: Hermeneutische, Phanomenologische und Interkulturelle Studien*, (Academia
Richarz Verlag Sankt Augustin, 2004), 285-308.

[104] Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*
(Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 202-3.

[105] The same can be said with related fields. Even within the context of philosophy of religion,
theologians like David Cheetham have been persuaded that a comparative approach is most applicable for
a constructive approach to the field and claims, "claims it as a novel development in philosophy itself."
Cheetham, "Comparative Philosophy of Religion," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the
Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, 105.

there is respect for the home religious tradition doing the comparative work. In order for comparative theology to be effective, maintaining one's identity is imperative to the comparative process. One cannot fully understand cognitively or relationally another's religious tradition without first knowing and holding steadfast to one's own. Losing one's identity within the comparative process defeats the sole purpose of doing interreligious study in the first place. One cannot compare if one does not have anything to compare to. "Otherness" is imperative to the process because one cannot compare theologies if they are too similar. Both the individuality and diversity of the two pieces are essential to the comparative process as a whole.

Encouragement to live creatively and intimately with other religious faiths is also essential to comparative theology. Comparative theology is not "armchair theology" that can be executed behind the convenience of a desk or in an office. It is dynamic, personal, and dependent on dialogue with the other religious tradition instead of merely reading and interpreting other religious texts. Just as Cheetham suggests, there is a need for "a spirit of enquiry, an *on-going* critical dialogue..."[106] This type of theology is contingent upon inquiry, dialogue, and relationship with another religious tradition. Although textual hermeneutics is part of comparative theology, it is not the sole arbitrator of hermeneutics within the discipline. True comparative theology cannot be performed without the personal experience of the religious Other.[107]

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[106] Cheetham, "Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 107.

[107] David Cheetham asserts, "the task of being an effective comparative philosopher of religion is both analytic and hermeneutic: if there is a virtue in the pursuit of clarity and accuracy, then there is also a call for hermeneutic courage and ambition. Moreover, it may be that the differences and incommensurables exist between traditions require a new adventurism that goes beyond the critical comparison... This is the need for imagination: the philosopher as mystic or aesthete." Cheetham, "Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 112.

Seeking understanding can be refreshing and fulfilling for the home religious tradition. A primary difference between the "old wave" and the "new wave" of theology is the application of meaning learned through authentic dialogue with the religious Other. As Francis Clooney states, comparative theology "is a theology deeply changed by its attention to multiple religious and theological traditions; it is a theology that occurs truly only after comparison."[108] Comparative theology seeks to reflect on one's own religious tradition in light of particular teachings and practices of another.

Finally, the encouragement of true and honest interreligious dialogue goes beyond understanding stagnant theological concepts and seeks to explain matters of faith and hope from different perspectives. Comparative theology does more than try to understand vague theological concepts, like soteriology, within another religious tradition. It primarily seeks to find the particular by dialectically communicating through a different religious mode, whether that is text, ritual, individual, orthopraxy, or tradition.

Even within the field of comparative religion, scholars like Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray, influenced by Jonathan Z. Smith, highlight the important nature of comparison as "an indeterminate scholarly procedure that is best undertaken as an intellectually creative enterprise, not as a science but as an art – an imaginative and critical act of mediation and redescription in the service of knowledge."[109] We can see that how Smith understands comparison is very much lodged in the space of obtaining knowledge-based understanding or "know-what." Smith points to "a Cartesian anthropology that tends to construe the human person

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[108] Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989 – 1995)," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 3 (1995): 521-550.
[109] Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in Postmodern Age* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 4. See specifically chapter 2 by Jonathan Smith, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," 23-44.

as, in essence, a 'thinking thing'... As a result, the 'religion' in philosophy *of religion* is a very cognitive, 'heady' phenomenon – reduced to beliefs, propositions and cognitive content, which are the only phenomena that can make it through the narrow theoretical gate that attends such rationalism."[110] For Smith, therefore, a challenge to rationalized Cartesian thought is necessary to make room to prioritize liturgy as a form of lived religion and embodied experience. For example, in Jonathan Smith's work, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, he describes how by reading Eliade's, *The Sacred and Profane* alongside original sources of Eliade's, he begins to question the comparative process. Smith claims, "it is axiomatic that comparison is never a matter of identity. Comparison requires the acceptance of difference as the grounds of its being interesting, and a methodological manipulation of that difference to achieve some stated cognitive end."[111] Smith connects comparison to space by noting, "it is solely from a human standpoint that we can speak of space."[112] As Smith argues, comparison and ritual have a foundational sharedness of space that orients us towards being.

1.10 Thesis Statement

A more complete theoretical approach can strengthen comparative theology by using a Gadamerian hermeneutical method that guides one through the process of interreligious hermeneutics. *Efforts in comparative theology are enhanced by the development and application of a hermeneutical approach based on philosophical insights from Gadamer, or what I will call*

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[110] James K. A. Smith, "Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice: Liturgy as Source and Method in Philosophy of Religion," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 136.

[111] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13-14.

[112] Jonathan Smith referencing Immanuel Kant from *Critique of Pure Reason* and referring to space as "being already existent, as being divided up into empty loci into which the images by which memories would be recalled are placed (Smith, *To Take Place*, 26-27)."

a Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. This research develops a Gadamerian

interreligious hermeneutic by gathering from the philosophical concepts of play, fusion of

horizons, symbol and festival through the means of liturgy to demonstration how interreligious

hermeneutics is embedded in the ontological view of "being and becoming."

1.11 Overview of the Story: Chapter Summaries

　　With its fairly new conception in the field of theology, comparative theology has faced

methodological difficulties due to its "nomadic" development. Therefore, many comparative

theologians are faced with the difficulty of the hermeneutical encounter of the religious Other

without a robust framework to aid in the process. This has led to many challenges for

comparative theologians. These challenges are multifold; which include balancing the encounter

of otherness from the religious Other without compromising the faith of the interpreter; the role

of the interpreter's prejudice and tradition within the comparative moments; and reflective

outcomes and their use within the hermeneutical encounter.

　　There are certain key comparative theologians who have played a large role in its

commencement and continuity. Francis Clooney is currently understood as a key shaper of the

current mode of comparative theology. His work with Hindu and Christian studies has been the

example of a well-articulated methodology for understanding other religions. We critically turn

to Clooney, a main contributor to the methods of the new wave of comparative theology.

Clooney's focus on text is a main discussion point that will draw our attention continually

throughout this work.

　　Marianne Moyaert's interreligious hermeneutics has shaped significant pieces of this

research, especially related to interreligious ritual and dialogue. Her pioneering work on

interrituality, influenced by the philosophical work of Paul Ricœur, has led the field into a

dynamic shift away from text into more embodied forms of interreligious experience. Although Moyaert does not disregard texts completely, she continues to hold onto texts tightly within the interreligious hermeneutical experience, which is a point I will continue to highlight throughout this research.

Paul Hedges is a major player in this research not only because of his deeply culturally-embedded and significant research in the area of comparative theology, but also because of his work in philosophical hermeneutics, particularly that which is engaged with Gadamer. Hedges' work on "opening of horizons," and "play," have significant implications for this research, as I take these understandings and move them forward to develop a methodology that can be utilized in comparative theology.

Although I am grateful for the work these key players have contributed to the discipline, there are various points of interest where I diverge. The first divergence is the overreliance and overuse of text in comparative theology. I argue that we are limiting ourselves and interreligious encounters by our hyper focus on text. Religions are more than their holy texts; they include diverse peoples with varying interpretations, practices, and modes of being, and we certainly cannot overlook religious transformation entirely without texts. Comparative theology has been dominated by a textual focus for too long, and it is time to move beyond texts for the purpose of fresh theological insights. This is why I specifically define text, influenced by Gadamer's philosophy, in the broader sense of the word: to mean any mode of religious dimensionality (person, ritual, symbol, liturgy, etc.).

Therefore, we turn our attention to Gadamer, for Gadamer has implemented a philosophical hermeneutic that shows promise to interreligious hermeneutics. To properly understand Gadamer's philosophy, we start in **chapter two** by exploring Gadamer's influence of

Platonism and his main criticism of Cartesian influenced Enlightenment thought. Gadamer understands Plato's dialogues differently than his contemporaries by not focusing primarily on the content of the dialogues but instead focusing on the dialogical process that occurs within and between the earlier and later dialogues. The stark difference of focus, according to Gadamer, leads him away from the pressure of methodology inspired by rational Cartesian and Enlightenment thinking. This brings Gadamer to his own hermeneutical approach rooted in the metaphor of "fusion of horizons." Gadamer's hermeneutics is supportive of the ventures in comparative theology and moves the discipline forward by expanding the realm of interreligious hermeneutics through utilization of non-textual comparative elements, calling attention to the prejudice of the interpreter, and supporting varying reflective outcomes. To grasp Gadamer's philosophy, it is imperative to understand Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. **Chapter three** addresses philosophical hermeneutics as developed and shaped by Gadamer and its relevance to the comparative theological journey. Various themes and philosophers are explored throughout this chapter that will aid my readers with the main backdrop of the philosophical markers leading to Gadamer's horizon.

Several concepts, like "prejudice," "tradition," "game of conversation," and "fusion of horizons" are explored in depth in **chapter four** as they are specifically tied to Gadamer's philosophy located within *Truth and Method* and contribute to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. The chapter includes a brief introduction to Gadamer's life, giving context to his philosophical concepts. The introduction to these philosophical concepts lays the foundation needed to grasp Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the following chapters on interreligious hermeneutics. It is here we dive into the relationship between Cartesian and Enlightenment influenced methodology and hermeneutics as seen by Gadamer. The main crux of

Gadamer's philosophy surrounds the understanding of dialogue and how it is at play within the hermeneutical experience. This foundation is imperative for the following chapter, as I base interreligious hermeneutics on the model of interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue as a model for interreligious hermeneutics is expanded upon in **chapter five**. Here, I lay out the developments within interreligious dialogue involving main comparative theologians David Tracy, Paul Hedges, Catherine Cornille, Marianne Moyaert, and Francis Clooney. I weave in Gadamer's involvement and applicability within the realm of interreligious dialogue by way of his philosophical concepts examined in chapter four, culminating to a model of interreligious dialogue that can inform interreligious hermeneutical understanding. The model of interreligious dialogue will serve as the basis for the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle (Figure 2) in the following chapter.

Because this way of understanding otherness is situated upon two important philosophical concepts, "prejudice" and "tradition," **chapter six** is dedicated to understanding the Gadamerian philosophical concept of *Vorurteil* or prejudice as pre-understanding. Gadamer, through his hermeneutical work in *Truth and Method*, fleshes out and reclaims prejudice from the Enlightenment stance against it. Gadamer's reinterpretation of prejudice can aid the comparative theological discipline and project by recognizing that the home tradition of the interpreter plays a vital role in their process of understanding religious otherness. The foundation for the development of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is based in the model of interreligious dialogue explored in the previous chapter. The dialogical method explored in **chapter seven**, coined as the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle (Figure 2), serves as a helpful way of viewing the process of understanding in the comparative theological venture. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle exemplifies how the process of

understanding is achieved and the purposes of the various interlocutors and dialogical pieces that play central roles within the process. These key interlocutors include the interpreter, their tradition and prejudice, the text/tradition, dialogue, and reflection. The main question of "where does fusion occur?" is also explored and highlighted as part of the hermeneutical process and not understood as a conclusionary remark.

In an overarching meta-understanding, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is not necessarily a method for interreligious hermeneutics but the process by which understanding occurs. Therefore, **chapter eight** shares the applicable nature of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle and the ontological nature of understanding religious otherness. Gadamer's understanding of the "game of conversation" allows for the fruitful abundance of various reflection outcomes; these reflection outcomes are shared in this chapter.

Chapter nine examines deeper the religious mode of liturgy as embodied symbolism and how Gadamer's philosophical concepts of symbol, festival, and play allow interreligious hermeneutics to take a central role in the interreligious encounter and empower us to participate in the ontological world of being. This chapter shares specific comparative moments that explore how versatile the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle and its methodological application is. The embodiment of play is encouraged as a mode of being, giving the comparative theologian room for the Other in ontologically ambiguous spaces to speak to their prejudices.

Finally, this research culminates the comparative theological journey as an ontological way of being in the world as informed by Gadamer in **chapter ten**. By assessing hermeneutics in an ontological fashion and applying it to interreligious hermeneutics, I position interreligious hermeneutics as a fruitful endeavor for interreligious understanding involving various traditions

and modes of interreligious engagement (liturgy). It is here I assert that the comparative theological discipline is more than "passing over and coming back" but it is more similar to what I like to describe as a "being and becoming."

The conclusion emphasizes the need for and applicability of a Gadamerian-infused hermeneutic for interreligious understanding by synthesizing its main objectives involving Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy, along with suggestions for further application. Here, I highlight the most critical insights involving Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and their applicability to the current issues within the field of comparative theology.

1.12 A Note on "Othering"

Recently there have been criticisms of the use of othering.[113] "Othering," currently distinguishable from the self, is the placement of something or someone separated from the self, due to difference. "Otherness" can be felt as not part of the whole. It feels as if it is only a part of the process, not part of the whole. Current traditions in the United States have turned the term other into an object separated from the whole subject. These terms function best together in dialogue. It is a deception to think of the Other as "a part separated from the whole" when the self and Other essentially distinguish themselves in the process of understanding. Otherness and belonging are naturally correlated as the whole cannot exist without the part, and the part cannot exist without the whole. They exist together in unity to form the whole. It is the Cartesian

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[113] In "'Othering' with Grace and Courage: Reflections on the Dynamic Tension between Mutuality and Incommensurability," (2021) Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen borrows the term "othering" from Walter Brueggemann, who defined it as a verb. "This word reminds us of the importance of seeing the religious Other not as a counter-object but rather as a partner in othering which is 'the risky, demanding, dynamic process of relating to one that is not us, one to whom we are accountable, who commands us, and from whom we receive our very life.'" Kärkkäinen quoting Walter Brueggemann, "'Othering' with Grace and Courage," in *The Covenant Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant,* ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 1.

subject/object dichotomy that has influenced today's understanding of otherness, and as a result otherness is being treated as an object to be observed, separate from the subject. I choose to keep the term "otherness" not to disparage and divide but to bring to fruition and recover "otherness" from captivity to the deception of Enlightenment thought.

The religious Other is not an object to be studied, observed, and recorded, the way scientific methods that have influenced the humanities would like to suggest. Tracy highlights the expansiveness of otherness that does not just apply to the religious tradition itself but also the modes of religious being and belonging. Tracy's connections here tie closely with Eliade's "creative hermeneutics:"

> Eliade's very notion of 'creative hermeneutics' radicalizes the notion of
> 'otherness' prevalent in Western hermeneutics by insisting that the most intense
> forms of otherness are archaic rituals, myths, and practices of the 'others' ... in
> our dreams, terrors, desires, camouflaged myths, and ordinary, even banal, rituals
> of the everyday where the sacred now hides.[114]

In the same way, religion – as a phenomenon – is other to us because of the ambiguity that prevails. "Religion is cognitively ambiguous precisely as a manifestation of the Other: of Being, the cosmos, the sacred that both reveals and withdraws itself in all the religions."[115] This otherness provides a creative environment for the disclosure and event of truth to occur.

The religious Other in itself is whole, formed with their own horizons and historical effectiveness. In this way, the religious Other is comparable to the home tradition of the

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[114] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 58. See Mircea Eliade's works on the concept of "other." *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 Volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978-85). A note to my readers, I have decided to only keep "western" capitalized in quotations as used by original authors.

[115] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 59.

interpreter because they both have their own traditions, and prejudices that have formed their particular horizons. I will say here, as I have supported before, it is impossible to understand (experience) another's horizon completely. This is because one cannot recreate the experiences and language passed down through tradition in the same way. We can only attempt to approach an understanding of the religious Other, in so far as they are willing to share their experiences with us.

CHAPTER 2: The Influence of Greek and Enlightenment Thought on Gadamer's Hermeneutical Journey and its Relevance to Comparative Theology: A Review

2.1 Wide Brush Strokes – The Enlightenment Influence

Interreligious hermeneutics has been greatly altered by the extension of Enlightenment understandings of Platonism due to the sway of the Cartesian-influenced Enlightenment of the 18th century on theological hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer's main critique of the Enlightenment and therefore, philosophical and theological thinkers influenced by the 'Age of Reason,' was their bondage to Enlightenment ideals like eradicating prejudice, ignoring tradition, and hyperfocus on method.[1]

René Descartes is frequently associated with Enlightenment idealism. Peter A. Schouls suggests this is because Descartes "unmistakenably articulated the Enlightenment's central ideas."[2] In part one of *Truth and Method,* Gadamer, as argued by Kristin Gjesdal, is mainly concerned with "transcending the way in which the Enlightenment conception of reason, truth, and knowledge, developing in the wake of Descartes, has had a tendency to evade the

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[1] Andrew Bowie suggests that Gadamer and others have an unrealistic criticism regarding the critique of 18th century Enlightenment's influence on German Idealism and its "claim to truth" with the humanities. Bowie asserts that it is more convoluted than Gadamer suggests. See more from Andrew Bowie, "German Idealism and the Arts," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* 2nd ed., ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 336-337. See also Terry Pinkard: "Indeed, once the European way of life had taken the Cartesian turn and decided that it needed to prove the existence of objects independent of our experiences of them, as Jacobi put it, 'they were left with mere subjectivity, with *sensation*. And thus, they discovered idealism' – and even worse, once Europeans subjected religion to the demand for scientific, rational proof, 'they were left with merely logical phantoms....'" Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760 – 1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95-96.

[2] Peter A. Schouls, *Descartes and the Enlightenment* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 1989), 12.

implications of our situatedness within tradition and history."[3] It must be noted here that

philosophical and Gadamerian scholars argue Gadamer's unyielding critique of the

Enlightenment, some arguing that the Enlightenment ideals have fueled Gadamer's

understanding of dialogue.[4] For Gadamer, Cartesian rationality is too foundationally imprinted

by methods of modern science and has encroached into notions of truth and aesthetics of art.

Gadamer explains,

> …the certainty of science is very different from the certainty acquired in life.
> Scientific certainty always has something Cartesian about it. It is the result of
> critical method that admits only the validity of what cannot be doubted. This
> certainty, then does not proceed from doubts arising and being overcome, but is
> always anterior to doubts occurring to anyone. Just as when in his famous
> meditation on doubt Descartes set up an artificial and hyperbolic doubt like an
> experiment, which led to the fundamentum inconcussum of self-consciousness, so
> methodical science fundamentally doubts everything that can be doubted in order
> to guarantee the certainty of its results.[5]

Therefore, for Gadamer, the issue at hand is Cartesian rationalism, therefore the answer

lies in, what Gjesdal argues as, illuminating the "Cartesian origin of the Enlightenment."[6]

Gjesdal goes on to explain, "Gadamer's reference to the Cartesian basis of modern science must

be understood in terms of a philosophical 'picture' – a general intellectual framework into which

our reflection on issues such as truth, rationality, and knowledge has a tendency to be led."[7]

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[3] Kristin Gjesdal, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism: Some Problems and Challenges in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 2 (2008): 286. It is important to note that Gjesdal does not fully align with Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment and finds it inadequate. See specifically, 293-295.

[4] Gjesdal, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism," 286.

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 240-241.

[6] Gjesdal, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism," 290.

[7] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 284. Gjesdal, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism," 289.

What leads Gadamer to such strikingly different views toward Cartesian Enlightenment ideals is his interpretation of Plato's dialogues.[9] This chapter will explore why Gadamer understands Plato's dialogues differently than other philosophers of his time and how this understanding led to the development of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and conception of fusion of horizons. Through his reinterpretation of Plato, Gadamer reveals the genesis of his hermeneutical horizon which serves to support comparative theology in its theological and hermeneutical journey by expanding our understanding of interreligious hermeneutics to include non-textual counterparts, emphasizing prejudice of the interpreter, and supporting various reflective outcomes that may shape the home tradition.[10]

Comparative theology is concerned with the interpretation of various religious texts and therefore needs a more defined hermeneutical process of interpretive reflection than what is currently being utilized. More recent discussions between theology of religions and comparative theology share a struggle for agreement on methods and processes related to hermeneutics.[11] One primary example is the pressure for the use of methods in comparative theology. As John Thatamanil explains, "given the relatively early stage of contemporary comparative theology as a field, there is not an indefinitely large set of approaches or *methods* for doing comparative

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[9] Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writing*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 29. It is Gadamer's reappropriation of the works of Plato and Aristotle that initiate a return to the Greek dialogues. The return serves as a foundational turn towards a counter-enlightenment influence on hermeneutics. This turn by Gadamer is so provocative that some accuse him of having "radical anti-Enlightenment views." Robert Dostal, "Gadamer, Kant, and the Enlightenment," *Research in Phenomenology* 46 (2016): 337.

[10] Hugh Nicholson argues that Gadamer's work in the area of exposing the Enlightenment influence of prejudice is only the first step of hermeneutics, "still does not address the very real problem of distortion in cross-cultural study." In "A Correlational Model of Comparative Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 196.

[11] Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 24-25.

theology."[12] What has changed more recently in the last 30 or so years, Thatamanil shares, is that it has become a more academic enterprise than it ever was before. Therefore, methodological or at least pedagogical approaches are necessary. He specifically highlights two comparative theologians in particular whose methodology is most influential in the field: Francis Clooney and his method of "situated comparison," and Robert Neville's "metaphysically grounded methodology."[13] However, as Paul Fairfield asserts, "[n]o technique governs this art; no empirical or 'evidence-based' pedagogy tells us how it is done or how to measure success, however, as is the case with an art and any skill, practice and habit-formation are imperative."[14] So how can comparative theologians practice the art of hermeneutics?[15]

This chapter demonstrates three main points that can better assist cultivating the hermeneutical process as a form of art. First, attention is drawn to the influence of Cartesian Enlightenment thinking on theological hermeneutics and western thought pertaining to textual prominence and preference. Second, it is emphasized how Gadamer understands Plato's dialogues and the Greeks, and how those understandings deterred him from aligning with Enlightenment ideals of textual interpretation and hermeneutics. And third, it is demonstrated how the above two points are not only influencing the pressure *for* methodology in contemporary

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[12] John Thatamanil, "Chapter 6 Integrating Vision: Comparative Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom," in *Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education*, ed. Najeeba Syeed and Heidi Hadsell, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 103, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420045_008.

[13] Thatamanil, "Integrating Vision," 103n.

[14] Paul Fairfield, "Hermeneutics and Education," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (New York: Routledge, 2015), 542.

[15] According to Gadamer, hermeneutics leaned more into the category of art than science. As he claims, "Dialectic is the art of carrying on a conversation, and this includes the conversation with oneself and the following out of the agreement reached with oneself. That is the art of thinking. But this is an art of raising questions about what one actually intends with what one thinks and says." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 186.

comparative theology, but also insist on methods grounded in scientific, literary, and historical methodologies.

Arguing for a materialization turn in comparative theology, Marianne Moyaert suggests, "it is clear that both religious scholars and comparative theologians do not often relate to the more concrete embodied dimensions of religion – such as symbols, ritual, and sacred space – possibly because these dimensions do not seem to lend themselves naturally to systemic reasoning."[16] Therefore, we must try to understand the text historically and balance that understanding with our present context. In other words, the fusion of the past and present by way of participatory hermeneutics can bring about the event of truth.

However, there is a need for comparative theologians to emancipate themselves from western Enlightenment thinking that has paralyzed them by reliance on religious texts as a mode for interreligious engagement with non-western religious traditions. Gadamer recognizes the need to be released from the reliance on method in hermeneutics, "Understanding itself, is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as constantly mediated. This is what must gain validity in hermeneutical theory, which is much too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method."[17]

To begin, it is important to explore certain themes, historical events, and individuals who have shaped the course of theological hermeneutics, which have undoubtedly shaped the field of comparative theology. I will discuss the hermeneutical, theological, cultural, and societal trends that developed before Gadamer's thought, specifically noting the important contributions of Greek, Enlightenment thought, and the philosophical trends that influenced the atmosphere of

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[16] Marianne Moyaert, "Christianity as the Measure of Religion? Materializing the Theology of Religions," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and New Frontiers*, ed. E. Harris, P. Hedges, and S. Hettiarachchi (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2016), 262.
[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 302.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. All of these contributions and developments laid the foundation for Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics either by way of acceptance or response by Gadamer. This section will develop specific themes, individuals, and movements related to the development of Gadamer's hermeneutical endeavors. Gadamer's interpretation of Plato lays the foundation for comparative theology to move beyond method which will be shown in the following section.

Using hermeneutics in comparative theology has long been applied through various comparative theologians and their specific methodologies. However, as Paul Hedges highlights, "…in comparative theology the theorizing has arguably been quite thin. This is important as philosophical hermeneutics can show that the kind of … border crossing entailed by comparative theology is theoretically justified, while enhancing its methodology."[18] Hedges continues by legitimating comparative theology through the help of philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Gadamer. The methodological assistance philosophical hermeneutics extends to comparative theology allows for "a theoretical possibility for the viability of interreligious engagement…"[19] In the space designated below, I dive deeper into the field of philosophical hermeneutics, specifically the grounding theories of Gadamer "for the sake of fresh theological insights" for the benefit and enhancement of methodology in comparative theology.

2.2 *"Prejudice Against Prejudice"*

Traditional definitions of the Enlightenment typically incorporate a wider divide between faith and reason, the implementation of the scientific method, and the "prejudice against

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[18] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Iss. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 58.
[19] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 72.

prejudice."[20] These elements do not encapsulate the entirety of the enlightenment movement but simply highlight the major themes for our purposes. Instead, we will look at major pieces in the movement and how they contribute specifically to the development of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

The journey through our focus on the Enlightenment includes the controversial division between faith and reason. Gadamer supports this by sharing, "It is a conversation, based on the Enlightenment, between the devotion to revelation and the belief in reason, which has lasted centuries."[21] Gadamer states: "In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the development of the mathematical natural sciences and their methodological ideal, there occurred a radical questioning of all that had previously been considered valid."[22] Connected to this is rationalism's association with progress: "The image of process seems unattached to actual historical situations."[23] The trust in science exponentially grew and this societal change affected all areas of thought, especially religion. Religious studies during this era increased their focus on systematics, apologetics, proofs, and other methods popular at this time.[24] Influenced by Gadamer, Nicholas Davey claims hermeneutics is the "in-between," especially that which is

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[20] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.

[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Philosophy and Religion of Judaism," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 159.

[22] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Philosophy and Religion of Judaism," 159.

[23] Rüdiger Bubner, "Looking Back on Gadamer," in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 222, E-book.

[24] Gadamer specifically points to Enlightenment's critique of religion as a central point. *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, 148. He also describes the romanticism that joined Enlightenment thought through the positive result of "religion of reason (161)." See also Muhammad Akram, "Beyond Dichotomies: The Import of Gadamer's Hermeneutics for the Debate of Relationship between Theology and Religious Studies," *Islamic Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 137-153.

between faith and reason. This does not promote a divide between the two distinct binaries; rather, it presents a way forward for both to exist concomitantly. [25]

The Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" was the belief that prejudice left too distorted understandings by the subject on the object.[26] The subject and object dichotomy developed from the influence of the scientific method when there grew a concern that human influence would interfere between the subject and object. Therefore, pure truth could not be derived without the use of methods. For example, Shabbir Akhtar suggests that, "No method or project, whether sceptical or committed, can be free of presuppositions, even prejudices."[27]

Since the time of the Reformation, theologians and philosophers have struggled to understand the relationship between faith and reason. This struggle continued into the era of Enlightenment and the emphasis of reason separate from faith was quickly embraced.[28] For example in Christian theology, the Enlightenment's focus on reason and history led some Christian writers of the Enlightenment period to believe that it was possible to reconstruct Jesus as he was. Therefore, due to the Enlightenment, a historical method was taken to study biblical

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[25] Influenced by Gadamer, Nicholas Davey claims hermeneutics is the "in-between." Especially that which is in-between faith and reason. Therefore, not promoting a divide between the two distinct binaries but a way forward for both to exist complementary. Nicholas Davey, "Hermeneutics: Between Faith and Reason," *Culture and Dialogue* 4 (2016): 226.

[26] The subject and object dichotomy is explored in more depth in chapter four within the frame of understanding.

[27] Akhtar is utilizing the approach of sensitivity to presuppositions in a Muslim context of methodology to highlight the tension between revelation (theology) and reason (philosophy) and the notion that these dimensions do not live outside the religious tradition. Shabbir Akhtar, "The Revival of Philosophy among Muslims," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 68.

[28] The major developments in theological hermeneutics that ultimately regards this discussion include Greek and enlightenment thought. The connections between reformation and enlightenment include the continual divide between faith and reason, heightened awareness of superstition and suspicion, increased sense of individualism and relativism - and schisms only encouraged this, the increased focus on the self/individual, rather than the community, and regard for personal salvation became more prominent.

narratives to search for the historical Jesus. These new methods and textual analyses were used

to determine the historical validity of Jesus and biblical texts.[29] Although it is not my intention to

dismiss these textual criticisms, it is important to note how far these techniques were taken to

produce "truthful and factual accounts" of the text.

The Enlightenment's influence was heavily pushed by René Decartes' understanding of

cogito in *First Meditations* in 1637.[30] According to Gadamer, the Enlightenment's stronghold on

truth, faith, and reason coming out of Descartes' *cogito* influence, has direct influence on our

perception of the situatedness of tradition and history.[31] This critique is what drives Gadamer's

discussion regarding prejudice. Whereby, we must intentionally remove all presuppositions so

that we may understand clearly to allow true knowledge to occur.

Theological hermeneutics is heavily influenced by an interpretation of the *cogito*,

understanding it as the need for absolute truths, and scientific proofs of religion. Since the

beginning of the Enlightenment, both conservative and liberal traditions embraced the *cogito* and

it manifested in different ways.[33] For liberalism, inductive reasoning by way of distanciation and

radical doubt determined absolute and universal truth therefore, liberal theologians paid close

attention to reason. Reason was understood as being a tangible truth, intellectual thinking, logical

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[29] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction,* 5th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 296.

[30] Kristen Gjesdal critiques Gadamer's critical assessment of Cartesian thought within Enlightenment influence by sharing, "Although Cartesian philosophy cannot be reduced to the consideration of a rational method for the natural sciences—such a reduction would overlook how the Meditations carries on some central motives from Augustine." Kristin Gjesdal, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism: Some Problems and Challenges in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 2 (2008): 289.

[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 289.

[33] Andrew Bowie claims, "The new philosophical task is therefore for human reason to establish its own legitimacy as the ground of truth. This transformation is prepared in the seventeenth century when Descartes makes the 'I think' the main point of certainty upon which philosophy can build, but Descartes still relies upon God to guarantee the connection of ourselves to the order of the universe." In *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 2.

account and or explanations, questioning, and critical knowledge. Modern liberals constructed

reality through inductive reasoning by acquiring truths in which all other truths could be

grounded. Theological hermeneutics, ranging within a spectrum of approaches, have been

significantly influenced by Cartesian Enlightenment tendencies.[34]

Theologians who came after Descartes built their theology and practice on the

foundational understanding that everything was ultimately knowable. Therefore, conservative

Christians emphasized the inerrancy of scripture and biblical propositional truths. Instead of

focusing on and emphasizing scientific truths, conservative modern theologians emphasized

biblical truths as propositions.[35] A negative implication of emphasizing propositional truths is the

loss of the biblical narrative for the sake of the proposition and the potential to miss other

revelations in the text.[36] Additionally, conservatives placed a major emphasis on the inerrancy of

scripture directly tying faith to theory. What this spectrum asserts are the influences of Platonic

thought, fueled by Enlightenment reasoning leading to their distinct characteristics as listed

above. As Max Horkheimer states in *The Eclipse of Reason*, "Inherent in Plato's system is the

idea of objective rather than subjective or formalized reason."[37] This leads us to our discussion

regarding Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's dialogues.

2.3 Plato's Theory of Forms

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[34] See for example how Akram evaluates how religious studies and theology have been explicitly influenced by Enlightenment thought and how Gadamer's hermeneutics can free the field of religious studies to encourage scholars to incorporate their own religious pre-understandings. Akram states that Gadamer's "work does imply that students of religion and theologians alike need to be aware of their own religious and ideological commitments as well as the historicity and finitude of their understanding. The more they realise this the more they will be able to take religious differences seriously and to respect the 'otherness' of the other religion." Akram, "Beyond Dichotomies," 153.

[35] See Gadamer's application to the tradition of scripture in *Truth and Method* (2013), 342.

[36] Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 39-40.

[37] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 90.

The Platonic conception of reality understands that the realm of reality is influenced by "forms" and "essences."[38] This concept understands that "form" is the intelligible world that stands above the visible world and gives the visible world being. "Essence" is understood as the visible world of senses that humans inhabit. Therefore, the substances in the world that humans inhabit are illusions or "copies" of the real forms.[39] For example, this theory emphasizes that the human soul and its intellectual apprehensions are in the "form" world, while their bodies and their perceptions are located in the "essence" world and therefore concludes that the human soul can survive the death of the body.[40] According to this theory, the 'forms' and 'essences' worlds do not collide and there must be an intermediary that can act in the in-between.[41] The epitome of Plato's *Theory of Forms* is the form of the Good which all forms inherently exist from which is supra-ontological and exists outside all forms.[42] This influential dichotomy will go on to be embedded within western thought and theology. However, it is Gadamer's reinterpretation of Plato's dialogues that are of real interest to this research.

2.4 Gadamer's Reinterpretation of Plato

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[38] It is not that hermeneutics did not exist before ancient Greek tradition, but merely that the Greek tradition influenced hermeneutical understanding in the western tradition in such a way that it is imperative to begin here. Plato and Aristotle changed the trajectory of the hermeneutical sphere in such a way that it diverged into something incredibly different. The legacy left by ancient Greece on our modern view of understanding was so influential that traces or variants of its influence are present today. Lauren Swayne Barthold, *Gadamer's Dialectical Hermeneutics* (Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington Books, 2010). Specifically, chapter 1, "Gadamer's Dialectical Plato;" Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Gadamer and Plato: an unending dialogue" in *The Gadamerian Mind*, ed. George, Theodore and Gert-Jan Van Der Heiden (Abingdon, Oxon U.K.: Routledge, 2022).

[39] J.D.G. Evans, *Plato Primer* (Durham, GBR: Acumen, 2010), 50.

[40] Evans, *Plato Primer*, 45.

[41] Evans, *Plato Primer*, 47.

[42] R.M. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 205-206.

The reinterpretation Gadamer offers of Plato is motivated by three main purposes. First, Gadamer's reinterpretation is a response to Heidegger's Aristotelian criticism of Plato. Second, Gadamer attempts to reconcile Plato and Aristotle on common ground, especially in regards to the concept of the Good. Third, viewing the Socratic dialogues as a way of being is the theoretical basis of Gadamer's hermeneutics.[43] As Andrew Fuyarchuk explains, the essence of Gadamer's Platonic influence is built on the "common ground between Plato and Aristotle based on Socrates' method of inquiry that foregrounds the question of the meaning of what something is, respect for the Other as Other, and recognition of their situation."[44]

From Heidegger's influence, Gadamer's initial interpretation and objective of understanding Plato was to search for the original intent of the author of the dialogues. What Gadamer discovered instead phenomenologically separated him from his mentor. Initially in *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer tries to persuade us, and himself, that by gathering from Plato's dialogues we can go back "to the things (the facts of the matter) themselves," or the essence of the text from the author.[46] What develops years later, especially through Aristotle's critique of Plato, is Gadamer's turn away from traditional phenomenological tools, as influenced by Heidegger. He maintains that exclusively interpreting a text historically, excludes the text to speak to us in our present horizon. Therefore, Gadamer affirms that with interpretation, especially of historical texts of the past, we must seek to fuse them with our current understanding.[47] In the case of Plato, for Gadamer, this historical text and tradition was

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[43] Andrew Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato: A Response to Heidegger and a Rejoinder by Stanley Rosen* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), xiv.
[44] Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato*, xiv.
[46] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), xxxii.
[47] Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, 52.

experienced as new encounter and therefore challenged Gadamer's position.[48] "We constantly have to re-evaluate and reconceive our understanding of ourselves and the world, however, in light of new experiences, we never begin merely with or as a 'blank slate.'"[49] Therefore, Zuckert describes Gadamer's goal is as such,

> By challenging the standard interpretation of Plato which identifies Plato with a "two worlds" view of intelligible and sensible experience and with a certain chronological development of his teaching concerning the ideas and which is still dominant both in Anglo-American schools of philosophy and on the continent, Gadamer asks his readers to reconsider and reconceive their understanding of the entire Western tradition.[50]

It is here we see Gadamer expanding on his position and horizon from Heidegger's influence of Plato and Plato's influence on hermeneutics. Gadamer, as he frequently notes, is indebted to Heidegger's phenomenology and part of Gadamer's understanding of Heidegger includes his critique of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato and Aristotle. Gadamer claims, "...one cannot think of my becoming who I am without Heidegger... Today I would say Heidegger was not fair to Plato..."[51] Gadamer is critical of Heidegger's contrast of Plato and Aristotle and his association of Plato with metaphysics.[52] Fuyarchuk claims that Gadamer achieves this "by

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[48] For a specific reading of Gadamer's work on the Greeks and Plato, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato as Portraitist," *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 245-274. See also Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Gadamer, et al., "Gadamer on Gadamer," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1991).

[49] Zuckert, "Hermeneutics in Practice," 218.

[50] Zuckert, "Hermeneutics in Practice," 219. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, 156-157.

[51] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Collected Works and their Effective History," in *The Gadamer Reader*, 425. See a grand overview of Gadamer's philosophical tradition and situation in Bubner, "Looking Back on Gadamer's Hermeneutics," in Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, 217-230.

[52] Heidegger was thankful for Gadamer's correction and later admitted his mistake. See more in Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato.* See also Barthold, *Gadamer's Dialectical Hermeneutics*.

demonstrating, for instance, that Plato is an Aristotelian in matters of ethics, and Aristotle a

Platonist in matters of physics."[53]

This brings us to point two. Gadamer's journey of reinterpretation of Plato as displayed

in "The Idea of the Good," is the coming, or "be-coming" of understanding that Plato and

Aristotle essentially have different quests that lead them to the "differences in their thinking."[54]

Using Plato's dialogues as models, Gadamer connects the means by which "dialogue" and

"understanding" occur. Therefore, as Fuyarchuk rightly states, "In recovering Aristotle's

philosophy, therefore, it is not first and foremost Aristotle who is interrogated, but ourselves; our

self-understanding and the horizon of meaning in which we dwell."[55] This is precisely the

context upon which Gadamer's hermeneutics is foundationally built.[56] "As we become aware of

the 'hermeneutic situation,' of 'the question and the intellectual resistance with which we

confront Aristotle,' Gadamer explains, Aristotle is brought near in an 'original repetition' that

speaks to the present."[57] This is connected to how Gadamer came to understand the sciences.

Gadamer looks to modernity as the initiation of "a new notion of science and method"[58]

by pointing to the fact that science was previously understood to be closely tied to philosophy.

So much so, that metaphysics, philosophy, astrology, medicine, mathematics were all subjects

understood as philosophical and it was not until after Descartes that they were understood to

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[53] Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato*, xvii. This thesis is developed primarily in Gadamer's "Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy."

[54] Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to* Plato, xvii.

[55] Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to* Plato, 26-27.

[56] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum Int. Pub. Grp, 2004), 22, 27.

[57] Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato*, 27. The method Heidegger used to retrieve Aristotle from Plato, is a similar method Gadamer uses to retrieve Plato from Heidegger.

[58] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 6.

have a new connotation.[59] It was only then that the empirical sciences separated by their methodology inspired by procedural steps and therefore separated themselves from philosophy.[60]

Hermeneutical trends throughout history in the western tradition convey several events and individuals vital to their development that is threaded together like beads on a necklace. These are the waves of influential thought that provoked the moments of understanding throughout western thought and have influenced the development of Gadamerian hermeneutical philosophy. These movements, some influenced by key individuals, provoked interpretation and led to significantly changed and developed theological hermeneutics. The trends set in these developmental theories bear the foundation for Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics as well as display the monumental themes of theology that lead to the questions of today's hermeneutical enterprise.

2.5 Plato's Dialogues and Their Being

We begin first by looking at how Gadamer was significantly influenced by Greek philosophy, specifically a certain interpretation of Plato.[61] According to Gadamer, the most appropriate way to understand Plato was through understanding how Plato's dialogues were written. The to-and-fro motion of question and answer and style of the conversation in Plato's writings became the foundation of Gadamer's hermeneutical theory of understanding.[62]

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[59] See a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between philosophy and science, especially related to the role of mathematics in Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Citizens of Two Worlds," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, 211.

[60] Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, 7.

[61] It is beyond the scope of this research to go into detail regarding Gadamer's observations of the different dialogues of Plato. For more details in this regard, see Gadamer's *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* and *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*.

[62] Gadamer first grounded this work in his dissertation at Marburg and then expanded on it with more philosophical connections years later. For more on Gadamer's work and Platonic dialogue see Gadamer's dissertation, "*Das Wesen der Lust nach den Platonischen Dialogen* (The Essence of Pleasure in Plato's Dialogues)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Marburg, 1922). For more details see Donatella Di

Gadamer argues that we misrepresented Plato by interpreting *Plato's Dialogues* as

doctrine *for* "being."[63] Instead, we must reclaim Plato by way of interpreting Plato by

understanding *how* Plato engaged dialectically and uncovered truth through understanding.

Because of the empirical sciences' indebtedness to the Cartesian model of understanding,

theological and philosophical ideals have been permanently separated from the natural sciences

as completely different types of understanding. All of this to say, theological and philosophical

hermeneutics have been constrained by the ways of the Cartesian-influenced Enlightenment and

therefore strive to prove themselves as academic and scientific enterprises.

In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer asserts the emphasis, is not on Plato's distinction

of Ideas and Forms as "generated by the subject in pursuit of knowledge of objects," but that it

was the overarching embodiment of the dialogue that was neglected. "This is not through

rigorous deduction or methodical interrogation of the object but through a questioning openness

that allows itself to be guided, in the back and forth of conversation."[64] Here we see the

differential between the Cartesian-based understanding of the *Dialogues* as the foundation for

doctrine and the Gadamerian understanding of the practice and process of the *Dialogues* by way

of application of "being."[65] The *Dialogues* by Plato have been the central theme and centrifuge

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Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[63] According to Gadamer, "Thinking always points beyond itself. Platonic dialogue has an expression for this; it refers to the one, the being, the good the presents itself in the order of the soul, the political constitution, or the nature of the world." Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 186.

[64] Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, xi.

[65] Robert Sullivan, the translator of *Philosophical Apprenticeships,* claims that "[t]he discovery that the Platonic Socrates had no systemic and objective philosophy – that his profession of ignorance was not irony but rather the plain truth, and that as a consequence he was compelled to fall back on discourse – was liberating for the young Gadamer as it had been for Schleiermacher before him." Such discovery for Gadamer was found in Paul Natorp who argued against the dogmatic Platonic interpretation but rather the hypothetical. This led to a redirection towards dialectics in German philology. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), xi-xii.

of Gadamer's hermeneutical worldview and have been his "single most continuous preoccupation throughout his career, precisely because of the way in which they embody and exemplify the process."[66]

Distinguishing between Aristotle and Plato, Gadamer exposes the dialogical nature of understanding by way of interpretive practice.[67] Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics are evident in the ways in which he understands Plato's dialogues.[68] Gadamer theorizes in a new and different way by understanding Plato's continuous commitment to dialogue as a means for understanding. Gadamer claims:

> For me the pre-eminent model has been the *dialogue*. Plato was right in saying that thinking is at best a dialogue with oneself. But in a *real* dialogue, like the dialogues he wrote, the key point to be grasped is that there is no subject who states and fixes the objective content of an utterance, and then argues this fixed idea as the whole point. Instead there is an interplay between two persons, so that both expose themselves to one another with the expectation that each tries in his own way to find a common point between himself and the interlocutor.[69]

Additionally, Gadamer reimagines the relationship between the 'forms' and 'essences.' The focus on the ideal version of the thing, the 'form' was designed to be a template made by the master and a mason would use it as a guide towards a true goal which requires a deep understanding and careful engagement of reality to grasp the form of the thing. This is one main deviation of Greek philosophy from Heideggerian interpretations that Gadamer tethers himself

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[66] Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, xii.

[67] To catch an overview of Gadamer's reading of Plato, see Charles Griswold, "Gadamer and the Interpretation of Plato," *Ancient Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 171-178.

[68] Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *The Gadamer Reader*, 227. *See* also Gary Browning, *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2016), 139.

[69] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer" in *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 222. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664883.

to, that Enlightenment as seen from Kant and Descartes, rooted in Greek philosophy as influenced by Plato and Aristotle.[70]

By arguing that the Enlightenment theories stemming from the central understandings of Plato's *Theories of Forms*, Gadamer asserts this resulted in the crux of the misunderstanding of Greek thought, especially related to hermeneutics. By understanding Plato's *Theories of Forms* reinterpreted by Gadamer, we gain much more than we currently understand and this becomes the central foundation of contemporary Gadamerian hermeneutics.[71]

Participation becomes, for Gadamer, the most central feature of hermeneutics. Zuckert claims, "Gadamer understood there to be no progress in hermeneutics, (especially philosophical), only participation within it."[72] This was drawn from Gadamer's central understanding of Plato's dialogues. Therefore, Zuckert observes, "Plato presented philosophy not as a doctrine or theory so much as a form of human existence."[73] Zuckert continues by explaining that tt is with Plato's dialogues that Gadamer recognizes how Plato presents philosophy "as the search for wisdom, never the possession of it."[74] Gadamer's metaphysical concepts used in his hermeneutic philosophy are derived directly from the Socratic dialogues being formative to "being" itself and exposes the essential characteristic of understanding, the application of dialogue. To Gadamer, understanding Plato's ideas could only be achieved dialectically. Zuckert summarizes Gadamer by claiming, "single ideas could not be recognized or known as such in themselves; they could

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[70] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 195.

[71] Gadamer claims that he had, "been formed more by the Platonic dialogues than by the great thinkers of German Idealism." Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 184.

[72] Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 71.

[73] Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 71.

[74] Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 72.

be known only in relation to others."[75] Therefore, hermeneutics is participation and truth is an event within that participation, the "fusion of horizons."

It has been noted that Plato's practice of art inspired Gadamer to connect the relationship "between the parts and the whole is by no means obvious or self-evident; it requires a certain kind of art both to see it and to enable others to see it as well."[76] Connected to Plato's *Parmenides* and *Philebus,* Gadamer bridges words and meanings to the structure of ideas. Just as the nature of dialogue and discourse, "what each letter means by itself it no longer means when it is combined with others to form a word."[77] Here we see, as Gadamer notes, that "Platonic dialogue is a model of writing that embraces many meanings and inner relationships."[78] Gadamer argues that the dialogues of Plato should be understood in the context of spoken language, "as a developing discussion."[79] Using Plato as a foundational narrative by which he based his early philosophy and dissertation, it was the emphasis of dialogue that Gadamer gathers from the Platonic dialogues and thereby critiques Aristotle's interpretation of Plato as being too "dogmatic."[80] Gadamer's quest was not concerned as much with the content of Plato's *Theory of Forms*, although he was critical of the Neo-Kantians use of the theory as scientific bases for the pursuit of knowledge of objects, he was supportive of understanding the form of dialogue that existed in Plato's work.

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[75] Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 76.
[76] Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 81. See also Christopher Smith, "H.-G. Gadamer's Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 12, no. 3 (1981): 211-230.
[77] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 147.
[78] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 558.
[79] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, ix.
[80] Gadamer even understands that his own earlier work on Plato in 1920 did the same. "Using the tools of phenomenology, it attempted to tie Plato's dialectic to Socratic dialogue, but in so doing the basic theme of Plato's doctrine was pushed all too much into the background." Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 125.

With Platonic dialogue itself and the "dialectic" that it embodies: with how Plato describes truth as happening, as coming about, among human beings. This is not through rigorous deduction or methodical interrogation of the object but through a questioning openness that allows itself to be guided, in the back and forth conversation…[81]

Gadamer maintains that Plato held oral ongoing discussions and the character of these is the essence of dialogue as a hermeneutical practice.[82] Even more so, the skeletal of Plato's philosophy in the dialogues is not the essence of his teaching, and therefore it would be limiting to assume it as doctrine. Gadamer notes, "Any interpretation of Plato's thought true to his intent must make use of what the dialogues only hint at without actually stating."[83] Gadamer expands on this with the example of words and their meanings, "Just as individual words acquire their meaning and relative unambiguity only in the unity of discourse, so the true knowledge of being can be achieved only in the whole of the relational structure of the ideas."[84] Gadamer gathers this primarily from Plato's dialogues and the resistant urge to deduce systematic doctrine from his dialogues. Therefore, he understands that "Plato's doctrine of ideas turns out to be a general theory of relationship from which it can be convincingly deduced that dialectic is unending and infinite."[85] To achieve this infinite and open-ended dialogue successfully, the ongoing feat "is a constant going beyond oneself and a return to oneself, one's own opinions and one's own point of view."[86] This contributes to Gadamer's emphasis on the importance of prejudice in the

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[81] Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, xi.
[82] "We can certainly agree that in general Plato gave oral instruction only to those who belonged to the intimate circle of his 'school' and that he exchanged his thoughts with them alone." Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 126.
[83] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 140.
[84] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 447.
[85] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 152.
[86] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2006), 547.

process of hermeneutics. However, Gadamer faced the daunting task of demonstrating to his peers his critique of Enlightenment as it pertained to critical thinking and hermeneutical inquiry.

2.6 Summary and Conclusion

The development of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as demonstrated above, through his ongoing transformation and understanding of Plato's dialogues, practically express the foundation to which Gadamer built his hermeneutical model. By which he articulates, "when we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but… into the perspective within which he has formed his views."[87]

The problem that exists today in comparative theology has a great deal to do with methodology. Some related fields of theology, that lean too far into the Enlightenment ideals and hold fast to foundational narratives derived from the text as truth have tried to cripple the theological and hermeneutical inquiries set by comparative theology. Like theology of religions, these academic enterprises highly focused their interpretative attention on methods to produce truth and looked to natural sciences to inform and mimic the methods of the humanities. This results in an emphasis on proofs and apologetics for the discovery of truth. This severe reliance on systems and systematics has drastically limited their hermeneutical horizon and therefore pressured other fields like comparative theology to take on the same task.

The characteristics of comparative theology as mentioned in the introduction of this research, display the essential issues that contemporary comparative theologians are facing in the field of theology. It is without a doubt that the influences noted above from the Enlightenment have shaped our current dynamics in comparative theology.

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[87] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 303.

In the next few chapters, we will explore – in a preliminary fashion – how interreligious hermeneutics is already being achieved in the field of comparative theology and how Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics is specifically applicable to the discipline. We will shift away from theological and philosophical hermeneutics by exploring how the shifts in philosophy have developed and impacted our horizon of hermeneutical understanding. During the timeline described in this chapter, a schism develops, a track of philosophy that runs parallel but is related to the field of theology. For our purposes, it will be important to cover some illuminating highlights of philosophical hermeneutics that will lead us to a better understanding of Gadamer's context, both philosophically and historically.

CHAPTER 3: Contemporary Philosophical Influences on Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Review

> Philosophical Hermeneutics takes as its task 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 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]

Philosophical hermeneutics was termed and most influenced by the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[2] Although Gadamer is a primary contributor, it is important to mention the significant philosophical themes and individuals who came before and those who have come after Gadamer. The themes this chapter explores include the emphasis on language, dialectic, hermeneutical circle, interpretation, and pre-understandings within hermeneutics. These themes are developed from the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Martin Heidegger. We also see the influence of Paul Ricœur and Hannah Arendt which highlights developments in philosophical hermeneutics after Gadamer; in particular, the hermeneutics of suspicion and political dimensions.[3] The themes developed by these philosophers influenced the current shape of philosophical hermeneutics and continue to pave the field today. As we will see,

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 277.

[2] Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), xi, E-book.

[3] It should be mentioned here that neither Gadamer nor Ricœur mention each other in their popular works in the 1960's. See Jean Grondin, "Do Gadamer and Ricœur have the Same Understanding of Hermeneutics?" in *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics,* dir. Ming Xie (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), 43-64.

the cross-pollination of philosophy and religion has created a space where interreligious hermeneutics has proven to thrive.[4]

3.1 Why philosophical hermeneutics?

Philosophical hermeneutics has informed and formed the development of interreligious hermeneutics primarily in two ways. First, philosophical hermeneutics has given structure and direction towards methodology within interreligious hermeneutics. The second aspect is in terms of application. Philosophical hermeneutics has informed how interreligious hermeneutics regards and incorporates the application of understanding. This chapter will first describe the philosophical waves, themes, and individuals who significantly influenced Hans-Georg Gadamer; second, put Gadamer in dialogue with these categories and describe how he expands, rejects or accepts certain philosophical trends; and third, briefly describe how these categories, themes, and individuals contribute to interreligious hermeneutics. Comparative theologians are increasingly interested in the intersection of philosophical hermeneutics and its dynamic relationship with interreligious hermeneutics.[5] Whether that interest is with the use of Ricœur's

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[4] It is here that I should mention that there are several hermeneutical philosophers like Betti, Hegel, Husserl, Herder, etc. who have contributed to the field but are not mentioned in this section. In part, the complete development of philosophical hermeneutics is beyond the scope of this research and unattainable in such a short piece. However, the complete development of philosophical hermeneutics, including more contemporary thinkers of today, would contribute much to today's conversation of philosophical hermeneutics and the various directions and fields of its influences. In this piece I try, albeit with difficultly, to stay, within the realm of philosophical concepts, themes, and individuals who are pertinent in understanding the philosophical development and influence of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

[5] See Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 7 (2016): 1-20, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007. See also Marianne Moyaert, "Ricœur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (2017): 173-199, https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491; Patrick J. Casey, "Ricœur on truth in Religious Discourse: A Reclamation," *Horizons* 46, no. 1 (2019): 24-52; Marianne Moyaert, "Comparative Theology in Search of a Hermeneutical Framework," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, eds., David Cheetham et. al., (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370_011; Nicholas Adams, "Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith

philosophical concept of ritual, linguistic hospitality, or Gadamer's concept of play or prejudice, comparative theologians increasingly incorporate philosophical hermeneutics into the development and expression of interreligious hermeneutics.

In *The Question for Theological Truth*, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin highlight the ever-growing interest in bridging philosophical and theological hermeneutics, "[o]ur hypothesis is that hermeneutics can form the bridge between theologians working with contemporary continental philosophers and their colleagues engaging the multireligious world."[6] This chapter will (1) highlight the philosophical tradition and trends that have informed and formed contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, especially related to the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, (2) describe the characteristics of interreligious hermeneutics inherited from philosophical hermeneutics, and (3) expose what interreligious hermeneutics still needs, the present problem, and address how Gadamer's philosophy can serve to be helpful.

We start with Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, not just because he is noted as the "father of hermeneutics,"[7] but because Gadamer understands that his quest for hermeneutical expositional theory is indebted to Schleiermacher's contributions.[8] Schleiermacher explores the interpretative theory, general hermeneutics, the "art of understanding," and the importance of language.[9] As Georgia Warnke supports, "For the hermeneutic tradition, the hermeneutic circle describes a

Hermeneutics," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, eds. Cheetham et al. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370_005.

[6] Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Quest of Theological Truth: Philosophical and Interreligious Perspectives*, ed. Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 21.

[7] Jacqueline Mariña, ed., "The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher," *Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521814480.

[8] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 243.

[9] Friedrich Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Volmer (New York: Continuum, 2006), 73.

means for testing our interpretation of a given text."[10] The *Christian Faith* by Schleiermacher is

a systematic theological endeavor that has been influential about the analysis of the human

experience.[11] Gadamer picks up on the themes of the hermeneutical circle and use of language

from his work throughout Gadamer's hermeneutical theory and expands them.[12]

Continuing with the legacy of hermeneutic philosophers we approach Wilhelm Dilthey

who expands on and critiques parts of Schleiermacher's interpretative hermeneutical theory.

Dilthey develops and adds his zest to the hermeneutical process, namely his contribution of

"experience, expression, and understanding."[13] Dilthey's method of understanding, still very

much rooted in the rationalism that developed out of the Enlightenment, emphasizes the

objectification of valid interpretations of the human's inner experience. This task is

accomplished best, according to Dilthey, by the process of "experience, expression, and

understanding." We find that Gadamer is not satisfied with Dilthey's hermeneutical method as it

focuses too much on method. And therefore, he strongly suggests that Dilthey does not fully

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[10] Georgia Warnke, "The Hermeneutical Circle Versus Dialogue," *The Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 1 (September 2011): 94.

[11] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, vol. 1-2, Trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016). See also, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 303. Warnke highlights the connections between Gadamer's hermeneutical circle and Heidegger but here does not specifically connect it back to Schleiermacher. Warnke, "The Hermeneutical Circle Versus Dialogue," 98. For more on Gadamer's connections to Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle see, Jean Grondin, "The Hermeneutical Circle," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Hoboken: John Wilen & Sons, Inc., 2016). Grondin traces the philosophical concept of the hermeneutical circle back to ancient antiquity. However, in modern philosophy he cites A. Boeckh as an influencer of Schleiermacher (401).

[13] Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," in *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding,* trans. Kenneth L. Heiges (Dordrecht: Springer, 1977). See also Iryna Liashenko, "Wilhelm Dilthey: Understanding the Human World," *Philosophy and Cosmology* 20 (2018): 164.

appreciate how humans are part and parcel of the tradition they encompass, which affects their experience, expression, and understanding.[14]

Moving beyond Dilthey, we come to the hermeneutical developments of Martin Heidegger. This is when phenomenology of hermeneutics begins to develop, essentially meaning the focus of hermeneutics is not the process or method of understanding but how understanding comes to fruition, through one's being.[15] In *Being and Time*, Heidegger emphasizes the "beingness" of the human experience rather than the "thinkingness" of Descartes' rationalism.[16] Essentially, "Heidegger's concern after *Being and Time* was to avoid the artesian idea that the ground of truth lay in the self-certainty of a subject."[17] As Heidegger's student at the University of Marburg, Gadamer was significantly influenced by his phenomenology of hermeneutics. Gadamer resonates with the way in which Heidegger leaned into the work of art as being connected to *Dasein*.[18] Gadamer claims, "It seems to me that Heidegger took a very important step in designating the work of art as an event of truth. He shows that the work of art is not merely the product of an ingenious creative process, but that it is a work that has its own brightness in itself; it is there [*da*], "so true, so fully existing [*so seined*]."[19]

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[14] Although Gadamer gives credit to Dilthey for drawing attention to history and "the whole of the text," Gadamer is critical of Dilthey's hermeneutical methods in *Truth and Method* (2013), 181, 203, 259.

[15] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 260-262.

[16] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), 23.

[17] Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London, U.K.: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 189.

[18] In *Truth and Method* (2013), instead of replacing *Dasein* with an English term, the translators have chosen to keep *Dasein* in the German because of its untranslatability into English. See also S. Panneerselvam, "Gadamer's Critique of Heidegger's Hermeneutics of Facticity," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2003): 495-508.

[19] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, John W. Stanley, trans. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 23-24.

Also mentioned below is the hermeneutics of Hannah Arendt, a peer of Gadamer's from the University of Marburg, and also a student of Heidegger. Paul Ricœur could not be without mention because of his development of hermeneutics of suspicion and his shared philosophical interests with Gadamer. Gathering from and influenced by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and others, Gadamer approaches the phenomenon of human understanding with a different perspective developed more fully in other parts of this research. These include philosophical concepts such as language, prejudice, tradition, reflection, symbol and "fusion of horizons."[20]

3.2 Schleiermacher, The Father of Modern Hermeneutics

Noted as "the father of modern hermeneutics as a general study," Friedrich Schleiermacher developed hermeneutics as a general field that could be applied to various types of texts; such as legal, sacred, and literature.[21] As Richard Palmer articulates, the essence of Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics is texts are based on language and "grammar is used to find the meaning of a sentence; a general idea interacts with the grammatical structure to form the meaning, no matter what the type of document."[22] For example, one could only properly

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[20] For a fuller work of these themes see, Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

[21] Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, 84. It is not just because Schleiermacher is a pillar of hermeneutics, theologically, he has proven to be a substantial contributor. Hugh Nicholson argues, "...Schleiermacher's conception of religion and religious community has proven more successful and influential in shaping the trajectory of liberal theology than has the theological rationalism of the Enlightenment." Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56.

[22] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 84.

interpret sacred texts with an understanding of interpretation that applied to all texts. This shift is situated from specific methods of interpretation to the more general sense of hermeneutics.[23]

Hermeneutics, according to Schleiermacher, is based on human experience, and is the "art of understanding ... the discourse of another person correctly."[24] Therefore, the art of understanding is dialogical in nature and the principles of the process of understanding contain reconstruction, the hermeneutical circle, grammatical and psychological interpretation. This is achieved, according to Schleiermacher, because "understanding" is the art of experiencing the same process of thought that the author experienced.[26] This process is fulfilled in a cyclical experience between text and interpreter, expressed through language. Within Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, there is a strong emphasis on understanding the language of the author because of the invitation language presents to the interpreter to experience the hermeneutical circle.

Most relevant to our quest is Schleiermacher's contribution of "the hermeneutical circle." The hermeneutical circle is derived from the dialectical interaction between the *part* and the *whole*, the interaction between the two modes gives meaning to each. The *part* is part of the *whole* and the *whole* does not exist without the *parts*. Understanding the *parts* and *whole* together is imperative to the art of understanding.[27] Therefore, according to Schleiermacher, through a cyclical fashion, meaning is illuminated.[28]

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[23] For an overview of the grand shifts in philosophical hermeneutics see Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

[24] Schleiermacher, "Hermeneutics and Criticism," in *Schleiermacher: Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, edited by Andrew Bowie, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

[26] Schleiermacher, "Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, 103.

[27] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, 231.

[28] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," 229, 231, 257.

Reconstruction of the experience of the author of a text to re-experience the mental process of the author is the basis of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics.[29] Schleiermacher's goal in hermeneutics is reconstructing the experience of the author's horizon.[30] Palmer explains, "In other words, the objective is not to assign motives or causes for the author's feelings (psychoanalysis) but to reconstruct the thought itself of another person through interpretation of his utterance."[31] This adds to the art of understanding by highlighting the process and reasons to understand the perspective, worldview, and interpretation of the author of a text. However, Schleiermacher understands there is room for misunderstanding. The "art of understanding" becomes the art of avoiding misunderstanding. Misunderstanding is divided into two forms: qualitative, not understanding the content, and quantitative, misunderstanding the nuance in the author's own sphere. As Palmer claims, Schleiermacher takes hermeneutics beyond scientific methods of understanding, "accumulated by trial and error and asserted the legitimacy of a general art of understanding proper to any special art of interpretation."[32]

In terms of the hermeneutical circle, "Schleiermacher left room for such a factor when he saw understanding as partly a comparative and partly an intuitive and divinatory matter."[33] This comparative piece is located in the pivotal intersection between the dialogue of the *part* and *the whole*. The *part* and *whole* are not separate entities but exist together because of shared understanding between the two.[34] As Palmer argues, for Schleiermacher, "Hermeneutics is seen as starting from the conditions of dialogue." However, Schleiermacher did not fully understand

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[29] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," 257-258.
[30] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," 50, 258.
[31] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 89.
[32] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 95.
[33] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 87.
[34] See Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, "The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures," *New Literary History* 10, no. 1, *Literary Hermeneutics* (Autumn, 1978): 2-3. "Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Hermeneutics and Criticism," 228.

the implications of hermeneutics dialogical essence because of "its own desire for laws and systematic coherence."[35]

Schleiermacher, with whom Dilthey would later disagree, argues "essentially and inwardly, thought and its expression are completely the same."[36] Gadamer asserts, "The problem for Schleiermacher was not that of the obscurities of history but of the obscurity of the thou."[37] Later Gadamer corrects his misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Schleiermacher.[38] As Andrew Bowie articulates, Gadamer's misleading account of Schleiermacher is likely due to several factors that "all relate to a more widespread failure adequately to engage with the philosophy of early German Romanticism, a failure which relates both to historical changes in the perception of the history of philosophy and to the fact that some of the relevant texts have not been readily accessible."[39] As Bleicher asserts, Schleiermacher and Dilthey allow us to consider texts as "expressions of life which have become fixed through writing."[40] However, Dilthey attempts to recover hermeneutics by returning to the romantic ideals concerned with human experience in the world. He attempts this by moving towards discovery of ideologies and laws of understanding.

3.3 Experience, Expression, Understanding

Wilhelm Dilthey, a German psychologist and philosopher, was deeply influenced by the scientific methodology and historical methods of his time. In a way, Dilthey revived Schleiermacher's hermeneutics that was rooted in German Romanticism. "It was Dilthey's aim

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[35] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics," 232-233.
[36] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), 21. Translated by Palmer in *Hermeneutics*, 93.
[37] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 197.
[38] Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 124.
[39] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie, xxxvii.
[40] Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 244.

to develop methods of gaining 'objectively valid' interpretations of 'expressions of inner life.'"[41]

Dilthey criticized the tendency of the humanities to take on the ways of understanding from the natural sciences.[42] Palmer strongly suggests that "concrete, historical, lived experience must be the starting and ending point for *Geisteswissenschaften*. Life itself is that out of which we must develop our thinking and towards which we direct our questioning."[44] To understand Dilthey and Gadamer more, we must understand them through the lens of Kant.

Immanuel Kant is an important interlocutor for Gadamer due to Kant's specific writings on Enlightenment.[46] Kant was a great philosopher who was a firm believer in rationalism until he was awakened from his "dogmatic slumber" by reading Hume. In 1781, Kant published the first of his three critiques: *The Critique of Pure Reason*.[47] According to Kant, there are no such things as innate ideas; yet there are fundamental structures of the mind, and within those structures, we must place whatever data the senses provide us. Those structures are, firstly, time and space, and then twelve "categories," such as causality, existence, substance, and so forth.[48] These twelve categories are not perceived through senses, however. Kant argues they are the structures that our

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[41] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 98.

[42] Gadamer says himself, "The first book of philosophy I picked up was Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*..." in *Philosophical Apprenticeships,* 5. Rüdiger Bubner, "Looking Back on Gadamer's Hermeneutics," in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 225.

[44] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 99. *Geisteswissenschaften* is the human and social sciences. Although there is more to be said regarding this term. This is properly highlighted in the Translator's Preface of the 2013 edition of *Truth and Method*.

[46] Robert Dostal asserts that Kant's essay *"Was heißt Aufklärung?"* (What is Enlightenment?) stands out as a culminating expression of what the Enlightenment is about. This is so not only for Gadamer but for almost every writer and commentator on the Enlightenment..." in Robert Dostal, "Gadamer, Kant, and the Enlightenment," *Research in Phenomenology* 46 (2016): 338.

[47] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Muller (London: MacMillan and Co., 1881); Kristin Gjesdal understands Gadamer's interpretation of Kant to be imperative to his argument in *Truth and Method* (2013), "Reading Kant Hermeneutically: Gadamer and *The Critique of Judgment*," *Kant-Stuien Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant*-Gesellschaft. Vol. 98, no. 3, (2007): 352, https://doi.org/10.1515/KANT.2007.020.

[48] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day Volume II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 246

mind had to use to organize the sensations that are fed to it by the senses. Kant's work meant that arguments traditionally used in support of doctrine were no longer valid.

According to Kant, there is no way to prove the existence of God or the soul, since existence is a category of the mind. This did not lead Kant's philosophy to believe in the absolute denial of a Creator or of eternity. This means that if there is a creator and an eternity, reason cannot know or understand them, "just as the eye cannot hear and the ear cannot see."[49] Kant, however, argued there is such a thing as "practical reason."[50] Practical reason's fundamental principle is to "act in such a manner that the rule for your action can be made a universal rule."[51] This concept accepts the knowledge of the existence of God as the judge of all action, of the soul and its freedom as the occasion for moral action, and life after death as the means for rewarding good and punishing evil. Kant significantly influenced the philosophical thought of Gadamer.[52] Gadamer's critique for Kant runs strong through *Truth and Method*. "Thus, for Gadamer, Kant's impetrative to 'think for oneself' is abstract, empty, and ultimately impossible."[53] Dilthey especially draws on Kant by extending the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the field of philosophy and history.

Dilthey's *Critique of Historical Reason* intended to overcome the rationalism of the Enlightenment within the scope of philosophy and history by engaging logic and lived

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[49] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 247.
[50] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2002).
[51] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 247.
[52] Kant influenced Gadamer to such a degree that there is a distinct "Kantian turning-point in Gadamerian hermeneutics." See more: Kristína Bosáková, "Kantian Turning Point in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," *International Journal of Philosophy* 4 (November 2016): 167.
[53] James Schmidt, "Introduction: What is Enlightenment? A Question, its context, and some Consequences," ed. James Schmidt *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 19.

experience in combination with each other as "science."[54] This is seen within his hermeneutical methodology.

> Dilthey, following Schleiermacher, sees this transposition as reconstruction and reexperiencing of another person's inner world of experience. The interest is not in the other person, however, but in the world itself, a world is seen as a "social-historical" world; it is the world of inner moral imperatives, a shared community of feelings and reactions, a common experience of beauty.[55]

Out of Dilthey's reconstruction and reexperience of the Other, he develops a hermeneutic consisting of "experience-expression-understanding."[56] These three aspects of hermeneutics Dilthey develops are further explained below.

Experience

There are two words for "experience" in German, *Erfahrung*, and *Erlebnis*. *Erfahrung* refers to the general experience in life. *Erlebnis*, used by Dilthey, refers to specific and limited experience. From the verb *Erleben,* means "to experience, especially in individual instances." "Thus, the word 'experience' is in German a cognate of the verb "to live," an emphatic form which suggests the immediacy of life itself as we meet it."[57] Lived experience, in Dilthey's language, is described as something "held together by a common meaning." Therefore, according to Dilthey, "Lived experience does provide an immediate sense of the whole, but

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[54] Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences: Selected Works* vol. III, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 238.

[55] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 104.

[56] Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," in *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding,* trans. Kenneth L. Heiges (Dordrecht: Springer, 1977).

[57] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 107.

understanding, in appealing to all the powers of the psyche, does not overlook the intellectual

processes."[58] Palmer elaborates by stating, "Experience is intrinsically temporal (and this means

historical in the deepest sense of the word), and therefore understanding of experience must also

be in commensurately temporal (historical) categories of thought."[59] In this sense, "historicality"

means that we only understand the present because of the reality of the past and future.[60]

Therefore, "the text or events of the past speak anew in the language of the present and answer

new questions; the present is enhanced and broadened by the fusion and the narrowness of its

prejudices overcome."[61]

Expression and Understanding

        The term, *Ausdruck,* translated as "expression," was used by Dilthey to convey the

"expression of life,"[62] which can refer to "an idea, a law, a social form, language – anything that

reflects the imprint of the inner life on [humans]. It is not primarily a symbol of feeling."[63]

Expressions are social-historical realities conveyed through mediums, like language, art, and

other works.[64] Therefore, all language is considered an expression of inner thought and thus

needs interpretation to be understood.

        Understanding, *Verstehen,* designates "the operation in which the mind grasps the 'mind'

(*Geist*) of the other person. It is not a purely cognitive operation of the mind at all but that special

        [58] Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," 7.
        [59] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 111.
        [60] Jacob Owensby, "Dilthey and the Historicity of Poetic Expression," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 4 (1988): 502.
        [61] David E. Linge, "Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Understanding," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLI, no. 4 (December 1973): 550, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLI.4.536.
        [62] Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," 123.
        [63] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 112. Gender-inclusive language added.
        [64] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 114.

moment when life understands life."[65] One step in understanding, especially related to the author of a text, is the methodological device of *Nacherleben*, meaning "re-experiencing." This is the process of recreating the socio-historical context of the author by which meaning was created.[66] Therefore, as Dilthey claims, "In each of these expressions there is a relation which exists between a state of a subject and an object...the intermediary between lived experience and understanding, namely, expression."[67]

3.4 Introducing the Hermeneutical Circle

Schleiermacher's process of interpretation, which Dilthey coined "the hermeneutical circle," was the reciprocity between implicit and explicit, or the *part* and *whole*.[68] "This is the basis of the famous *hermeneutical circle*, a continual reciprocity between whole and parts, which Schleiermacher envisaged as essential in the art of interpretation."[69] Gathering from Schleiermacher, the hermeneutical circle is a reference for Dilthey. The crucial element for Dilthey, however, is the "meaning" between the interaction of the *whole* and *part*.[70] Dilthey affirms this is similar to the "meaning" created when the *parts* of someone's life interact with the *whole* of their life. Therefore, "the meaning of the whole is a 'sense' derived from the meaning of individual parts… The sense of the whole determines the function and the meaning of the parts. And meaning is something historical; it is a relationship of whole to parts seen by us from a given standpoint, at a given time, for a given combination of parts."[71]

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[65] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 115.
[66] Owensby, "Dilthey and the Historicity of Poetic Expression," 505.
[67] Wilhelm Dilthey, "Poetry and Experience," *Selected Works* vol V., ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 229.
[68] Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," 15-16.
[69] Keith W. Clements, "Main Themes in Schleiermacher's Theology," in *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 49.
[70] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 118.
[71] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 118.

Dilthey also suggests that the circularity of understanding does not prescribe a particular place from which to begin.[72] Palmer explains this by claiming, "Since we understand always from within our own horizon, which is part of the hermeneutical circle, there can be non-positional understanding of anything. We understand by constant reference to our experience."[73]

Gadamer's criticism of Dilthey, expressed in *Truth and Method*, focuses primarily on Dilthey's approach and emphasis on aesthetics and method. Gadamer highlights that Dilthey does not recognize that the interpreter's interpretations have a temporal horizon by occupying a particular position within the horizon of the interpreter.[74] For Gadamer understanding is not achieved by reconstruction but through integration. Gadamer claims, "It would be an inadmissible abstraction to contend that we must first have achieved a contemporaneousness with the author or the original reader by means of a reconstruction of his historical horizon before we could begin to grasp the meaning of what is said."[76] Continuing by explaining, "...the experience of art is experience in a real sense and must master ever anew the task that experience involves: the task of integrating..."[77]

As seen in Schleiermacher and now in Dilthey, the attachment to methods of interpretation, Heidegger moves us in a different direction by building on the efforts of those who have come before him. Heidegger's convictions and emphasis on *Dasein* were conceived

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[72] Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Expressions of Life," 15-16.
[73] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 121.
[74] Linge, "Dilthey and Gadamer," 544.
[76] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Hermeneutics* Trans and ed. David E. Linge (California: University of California Pres, 1976), 101.
[77] Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," 101.

from Dilthey's approach to the subject matter, which led Heidegger towards a more ontological view of understanding.[78]

3.5 The Unfolding of the Self in Time

Martin Heidegger emphasizes the meaning of *being*. The concept of humans is linked to Descartes' understanding that human existence is founded on *thinking*. "Hermeneutics, with one step, has become 'interpretation of being of *Dasein*.'" Thus, "[i]t lays open what was hidden; it constitutes not an interpretation of an interpretation but the primary act of interpretation which first brings a thing from concealment."[79] The unfolding of what is concealed is the *being* that is understood.[80]

Heidegger emphasizes a phenomenological approach to hermeneutics that becomes a strong development within philosophical hermeneutics. Going further, "such a method would be of highest significance to hermeneutical theory, since it implies that interpretation is not grounded in human consciousness and human categories but in the manifestness of the thing encountered, the reality that comes to meet us."[81]

Heidegger's Understanding

Heidegger differentiates his hermeneutics from traditional hermeneutics, like Schleiermacher and Dilthey, by deviating from the Cartesian expression of understanding that regarded knowledge in the humanities as sub-par. *Dasein*, Heidegger's analysis of "being-in-the-

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[78] See more on romantic hermeneutics in Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (1969), 117. See also Schleiermacher, "The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures," 1-2.

[79] Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* 129.

[80] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), 105.

[81] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 128.

world," heavily influenced the "understanding of understanding from a derivative phenomenon to the central feature, the keystone, of human experience."[82] In this sense, understanding is more than observation of behaviors of an object and subject dichotomy. Understanding, in the way Gadamer proposes, embraces the *whole* of its own experience of the world. This brings us to Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein*.

Dasein

Before Heidegger, *Dasein* was often translated into the word, "existence." It is directly translated into da-sein meaning "being-there/there-being."[83] Heidegger disagreed with this definition of *Dasein* and went on to develop it in *Being and Time*. He went further and developed the term to mean, "that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue..."[84] *Dasein* is more than self-understanding as self-understanding is understanding the human condition within the individual context. *Dasein* is understanding the self within the context of the world and the act of being with and of the world. It is understanding human existence within the world. The process of understanding the meaning created by *Dasein* is assisted by interpretation.[85]

As Hoy asserts, Heidegger emphasizes interpretative understanding as developed by the primary mode of human existence, *Dasein*.[86] *Dasein* circularly connects with the world and

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[82] David Couzens Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutics Turn," *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177.

[83] Gadamer shares that *Dasein* is more than what Heidegger understands as "existence." Dasein is the "being there present." He connects this to festival, as just being at the festival is not the same as participating in the festival. See *Truth and Method* (2013), 126-127.

[84] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67-68.

[85] Heidegger claims, "We have interpreted the world ontologically by going through what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; and Interpretation has been put first, because Dasein, in its everydayness... not only is in a world but comports itself towards that world with one predominant kind of Being." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 149.

[86] Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutics Turn," 177.

invites the hermeneutic circle, developed by Schleiermacher, into this mode of being through human existence.[87] "Traditional philosophy from Descartes to Kant wanted to offer not only a definition of knowledge (for instance, as correct representation of the real world), but also an account of how the knower is connected to the known."[88] In this way, traditional philosophy separated the interpreter from the interpreted and therefore categorized understanding in such a way that meaning was hijacked to be understood only in such a way. The only way meaning was understood was in proofs, tests, and methods. Therefore, the staunched and striking approach of hermeneutics by Heidegger breaks it free from cemented ways of Cartesian approaches of understanding.

Interpretation

Heidegger shares two different terms for interpretation[89] as Hoy claims,

> Heidegger distinguishes between *Auslegung and Interpretierung. Auslegung,* the standard translation of which is "interpretation" with a lowercase "i," includes the everyday phenomena of ordinary skills like hammering, typing, or driving. *Interpretierung,* translated as "Interpretation" with an uppercase "I," includes thematized, discursive articulation and theorization.[90]

To Heidegger, "what is understood is not the meaning but beings [Seiende], or being [Sein]."[91] This is because for Heidegger, "*Meaning … is the upon-which of the project in terms of which something becomes intelligible* [understandable] *as something.*" And "every

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[87] Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutics Turn," 179.
[88] Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutics Turn," 183.
[89] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. Joan Stanbaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 144-147.
[90] Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2010), 147.
[91] Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2010), 146.

interpretation has its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception."[92] In other words,

meaning is understood between the interaction of the *whole* and the *part*. Understanding a *part*

does not necessarily mean that one understands the *whole*. The *whole* is developed through the

process of understanding through the circle of hermeneutics. In this sense, "Understanding is

itself always realized in interpretation and is not a separate, prior operation that then gets

reprocessed in a secondary operation of interpretation."[93] Therefore, commonly understood in

biblical, theological, and philosophical interpretation, understanding is not a product of

interpretation but interpretation is the ongoing process of understanding. Therefore, "the coming

to be – the unfolding or explication – of what *Dasein* can be Heidegger calls interpretation."[94] In

this sense, Heidegger understands the hermeneutical circle to incorporate more than *part* and

whole but a circular relationship between the "already" and the "to be."[95]

3.6 Heidegger's Being

Although Gadamer was highly influenced by Heidegger, he diverged in a few ways. One

of those divergent ways was his understanding of being. Heidegger's description of being is

concerned with uncovering what is disclosed and this is achieved through meditation.[96]

Meditative thinking, according to Heidegger, is not a detachment from reality but the intentional

observation and pondering that allows for our awareness to be awakened.[97] This is because

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[92] Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2010), 222.
[93] Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutics Turn," 194.
[94] Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991), 10.
[95] Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2010), 147, 176.
[96] See more on meditation in Heidegger's being in Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger's Way of Being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 6.
[97] Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 46.

Heidegger's concern is the forgetfulness of being in the history of metaphysics.[98] Therefore, meditation is part of the recovery process of being. Heidegger's being is more than understanding, it is ontological in nature and defines the question of being within the "horizon of time."[99] Charles Guignon also understands Heidegger in this way, in that "Being is temporal unfolding: indeed, it is time itself."[100] The meditativeness of being is expressed by Heidegger as, "The meditative man is to experience the untrembling heart of unconcealment...that the path of thinking, speculative and intuitive, needs the traversable opening. But in that opening rests possible radiance, that is, the possible presencing of presence itself."[101] Although, Heidegger has a meditative attachment to being, Gadamer does not align with this attachment.

As Dostal claims, Gadamer isolates Heidegger's misinterpretation of being to Heidegger's misunderstanding of Plato. That being for Plato and the post-Platonic philosophers "was being-present-at-hand" and that truth for Plato was "correctness."[102] Gadamer criticizes Heidegger's understanding of being by specifically stating, "he is never able to state clearly what Being is—this Being that is not supposed to be the Being of a being [*Seiende*] is sometimes said to be able to be without a being and, at other times, is said to be unable to be without a being (or not: to 'be?')"[103] In *Truth and Method* Gadamer's divergent understanding of being comes out as, "Being that can be understood is language."[104] What Gadamer means here is that being is

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[98] Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, 84.

[99] Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 7. See also Gadamer's dialogue regarding Heidegger's "being-present-at-hand" in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, 97, 103.

[100] Charles Guignon, "Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*," in John Shand, ed., "The Twentieth Century Moore to Popper," *Central Works of Philosophy* 4, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2005), 92.

[101] Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 68.

[102] Robert J. Dostal, "Gadamer's Relation to Heidegger and to Phenomenology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Robert Dostal, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 248.

[103] Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, 22.

[104] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 490.

understood linguistically, not meditatively, like Heidegger asserts. Language is the condition of by which understanding comes to be, through dialogue. Therefore, being is the "already" and becoming is the "to be," that which is to come into being. And for Gadamer, being comes to be through a dialogical process of interpretation between the "already" and the "to be."[105] For Gadamer this process is the process of philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer gathers from Heidegger from various areas and is heavily influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutics.[106] However, Gadamer is divergent in a few ways. First, Gadamer

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[105] For more on "becoming," see Gadamer's work on the relationship between being and becoming in Plato in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, P. Christopher Smith, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 30-31, 112.

[106] It cannot be without mention the significance of Heidegger's involvement with the National Socialist party of Germany from the 1930s and beyond. Heidegger publicly supported the Nazi movement during his rectorship between 1933-1934 at Freiburg University and paid dues to the Nazi party until 1945 (Lyotard, 52). Heidegger expressed regret regarding some texts he had written expressing Nazi sentiment. He disavowed these in 1966, Spiegel Interview. There have been several ways by which Heidegger's involvement with Nazism has been interpreted. For example, Lyotard argues that Heidegger's antisemitism is seeped throughout his philosophical framework, especially Heidegger's understanding of history and critique of modernity (Lyotard, 75). Others like Fred Dallmayr argue for a more nuanced approach to Heidegger's philosophy as it related to Nazism and antisemitism. While others like Victor Farias in *Heidegger and Nazism* and Lacoue-Labarthe are critical of Heidegger because of his involvement with Nazism. See Martin Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* (Mai, 1976): 193-219, trans. W. Richardson as "Only a God Can Save Us" in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (New York: Routledge, 1981), 45-67. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews,"* trans. Andreas Micheal and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, trans. Jeff Fort (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2007).

What is clear is that in a series of private black notebooks, Heidegger reflected on various topics including Nazism. Heidegger expresses antisemitic conspiracy theories, derogatory language and remarks about Jews and engages with Nazi ideology. Published between 2014 and 2021, these notebooks have reignited criticism against Heidegger's involvement in Nazism and has provided more insight into his relationship with Nazism. These notebooks have led to debate and concerns regarding the philosophy of Heidegger and his beliefs.

In, "Origins of Totalitarianism," Hannah Arendt criticizes Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi movement. However, Arendt does not try to separate Heidegger's philosophy from his politics and in her essay, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," she argues that Heidegger's politics is steeped in his philosophy. Arendt also criticisms Heidegger's lack of acknowledgment of responsibility. Arendt's acknowledgment of Heidegger's discouraging ways does not lead to Arendt's rejection of Heidegger's philosophy. Instead, she merely reads Heidegger responsibly with the awareness of his political learnings. See Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *The New York Review*, October 21, 1971.

develops the notion of *Dasein* by emphasizing how language plays a crucial role in understanding and being-within-the-world. Second, Gadamer expands on Heidegger's understanding of the hermeneutical circle by adding the influence and necessity of prejudice and tradition. Third, Gadamer's understanding of being corrects Heidegger's and expands it to be that which language is the vessel and dialogue is the process by which we understand being. Finally, Gadamer understands being to be rooted in dialogue rather than meditation. We will now turn to thinkers like Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricœur who have engaged with Gadamer specifically related to hermeneutical theory development.

3.7 The Influence of Tradition and Need for Participatory Application

Hannah Arendt was a student of Heidegger along with Gadamer. Arendt highlights several aspects of hermeneutics that deviate from Gadamer's perspective, including prejudice, historicity, and tradition.[107] The context of Arendt's life places hermeneutics and ways of understanding the world in such a place where one can understand how she disagreed and deviated from Heidegger and Gadamer, who were among the privileged in their society.[108] Throughout Arendt's career, she wrote on a range of topics but more prolifically she highlighted

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[107] I do not want to miss the opportunity to introduce Hannah Arendt's hermeneutics. Arendt's hermeneutics is especially relevant to my research because she is German-American, female, Jewish, and focuses on relationships; these are particularly connected to interreligious hermeneutics and rightfully should be explored in more detail.

[108] An obvious connection is the influence of Arendt's experience from World War II and the Nazi regime who arrested her and upon her release, she moved out of Germany. She settled in Paris where she worked for Jewish non-profits. When Germany invaded France, she was arrested again by the Nazis and when she escaped, she immigrated to the United States. For more on the life of Hannah Arendt see, Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, Ross Guberman, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

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the political oppression of totalitarianism and the nature of power and evil. Most significant to our topic here is her understanding of prejudice and tradition.[109]

Arendt's position on the philosophical concept of understanding has a practical emphasis, it is essentially to reconcile the space between distance and closeness or between familiarity and strangeness.[110] Describing Arendt's position, Novak explains "this reconciliation does not involve only the present state of affairs, but also reconciliation with the past, especially with the catastrophes of recent history."[111] Interestingly enough, Arendt's position of reconciliation does not include forgiveness empathically.[112] However, an essential aspect of Arendt's concept of understanding is the relatedness understanding has with action in application. This action, according to Arendt, is to be political, moral, ethical, and purposeful.[113]

In connection to methods, Arendt assigns a negative position on the ability of tradition to bring about understanding.[114] Arendt recognizes that tradition has had a history of the inability to recognize and name the political rise in totalitarianism.[115] Arendt recognizes, "the past, to the extent that it is passed on as tradition, has authority; authority, to the extent that it presents itself as history, becomes tradition; and … [a]cceptance of tradition without religiously-based

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[109] See specifically Arendt's work in Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," In *Essays in Understanding 1930 – 1954 by Hannah Arendt: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, Jerome Kohn, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 307-327.

[110] Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 308, 323. See also, Jakub Novak, "Understanding and Judging History: Hannah Arendt and Philosophical Hermeneutics," *META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* II, no. 2 (2010): 494.

[111] Novak, "Understanding and Judging History: Hannah Arendt and Philosophical Hermeneutics," 494.

[112] Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 308.

[113] Hannah Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin [1953]," in Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn, trans. R. Kimber and R. Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 401-409.

[114] Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 308. See also Novak, "Understanding and Judging History: Hannah Arendt and Philosophical Hermeneutics," 482.

[115] Novak, "Understanding and Judging History," 492.

authority is always non-binding."[116] In this sense, tradition, on its own, is unable to recognize the

authority by which it occupies and the power that comes with that authority. She continues to

support this by noting how tradition perpetuates its inherited forms of social patterns, prejudice,

and views of the world and history. Arendt differs from Gadamer in this sense and their

difference is rooted in their interpretation of Plato and Aristotle.[117]

To Arendt, prejudices are not idiosyncratic. Rather, prejudices are "expressions of

collective attitudes toward and viewpoints on the common world."[118] Therefore, prejudices hold

a political element to them. Arendt claims, "The prejudices that we share, that we take to be self-

evident... are... themselves political... something that constitutes an integral part of those human

affairs that are the context in which we go about our daily lives."[119] Additionally, Novak

elaborates by claiming that prejudices "can constitute a viewpoint that is possibly distortive to

newly emerging situations and phenomena; they are still somehow rooted in an actual

confrontation with things and events of the world."[120] Arendt does not state the criteria for how

to decipher which prejudices are valid or invalid (positive or negative).[121]

3.8 A Hermeneutic of Suspicion?

Paul Ricœur's work on hermeneutic phenomenology provides a theoretical perspective,

which recognizes an embodied being-in-the-world that exists outside language but whose

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[116] Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics,* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Shocken Books, 2005), 73.

[117] Douglas B. Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt on Authority and Tradition," in *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts,* ed. Patrick Hayden (London: Routledge, 2014), 149.

[118] Novak, "Understanding and Judging History: Hannah Arendt and Philosophical Hermeneutics," 492.

[119] Arendt, "Introduction into Politics" in *The Promise of Politics*, 99.

[120] Novak, "Understanding and Judging History," 492.

[121] For a more extensive account of the nature and role of prejudice see specifically, Hannah Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, 93-200. Like Gadamer, Arendt turns to the philosophical classics of Plato to understand western philosophical thought.

meaning can be understood only through language, which is immediately and directly applicable to "existential-phenomenological theory and practice."[122] It can be shown that Ricœur's hermeneutical developments were inspired by the Gadamer-Habermas debate.

The Gadamer-Habermas debate involves several issues but the main concern revolves around the philosophy of tradition which ties into views of prejudice and tradition. Gadamer supports the essentialness and usefulness of prejudice and tradition while Habermas claims the necessity of suspecting prejudice and tradition. Ricœur's efforts attempt to illuminate a third way between the two philosophers.[123]

Ricœur was interested in an alternative to hermeneutic (meaning-recollection) versus critical (suspicious) approach to understanding because he was not convinced that they should be in opposition to one another. Within the Gadamer-Habermas debate, Ricœur emphasizes the importance of literary theory. Langdridge summarizes Ricœur's position below:

> Ricœur mediates in the debate between Gadamer and Habermas through a return to his theory of text and reading. Ricœur's intervention in the debate (i) provides us with a particularly illuminating way of introducing his hermeneutic phenomenology and (ii) a means of engaging with his arguments for both a hermeneutic of tradition and critique of ideology in the analysis of the text.[124]

Text

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[122] Darren Langdridge, "The Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Paul Ricœur," *Existential Analysis* 15, no. 2 (July 2004): 243- 244.

[123] See more regarding Ricœur's understanding of tradition as a response to the Gadamer-Habermas Debate in Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, Paul Ricœur, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23-60. See also, Robert Piercey, "Ricœur 's Account of Tradition and the Gadamer–Habermas Debate," *Human Studies* 27, no. 3 (2004): 259-280.

[124] Langdridge, "The Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Paul Ricœur," 245.

Although Ricœur does not believe that everything can be considered *text*, he does suggest that all human activity can be understood as text because of the similarities between text and human activity.[125] As Langdridge suggests, "Ricœur argues, on the basis that (i) human action displays much the same properties as text and (ii) human sciences methodology engages with the same kind of procedures as textual interpretation, that all human action should be understood as text."[126]

Suspicion

A defining difference between Gadamer and Ricœur is Ricœur's concept of "hermeneutics of suspicion." It is presented by Ricœur as an interpretive method of "decoding" what is hidden within a text by adopting the demeanor of distrust or skepticism.[127] Ricœur presents four features of text that support critical methodology in hermeneutics. (1) Distanciation as a necessary and positive aspect of text, (2) the need for explanation and understanding in interpretation, (3) the role of opening new worlds in the referential moment of the text, and (4) a critique of the illusions of subjectivity.[128]

To Ricœur, *text* is already distanced from the author by noting, "writing does not represent a radical revolution in the constitution of discourse, but only accomplishes the latter's profoundest aim."[129] Ricœur supports that from Dilthey, hermeneutics inherited the dichotomy of

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[125] Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, 35-36.

[126] Langdridge, "The Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Paul Ricœur," 246-247.

[127] See Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

[128] Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, 51-54.

[129] Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 52.

'explanation' and 'understanding.' Therefore, Ricœur also addresses appropriation, defined as "To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it..."[130] Specifically Langdridge explains, "A reader does not seek to capture the original intentions of the author but instead to expand their horizons by actualizing the meaning of a text. A reader seeks to appropriate a world from the text, not behind the text, but in front of it through expanding his or her way of seeing the world."[131]

Therefore, "Ricœur argues that reading is the way in which the meaning of the text is 'rescued' from the estrangement of distanciation. Appropriation is the act of capturing the meaning of text, not through identification of authorial intention, but through 'a fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1975) with the potential to expand our knowledge of ourselves through engagement with the text."[132] Ricœur supports that there is danger in understanding appropriation as a form of subjectivism. Ricœur encourages us not to separate hermeneutics and method as this will encourage them "to be no more than… ideologies!"[133]

3.9 Gadamer's Critics

Like any philosopher, Gadamer is not left without critique. There are two popular criticisms of Gadamer that have gained attention in Gadamer's academic career. The first criticism was in 1967, with Jürgen Habermas, known as the Habermas and Gadamer debate

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[130] Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 54.
[131] Langdridge, "The Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Paul Ricœur," 248.
[132] Langdridge, "The Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Paul Ricœur," 248.
[133] Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 60. At this point is it important to emphasize the acknowledgment that my method does not give much attention to suspicion. Suspicion is less of a concern of mine since my focus is on cultivating an openness to the other and new interpretations. Nonetheless, a "hermeneutics of suspicion" is important work, as David Tracy demonstrates in section two of "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue."

relating specifically to Gadamer's hermeneutics. The second was in 1981 with Jacques Derrida surrounding the issue if otherness in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Both of these critics of Gadamer lean into and continually feed a narrative of Gadamer's hermeneutics that dismiss its applicability. Due to time and scope, I will only briefly sketch out these debates and how they are relevant to this research.

The Habermas and Gadamer debate primarily concerns the universality of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Habermas has different interests which concern the search for a method for the social sciences. His criticism against Gadamer involves the role of authority, tradition and the limits of hermeneutical reflection.[134] Habermas is concerned that Gadamer's hermeneutical approach is a form of subjectivism and that tradition and authority are "dogmatic forces and sees rational (emancipatory) reflection" as a means of dissolving these powers.[135] It has been described that Habermas also understands Gadamer's hermeneutics as "agreement and consensus."[136] Here we see that Habermas' critique of Gadamer is situated within the confines of the Enlightenment influence on reason. Scheibler explains, "this Enlightenment 'prejudice' holds that reflection is rational only when dissolving a relation to authority or tradition."[137] Acknowledgment and dissolution are needed to overcome oppressive forces however, Gadamer's hermeneutics does not stop just at acknowledgement. He understands that we cannot simply dissolve prejudices at a whim because the forces of tradition and authority run much deeper. We can continually be open in conversation with otherness and therefore, "the

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[134] Ingrid Scheibler, *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 2.

[135] Scheibler, *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas*, 3.

[136] Scheibler, *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas*, 11.

[137] Scheibler, *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas*, 11. Gadamer also claims that the Enlightenment presents a hermeneutical problem because, "It desires to understand tradition correctly, i.e., reasonably and without prejudice." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," in *The Hermeneutic Reader,* Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed. (New York: Continuum, 1985), 257.

[hermeneutical] task becomes of itself a questioning of things...”[138] The openness to otherness is the central focal point for the debate between Derrida and Gadamer.

The Derrida and Gadamer debate centered its focus on “the willingness of each partner in a conversation to be open to what the other has to say.”[139] This encounter between Derrida and Gadamer is an example of continuing the conversation that did not align in agreement or consensus. The encounter between Derrida and Gadamer at the Goethe Institute in Paris in 1981 is a clear example of two “radically different interpretations of interpretation...”[140] It was here that a debate or genuine encounter was expected but did not occur. Derrida seemed to have missed the opportunity to connect with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. And because of this, Gadamer attributed the situation as a misunderstanding or a language barrier since Gadamer spoke in German and Derrida in French. It seems that Derrida could be making a point, “how does one have conversation with another who is unwilling to participate in said conversation or does not have good will?” However, Gadamer did not allow the conversation to end there. He looked for common ground with Derrida and found it in Heidegger’s thought and pursued to move the conversation forward and Gadamer sought to continue the conversation with Derrida after this encounter.[141] Therefore, this “failed” debate with Derrida shows as an example of nonconsensus but productive dialogue. Thus, by Derrida’s frustrating efforts of dialogue with Gadamer, “Derrida was implicitly denying the claim of philosophical hermeneutics to universality.”[142] It was still productive because as Derrida states, “...an ‘interior dialogue’ would

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[138] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 281.

[139] Diane P. Michelfelder, and Richard E. Palmer, “Introduction,” in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer Derrida Encounter* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989), 3.

[140] Michelfelder, *“Introduction,”* 1-2.

[141] Adrian Costache, *Gadamer and the Question of Understanding: Between Heidegger and Derrida* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 95.

[142] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carsten Dutt, Glenn W. Most, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2001),14.

continue in both of us, sometimes wordlessly, immediately in us or indirectly, as was confirmed in the years that followed."[143] This is because for the years that followed their 1981 debate, both Gadamer and Derrida would continue to engage in internal dialogues that were provoked from this challenging encounter.

3.10 Summary and Conclusion

We started with Schleiermacher's development of the hermeneutical circle. The circle of hermeneutics according to Schleiermacher is the interaction and reciprocation of the *part* with the *whole*. The *part* interacts with the *whole* and the *whole* interact with the *part* by participatory reciprocation. Participatory reciprocation is more than just osmosis or encounter but active engagement between the *part* and the *whole*. Gadamer expands on this concept by describing that the active engagement between *part* and *whole* is achieved through dialogue.

One of Wilhelm Dilthey's additions to hermeneutics was by explaining the concepts of interpretation as "experience," "expression," and "understanding." Any interpretation, explained Dilthey, was merely an expression of what is being interpreted, not the actual interpretation of the thing itself. Dilthey's explanation of understanding is very much grounded in the Cartesian model of subjectivity and objectivity in understanding.

Heidegger significantly changed the direction of philosophical hermeneutics by attributing to it a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach developed by Heidegger defined hermeneutics not as a methodological approach of understanding and interpreting but as how humans naturally understand being-in-the-world. *Dasein*, Heidegger develops, is the human existence as being-in-the-world.

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[143] Jacque Derrida, "Rams," in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 136.

This work of Heidegger discredits the Cartesian model of an "abstract agent" in the hermeneutical process. In the Cartesian model of understanding, the subject scrutinizes the object through a methodological approach. Heidegger agrees with Dilthey, in that *Dasein* is constantly engaging in the world, not objectively but as a means of "being."[144] The methodological approach is determined by the means of observation from a distance and without interference. This practice of understanding was gaining more traction in the humanities through the study of art, religion, history, and social sciences.[145] Gadamer also expands upon Heidegger's understanding of being. Heidegger comes to understand being by way of meditative thinking that observes and ponders. Gadamer moves beyond Heidegger's static understanding of being and brings it even more into an ontologically based dialogical process.

Of Hannah Arendt's work, the most applicable concept to this research is her understanding of prejudice and action. Arendt's understanding of prejudice is intertwined with her experience of totalitarianism. Arendt highlights the implications of negative prejudices to politics and government. These are important aspect of prejudice that have gone unaddressed in philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's response to Arendt is somewhat inadequate, as it does not describe how Arendt's conception of prejudice and its influence in politics and governance applies to a phenomenological understanding of prejudice, particularly as it applies to the hermeneutical process.

Ricœur reminds us that critique, or method, should not be completely dismissed as there is room for openness between hermeneutics and suspicion that developed out of his

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[144] However, as we will see in the following chapters, Gadamer takes *Dasein* further by elaborating on participation and relationship of *Dasein*.

[145] Leiviska, informed by Gadamer, understands application as, "the historically effected nature of human existence, there simply is no objective, impartial, or unitary way to interpret tradition that could be equally valid in all historical ages." Anniina Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition to the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* 65, no. 5 (2005): 595.

interpretation of the Gadamer and Habermas debate. Ricœur also mentions the use of human action considered as text to be interpreted similarly. The debate between Habermas and Gadamer is a prime example of misinterpretation of Gadamer's philosophical concept of "fusion of horizons" and Gadamer's understanding of the forces of tradition. The encounter between Derrida and Gadamer is also an example of misinterpretation of Gadamer's philosophical thought but also on another level, it represents as a model for dialogue in conversation with otherness that does not seek to come to an agreement on the subject matter.

This is a glimpse of the development of philosophical hermeneutics that has influenced Gadamer's more contemporary understandings of hermeneutics. This is without mention of the ancient philosophy and theology that influenced Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics for understanding within the humanities, which was explored in the previous chapter. Gadamer critiques the positions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Arendt, and Ricœur, by claiming that their hermeneutics is too much connected with Cartesianism and there is a need for 18th and 19th century hermeneutics to become more reflective.[146]

Gadamer's hermeneutics presented in the next section of this research explores the philosophical concepts mentioned above (prejudice, tradition, culture, hermeneutical circle, understanding, text, *Dasein*, suspicion, being, etc.) and how they do or do not participate in

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[146] Gjesdal argues that Gadamer is incorrect in his critique, stating, "Unfortunately, Gadamer mischaracterizes the positions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and later hermeneuticians in their vein. In particular, he is wrong in claiming that this kind of hermeneutics is committed to a naïve and rigid Cartesianism... He is right, however, in pointing out that late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century hermeneutics is concerned with the need for a reflective, methodological consciousness, though that does not imply that it is Cartesian in nature (at least not in Gadamer's meaning of the term). Gjesdal's critique of Gadamer cannot go unrecognized because it shows Gadamer's limits within the German philosophical tradition. According to Gjesdal, Gadamer misappropriates and misattributes the methodological focus of hermeneutics to Cartesianism. Kristin Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics and the Question of Method" in "The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology," *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy*, ed. D'Oro, Giuseppina, and Søren Overgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 343, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316344118.

Gadamer's development of "fusions of horizons." We see how Gadamer responds to the problem

of the Cartesian concept of *cogito* and seeks to reshape how hermeneutical methodology is

understood and how this will have an implication on the development of interreligious

hermeneutics.

PART II: THE PURSUIT FOR AN INTERRELIGIOUS HERMENEUTIC

Part II dives into specific philosophical concepts developed by Gadamer that are appropriate for use in comparative theology. It looks to the model of interreligious dialogue as an appropriate example of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. From the model of interreligious dialogue and Gadamer's philosophy an interreligious hermeneutic is developed. The philosophical concept of prejudice is developed specifically for the field of comparative theology. It critiques the understanding of prejudice as something that needs to be ignored or overcome but it shapes the concept of prejudice to be more closely understood as "pre-understandings" which allow for new understandings to come into the horizon of the comparative theologian.

The *Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle* is a method comparative theologians can utilize in their interreligious engagement to help inform and form their understanding of religious otherness within the hermeneutical circle of understanding. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle describes the process by which we come to understand religious otherness within comparative theology. This descriptive process gives language to the already occurring hermeneutical work of comparative theology and unbinds the strains and pressures of a textual focus in comparative theological studies. Therefore, giving a path forward for comparative theology to expand more freely into other religious dimensions like liturgies.

CHAPTER 4: Toward a Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutic

4.1 Introduction

Hans-Georg Gadamer expresses several different components of philosophical

hermeneutics that have influenced the new wave of comparative theology and comparative

theologians alike. This chapter will explore Gadamer's contextual situation and how it relates to

his philosophy and the central philosophical concepts and themes throughout his magnum opus,

Truth and Method. Throughout *Truth and Method,* Gadamer's main inquiry is the nature of

understanding the human. Truth is not fundamentally that which can be determined by a set of

criteria but through an event or experience in which we are engaged and changed.[1]

This chapter seeks to give a brief overview of specific Gadamerian philosophical terms

that are relevant to the hermeneutical experience. Imperative to Gadamer's philosophy is the

concept *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein,* translated as "historically effective

consciousness."[2] Contrary to modern era philosophy, Gadamer highlights the importance of

prejudice, or pre-understandings, in hermeneutics as necessary prerequisites, not hindrances to

understanding. Gadamer emphasizes that the Enlightenment's influence of eradicating our pre-

understandings is both unnecessary and impossible.[3] In all of this, what allows the process of

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 264.

[2] Gadamer's philosophical concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as described by Leiviska: "Effective history refers to a continuum of interpretations where each interpretation of a given subject matter is simultaneously preconditioned by its antecedent tradition of interpretations *and* itself participates in the evolution of tradition. Understanding is therefore both effected by tradition and has an effect *on* tradition, as each historical moment understands the subject matter in question in a new way from the viewpoint of its own unique place in history, and thereby transforms the way the subject matter is understood (TM, 296)." Anniina Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition to the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* 65, no. 5 (2005): 588.

[3] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 286, 288. See a more complete understanding of Gadamer's concept of prejudice in chapter six. For a succinct overview of Gadamer's position see Philippe Forget, "Argument(s)," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer Derrida Encounter*, ed.

understanding to occur is the medium of language through written, read, and spoken word and therefore, according to Gadamer, we are contextually situated in our horizon by language.[4] Gadamer's quest for understanding culminates to his interpretation of *Erfahrung,* the culmination of tradition and experience, a continuous multifaceted process in which what we encounter expands our horizon by way of overturning any existing preconceptions.[5]

4.2 Hans-Georg Gadamer's Context, Briefly Considered

There is a tendency to separate Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics from his life context. However, Gadamer's contextual situation connects his life legacy to his hermeneutical theories of interpretation. Gadamer is one of the most important philosophical figures from the twentieth century in the western world.[6] He was born in 1900 in Germany, living through two world wars, the Nazi regime, the crutch of late modern era, and through the events of September 11, 2001. Although he lived a long life, Gadamer's young life was fraught with difficulty.

In his memoirs, Gadamer scarcely referenced his mother and siblings; however, he spoke a great deal about his father, Johannes Gadamer.[7] Johannes Gadamer received his Doctor of

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Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989), 135-144.

[4] Gadamer's claim regarding language's relationship in hermeneutics, "*Verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience.* If every language is a view of the world, it is so not primarily because it is a particular type of language (in the way that linguists view language) but because of what is said or handed down in this language." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 457-458.

[5] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 225. Also described in the Translator's Preface on page xii.

[6] To emphasize Gadamer's legacy Donatella Di Cesare attests, "A great number of books, essays, dissertations, conferences, debates, and films have been dedicated to Gadamer. His principal work, *Truth and Method*, has be translated into thirteen languages…Few other philosophers have been so present on the public stage, and few have spoken so often on the most varied and topical issues." Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, Niall Keane, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 1. David Klemm highlights, "Hans-Georg Gadamer, more than anyone else, is responsible for intensifying and enlivening hermeneutical discussion since 1960." in David D. Klemm, ed., *Hermeneutical Inquiry I*, *The Interpretation of Texts (AAR Studies in Religion, 43)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986): 173.

[7] Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer

Philosophy in pharmaceutical chemistry.[8] When Gadamer spoke about his father he always

mentioned his "rigorous, Prussian discipline, and his continual attempts to persuade his gifted

son to take up the rigors of the natural sciences."[9] It is understandable then, that Johannes

Gadamer was sincerely disappointed in his son when he decided to pursue the study of

philosophy, even saying on his deathbed, "I am worried about my son…do you really believe

that philosophy is enough of a vocation to occupy one's life?"[10] It can be imagined that Gadamer

was severely affected by his father's opinion on his choice of studies, however that did not

prevent Gadamer from continuing with the study of philosophy. Instead, he worked harder to

prove himself in the field and to his father. His father's scientific background and persuasiveness

could have an influence on Gadamer's later rejection of truth explained through scientific

methods in the humanities. Hermeneutics centers on, according to Gadamer, "...modes of

experience that lie outside of science with the experience of philosophy, of art, and of history

itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified

by methodological means proper to science."[11]

Another significant life-event for Gadamer was the Third *Reich* in Germany.[12] Gadamer

took very few political positions during the National Socialist movement, which at times

hindered his professorship and other times helped.[13] There are few direct statements and even

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(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 20.

[8] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 27.

[9] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 20.

[10] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 29.

[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), xii.

[12] Gadamer has been critiqued by Teresa Orozco for not publicly speaking out against and accuses him of being complicit with the Third *Reich*. Gadamer shares with Orozco in an interview, "we were publicly asked if anyone at all was against it (signing the Appeal for Reichstag Election and a Vote of the People in 1933), and nobody had the courage to say yes. Why? *Because that would have meant emigration.* That was how significant it was whether one signed onto this call." Therefore, Gadamer was forced to comply. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carsten Dutt, Glenn W. Most, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 25.

[13] Gadamer, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, 3.

fewer publications from him during this time.[14] Because Gadamer seemed apolitical and did not voice his opinions about the National Socialist movement, it was often difficult for him to find work teaching at universities.

The only document from this period of time was his signature on the mandatory loyalty oath, "Declaration of Professors at German Universities in Favor of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State."[15] To not sign this document was academic (and possibly literal) martyrdom. Eventually he attained a professorship after he attended several National Socialist conferences for academic professors. As time passed, the young Gadamer was quietly sympathetic to his Jewish friends during the war.[16] During this time, it seemed Gadamer taught philosophy in an apolitical manner.[17] This approach served him well when the Americans began the denazification process and approved Gadamer for Dean of the Philosophy and History departments.[18] Eventually he was awarded the role of rector of the university by his colleagues. Gadamer's skepticism of totalitarian explanations of truth were likely driven by the totalitarianism Gadamer experienced in the Third *Reich.*[19]

Gadamer was a conversationalist and enjoyed engaging in dialogue with his students. At this time, it was not unheard of to have hundreds of students in long lectures, followed by exams. Gadamer wanted to bring life and dialogue back into the university setting, specifically into the

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[14] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 154.
[15] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 158.
[16] Gadamer worked to restore and recall Jewish colleagues back to their academic positions. Gadamer, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, 4.
[17] Gadamer's philosophy was influenced significantly by World War II. Specifically referencing the difference between *Philebus*, written before the war and *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, written after, are "utterly different approaches to philosophical conceptualization..." Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 229, E-book.
[18] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 235.
[19] Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, 12-16.

classroom.[20] Gadamer's way of being in academia could have been influenced by his emphasis on "conversation" in his philosophical hermeneutics. Compared to other German professors who were "classical, distanced, objective, dogmatic, and disdainful," Gadamer had an "easy-going, gracious charm…a spirit of tolerance, and a generous openness to dialogue."[21]

By the time World War II was over, Gadamer's students persuaded him to write and publish a substantial piece of work.[22] Writing was difficult for Gadamer, who did not keep that secret stating, "It is true that it is terribly painful for me to have to write. Where is my interlocutor, this silent and yet continually responding presence of the other with whom one tries to conduct a conversation with oneself that is called thinking? … So I put off writing as long as I possibly can."[23] So when *Truth and Method* was first published in 1960, no one – not even Gadamer – thought it would have such a resounding effect on the academia.[24]

By the time an English translation of *Truth and Method* was published in the 1970's, Gadamer's work had grown international recognition.[25] The book's provocative thesis drew readers worldwide. Grondin summarizes Gadamer's thesis concretely by stating:

> We always come too late when we try to completely conceptualize and methodize
> what we actually understand. Understanding can never really be grounded

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[20] John Arthos, "The Inner Word in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," in *Denison Faculty & Emeriti*, December 3, 2009, podcast, https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/our-faculty-artists-authors-scholars/id418621719?mt=2.

[21] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 225.

[22] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 267.

[23] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 280. Grondin's translation of Gadamer from *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* (1983). For Gadamer's texts not translated into English, I have utilized the trusted work of translators like Grondin above.

[24] *Truth and Method* sparked discussion from both political ends. "The left claimed it offered an idealism of language that took no account of the material conditions that produce change... It was not political enough for the leftist… it actually defended prejudices as necessary for understanding anything." The political right complained that Gadamer had distorted the hermeneutic tradition as a method "for objectively determining textual meaning." Gadamer, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, 4. *Truth and Method* has been so impactful that it has overshadow Gadamer's other works of research. See Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, 1.

[25] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 291.

because it is itself the ground, the floor, on which we are always already standing... Its point is rather to make us aware of the ungrounded nature of hermeneutic experience.[26]

A main component to *Truth and Method* was Gadamer's belief that philosophy and science are united. However, what he questioned about science –known as "real knowledge"– was that it too closely bound to the humanities through truth-seeking methods and that philosophy, art, and history are equally considered sources of truth in their own distinct ways.[27] In the beginning of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer states, "The following investigations start with the resistance in modern science itself to the universal claim of scientific method…"[28] As we have seen, it can be inferred that some of Gadamer's life experiences influenced how he developed his philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer's life context shaped the development of his hermeneutics; his father being a scientist, the Third *Reich*, and Gadamer's dialogical way of being, have all influenced his major thesis of philosophical hermeneutics initiated in *Truth and Method.* In turn, these have shaped Gadamer's ontological way of being. To understand Gadamer a bit more, we will dive deeper into his major philosophical content. We now turn to some of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutical understandings described in *Truth and Method* to point our way forward.

4.3 Introducing Gadamer's Philosophy of Hermeneutics

Gadamer's endeavor in hermeneutics is to develop the notion of knowledge and truth as it relates to the whole of our hermeneutical experience.[29] Gadamer is fundamental both for general

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[26] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 284.
[27] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 62.
[28] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), xxii.
[29] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, xxii.

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interpretation theory and for biblical hermeneutics and interpretation.[30] He offers an

interpretation theory that pays attention to history, without being strictly historicist. In addition to

criticizing the Enlightenment idea that accomplishing objectivity is possible by putting aside all

prejudices, Gadamer developed several aspects of interpretation which are helpful in the

interpretation of religious texts. James Schmidt recognizes that,

> Gadamer...acknowledges that the 'prejudice against prejudices' never went as far
> in Germany as it is alleged to have gone in England and France and suggests that
> the German willingness to recognize 'the 'true prejudices' of the Christian
> religion' in part brought about that 'modification and moderation of
> Enlightenment' that laid the groundwork for the romantic movement.[31]

The main philosophical themes described below are directly related to Gadamer's

philosophical hermeneutics and direct our attention to the hermeneutical emphasis and influence

in the pursuit for a Gadamerian-influenced interreligious hermeneutic.

4.4 The Necessity of Pre-understandings

First, Gadamer highlights that the interpreter always approaches the text with some type

of prejudice or pre-understanding of the subject matter, whether they consciously or

subconsciously understand the presence of their prejudice. The understanding that one can

eliminate prejudice prior to interpretation dates to the Enlightenment period, this is especially so

due to the Cartesian strong emphasis of rationally observable thought. Decartes' *cogito* states

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[30] Anthony Thiselton draws implications from Gadamer for biblical interpretation, especially the connection of historically effective consciousness, world of art, and horizons. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

[31] James Schmidt, "Introduction," What is Enlightenment? A Question, Its Context, and Some Consequences," in *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 28.

that in order to understand, one must deliberately clear away all preconceived notions and

prejudices for true knowledge to occur.[32] According to Gadamer, Decartes' *cogito* was informed

and formed by the influence of Enlightenment and modernist thought which led to the

assumption in western thought that one could not properly interpret religious texts without the

eradication of one's own prejudices. However, as Tracy highlights, Gadamer contends that "no

interpreter enters the process of interpretation without some pre-judgments: included in those

pre-judgments through the very language we speak and write is the history of the effects of

traditions forming that language."[33] Gadamer's assertion of the constant presence of prejudice is

fundamental to his hermeneutical theory.[34]

By provoking these pre-understandings, the interpreter can recognize how cemented their

pre-conceptions are and attention to the sense of provocation is elicited. The interpreter is then

forced into the activity of interpretation and searches for a method of understanding to process

this new interpretation. In other words, the need to understand provokes a search for

interpretation, and the need for interpretation elicits a search for a method of understanding. Each

one stimulates the other – and meaningfully distinguishing between the two. This is where

Gadamer's concept, "game of conversation," for the process of understanding arrives.[35]

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[32] "...to leave behind the comfortable world of inherited prejudice and preconceived opinion; to take nothing for granted in the determination to achieve secure and reliable knowledge." René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), vii. Also, in René Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, he argues, "In order to philosophize seriously, and to discover the truth about all things which can be known: first, all prejudices must be abandoned or else we must carefully avoid any of the opinions accepted by us..." René Descartes, *René Descartes: Principles of Philosophy*, trans. R.P Miller and Valentine Rodger Miller (Netherlands: Springer, 1984), 35.

[33] Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 156-157.

[34] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," in *The Hermeneutics Reader*: *Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1985), 257-260. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 286, 288.

[35] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 107-117, 505. See also Grant and Tracy, *A Short History,* 157-158.

Tracy argues, Gadamer's game of conversation recognizes that "the phenomenon of the conversation aptly describes the *de facto* experience of interpreting any classic text."[36] The key to any game is the back-and-forth movements that take over the players as they play the game. Therefore, when the players "play," they get caught in the moment of the game. This metaphor is used by Gadamer to understand how "the model of conversation" is used for the interpretation of a text. "Just as the subjects in any game release themselves from self-consciousness in order to play, so too in every authentic conversation the subject is released by the to-and-fro movement of the subject matter under discussion."[37]

Gadamer emphasizes that another aspect to understanding is the relevance and naming of these "pre-understandings" within one's own horizon. He writes, "The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."[38] It is important to note here that Gadamer uses the term *Vorurteil*. This term is usually translated in *Truth and Method* as "prejudice," however Gadamer uses this term as referring to the concept of pre-judgments, pre-understandings, and preconceptions of one's own understandings before encountering the horizon of another.[39] Gadamer understands that contrary to the Enlightenment assumption, eradicating our pre-understandings is both unnecessary and impossible.[40]

Gadamer also encourages engagement with pre-understandings by encountering the past and exploring the traditions from which we have come.[41] "In fact the horizon of the present is

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[36] Grant and Tracy, *A Short History,* 158.
[37] Grant and Tracy, *A Short History*, 159.
[38] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 289.
[39] We will return to Gadamer's philosophical understanding of prejudice in more detail in chapter six of this thesis.
[40] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 289.
[41] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.

continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices."[42] Prejudice is an inevitable part of hermeneutics. An individual understands and learns from the Other through the dispositions and expectations of one's vantage point or horizon. Gadamer insists that prejudgments or pre-understandings are not a hindrance to understanding but a necessary prerequisite. Being honest and attentive to one's prejudices helps with hermeneutical dialogue since nothing is obscured. Therefore, as Gadamer would argue, "presupposition-lessness" is impossible and unhelpful for hermeneutics.

4.5 The Gadamerian Truth

It is necessary to discuss Gadamer's understanding of truth as it relates to interreligious hermeneutics. Overall, he holds a pluralistic conception of truth, believing there are truths of science, knowledge, religion, and art. What Gadamer is concerned with is freeing truth from narrow, scientific methodological monopolized conceptions. According to him, truth is within the life-changing event of understanding the Other.[43] Just as Gadamer explains, "in understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe."[44] To Gadamer, dialogue through questioning and answering can eventually lead to truth through the act of understanding that comes through the process of dialogue.[45] The scientific method, however, does not affirm or calculate truth in the humanities.

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[42] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.
[43] Gadamer claims, "However thoroughly one may adopt a foreign frame of mind, one still does not forget one's worldview and language-view. Rather, the other world we encounter is not only foreign but is also related to us. It has not only its own truth *in itself* but also its own truth *for us*." *Truth and Method* (2013), 458.
[44] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 506.
[45] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.

For Gadamer, the encroachment of modern science on the ways of knowing in the humanities was being take too far. He asserts, "The methods of the natural sciences do not encompass everything that is worth knowing..."[46] Gadamer stresses that the priority of certainty of truth is not only rested in the methods of the natural sciences. Going on to share, "So said Aristotle: a judgment is true when it lets something be presented together that is presented together in the thing [*die Sache*]; a judgment is false when it lets something be presented together that is not presented together in the thing [*die Sache*]."[47]

To aid his thesis, Gadamer uses the concept of art to describe truth, whereby art is a practical truth rather than a theoretical truth.[48] It was widely held that if art cannot methodologically calculate truth, it is then merely aesthetic.[49] Gadamer claims, "In the beautiful presented in nature and art, we experience this convincing illumination of truth and harmony, which compels the admission: 'This is true.'"[50] For years Gadamer coined his hermeneutic "art and history" because experiencing art is experiencing truth that cannot be measured by finite numbers and methods. Gadamer highlights, "The question of the truth of art forces us, too, to undertake a critique of both aesthetic and historical consciousness, insomuch as we are inquiring into the truth that manifests itself in art and history."[51] Therefore, "what is involved in these studies is not achieving a truth valid for all time, independent of the standpoint and interpreter; rather, it involves participating in a truth that is essentially historical."[52] To Gadamer, truth was a

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[46] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Science," trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 26.

[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "What is Truth?" in *Hermeneutics and Truth,* ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 36.

[48] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 37.

[49] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 168.

[50] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 15.

[51] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 168.

[52] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 208.

different kind of knowledge, not one that someone could have dominion over, but one that is unveiling and participatory through experiencing meaning. "What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it."[53] Gadamer believes that to experience truth one must go through a process of dialogical understanding.[54] However, what Gadamer is essentially after is not the use of methods for the sake of discovering truth and truth claims of our lives. He was noticing the rise of methodology becoming foundational to the humanities, especially in art and literature and to Gadamer method was being taken too far. The example Gadamer returns to over and over again is the example of truth in art. As Gadamer supports, "An artwork has its being as a work of art in being brought to fulfillment in experience."[56] Therefore, "Any truth-claim can be doubted, but the true shows itself in the beautiful in that the true has a kind of luminosity to it which Gadamer refers to as the 'radiance' of the true.'"[57] Gadamer certainly highlights that truth does not mean certainty, as western thought would have us believe and this is why "truth often presents itself as beauty, as a self-illuminating radiance..."[58]

4.6 Introducing Symbol, Ritual and Festival

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[53] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 506. Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 268.

[54] It is here I must highlight the critiques of Gadamer by his peers in regards to his seemingly underdeveloped idea of truth. Wachterhauser states, "Given the state of affairs, one is tempted to agree with such critics as Rüdiger Bubner, Richard Rorty, Claus von Bormann, and Reiner Wiehl that there is no theory of truth in Gadamer's work. This criticism is primarily due to "Gadamer's own lack of clarity with regard to the notion of truth..." Brice R. Wachterhauser, "Must We Be What We Say? Gadamer on Truth in the Human Sciences," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 220.

[56] Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image: "So True, So Full of Being!" in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writing*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 219.

[57] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being*, 13.

[58] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 497.

According to Gadamer, modern art presents more than it represents and, in this sense, it can be viewed and categorized as a symbol. This is because the symbolic power of art, "does not perform the representative function of pointing to something already universally shared, but precisely in awakening a shared consciousness of something through its own expressive power."[59] And therefore, the symbolic in art, "rests upon an intricate interplay of showing and concealing."[60] This intricate exchanged, or conversation, with art functions within an experience. We are invited into an experience of perceiving the work of art and within that experience of understanding we can come to a fuller understanding of ourselves.[61] This is how the visual arts, especially symbol can function as text.[62] It is because the symbol or artwork present a reality and invite the audience to engage, dialogically, that makes this understanding of symbol a revelation of truth.[63] In this way, symbols reveal what is hidden, by making the meaning of the hidden present, and carry out the presence of the symbolized through its own self.

The philosophical concept of "festival" is closely related to Gadamer's understanding of "symbol" and "ritual." Like ritual, festival occupies a separate space, time, and encourages participation. Similarly to symbol, festival points beyond itself and makes present what is familiar, while also exposing that which is unfamiliar. This is why Gadamer utilizes festival as "the inclusive concept for regaining the idea of universal communication."[64]

4.7 Understanding in Gadamer's Context

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[59] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 150.
[60] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 33.
[61] Keane, *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 408.
[62] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* 152.
[63] Sirka, "Gadamer's Concept of Aesthetic Experience as a Possibility for the Orthodox Biblical Theology," 394.
[64] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 12.

Gadamer asserts that understanding is not a theoretical activity in which one scrutinizes the material before oneself as a passive object, similar to what is shown in Figure 1 below. However, truth arises in the event of understanding through dialogue. Andrew Bowie highlights,

> The Heidegger-Gadamer tradition, for example, links the rise of aesthetics, as one aspect of the history of 'subjectification,' to the dominance of the 'method' of the natural sciences as another, in order to try to show how a different kind of truth happens in art which cannot be reduced to an account in terms of the role of the subject.[65]

The subject and object dichotomy, which was heavily influenced by Descartes, is less effective and an unattainable ideal in the process of understanding. Kemal Ataman in *Understanding Other Religions* writes, "[i]n other words, there is no subject 'over here' and an object 'over there' standing independent of one another in constant tension. Rather, subject and object belong together and constitute a total unity."[66] In reality, the "object" in question here is not a passive entity waiting to be understood, but rather an active participant in the actual process of understanding. The subject is not detached from the object while investigating it from afar. According to Gadamer, the subject is not apart from its own perspective, tradition, and process of understanding. "The idealistic concept of the mind contained the same substantial communion between the subject and the object, between the I and the Thou."[67] Therefore, the subject's own connection to its tradition and prejudices are part of and embedded in the subject.

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[65] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2003), 317, E-book.

[66] Kemal Ataman, *Understanding Other Religions: Al-Biruni and Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizons*," vol. 19 (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 36.

[67] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 529.

Model of Modern Hermeneutics
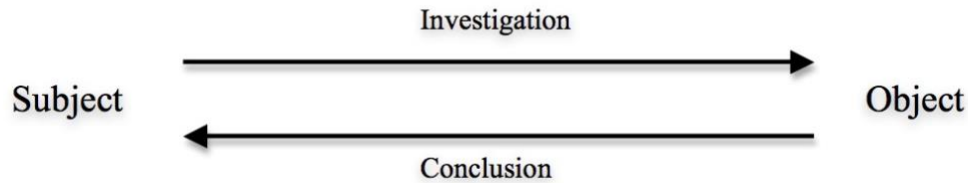
Figure 1. Model of Modern Hermeneutics. A model of understanding influenced by the natural sciences in western thought that heavily influenced hermeneutics prior to Gadamer.

Gadamer states that understanding is more dynamic and fluid rather than static and calculated. Hermeneutics, according to him, is more the art of listening over anything else.[68] Through a Gadamerian approach to hermeneutics, understanding is achieved through the means of dialogue with the matter in question.[69] Gadamer gathered from Plato to re-imagine his understanding of dialogue as Plato understood dialogue as "the interior dialogue of the soul with itself..."[70] Therefore, dialogical efforts with the self is conditional for dialogue with the Other. Continuing Gadamer claims "...which is always simultaneously the anticipation of conversation with others and the introduction of others."[71] This dialogue could be between oneself and the

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[68] See more about hermeneutics as listening to other in Stephanie Kimball and Jim Garrison, "Hermeneutic Listening: An Approach to Understanding in Multicultural Conversations," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 15 (1996): 51-59.

[69] The Greek word *διάλογος* (dialogues), could be divided into the prefix διά (through) and the noun, *λογος* (word, project, speech, reason, etc.) (80). "For both Aristotle and Gadamer, *logos* is the essence of people, since it belongs to all and all belong to it (Hermann, 2014)." Gadamer uses philosophy of dialogue through dialogue with texts, dialogue as the mode of language, and dialogue through the "fusion of horizons (81)." See Carlos Alberto Vargas Gonzalez, "Toward dialogic administration: A Proposal from Gadamer's Thinking," *Journal of Management* 33, no. 59 (September 2017): 79-91.

[70] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 569.

[71] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 569.

encounter of another religious tradition, practice, or text. In order to fully encounter another text or tradition, Gadamer asserts the importance of first understanding one's own tradition.[72]

4.8 Tradition

Gadamer believes that one's tradition is pertinent to their hermeneutics for two main reasons. First, one's tradition is developed through their history, experiences, and locality. Therefore, one's tradition is the context in which the hermeneutical experience occurs.[73] Therefore, our tradition informs the way in which we encounter the world and create meaning. Second, tradition is also "what is to be experienced" in the hermeneutical encounter. What is experienced through the hermeneutical encounter with the Other is in itself part of tradition. Gadamer emphasizes the encounter with written text to be the most valuable aspect due largely to his thoughts on the influence of language.[74] It is important to note, therefore, that Gadamer claims that both "the text and interpreter belong to the tradition, and the event of their understanding is also a further happening of tradition."[75] Laura Schmidt Roberts views tradition to be a central genuine dialogical partner in a Gadamerian hermeneutical model. This ties into idea that tradition shapes both the context and content of the hermeneutical encounter.[76] The

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[72] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282.

[73] Laura Schmidt Roberts, "Tradition as a Partner in Dialogue: An Exploration of Tradition in Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Truth and Method'" (Course research paper, University of California, Berkeley, 1999), 1.

[74] It is important to note that Gadamer's philosophy of understanding is "... that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 386; he suggests that language actually finds its essence "erst im Gespräch (only in conversation)" Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 436. See Robert Craig, "Dilthey, Gadamer, and Facebook: Towards a New Hermeneutics of the Social Network," *The Modern Language Review* 110, no. 1 (January 2015): 198.

[75] Craig, "Dilthey, Gadamer, and Facebook," 3.

[76] Craig, "Dilthey, Gadamer, and Facebook," 13.

dialogical partners are diverse from one another but are also both rooted in the shared

hermeneutical experience.

4.9 Historically Effective Consciousness

Gadamer develops *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* or "historically effected

consciousness," to explain how the individual's understanding fits within the larger historical

and hermeneutical context.[77] Historically effective consciousness is the "combination of

awareness of being affected by history and openness."[78] It is necessary in order to truly

understand, encounter, and engage with the Other as related to the interpreter. Gadamer sees a

hermeneutical encounter as possible by understanding that the text is a genuine partner in

dialogue.[79] This is why Gadamer asserts that the text is not an object but a subject to engage with

dialogically.[80] Gadamer understands that the text is partner to the interpreter because it also

belongs to the interpreter's tradition.[81] The ongoing tension of otherness and belonging are

essential to the hermeneutical experience.[82]

For Gadamer, viewing the text as a genuine partner means that the text is neither an

object for observation nor a reflection of the interpreter, but a distinct Other who has something

to contribute to the conversation. However, he notes that the text, as a partner in dialogue, cannot

speak for itself. Rather, the interpreter must bring the text to speech.[83] Therefore, the

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[77] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317. *See* also Robert Dostal, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.
[78] Dostal, "Introduction," 4.
[79] Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," 256.
[80] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 378. Here Gadamer is specifically referencing historical texts.
[81] Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Fantel, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 5, no. 1 (1975): 8-52.
[82] Dostal, "Introduction," 4.
[83] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1994), 377.

hermeneutical conversation is a way in which historically effected consciousness may come to be exposed

4.10 Fusion of horizons

To show that all understanding is hermeneutical, Gadamer employs Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concept of the "horizon."[84] Gadamer highlights the hermeneutical experience of understanding is like a "fusion of horizons."[85] The horizons are a combination of perspectives, prejudices, experiences, and worldviews that are shaped by one's own religious tradition. In our specific case, Gadamer understands horizons to be in constant transition, everyone has different perspectives of the horizon and those perspectives are limited. Therefore, when two horizons meet, a fusion of horizons is possible because two perspectives, worldviews, prejudices, and experiences collide.[86] Georgia Warnke suggests that understanding, according to Gadamer, is the testing of prejudices in dialogue with prejudices of others and then "come to a consensus with others about a subject matter (*Sache*)."[87] However, that is not always the case. Understanding can also occur without consensus.[88]

Gadamer metaphorically explains hermeneutics through the idea of separate horizons being fused together. "A horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen

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[84] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 247.

[85] Gadamer claims, "In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs –which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.

[86] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (2013), 314.

[87] Georgia Warnke, "The Hermeneutic Circle Versus Dialogue," *The Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 1 (2011): 91-92. Or "mutual agreement." See also Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 187, 403.

[88] As Gadamer understands its, fusion of horizons in not merely agreement with otherness. "It is not necessarily agreement about the subject matter but it is, by Gadamer's definition, a shared understanding about the subject matter." David Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 531. See also Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 187.

from a particular vantage point."[89] Each individual has a unique horizon that constantly changes. Horizons are mainly developed through an individual's experiences, which includes a host of influences as in their worldview, life experiences, and religious tradition. As an individual expands their worldview, their horizon expands, and vice versa. Gadamer contends, "'to have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it."[90] Hypothetically, an individual who is unable to see beyond their horizon is unable to see far enough to experience another horizon and expand their own, resulting in overvaluing what they can see within their own horizon.

Additionally, Gadamer asserts through the image of fusion of horizons that "the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus, the horizon of the past… which exists in the form of tradition is always in motion."[91] The fusion of horizons occurs when genuine understanding transpires between the text and the interpreter and this understanding is not static but dynamic and fluid, always susceptible to change. Therefore, a newly fused horizon becomes the subject to new "fusings."

There are two main limits within one's horizon. First, a horizon is a limit of one's perspective and this perspective is limited by one's own position. If an individual wishes to expand their horizon, they need to engage with a different horizon. Therefore, everyone has a maximum situation that is in need of otherness. As Gadamer claims, "Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of situation by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision."[92] Gadamer maintains that there is a finitude to an individual's situatedness and the cultivation of one's horizon is the fusion with another horizon. The problem

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[89] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1994), 302.
[90] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1994), 302.
[91] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1994), 304.
[92] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 313.

is that an individual may reach their limits in their situatedness and therefore are only able to see part of the total picture at one time. If someone wants to see more of the picture, they have to involve other perspectives or "horizons." The only way one can begin to approximate seeing the whole picture is if they engage with another horizon and this may allow for fusion to occur. This helps each perspective gain a better understanding of what lies beyond their own horizon, and it allows both parties to see more of the whole picture. This can only happen when one trusts the Other and is willing to share their own horizon and then "the tasks presented to us are to be just as much one with oneself and to remain united with Others."[93]

The act of fusion happens when one horizon meets and engages with a different horizon thereby creating something new. Therefore, otherness is essential to the fusion of horizons because the Other brings something to the hermeneutical space that was not present before. When a horizon meets another horizon that is the same, fusion does not occur because there is nothing different to "fuse" with. Therefore, otherness is critical to the process of fusing horizons.

Second, it is important to recognize that not all dialogue leads to fusion of horizons. For example, David Tracy recognizes that dialogue does not necessarily lead to fusion of horizons or need to achieve fusion of horizons for dialogue to be successful.[94] Just because individuals are in dialogue, does not necessarily mean that fusion will occur. Therefore, the act of "fusion" occurs when an individual encounters true meaning and understanding that then becomes part of their pre-understanding for further dialogue. Additionally, there are horizons that are difficult to fuse with because the presence of "creative tension" is too strong or the Other's horizon does not lead to true understanding.

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[93] See Gadamer's use of friendship in "Friendship and Solidarity (1999)" *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009), 12.

[94] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics," 4. David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 152.

4.11 The Hermeneutical Conversation

The hermeneutical conversation is situated within dialogue, as Gadamer notes: The dialectic of question and answer [is] disclosed in the structure of hermeneutical experience ...For the dialectic of question and answer that we demonstrated makes understanding appear to be a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation"[95] This process involves a question-and-answer format, where the historical text or mode is the object of interpretation and the questioner is the interpreter. It is through the process of dialogue that fresh insights may emerge. These insights are not only a product of the process of reflection, but are from the dialogical process as a whole.

The hermeneutical horizon must be attained in order to understand a text or mode. One must acquire the right horizon of inquiry in order to participate in a dialogue with the other tradition. This means that one's own horizon is not a personal standing point that must be maintained and enforced. The vantage point that one brings into the hermeneutical space and conversation assists in their understanding.[96]

> Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon on the question – a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers.[97]

In true dialogue, two parties enter to understand the other person's argument, rather than impress their personal view on the Other. The other person is persuasive and makes a good

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[95] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.
[96] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 313.
[97] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1994), 370.

argument because their ideas are offered sincerely. The goal of communication is the willingness to express and transform your own views so that the dialogical partner may understand them. Gadamer understood the nature of dialogue to be the idea that people bring their different worldviews together for the purpose of challenging, growing, and changing both their own and Others' ideas. This goes to the heart of what hermeneutics means. It is not just as a description of truth but a practice of self-transformation. This fusion of horizons is not just something that occurs, but rather something that is sought after.

Gadamer understands "Only if all these movements compromising the art of conversation – argument, question and answer, objection and refutation, which are undertaken in regard to a text as an inner dialogue of the soul seeking understanding..."[98] This dialogue is a question-and-answer format where we are open to new and informed experiences. The initiation of dialogue comes from the text, which provokes questions through our experience with it. The text both draws the interpreter in with questions and raises new questions. There is unity between interpreter and interpreted. What one learns from the text is in part dependent on the interpreter, as questions inform both the interpreter's horizons and play a role in the text's answers to the interpreter.

4.12 The Process of Dialogue through the Concept of "Play"

Gadamer uses the metaphor of "play" as an analysis of how he sees language, meaning, and reality itself.[99] He sees play as a model for ontological explanation, similar to "play" as defined when playing a game. When we play, different people and elements come together to follow rules that shape the game, uniting people in a shared experience. They are taken up in a

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[98] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 187.
[99] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107-130.

complex activity which has a life of its own, and each of the players enters the play of the game.

They do not lose their identity or individuality but contribute their individuality to a dynamic

new reality. This is a dialectical model of different elements coming together to shape a new

pattern.

One is not just an individual who sees the world, but rather is part of a dialectical

complex activity, which is the play of the world itself. This is how Gadamer expresses the nature

of language. Players are within the larger game. This leaves space for creativity. Each game is

created by the players [and is not necessarily something that determines them] and each player is

the creation of the elements that make it up.[100]

4.13 Bildung

Bildung, according to Gadamer, is "the *concept of self-formation, education, or

cultivation*."[101] It is often translated into English as "culture" but Gadamer highlights how the

root word *Bild* means "to form," "image," or "picture."[102] This term should be understood as a

verbal noun that speaks to the actions of becoming and forming culture.[103] Gadamer emphasizes

that the general characteristic of *Bildung* is, "keeping oneself open to what is other-to other,

more universal points of view."[104] Therefore, the meaning of *Bildung*, is understood by Gadamer

as self-cultivation or ongoing self-formation. Gadamer utilizes this term as a process of

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[100] Paul Hedges views this as a metaphor and model that may not only be suitable for certain areas within the human sciences but especially within comparative theology. Gadamer hints to us that the purpose of play is fulfilled when the player "loses himself in his play." That is to say, one may become lost in fascination as we are taken over by the game itself, and if played fully we live within the game world. Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies,* 4 (2016): 8.
[101] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 9.
[102] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 10, 139, 142.
[103] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 10.
[104] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 16.

understanding.

Bildung is the process of an ongoing internal reflective dialogue that is informed and formed by the transformation of prejudices in the hermeneutical event of "fusion of horizons." Thus, "fusions of horizons" is the foundational structure of *Bildung*. Therefore, *Bildung* is the embodiment of understanding through transformational hermeneutical experiences. This is why *Bildung* is interconnected to the human experience, because according to Gadamer, *Bildung* is "the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities."[105] *Bild* is not a being but a coming into, or becoming. It is not the end result but the ongoing process that forms being.[106]

4.14 Additional Components

There are a few additional components of Gadamer's hermeneutic that may be helpful towards the development of a method because of the theoretical context in which they are connected to understanding. First, it is important to note that Gadamer, who is often misinterpreted, does not present a methodology for dialogue. Gadamer does confess that there are certain implications of his theory that may render a method, but he himself does not arrange a method of dialogical hermeneutics.[107] Gadamer is more concerned with the philosophical analysis of dialogue as a means for understanding than he is interested in the methodological implications.

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[105] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 18.

[106] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013). 10.

[107] Grondin claims, "[e]ven if Gadamer does not wish to exclude method entirely from the realm of the humanities, it is his conviction that methods alone are not that which make up the scientificity and relevance of the human sciences. "Gadamer on Humanism," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Library of Living Philosophers,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1997), 161-162, XXIV.

Second, Gadamer spends a great deal of effort and time arguing against historicism and historical reconstruction.[108] Historicism understands hermeneutics to be possible through a method of discovering and reconstructing the past. Alternately, Gadamer proposes the use of a historically conscious hermeneutic and promotes the awareness of our present historical context. For Gadamer, we can never detach ourselves from our history and, therefore, we are to embrace and become attentive to its presence in our tradition and horizon.

Third, Gadamer emphasizes the effect language has in hermeneutics and the creation of meaning. Gadamer insists that humans understand and create meaning through language and, therefore, humans understand similar things differently due to the difference in languages and the finitude that language presents.[109] As Tracy understands Gadamer our past experiences are shaped by cultural, social, economic, religious traditions and, most importantly, language, which is expressed and interpreted through experience.[110]

Fourth, through genuine understanding or a fusion of horizons, Gadamer asserts that a "creative tension" may be encountered and, therefore, the hermeneutical task is not to masquerade this tension but consciously to expose it.[111] Gadamer understands this creative tension to be present when "Such art generally tends to produce an explicit shock effect upon us."[112] When one encounters another text there is a shock delivered to the ordinary and this encounter provides an experience of shock, newness, and possibly tension.[113] Shock and newness create initial tension but may eventually subside; however, there may be ongoing tensions that have to be dealt with creatively.

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[108] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 257-288.
[109] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 407.
[110] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,".
[111] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.
[112] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 92.
[113] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 33.

4.15 Gadamer and Theology

Although Gadamer is not a theologian, his work has resonated immensely in religious studies and biblical theology.[114] *Truth and Method* largely shaped and informed hermeneutics in the religious and biblical field and it is an effort by Gadamer to revive the humanities that had been so heavily influenced by the static and detached model of the natural sciences in western culture. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer understands that method is not the only way to truth and truth is reached through inquiry and exploration, not scientific methodology.[115]

Although Gadamer was not a self-claimed theologian, he was significantly familiar with theology. He primarily followed Bultmann's theology and hermeneutics because Bultmann approached hermeneutics by going beyond methodology and concentrating on "being immediately addressed and seized by the meaning of the Christian gospel."[116] Gadamer meaningfully considered Bultmann's idea that "the subject matter represents a fundamental condition of understandings, which goes beyond the methodological idea of presuppositionless exegesis."[117]

Gadamer claims that his model can universally be applied for all understanding, not solely dialogically; however, the Gadamerian model for dialogue has greatly influenced several related fields of academics.[118] Gadamer insists that the model of hermeneutics can be helpful in interpreting religious texts. When writing to Bultmann, Gadamer states:

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[114] See for example Jens Zimmermann claims Gadamer's hermeneutics "is the best possible starting point for a recovery of theological hermeneutics." Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 170.

[115] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 578.

[116] Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 279.

[117] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 247.

[118] See for instance John Arthos and his utilization of Gadamer with poetics and Cynthia Nielson and her use with philosophy of music.

In my book I have tried to explain the fact that historical consciousness – entirely in my own field of experience, the experience of the philosophical classics, of art, and of the humanistic tradition – is permeated with a claim required by the content, which it seems to me is something that corresponds exactly to the situation of theology in recent decades.[119]

Gadamer also notes that it is imperative that the interpreters allow the religious text to engage seriously with them in conversation, leading into a question-and-answer format with the text.[120] For Gadamer claims, "For the dialectic of question and answer that we demonstrated makes understanding appear to be a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation."[121]

4.16 Summary and Conclusion

In Gadamerian fashion, we notice how Gadamer's contextual situation relate to his philosophical hermeneutics. The Greek dialogues from chapter two, leading philosophers from chapter three, his personal context, all culminate through his philosophical hermeneutics introduced in this chapter. We cannot dismiss how much of Gadamer's life context has influenced his hermeneutics. The influence of his father and being a devoted scientist may have made a strong impact on his own understandings and appreciation for the humanities. The Third *Reich* was also impactful for Gadamer. Gadamer did what he could to stay in academia during the Third *Reich* and laid low by teaching Plato. The Nazis' were unconcerned with Plato. However, what they were unaware of was Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's *Dialogues* and

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[119] Gadamer's letter to Rudolf Bultmann, 8 September 1961, UAT, Bultmann papers from Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 279.
[120] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 383.
[121] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.

how they deviated from the main. Gadamer's interpretation of the Platonic dialogues became the

foundation of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, culminating in *Truth and Method*.[122]

Truth and Method, Gadamer's major work, outlines much of Gadamer's philosophical

hermeneutics and caught international attention, especially when it was translated into English.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics unfolds throughout *Truth and Method*. Beginning with

Gadamer's understanding of prejudice and his critique of the Cartesian Enlightenment.

According to Gadamer, prejudice has been held hostage by the Enlightenment due to its strong

ambition of eradicating all presuppositions to gain absolute knowledge through inductive

reasoning by way of the scientific method. Gadamer critiques the foundational basis that

Enlightenment has against prejudice. Because this was such an influential component to

Gadamer's hermeneutics, we will return to Gadamer's conception of prejudice in chapter six.

Gadamer also desires to rehabilitate the concept of tradition. Not in the sense of going

back to "what once was" or becoming a historicist but by understanding the important role and

influence tradition has on us. He explains this by elaborating on historically effective

consciousness, understanding how our current perspectives of the world and ourselves are

historically formed and informed by our tradition, whether we are conscious of it or not. These

concepts that Gadamer has concerned himself with, all culminate to his metaphor of fusion of

horizons.

Understanding "fusion of horizons" as described by Gadamer, to be the hermeneutical

process of understanding is key to understanding Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. To

clarify, the fusion of horizons is the fusion of two horizons, the first horizon is our prejudices,

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[122] In a speech to French prisoners of war, Gadamer states, "An empire that extends itself beyond measure, beyond moderation is near its fall." He claims the Nazis did not understand the meaning but the prisoners did. Gadamer, *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, 20.

and the second horizon is our new understandings developed from the exposure to otherness. The fusion of two different horizons is not based on collision but on absorption. One horizon takes up another horizon, like dialogue in conversation.

David Vessey's description of fusion of horizons is most appropriate to this research. Vessey describes Gadamer's metaphor of horizons as "gateways to something beyond..."[123] and "the horizon is everything we are aware of in the preception of an object above and beyond what is given directly to our senses."[124] Therefore, horizons are the limits and the perspective from a particular vantage point. In this sense, horizon "means not being limited by what is nearby, but to see beyond it."[125] It is also relevant to understand that fusion of horizons "is not necessarily agreement about the subject matter, but it is, by Gadamer's definition, a shared understanding about the subject matter."[126]

The way of being within the process of fusion of horizons is a formative function of play. To Gadamer, play is a way of interaction within dialogue that allows oneself to be fully present and available to others within the dialogical process. Play, with all seriousness, is the mode of being within the dialogical encounter of understanding. By enacting a playful mode of being within the comparative theological encounter we allow ourselves to be open to the theological possibilities of the Other. We allow these possibilities to play with our prejudices, giving the opportunity to understand the Other in a deep and meaningful way. In the next chapter, we will see how these Gadamerian infused philosophical themes influence interreligious dialogue and how the dialogical process in interreligious encounters can be the foundation for fusion of horizons to occur in interreligious hermeneutics.

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[123] Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," 533.
[124] Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," 534.
[125] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 302.
[126] Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," 541.

CHAPTER 5: Interreligious Dialogue, an example of Gadamerian Hermeneutics

> "Dialogue itself is first a practice (and a difficult one) before theories on dialogue or conclusions on the results of dialogue are forthcoming."[1]

Not only can interreligious dialogue serve as a mode for interreligious hermeneutics but it can also be used as a model to philosophically understand interreligious hermeneutics and how we are able to understand religious otherness. This chapter seeks to set the historical and theological landscape of interreligious dialogue, define the terms and conditions for dialogue, and challenges, as well as layout the theoretical frameworks that have shaped interreligious dialogue. Then, we explore specific examples of interreligious dialogue and how they contribute directly to an overarching mode of dialogue. This all leads to inviting Gadamer's philosophical thought into the realm of interreligious dialogue as a way of understanding interreligious hermeneutics as a dialogical encounter with religious otherness.

5.1 Overview of Interreligious Dialogue and Defining the Terms

The terminology of interreligious dialogue is vague and needs addressing before we continue.[2] Interreligious dialogue is often interchangeably used with "interfaith dialogue." I will use the term Clooney utilizes, "Interreligious dialogue points to actual conversations, sometimes formal and academic, sometimes simply interpersonal conversations among persons of different

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[1] David Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," *Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs* 1 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), 76.

[2] Christopher Craig Brittain, "Partnership not Dialogue: Lent and Ramadan under the Same Roof," *Ecclesial Practices* 3, no. 2 (2016): 190.

religious traditions willing to listen to one another and share their stories of faith and values."[3] Catherine Cornille asserts that she uses, "a rather broad definition of interreligious dialogue as any form of constructive engagement between members of different religious traditions."[4] Continuing on, "[s]o interreligious dialogue can just be sort of friendly exchange between people from different religions. It can be collaboration between members of different religions on social projects. Or it can be theological engagement between religious traditions, or what we call comparative theology."[5] For our purposes we will include ecumenical within the definition of interfaith.

How can interfaith mean ecumenical? Maybe the question is better stated, "is ecumenicalism different enough to mean interfaith?" Although times seem different now in North America, not always were Christian church denominations in good standing with each other. As we will explore later in this chapter, individuals belonging to different denominations experienced severe persecution. If the differences between Christian denominations were considered different enough to incite violence, they are certainly different enough to study. In "Comparative Theology as Liberal and Confessional Theology," Klaus von Stosch observes, "Comparative theology has to be an ecumenical endeavor with different insiders from each denomination if it wants to achieve representative results."[6] Those who argue that ecumenical work is not within the realm of interfaith, deny the unique and varying identities within Christian denominations that have divided Christians for centuries and continue to do so.

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[3] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.

[4] Catherine Cornille with Blair Hodges, "The Risks and Rewards of Interreligious Dialogue,[MIPodcast #88]," *BYU Maxwell Institute,* January 22, 2019, podcast, https://mi.byu.edu/mip-88-cornille/.

[5] Cornille, "The Risks and Rewards," [MIPodcast #88].

[6] Klaus von Stosch, "Comparative Theology as Liberal and Confessional Theology," *Religions* 3 (2012): 990, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3040983.

5.2 Comparative Theology and Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue and comparative theology are related but also separate entities. Not all comparative theology is achieved through interreligious dialogue, and not all interreligious dialogue is within the category of comparative theology. Comparative theology is attentive to the differences encountered in interreligious dialogue.[7] For example, Clooney states, "...I rarely seek out formal occasions to engage in dialogue."[8] This is because Clooney works within the framework of comparative theology as an academic enterprise. He seeks a "necessary distinction between comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue..."[9] Clooney neatly separates his academic work from his dialogical work, he separates dialogue from comparative theology, and he distinguishes them as such. However, I would critique Clooney using his own words, "[a]s actual, living interaction among people of different faith traditions that enhanced mutual understanding, personal encounters in dialogue should remind us that religions flourish in the lives, beliefs, and activities of real people living out their faith day by day."[10] This does not support Clooney's argument of separate but equal when it comes to interreligious dialogue and its fit with comparative theology. In fact, it pushes us to recognize that interreligious dialogue is at the heart of comparative theology. For example, Clooney asserts, "Comparative theology is primarily and usually a form of reading: inter-religious dialogue is usually a form of

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[7] Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (New York: Brill, 2011), 161, E-book.

[8] Francis Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue." in Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 51, E-book.

[9] Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 60.

[10] Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 53.

conversation."[11] Can they or should they be so easily distinguished by Clooney's standards? Are they so different on a hermeneutical level?

5.3 Brief Historical Connections

A full overview of the history of interreligious dialogue is not part of the scope of this study, however there are points within its historical narrative that represent major turning points fruitful for our purposes.[12] The Christian ecumenical movement has led to the purposeful and determined dialogue with other religious. This includes the Vatican Council II (1962 – 1965). The Vatican Council II passed three important decrees, the "Declaration on Religious Liberty," the "Decree on Ecumenism," and the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." These three decrees promoted ecumenical and dialogical efforts within the Catholic tradition with non-Catholics.[13]

Moyaert claims, "The rise of the interreligious movement occurred in the wake of ecumenical dialogue."[14] Moyaert also argues that it was decolonization efforts after World War II that led to the change in ages, "from the age of monologue to the age of dialogue."[15] With this, the devastations and horrors of the Holocaust led to deep awareness and reflection within Catholic and Protestant traditions and their interreligious relationships with Judaism.[16]

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[11] Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 54.

[12] A full historical overview of interreligious dialogue is not feasible nor helpful at this point. However, see: Leonard Swindler, "The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue" in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*.

[13] Leonard Swidler, The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 7.

[14] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196.

[15] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 197.

[16] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 197.

The rise in interreligious dialogue caused radical shifts in western Enlightenment conceptions of truth as "relational," hermeneutics, globalization, and in the academic study of religion.[17] Therefore, interreligious dialogue is a response to these movements. It cannot be without mention that the accessibility of dialogue has come about by the globalization and technologization of the world.[18] Interestingly, Gadamer has quite a negative view of the impact of technology in the dynamics of conversation. He asserts that technology can give rise to "objective social conditions that can make us forget how to speak, that is, how to *speak to someone* and *answer someone*: it is this that we call a conversation."[19] Additionally, the events of September 11, 2001 pushed for interreligious dialogue and a skepticism grew from these events.[20] All of this is to point to the historical events that contributed to the rise of interreligious dialogue.

5.4 Different types of dialogue

Interreligious dialogue can take on various forms. It is significant to distinguish between the valid and various varieties of interreligious dialogue that may occur through the process of understanding the religious Other. In "Interreligious Dialogue" from *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* Sallie B. King elaborates on the variety of different types of dialogues that occur in interreligious settings and their functions. These include: 1. Institutional dialogue that happens between elite religious figures as official representatives of the religion; 2.

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[17] Leonard Swidler, The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue," 10-15.

[18] One example can be found in Giuseppe Giordan and Andrew P. Lynch, "Interreligious Dialogue: From Religion to Geopolitics," *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion,* vol. 10 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brills, 2019): 1-9, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004401266_002.

[19] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation (1972)," trans. David Vessey and Chris Blauwkamp, *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 4 (2006): 358.

[20] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism: Searching for a Way out of the Deadlock," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (2005): 36.

Parliamentary-style in open-forum setting where religious leaders share their views; 3. Verbal dialogue for the purpose for better understanding of the religious Other through a focus on doctrines and theology; 4. Intervisitation as the process of one religious community member visiting another's religious community either by visitation or by quest of inquiry; 5. Spiritual dialogue is the engagement of spiritual practices of another religion; 6. Practical dialogue is by way of active participation in another religious community, and; 7. Internal dialogue is the dialogical process of discerning the exposition of another religion by oneself.[21]

The *Dialogue and Proclamation* from the Vatican in 1991 suggests four forms of dialogue in no particular order: dialogue of the theological exchange, dialogue of life, dialogue of action, and dialogue of religious experience.[22] Dialogue of the theological exchange is interreligious dialogue that specifically relates to theological and philosophical discourse. Dialogue of life is centered on people, communities, and their personal interactions and dialogue. Dialogue of action is interreligious dialogue accompanied with social action and activism. The dialogue of religious experience is based on the sharing of spiritual experiences.

The *Dialogue and Proclamation* proposes four forms of dialogue: the dialogue of theological exchange; religious experience; activism; and life. These different types of dialogical encounters have varying expectations within them. In theological dialogue people share on a theoretical level their theologies, faith traditions, and religious beliefs with each other. This type of learning is most closely related to comparative theology, in the larger sense of the term. The

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[21] Sallie B. King, "Interreligious Dialogue" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, ed. Chad Meister (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Jan. 2011), 101-102.

[22] Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, "Dialogue and Mission," in *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Vatican City: Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, 1991), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

form of spiritual or religious experience shared in interreligious dialogue revolves around the reality of transcendence. Interreligious activism is also considered interreligious dialogue as it pertains to the sharing of interreligious traditions towards a common purpose, usually involving community or social activism. Additionally, there is the dialogue of religious life, The *Dialogue and Proclamation* from the Vatican has provided a modeled structure of dialogical forms. For example, Eric Sharpe proposes a fourfold typology within the category of dialogue of religions: discursive, human, secular, and interior.[26]

Simultaneously, Moyaert attends to five various forms of interreligious dialogue. These include theological, spiritual, diplomatic, practical, dialogue of life.[27] Sergey Melnik, expands on the types of interreligious dialogues by categorizing them differently based on the intention of the interreligious dialogical encounter.[28] These types include, polemical, cognitive, peacemaking, and partnership. What all of these types of dialogue share is the method of conversation.

5.5 Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue

Cornille maintains that one of the first steps towards dialogue is doctrinal humility, which is humility that comes from a place of desire to learn from otherness and acceptance that one does not have the entire hermeneutical horizon. Commitment is the second step according to Cornille. This is rooted in the unique dedication to each religious tradition and an individual's special commitment to their particularness within their tradition. Cornille emphasizes that this "allows the dialogue to go beyond one's own positioning in the world. So that kind of dialogue is

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[26] Eric Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between World Religions*, ed. John Hick (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), 78. See more in Alan Race, "Interfaith Dialogue: Religious Accountability between Strangeness and Resonance," in *SCM Core Text Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Paul Hedges and Alan Race, 161-163.
[27] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 202.
[28] Sergey Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 31 (November 2020): 58.

not just for oneself, but it is a dialogue that one conducts in service of a larger tradition."[29]

Cornille accentuates that:

> Some scholars would go so far as to say that for a true dialogue to take place one
> has to be able to be willing to sacrifice everything in the dialogue, and give
> oneself just completely to where the dialogue takes the partners in dialogue. I find
> that in some ways an unrealistic condition for dialogue, if one belongs to a
> particular religious tradition, psychologically, one cannot imagine ever giving that
> up.[30]

Gadamer would argue that one in unable to "give up" their tradition and this is an
unrealistic way of understanding how tradition functions.[31] Even if we are not aware of its pull
on our horizon, it affects us and therefore we cannot remove ourselves from its grasp.

The third condition for Cornille is "Interconnection" as the understanding that one's
tradition or religious beliefs are relatable or compatible for comparative intersection that comes
out of one's own belief systems. Empathy is the fourth condition because of the deep religious
and faith experiences that one is sharing. It is vital to have empathy for temporarily entering into
the horizon of the Other.[32] The fifth and final condition is "Hospitality" which "has more to do
with an appreciation of the possible truth of another religious tradition. So it involves not just
resonating with, but allowing for the possibility that there might be truth in another religion that
one might learn from."[33] The conditions shared here by Cornille illustrate the suggested climate
with which one can approach interreligious dialogue. Cornille does not demand that dialogue can

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[29] Cornille, "The Risks and Rewards," [MIPodcast #88].
[30] Cornille, "The Risks and Rewards," [MIPodcast #88].
[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), xv.
[32] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2008), 145.
[33] Cornille, "The Risks and Rewards," [MIPodcast #88].

only occur in this type of environment but from her own research and experience shares what contributes to the fruitful development of successful dialogue between faiths.

5.6 Challenges and Conflicting Polemics

With any type of dialogue, there will likely come a time when conversation is challenging and conflicting. The conflicts that arise can vary to a certain degree but have in common an approach to our own prejudices that may fuel an internal struggle. Some of these challenges will not easily be overcome and there is a possibility that they never will. This speaks to the unique attributes of the particularisms within the individual's religious traditions. This does not mean that understanding within dialogue has not occurred. Certainly, there are times when we understand something that has challenged our pre-existing understandings. This is why disagreement does not necessarily mean that one does not understand. It actually shows that one understands the unique nuances within the dialogical exchange.

We cannot speak of dialogue without mentioning the possibilities of misunderstandings. Misunderstandings can certainly occur within interreligious dialogue, just as they occur in any other dialogical setting. Misunderstandings do not mean one does not understand anything at all or will not understand eventually. In fact, misunderstandings can lead to better understanding. Through the process of clearing the misconceptions of the interreligious encounter, one can learn deeper what one misunderstood. Do we not find that we understand some things better when we are corrected or learn from our misunderstandings? Part of the struggle in interreligious dialogue is that comparative theologians are often torn between the two points of interest, universalism and particularism. Therefore, "Comparative theology requires a sophisticated hermeneutics..." that can appreciate the polemics between the home tradition and the religious traditions of

another.[34] These are the issues that are relevant to the work and influence of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It is my hope that the example below of an ecumenical interfaith historical event will display the applicability of Gadamerian hermeneutics as appropriate for ecumenical interfaith dialogue.

5.7 An Ecumenical Interfaith Dialogue

In Germany, at the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980,[35] Lutherans – in their desire to have a more ecumenical celebration – invited several different Christian denominational representatives to share in their celebration. In attendance were Mennonite Anabaptist representatives and when they gave their comments of celebration at the conference, they commented on a clause in the Augsburg Confession that continued lasting persecution of Mennonites who were "imprisoned, tortured, and executed at the time of the Reformation."[36] This clause states in five different areas, "Damned are the Anabaptists..."[37] At first the Mennonites declined their invitation, "How, they wondered, could they celebrate their own condemnation."[38] When word of this spread, the Lutherans wrote a formal apology.

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[34] James L. Fredericks, "Introduction," in Francis X. Clooney, ed., *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), xiii, E-book.

[35] Richard Cahill, "'Damnant Anabaptistas': The Damned Anabaptists in the Textual History of the Augsburg Confession," *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 75, no. 2 (1995): 188–97.

[36] John D. Roth, "How to commemorate a division? Reflections on the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and its relevance for the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church today," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91, no. 1 (2017): 5, *Gale Academic OneFile*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A480412191/AONE?u=anon~b926e2f7&sid=googleScholar&xid=e565f0e5.

[37] See specifically, "Article IX. Concerning Baptism," the language in the Latin version is "They condemn the Anabaptists who disapprove of the baptism of children and assert that children are saved without baptism (pg. 43)." The German version states, "Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists... (pg. 42)." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

[38] Larry Miller, "The Lutheran Dialogue with Mennonites: an Example of a Dialogue with a Free Church (with a postscript on visions of unity)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86, no. 3 (2012): 294.

The Lutheran World Federation on July11, 1980 adopted a "Statement on the *Confessio Augustana*" which states:

> It is with sorrow that we recognize the fact that the specific condemnations of the
> Confession against certain opinions that were held at the time of the Reformation
> have caused pain and suffering for some. We realized that some of these opinions
> are no longer held in the same way in these churches, and we express our hope
> that the remaining differences may be overcome. We worship a Jesus Christ who
> liberates and calls on our member churches to celebrate our common Lutheran
> heritage with a spirit both of gratitude and penitence.[39]

Although this example was not set out to be a comparative theological venture, through the dialogical process, the Anabaptists learned more about their own theological tradition because of the dialogical conversations inspired by these events. After a series of dialogues between the Lutherans and the German Mennonites from 2005 through 2008, they meet annually for one week and then in 2009 and 2010 drafted a report that highlighted their outcomes. The Lutheran and Mennonite council representatives completed their official responses of reconciliation, "Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ."[40] These responses were the first official attempt at reconciliation between the Lutherans and Anabaptists and called them to "move beyond the condemnations."[41]

These were later translated into English for Mennonites outside of Germany and led to a series of conversations within the Mennonite tradition about their own religious identity. When other Mennonites read the reconciliation documents, there were sentiments of dismay and

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[39] Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ,* Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission (Geneva and Strasbourg: The Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference, 2010), 11, https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/oea-lutheran-mennonites-web-en.pdf.

[40] See Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*.

[41] Lutheran World Federation, *Healing Memories*, 102.

apprehension, believing they were not properly represented by their own tradition. This led to a series of internal Mennonite dialogues about Mennonite faith and tradition. "The commission had to find a way forward that 'both honoured the enduring authority of the Augsburg Confession within the Lutheran tradition while recognizing the historical continuity that joins Anabaptists condemned by the confession with contemporary Mennonites.'"[42] This is an example of an interfaith dialogue that caused conflict internally within the religious traditions and with further dialogue led to creating a joint historical narrative of Lutheran and Mennonite relations during the formative Reformation period.[43]

The next pivotal step in this joint dialogue was a focus on ecumenical reconciliation including repentance and forgiveness of past transgressions and made future commitments to Mennonites. "On July 22, 2010, the Lutheran World Federation in its general assembly at Stuttgart, Germany, formally asked for forgiveness. Representatives of Mennonite World Conference responded by granting forgiveness."[44] Reconciliation work occurred in a plenary session and through a public ecumenical worship service. Part of this reconciliation process included a joint study guide for congregations, "the publication is intended to bring people from each tradition together to study the history and theological conflicts behind Lutheran-Mennonite relations."[45] This is an example of how interfaith dialogue can be shared back with the main of traditions.

5.8 Theological Points of Contention

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[42] Miller, "The Lutheran Dialogue with Mennonites," 297.
[43] Miller, "The Lutheran Dialogue with Mennonites," 298.
[44] Miller, "The Lutheran Dialogue with Mennonites," 299.
[45] See more, "Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ," a Lutheran-Mennonite study guide for congregations, commissioned by Mennonite Church Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, (2010) https://canadianmennonite.org/articles/lutherans-mennonites-study-together.

The reconciliation between the Lutherans and Mennonites also included "a mutual commitment to return to dialogue for issues unresolved between the two communions."[46] One point of difference includes interpretations surrounding baptism and they recognize that mutual understanding surrounding the theology of baptism was not a realistic outcome. Therefore, coming to the conclusion:

> Under the eyes of the others each communion will reflect on its own theology and practice of baptism, especially as entrance into the Church and into a life of discipleship. This will allow an exchange of gifts, with the challenges posed by the other communities helping all of them to nurture faithful discipleship. Communions will assist one another to express the transformative power of the Christian faith in ways responsive to contemporary questions and problems.[47]

The goal was not only mutual understanding but growing in their own theological understandings by being accountable to each other. Jeremy Bergen argues on the importance of visible unity as "a necessary aspect of the nature and mission of the church. The challenge is to affirm that the church lives concretely and visibly without seizing on visibility or concreteness as means by which to 'settle' ecclesiology and take control... neither the current denominational situation not a strictly 'spiritual' unity are adequate." [48] This specific example of interfaith shows how even ecumenical dialogue can be an expression of comparative theology. Through this comparative moment, these two different, yet alike religious traditions overcome their obstacles of difference in likeness by holding each other accountable to their own theological beliefs and also expressing forgiveness for past transgressions of persecutive and violence. Within this

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[46] Miller, "The Lutheran dialogue with Mennonites," 303.
[47] Miller, "The Lutheran dialogue with Mennonites," 304.
[48] Jeremy M. Bergen, "Lutheran repentance at Stuttgart and Mennonite Ecclesial Identity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86, no. 3 (2012): 320n.

comparative moment, we see how both traditions gained a better understanding of their own

tradition and the other's theology.

5.9 Is there more to say about interreligious dialogue?

By now, we have already seen some of the benefits and challenges of interreligious

dialogue. But I must be precise about the value and obstacles of this type of dialogue. In a

podcast with Catherine Cornille and Brigham Young University's Wheatley Institution, Cornille

highlights the "risks and rewards" of interreligious dialogue.[49] Dialogue is a great introduction to

interreligious engagement with other religious traditions, though it must be from a position of

learning from the Other. Dialogue can also serve as an advocate for learning. But is dialogue

enough? Christopher Brittain suggests that interreligious dialogue is not enough and in fact

demonstrates the "avoidance of the predominant model" of dialogue resulting in lasting

interreligious partnerships. This is an example of how dialogue is more than what happens within

the in-between, but something that occurs meta-ontologically.[50] To understand what more can be

said about interreligious dialogue, let's explore the various theoretical approaches.

5.10 Theoretical Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue as it is practiced is in search of a theory that complements its

everyday and varied practices. For example, Oddbjørn Leirvik utilizes the philosophical efforts

from Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas.[51] There are many approaches to interreligious

dialogue, too many to explore in much depth here. However, I will briefly sketch out

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[49] Cornille, "The Risks and Rewards," [MIPodcast #88].

[50] Christopher Craig Brittain, "Partnership Not Dialogue: Lent and Ramadan Under the Same Roof," *Ecclesial Practices* 3 (2016): 209.

[51] Oddbjørn Leirvik, "Philosophies of Interreligious Dialogue: Practice in Search of Theory," *Approaching Religion* 1, no. 1 (2011): 16-24.

interpersonal communication theory as applicable to interreligious dialogue and end with the philosophical hermeneutical approach.

Communication theorist assert that because interreligious dialogue is a form of communication, general communication theories would assist in the problems that exist with interreligious dialogue.[52] David Krieger asserts that a general communication theory is applicable to interreligious dialogue as it can assist in resolving some of the problems involved in interreligious dialogue. By expanding on this Krieger claims, "An adequate appreciation of the pragmatic conditions of human communication leads us to strive for *universal communication*, rather than agreement on doctrines, categories, or formulas."[53] Krieger puts forth a seven-step methodology:

> 1. Critical and faithful understanding of one's own tradition; 2. One must gain an understanding of another religious tradition; 3. This understanding must be allowed to become conviction; 4. The acceptance of the Other's truth must not imply the exclusion of one's former beliefs. 5. This discourse must then become an external *inter*religious dialogue with representatives from the other tradition. 6. These steps must be presupposed for all parties involved in the interreligious encounter. 7. New interpretations are 'tested' for their 'orthodoxy.[54]

Although Krieger attempts to solve the problems of interreligious dialogue with a methodical approach inspired by communication theory, it seems that he avoids the problems inherent within the realm of interreligious dialogue completely. For example, how is one to

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[52] Communication theories have also incorporated Gadamer's philosophy. See, for example, Stanley Deetz, "Conceptualizing Human Understanding: Gadamer's Hermeneutics and American Communication Studies," *Communication Quarterly* 26 (1978): 12-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/01463377809369288.

[53] David J. Krieger, "Communication Theory and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (1993): 353.

[54] Krieger, "Communication Theory and Interreligious Dialogue," 352-353.

balance the acceptance of the other truth with conviction (steps 3) and hold on to their own religious tradition and beliefs (step 4).

Communication theories have been applied to the praxis of interreligious dialogue, take for example, Daniel Brown who supports communication theories as guidelines for interfaith dialogue. Although Brown's purposes for dialogue are "peace-making" and "witness-bearing" he highlights the use of communication theory that provides space for dialogue as "accidental dialogue," through unexpected moments of interfaith dialogue. He relates turning points within interfaith dialogue to the theory of "relational dialectics." Brown references Keaton and Soukup's article, "Dialogue and Religious Otherness: Toward a Model of Pluralistic Interfaith Dialogue" as a pioneering venture from the communication field into interreligious dialogue and quotes its effectiveness in understanding the spontaneity of interfaith dialogue. "Dialogue is always, to some degree, spontaneous and unpredictable. Reciprocity, mutuality, and spontaneity can foster what might be considered the ultimate purpose of dialogue, wholeness."[55] Although the communication theories have an underdeveloped approach to interreligious dialogue, this highlights that communication theories are receptive to the need for theory in interreligious dialogue and are responding. Both communication and philosophical approaches to hermeneutics are based in the linguistics of human experience.

Let us pivot to philosophical approaches to interreligious dialogue starting with the use of Paul Ricœur. It would be insufficient of me to speak of hermeneutics based in dialogue without mentioning the work of Ricœur in relation to Gadamer. Ricœur and Gadamer are often paired together, however it is "safe to say that Ricœur and Gadamer unfolded their hermeneutics

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[55] Daniel S. Brown Jr., *A Communication Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue: Living within the Abrahamic Traditions* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 13-15.

independently from one another."[56] Marianne Moyaert has been significantly influenced by the

hermeneutical lens of Ricœur in the development of her interreligious hermeneutics and Paul

Hedges complements Moyaert's approach to philosophical hermeneutics within the context of

comparative theology.[57] Moyaert sees that Ricœur adds a philosophical foundation to

comparative theology that it was insufficiently addressing. She maintains that the essential

challenge of interreligious dialogue, is the "balance between one's own faith commitment and

openness to the otherness of the other."[58] I would push Moyaert's statement and suggest that the

challenge goes beyond just the mode of interreligious dialogue and towards all meeting spaces of

interreligious encounters.

Supported by Ricœurian hermeneutics, Moyaert encourages a linguistic model of

hospitality for interreligious dialogue.[59] Three main points are argued here, first, the challenge of

translation as an analogy for interreligious dialogue, second, translation as a paradigm and

interconnected to hermeneutical hospitality, and third, Ricœur supports this as a mode for

interreligious dialogue.[60] Moyaert's pioneering work with Ricœur's hermeneutics adds substance

to interreligious hermeneutics, just like Clooney, Tracy, and Hedges have utilized Gadamer.

Even Moyaert argues, "[Gadamer's] hermeneutical model of conversation often resounds in

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[56] Ming Xie, *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). 51.

[57] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 1 (2016): 7. See also Paul Hedges, "In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters, by Marianne Moyaert." *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 2, no. 1 (2018): 125-28. https://doi.org/10.1558/36167.

[58] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 194.

[59] Marianne Moyaert, "The (Un-)translatability of religions? Ricœur's linguistic hospitality as model for inter-religious dialogue," *Exchange* 37, no. 3 (2008): 337-364.

[60] Moyaert, "The (Un-)translatability of religions?" 339.

reflections on interreligious dialogue."[61] However, Moyaert mentions that there are differences between Ricœur and Gadamer.

Moyaert suggests that one difference between Gadamer and Ricœur is based on Gadamer's fusion of horizons, stating: "Ricœur...claims hermeneutics to be a never-ending enterprise because of what he calls *la fuite des horizons*. There is always something which escapes hermeneutics. The difference between the familiar and the foreign will thus not be resolved in a fusion."[62] Therefore, Ricœur claims that "This notion of a fusion of horizons leads to the theme that finally what is at stake in the hermeneutics of historical consciousness is the tension between the horizon of the past and that of the present."[63] Ricœur further highlights that the fusion of horizons is an "ideal type of reading."[64] So for Ricœur, fusion of horizons is ideal but incomplete. This is expressed in Ricœur's notion of translation, at some point there exists something that is untranslatable, "irreducibility" and "impassable difference."[65] For Ricœur, there always lies a distance of some sort between fusion and indifference.

Is it possible Ricœur misunderstands Gadamer? There are other areas within Gadamer's hermeneutical work where Ricœur misses an opportunity to engage with a better understanding of Gadamer. Take for example when Ricœur suggests that Gadamer should change the title of his magnum opus to "Truth *or* Method."[66] Ricœur, thinks he understands Gadamer to propose a new

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[61] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt & David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 206.

[62] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 355.

[63] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* (vol. 1), trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 220.

[64] Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 178.

[65] Paul Ricœur, *On Translation*, trans. E. Brennan (London: Routledge, 2006) 9, 23.

[66] Paul Ricœur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1973): 126. In fact, Gadamer claims, "...the title of *Truth and Method* never intended that the antithesis it implies should be mutually exclusive." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Linge (CA: University of California Press, 2008), 26.

methodology for the human sciences. However, in fact this is not the case. Gadamer explicitly

states, "...Nor have I ever thought of concocting a set of systematic rules to describe or guide the

methodological procedures of human sciences."[67] Misunderstanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics

is directly related to the characteristics (like *Dasein*) and ontological theory rooting Gadamer's

hermeneutical philosophy.

Gadamer is often misunderstood and I think Moyaert has fallen into this faction,

especially in how she understands fusion of horizons.[68] This is clarified by Moyaert's

terminology (that she gathers from Ricœur) of the "vicious circle."[69] This could very well be

why Hedges pushes for an "opening of horizons," to help us understand what Gadamer illustrates

for us in his metaphor of fusion of horizons.[70] In fact, Gadamer's metaphor of fusion of horizons

can help illuminate and process the ambiguous nature that Moyaert is consistently aware of in

the practice of comparative theology, "a never-ending hermeneutical circle which moves

between identity and openness, conviction and critique, commitment and distanciation..."[71] It is

unfortunate that Moyaert misses Gadamer's understanding of "fusion of horizons," because there

are ways that Gadamer and Ricœur could collaborate together in helping postmodernism

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[67] Vorwort zur 2. Auflage (1965), S. 437-448. "Foreward to the Second Edition" in *Truth and Method*, xxv-xxxvii; "Foreword to The Second German Edition of Truth and Method" in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?,* eds. Kenneth Baynes, et. al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 339-350.

[68] See Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (January 2012): 51, fig. 103.

[69] Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 43.

[70] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons." *Journal of Dialogue Studies,* 4 (2016): 17. Gadamer supports the use of opening of horizons sharing, "Interpretation is an ongoing process of life in which there is always something behind and something expressly intended. Both an opening of a horizon and a concealing of something take place in all our experiences of interpretation." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer" in Paul Ricœur and Mario Valdes, *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 222, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664883.

[71] Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 41.

understand hermeneutics and a dialogical effort involving both philosophers may prove to be resourceful in grasping a fuller understanding of the philosophical hermeneutical tradition. Unfortunately, there is little room for that scope of work in this study.

Philosophical hermeneutical theories in interreligious dialogue have been highlighted before amongst comparative theologians, even with the assistance of a Gadamerian infused hermeneutical theory.[72] Atkinson highlights a three-prong methodology based in moral psychology and social learning theory. Claiming, "[a] learning based dialogical approach informed through comparative theology suggests that the value of interfaith dialogue lies not in protecting our viewpoints but in realizing our vulnerability."[73] Although I sympathize with Atkinson's approach and intentions, he misses the point with his utilization of Gadamer. Atkinson claims, "Our cultural 'horizon', according to Gadamer (1989, p304-306), is one frequently mired in ignorance and prejudice about both ourselves and the Other ensuring that we cannot readily move beyond that which we have already conceived of as 'truth.'"[74] Gadamer's main point on "historical horizon" in this section of *Truth and Method* surrounds the context of historically effected consciousness. This comes already after Gadamer's main thesis on prejudice as conditions for understanding. Gadamer argues that, "[h]istorical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own."[75] "Foreground" *Abheben* in this context means, a reciprocal process that makes visible that which is foregrounded.[76] This is how Gadamer also understands prejudice. "We start by saying that a

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[72] See, Michael Atkinson, "Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology: A Theoretical Approach to a Practical Dilemma," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 3, no. 1 (2019): 47-57.
[73] Atkinson, "Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology," 55.
[74] Atkinson, "Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology," 51. See also Mariah Cushing, "Gadamer's Philosophical Concept of 'Prejudice' and its Use in Comparative Theology," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 29 (2020): 19 – 37.
[75] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2004), 305.
[76] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282, 310, 316.

hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us..." and continues

by asserting, "it is important to avoid the error of thinking that the horizon of the present consists

of a fixed set of opinions..."[77]Atkinson's assertation of Gadamer's conception of prejudice and

horizon are common misunderstandings of Gadamer. A better approach to Gadamerian

hermeneutics is shown in Hedges' interreligious hermeneutics. Let's look at how Hedges utilizes

Gadamer within the context of interreligious dialogue.

As noted before, Paul Hedges uses Gadamer's philosophical thought throughout his

interreligious hermeneutical research. In the field of comparative theology, Hedges is the number

one proponent for Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutics. There is much to say regarding

Hedges' use of Gadamer, some points have been referenced elsewhere throughout this research,

however we will focus here primarily on how Hedges appropriates Gadamer for the purpose of

methodological use in interreligious dialogue. Hedges asserts the applicability and usefulness of

Gadamer's hermeneutical work and themes for the field of comparative theology.[78]

The themes and tools Hedges utilized from Gadamer include: "tact," "formation,"

"judgement or good sense," and "art and beauty."[79] By "tact," Hedges maintains that it is a sense

that functions as a mode of being and that he implicitly connects this with comparative

theological methodologies of empathy inherited by Clooney. "Formation" and "judgement or

good sense" are skills Hedges promotes from Gadamer's playbook for comparative theology that

may serve to be helpful in comparative projects. Hedges promotes the use of art, ritual, and

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[77] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2004), 305.
[78] I will not repeat here what Hedges has already claimed as the applicability of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for interreligious dialogue with specific interreligious contexts. See specifically Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 1 (2016): 5.
[79] Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," 14-15.

symbol through Gadamer's understanding of "art and beauty" because for Gadamer "hermeneutics... is for him applicable to all areas of life."[80] Hedges continues by claiming,

> Certainly Gadamer can help us see that the kind of methodology and system Clooney has employed in his textual Comparative Theology may also be profitably turned to the analysis of art, rituals, and symbols because the focus is not language as words per se, rather it is about systems of human understanding and interpretation across myriad cultural forms.[81]

In another article, Hedges explains Gadamer's use of play and opening of horizons, and how it relates to dialogue.[82] Through these themes, Hedges leans toward an ontological hermeneutic by claiming, "we can speak of all understanding and dialogue as medial," but he stops there noting, "it is not a defining Gadamerian concept developed at length..."[83] Although I am indebted to Hedges for his introduction of Gadamer, I have found that Gadamer means more than what Hedges gives him credit for, and this is where Hedges and my own hermeneutical journey dissever. Hedges continues to use Gadamerian themes throughout his interreligious hermeneutics and although I align my hermeneutical approach closely with Hedges' Gadamerian hermeneutics, he has naturally led me into the metaphorical use of "conversation" as a hermeneutical theory informed by interreligious dialogue.

5.11 Gadamer's Conversation

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[80] Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," 15.

[81] Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation,"15.

[82] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 5-26.

[83] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 10.

Gadamer connects dialogue and conversation all the way back to Aristotle, sharing, "Aristotle identified humans as the beings with language, and language exists only in conversation."[84] Incapacity for conversation, for Gadamer, is rooted in "whether one is open, and finds the other open, enough that the threads of the conversation can run back and forth."[85] For Gadamer, the incapacity that exists within dialogue comes from the self: "Ignoring and mishearing occur for the same obvious reason: one who ignores or mishears is one who constantly listens to himself, whose ears are so filled from the encouragement that he constantly gives to himself and with which he pursues his drives and interests, that he is unable to hear the Other."[86]

For Gadamer, the model of conversation has an influential role in philosophical thought, serving as an archetype for how understanding unfolds. Gadamer reiterates this point, "When two people come together and enter into an exchange with one another, then there is always an encounter between, as it were, two worlds, two worldviews and two world pictures."[87] Gadamer connects conversation back to the notion of truth. For Plato, "...saw in conversation a principle of truth, that the word only finds value through its reception by another and through that other's agreement, and that no argumentative conclusion has power until one person enters into the thought of another."[88] This notion of truth is the guiding principle for Gadamer, the center for which Gadamer strives in conversation. He gives the prime example of "Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic thinkers who came from very different camps... [but] were united together in the conviction that the way of truth was conversation."[89] This truth is "that we have encountered

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[84] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 351.
[85] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 352.
[86] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 358.
[87] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 354.
[88] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 354.
[89] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 355.

something in the other that we have not encountered in the same way in our own experiences of

the world." And a successful conversation is one where "something remains for us and

something remains in us that has transformed is."[90] Conversation, when successful, brings about

reconciliation, for "the persons who arrive at a reconciliation..." and overcomes the powers of

economics and politics. For Gadamer, humanity's true fulfilment is to always be "capable of

conversation – that is, to listen to the Other..."[91]

Gadamer uses the metaphor of dialogue and conversation to explain how understanding

develops. Because Gadamer is so convinced that understanding happens linguistically within our

human nature, a natural move for Gadamer is that conversation describes how humans

understand the world around us. This dialogical model shares with us how easily we can adapt

the model of interreligious dialogue as a hermeneutical form of understanding within

interreligious engagements within the realm of actual interreligious dialogue, solo interreligious

readings of texts, and rituals. David Tracy takes on this idea of conversation as a hermeneutical

model and applies it to interreligious dialogue.[92]

5.12 David Tracy's Turn Toward Gadamer

David Tracy finds meaning in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics because of its

foundation in dialogue and the model of conversation.[93] David Tracy supports a Gadamerian

influenced hermeneutic for interreligious dialogue and uses Mircea Eliade as a major reference

in how the Gadamerian hermeneutic is applied. Tracy lists three steps based on Gadamer's

evaluation of interpretation based on the models of the game and dialogue from *Truth and*

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[90] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 355. It is here that Gadamer knits together conversation with friendship.
[91] Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972)," 358.
[92] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 19.
[93] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 41.

Method.[94] The first step Tracy highlights is that each individual interpreter enters into

hermeneutics with pre-understandings that have sincere influence on their views of the "subject

matter." Tracy states, "The fact is that no interpreter enters into the attempt to understand any

text without pre-judgments formed by the history of the effects of her/his culture."[95] The

interpreter can be consciously aware of these pre-judgments or unconsciously aware of them,

either way, the pre-judgments still affect the interpreter because of their historical effected

consciousness.

The second step indicated by Tracy involves the interpreter's active participation with the

text or tradition through a conversational model of the game of questioning. The game of

questioning revolves around the provocative nature of text or tradition claiming the attention of

the interpreter, provoking questions and responding with otherness to the interpreter's pre-

understandings. Tracy stresses, the interpreter "must be willing to interpret the claim to attention

of the Other in order to understand even the self."[96] According to Tracy, at this point in the

process of understanding the Other, one might be searching for a "heuristic model by means of

which one may better understand the complex process of interaction between text and

interpreter..."[97] Tracy invites Gadamer's "game of conversation" into the hermeneutical process.

The third step Tracy describes is the game of conversation initiated by Gadamer's

influence suggesting, "the common human experience of playing a game can become the key to

the basic model of hermeneutics as conversation."[98] He suggests the "caught up in the move of

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[94] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 61.
[95] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 61.
[96] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 63.
[97] Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," 63.
[98] David Tracy, "Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion: The Question of Radical Pluralism," *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984), 297.

the game" and the to-and-fro movement of the conversation by the interpreter allowing

themselves to play in the game of conversation with Other.[99]

It is Tracy's introduction of Gadamer within interreligious studies that lights a fire on the

applicability of philosophical hermeneutics for comparative theology. And as much influence

Tracy has had with Gadamer in the field, I find Tracy's analysis of Gadamer's philosophy and

hermeneutics insufficient. For instance, he does not mention the involvement of pre-

understandings within the game of conversation and therefore lacks to mention the metaphor of

fusion of horizons.[100] Tracy understands the "game" as a step of the hermeneutical process

instead of a metaphor to describe how understanding comes to be. This makes sense as to why

Tracy does not highlight reflection or the applicability of fusion of horizons. Although Tracy's

interpretation points our attention to the ways of Gadamer, there is more to be said. Tracy misses

a significant contribution of interpretation namely, reflection and application, the fusion that

comes about in the interreligious hermeneutical process. Tracy has successfully initiated

Gadamer's work in to the field of interreligious studies and now others after him continue to

contribute to the conversation.

5.13 Interreligious Dialogue as a Model for Interreligious Hermeneutics

This begs the question, "can interreligious dialogue be a modeled example for

interreligious hermeneutics?" I propose that the dialogical model of interreligious dialogue,

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[99] Tracy, "Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion," 297.

[100] To be clear: I am not claiming that Tracy does not value or include reflection in his hermeneutics; rather, I am highlighting that he does not mention reflection or fusion in this expose of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Surely there are other references where Tracy understands the critical nature of reflection. For example, "To be sure, true theory is also grounded in praxis – the praxis of critical reflection." Tracy, "Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion," 95. See also David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Interreligious Hermeneutics,* ed. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43.

inspired by Tracy, Hedges, Clooney, Moyaert, and Cornille, is foundationally rooted and

supported by a Gadamerian based interreligious hermeneutic. This is supported by how Gadamer

uses conversation as a metaphor for hermeneutics. This is because interreligious dialogue mimics

Gadamer's metaphor of conversation and dialogue.[101] Using Gadamer's metaphor of

conversation and dialogue as a model for interreligious hermeneutics, we can see how

interreligious dialogue can inform an interreligious hermeneutic. There are several points

supporting the culmination of this proposition.

5.14 Hermeneutics is based in language through dialogue.

According to Gadamer, it is due to and by means of language that we are able to

understand anything and anyone, if we can understand at all.[102] Therefore, a hermeneutic

inspired by dialogue, as Gadamer insists, describes how we are able to understand at its very

essence. Within the dialogical encounter of the Other, the theologian will bring with them their

own horizon that is infused with their prejudice and tradition. Supporting this, Moyaert claims,

"People engaging in dialogue do so by entering the hermeneutical circle, for, either consciously

or unconsciously, they bring to their work a specific pre-understanding, a prior set of postulates

drawn by their own faith and from their tradition and its theologies."[103] And therefore,

comparative theology "sees interreligious encounter, first and foremost, as an ongoing

conversation process which can yield preliminary results only."[104]

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[101] Andrzej Wierciński, ed., *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation* Vol. 2 (LIT Verlag Münster, 2011).

[102] For a comprehensive overview on Gadamer's utilization of language see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Language and Understanding (1970)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (January 2006): 13-27.

[103] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 208.

[104] Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 26.

5.15 Question and Answer format

The conversation model is driven by the format of "question-and-answer" between the interpreter and the Other. Moyaert maintains, "Gadamer points in this perspective to the hermeneutical circle in which understanding occurs. This circle points to the perpetual 'back-and-forth' movement between prior expectations and the strange, a process that is characterized by change, refinement, and correction of those expectations."[105] This is what Gadamer refers to as the "dialectic of question and answer" which is similar to the conversation model discussed previously. According to Gadamer, the question and answer creates a reciprocal relationship between the self and Other.[106] When approaching a text (or other religious dimension) the questions we present to the hermeneutical space say more about the interpreter than about the Other. As Gadamer argues this is because, "anticipating an answer itself presupposes that the questioner is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it."[107] The question-and-answer format is less of a procedural method because it is informed and formed by historically effected consciousness and open to the fusion of horizons.

5.16 Fusion not as agreement but understanding

Gadamer's philosophical metaphor of fusion of horizons has been misunderstood and it is this misunderstanding that gets in the way of truly appreciating Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Tracy argues, "I cannot subscribe to one important emphasis of Gadamer for dialogue: his notion of a necessary drive in dialogue to an achievement of 'mutual understanding' and a 'fusion of horizons.'"[108] As another example, even Thiselton claims, "in

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[105] Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," 207.
[106] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.
[107] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.
[108] Tracy is not alone in this. Others have dismissed Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics due to their misunderstanding of Gadamer's fusion of horizons. Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Inter-

Gadamer's notion of the merging of horizons we find a parallel to Wink's ideas about 'fusion'

and 'communion,'... 'common understanding,' 'mutual agreement,' 'empathy.'"[109] Fusion of

horizons is not agreement or appropriation, in the sense that we understand that term to mean

today. Fusion is understanding. As David Vessey claims, "Something with a different horizon

would have either to fall within our horizon, in which case understanding it doesn't involve a

fusion of two horizons, or fall outside our horizon, in which case we can't understand it."[110] And

continues by sharing that, "It is not necessarily agreement about the subject matter, but it is, by

Gadamer's definition, a shared understanding about the subject matter."[111] Fusion is the

understandings that become part of an interpreter's new pre-understandings in the hermeneutical

process. Therefore, fusion is the new understandings that an interpreter has gained in the

hermeneutical process. In this sense, fusion is transformative understanding.

Understanding just for the sake of understanding is not the sole purpose of the meaning

of understanding for Gadamer. Understanding is the cycle of formation and transformation.

Although the reality of this transformative power of understanding is not explicitly explained by

Gadamer, "Following Gadamer's understanding that the conversation leads us, we can say that

conversation as conversion is the gift of grace that transforms us."[112] The hermeneutic

conversation that includes the question-and-answer format allows for transformational

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Religious Dialogue," 8. See also David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 78.

[109] Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 317.

[110] David Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 532.

[111] Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," 541.

[112] Conversion in this sense means to "arrive at a different self-understanding." Conversion, therefore, is self-transformation. See Wierciński, "The Primacy of Conversation in Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, 17.

understanding to occur. However, even within this dialectical way of understanding, tension is a natural possibility.

5.17 Possibility of tension

It is not without question that tension will arise in the process of interreligious dialogue. In the tension, the interpreter searches for ways of mediating said tension. There are several ways to process this tension and a dialogical formatted model can aid in the hermeneutical process of alleviating and processing tensions. Some tensions that arise may include issues related to appropriation, challenge of differences and similarities, and challenges to uniqueness. What a dialogical interreligious hermeneutics shares with us is the ability to experience otherness with the presence of these tensions, giving us space to reflect internally, through inner dialogue.

Therefore, "...a true hermeneutic conversation is not free from distractions, confusions, and even a certain amount of awkwardness, what is essential is that in and through the conversation – vulnerable yet willing to open themselves toward the Other – partners arrive at a shared understanding."[113] To expand on this, I want to articulate that a sharedness in conversation does not presuppose or mean agreement. It is more of a shared or common understanding of what is communicated. Personal agreement or disagreement does not discount or discredit what is commonly shared in understanding. It is possible to come to an understanding and the conversation partners do not agree. Shared meaning and understanding still can occur in these types of dialogical events.

This is where Paul Hedge's expansion of "fusion of horizon" to "opening of horizons" is a helpful analysis to consider. Due to misinterpretations of the meaning of Gadamer's metaphor

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[113] Wierciński, "The Primacy of Conversation in Philosophical Hermeneutics," 22.

of "fusion of horizons," Paul Hedges expands the term to "opening of horizons" to help convey

the essence of what occurs in the process of interreligious hermeneutics. Hedges highlights a few

ways opening rather than fusion is helpful for comparative theology.

First, "fusion" implies that the wholeness of the other worldview has been merged with

the fullness of ones own worldview. Although this understanding is valid for how the metaphor

is has been understood (i.e. Tracy, Thiselton), this is not how Gadamer understood "fusion."[114]

However, Hedges is correct in that the metaphor of fusion has currently implied the fusion of self

and other into something new. This is what leads Hedges to his second point. Hedges observes

that the term fusion is "not necessarily agreement or creating a universal point of view."[115] This

is where Tracy falls short in understanding fusion of horizons.[116] It is helpful to expand

Gadamer's metaphor of fusion of horizons to include in the definition Hedges' emphasis of

openness, especially for the efforts of comparative theology. One primary reason "opening" is

helpful to comparative theology is expressed in Hedges' third point – openness is central to the

comparative theologian's approach to religious otherness and therefore could translate well.[117]

This results in a hermeneutically influenced interreligious dialogue. "Where a

conversation is successful, something remains for us and something remains in us that has

transformed us."[118] This dialogically-natured hermeneutic will be fleshed out more thoroughly in

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[114] Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation*, 317.

[115] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 20.

[116] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Cornille and Conway, 2.

[117] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 20. Throughout this research I will continue to use the metaphor, "fusion of horizons," to encourage a better understanding of Gadamer's intent of the metaphor.

[118] Wierciński, "The Primacy of Conversation in Philosophical Hermeneutics," 22. Quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Incapacity for Conversation (1972)," 355.

the following chapter through a method I have coined, the Gadamerian Interreligious

Hermeneutical Circle.[119]

5.18 Summary and Conclusion

For Gadamer, hermeneutics is similar and connected to dialogue by being rooted in

language. For our purposes here, I use interreligious dialogue as a foundational model for

developing an interreligious hermeneutical archetype. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is

not only based in the act of dialogue but it is formed by the model of conversation, through

question-and-answer format, and transformative understanding of the self and Other. Shown in

the example of Lutheran and Mennonite ecumenical dialogue over the disagreements of

communion and baptism, we see how even ecumenical dialogue can also be interreligious. For

we know that our closest family can be the most Other from us. Through this example we can

see how otherness is otherness, whether belief systems remain similar. We also see how

reconciliation can occur even when disagreement exists. In this example, understanding occurs,

not just through mutual acceptance but, by commitment to understand otherness in its own terms.

Interreligious dialogue is, effectively, theory searching for an applicable praxis that

allows for otherness to remain Other and understood. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics

allows for just that. Moyaert sees the applicability of Ricœur's hermeneutical framework as a

hospitable linguistic model. However, as I argue, Ricœur misunderstands Gadamer's fusion of

horizons and therefore misses the opportunity to really engage in Gadamer's philosophical

hermeneutics.

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[119] I coin this in Mariah T. Cushing, "The Circle of Understanding the 'Religious Other': Toward a Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Method" (Fresno: Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, 2017), E-Thesis.

As David Tracy has supported, conversely, Gadamer's hermeneutics allows for the model of conversation to lead interreligious dialogue not only as a methodological approach but as a framework for interreligious hermeneutics. Gadamer goes beyond method to share with us the ontological approach that interreligious dialogue can have for interreligious hermeneutics. Before moving forward, it is imperative to understand Gadamer's philosophical concept of prejudice more thoroughly because of the misconceptions and imperative role prejudice has in Gadamer's hermeneutical theory. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will explore the philosophy surrounding Gadamer's reconstructed concept of prejudice and how it relates directly to comparative theology.

CHAPTER 6: Gadamer's Philosophical Concept of "Prejudice"

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges within the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations regarding a certain meaning. Working out the fore-projections, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates the meaning, understands what is there.[120]

6.1 Introduction

In recent years, comparative theology has seen a shift in application. This new wave of comparative theology is now a process of understanding, learning from, and engaging with other religious traditions both comparatively and theologically for the purpose of seeking fresh theological insights that may be applicable for the comparative theologian. The key players within the discipline of comparative theology highlighted within this chapter are chosen to portray the depth and the breath of research and theological scope. Along with key players within comparative theology, there are several philosophical concepts Gadamer develops in *Truth and Method* that are useful for interreligious hermeneutics and to the comparative theologian.[121] One of these is *Vorurteil* or "prejudice," because it aids the comparativists in the search for understanding through acknowledgment of pre-understandings.[122] The presumption that one can eliminate prejudice before interpretation dates to the Enlightenment era. This is especially

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[120] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 279.

[121] During the development of this PhD Thesis, a similar version of this chapter was published in a special issue in the Journal of Interreligious Studies from the 17th Annual Engaging Particularities Conference of the Boston College Theology Department. See, Mariah T. Cushing, "Gadamer's Philosophical Concept of 'Prejudice' and its Use in Comparative Theology," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 29, (2020): 19-37.

[122] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.

connected to Descartes' *cogito,* rationally observable thought. Enlightenment-influenced philosophy understood prejudice as partiality or bias without justification that prevents an objective judgment.[123] Gadamer counters this Enlightenment ideal by arguing that it is because we have prejudice that we can internally process human experiences, and to subject them to critical reflection is vital to understanding.[124] The assertion of the constant presence of prejudice is fundamental in Gadamer's hermeneutical theory; as he understands, "it brings this whole breadth into play, it forces the interpreter to play with his own prejudices at stake. These are the winnings of reflection that accrue from practice, and practice alone."[125]

Within the realm of comparative theology, Cornille and Hedges[126] highlight that this theological field is increasingly connecting with Gadamerian philosophical concepts, creating a more robust framework for interreligious hermeneutics.[127] Interreligious hermeneutics, expressed through contemporary comparative theology, would benefit by applying Gadamer's concept of prejudice even more extensively. Gadamer argues that his philosophical hermeneutics does not imply that we should or should not approach or engage with the past in a particular way; they merely function to describe what does happen in the act of understanding. Gadamer states: "Fundamentally, I am not proposing a method; I am describing what is the case."[128] He is not necessarily interested in creating a method that will bring about true, correct, or legitimate understanding; rather he is pointing out what occurs when the interpreter understands. One

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[123] István M. Fehér, "Prejudice and Pre-Understanding," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015).

[124] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 284.

[125] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 592.

[126] For more information on Paul Hedges' approach and work on Gadamer see Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 1 (2016): 1-20, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007.

[127] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 79 and 81.

[128] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 534.

significant philosophical connection to the process of understanding is Gadamer's concept of

"prejudice." He highlights the importance of prejudice through his "recognition that all

understanding inevitably involves some prejudice."[129] Gadamer understands prejudice as the

facilitator of deeper truth or knowledge about reality and emphasizes the role prejudice plays in

an individual's knowing and being in the world.

An important aspect of understanding is the relevance and realization of these prejudices

within one's horizon. When an interpreter's prejudices are provoked, that provocation draws

attention to those prejudices in the interpreter, and the interpreter can recognize how cemented

their preconceptions are. Then the interpreter is invited into the activity of interpretation and

searches for a method of understanding to process this new interpretation. The interpreter enters

into a game with the interpreted, a game of conversation. The movement of play, back-and-forth,

take over those who are playing the game of interpretation. As they "get caught up" in the

seriousness of the game by playing by the rules, engaging in fair play, and playing along with

others in the game, they are met with the disclosed truth that presents itself within the play. It is

then the testing of this truth with the interpreter's prejudices that become part of the game itself.

Gadamer encourages testing prejudices by encountering the past, exploring the traditions

from which we have come, and encountering the Other.[130] Prejudice is an inevitable part of

hermeneutics, not a hindrance to understanding but a necessary prerequisite, because individuals

understand and learn from the Other through the dispositions and expectations of their

horizons.[131]

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[129] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 283.
[130] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 310.
[131] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.

This chapter explores Gadamer's understanding of prejudice as it relates to the process of understanding and asks how it could be applied to interreligious hermeneutics in the new wave of comparative theology. The first section situates the use of Gadamer's hermeneutical understandings within the current theological conversation in the field of comparative theology. It is argued here that Gadamer's philosophical concepts, specifically his understanding of prejudice, can be used even more. The second section of this research attempts to survey modern social scientific definitions of prejudice and asks how Gadamer distinguishes his understanding to go beyond their definitions and apply his exposition of prejudice to a philosophical meta-understanding. The third section explores a more robust theoretical framework that may strengthen the new wave of comparative theology by using a Gadamerian hermeneutical method that helps guide the researcher through the process of interreligious hermeneutics for fresh theological insight. There are four main parts of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. First, the *interpreter* is met by two very important influencers: the interpreter's prejudices and tradition. Second, the interpreter encounters the text/tradition through dialogue. *Dialogue* occurs when the interpreter questions the text or tradition and experiences the text or tradition through a communicative process. *Reflection* is the third component of the process of interreligious hermeneutics. Reflection can come in various forms, such as challenges and tensions, reinterpretations, and expansion of understanding. Finally, *fusion of horizons* occurs when new understandings from the religious Other become part of the interpreter's prejudices, ready for the interreligious hermeneutical circle to begin again.

This chapter ends by focusing on the challenges and implications of Gadamer's philosophical understanding of prejudice for comparative theology. This chapter develops the challenge of "openness" to the Other and the interpreter's prejudices, how prejudice is the

condition for understanding the self and the religious Other, and the role of prejudice in theological application. Finally, this chapter ends by explaining how comparative theological reflection can function in dethroning illegitimate prejudices.

6.2 Comparative Theology and Gadamerian Hermeneutics

There are several Gadamerian philosophical concepts that have been overlooked in the field of comparative theology. One of these is "prejudice." These terms may be overlooked in part because of the significant attention drawn to Gadamer's metaphors of fusion of horizons and the "model of conversation."[132] However, as conveyed in this chapter, Gadamer's concept of prejudice is part and parcel of understanding these significant philosophical concepts and yet it is excluded or only briefly discussed by comparative theologians. Hence, there are peripheral philosophical Gadamerian concepts that may benefit our understanding and interpretation of Gadamer for comparative theology in the twenty-first century. There are certain key players that assist our endeavor of an interreligious hermeneutic. These key players, through their own interreligious interpretations and hermeneutical application, give insight to the ways in which interreligious hermeneutics is currently expressed in the field.

6.3 Key Player, Francis Clooney

Francis Clooney's method comes from a place of deep meaningful engagement in and with Hinduism.[133] It is through his own personal encounters with Hinduism and Buddhism while

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[132] See in detail Tracy's extensive work on Gadamer's "model of conversation" and "fusion of horizons" in David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogues," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43.

[133] See for example Francis Clooney's work, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010); *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2005); *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Srivaisnavas of South India* (New

living abroad in India as a Jesuit scholar that he started his comparative and theological journey.[134]

Clooney's own comparative theological horizon has led to what Clooney describes as "crossing over."[135] His method, strongly emphasizes the use of religious texts in their original languages and suggests that a slow discernment while reading, "allows readers to enter the texts as seekers, who may, in the act of reading, move to a deeper apprehension..."[136] This type of serious engagement with the religious texts of another is central to Clooney's methodology. Another important aspect of Clooney's approach is his attention to particularism and the attention to the "home tradition." For example, in his text, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions*, Clooney highlights the importance of a comparative method and its embodied nature.

> Methodologically, this experiment will confirm the position I have been stating throughout: no theological topic, even the most seemingly concrete and tradition-specific, profits from being considered in isolation from comparable theological reflections in other traditions. The event of divine embodiment can be thought of in a comparative theological perspective, and even this most specific of religious

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York: SUNY Press, 1996); *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics: Why and How Deep Learning Still Matters* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2019).

[134] Clooney's comparative theological work demonstrates a significant shift in interreligious studies marked by a dynamic, dialogical, and collegial approach to interreligious hermeneutics. For, "...Clooney's examples have demonstrated, theological topics, methods, and even conclusions have been shared across these diverse traditions." From Patil, Parimal "A Hindu Theologian's Response: A Prolegomenon to 'Christian God, Hindu God'" in Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God,* 186.

[135] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders,* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10-11.

[136] Francis Clooney, *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother,* 232. Paul Hedges includes a fourth dimension in the typological approaches within the theology of religion, "particularities." Paul Hedges and Alan Race, eds., *SCM Core Text Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., 2008), 11. See more, Knitter also includes a "particularities model" within his own framework. See Knitter's description, in "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," in Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue,* 137.

and theological claims is more richly appreciated in an interreligious theological context.[137]

The nature of embodiment Clooney references is an important piece to the comparative and theological project that is exemplified through Clooney's method. Although Clooney has pioneered his comparative methodology, critics have noted a few variables. Clooney recognizes that there are critiques against his methodology. "I may also disappoint those more determined readers who find that I did not in the end actually decide which God, religion, or theology is the right one."[138]

Clooney has also been criticized because of his lack of engagement with larger implications of ontological and phenomenological questions and critiques of religious engagement. For example, Cheetham notes, "Francis Clooney attempts to draw a distinction between comparative theology and the theology of religion by placing greater emphasis on *local* comparisons without seeking to supply an explanatory meta-theology."[139] The particular approach Clooney subscribes to is also critiqued by Perry Schmidt-Leukel for avoiding the categories within the theology of religion and therefore, not taking seriously diverse methodologies and ignoring sincere religious claims of the Other.[140]

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[137] Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 101.
[138] Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 179.
[139] David Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 74.
[140] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed," in Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 27.

6.4 Key Player, David Tracy

David Tracy, for example, has been influenced by the hermeneutical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[141] Specifically, Tracy highlights that the final moment of interpretation is not one subject understanding another subject, but rather the fusion of horizons. As Tracy gathers from Gadamer, "the reader overcomes the strangeness of another horizon not by empathizing with the psychic state or cultural situation of the author but rather by understanding the basic vision of the author implied by the text...."[142] Tracy continues to display how a common religious interpretation of human experience and language is possible and may hold truths.[143]

While commenting on interpreting religious traditions, Tracy acknowledges that interpreting religious traditions involves pre-understandings that the reader brings to the tradition. Also supporting the recognition of the power that the tradition exerts is a willingness to engage dialogically with the tradition by allowing the tradition to take over the conversation, and expanding the dialogue to include other interpretations.[144] This is a hermeneutics of "recovery and suspicion." Tracy understands that the hermeneutics of retrieval must be accompanied by a hermeneutic of suspicion and the use of critical theory.[145] "Hermeneutics of suspicion" was presented by the philosopher Paul Ricœur as an interpretive method to "decoding" what is hidden within a text, from a stance of distrust or skepticism.[146]

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[141] Howland T. Sanks, "David Tracy's Theological Project: An Overview and Some Implications," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 699.

[142] David Tracy, *A Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 78.

[143] Sanks, "David Tracy's Theological Project," 707.

[144] Sanks, "David Tracy's Theological Project," 715.

[145] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogues," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Cornille and Conway, 9.

[146] See Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Curtis Holzen and Matthew Nelson Hill contend, "In contrast to modernist hermeneutics, which often champion suspicion, distrust, and methodological doubt, Gadamer's hermeneutic of trust utilizes a principle of charity, or as Gadamer calls it, 'good will.' For Gadamer, a person of good will 'does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to

Tracy understands that Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy is understanding that happens to us through dialogue where we are taken over by the question of the dialogue and through the logic of inquiry. Tracy expands Gadamer's hermeneutical model to incorporate several different dialogical partners. The two dialogical partners can be two conversational partners, a reader, a text, symbol, ritual, or historical event.[147] Tracy highlights that the key to dialogue is the process of question and answers, whereby the emphasis of the dialogue is shifted from the reader to the Other, whether that be the other dialogical partner, text, ritual, etc. Regarding dialogue, therefore, "the self-in-dialogue-with-the-other through the 'game' of conversation is always a self-interpreting, discovering, constituting (i.e. not inventing) an ever-changing self."[148] Tracy also highlights that in order to have genuine dialogue, the dialogical partner must possess otherness and not just be a projection of the Other.[149]

Interestingly, Tracy highlights that "dialogue need not reach full 'fusion of horizons' or mutual understanding in order to be a successful dialogue on the Gadamerian model itself."[150] Tracy argues that a fusion of horizons is commendable but is not necessarily required for successful dialogue. Tracy goes on to note that Gadamer is so concerned with fusion of horizons because of his emphasis on "unity" of the interpretation of the text in order for understanding to occur. It is important to note that "textual meaning may, in fact, never unify; horizons may not

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prove one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating.'" Although Holzen, et al. do not apply this directly to the interreligious context, as they do to Christian liturgy and worship, this could still show promise for interreligious application. William Curtis Holtzen and Matthew Nelson Hill, "Gadamer's Hermeneutic of Trust – Ontological and Reflective," in *In Spirit and in Truth: Philosophical Reflections on Liturgy and Worship*, ed. William Curtis Holtzen and Matthew Nelson Hill (Claremont School of Theology Press, 2016), 87.

[147] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics,* ed. Cornille and Conway, 2.

[148] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 2–3.

[149] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 3.

[150] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 8.

fuse; consensus may not arrive. And yet dialogue still happens."[151] This helpfully shows a limitation of the concept of fusion. According to, or at least implied by Gadamer, something either fuses, or it does not. This does not do justice to the nuanced results of a dialogue. There are two main strengths Tracy brings to the discussion of interreligious hermeneutics. First, Tracy, like Clooney, incorporates several different dialogical partners to include individuals, texts, symbols, rituals, or historical events. Second, Tracy understands that interreligious dialogue can still be productive even if fusion of horizons does not occur.

Within Tracy's exposition of Gadamerian hermeneutics and its relation to comparative theology, he does not elaborate on how Gadamer's concept of prejudice plays a role in the model of conversation. If it is understood that fusion of horizon is the understanding of the comparative theologian, then Tracy asserts that dialogue can happen without fusion. There is no saying why Tracy avoids or does not address prejudice in his interpretation of Gadamer's philosophy but it is striking that prejudice, even pre-understandings, are not emphasized.[152]

6.5 Key Player, Catherine Cornille

Catherine Cornille highlights how negative prejudice may distort understanding within interreligious hermeneutics. She highlights four categories in which negative prejudice may influence misunderstanding—essentialization, generalization, exaggeration, and projection. She continues by explaining that these misunderstandings "would not likely lead to a constructive desire to see oneself through the other."[153]

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[151] Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 9.
[152] As explained and further critiqued in section 5.16, Tracy incorrectly understands Gadamer's metaphor of "fusion of horizons" to mean mutual consensus or agreement. David Vessey has corrected this understanding in depth in David Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 541.
[153] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 90.

Although what Cornille highlights holds value for the field of comparative theology, she overlooks and does not conjoin Gadamer's term prejudice with its purpose in the fusion of horizons. The most essential piece of Gadamer's philosophical concept of prejudice is that it becomes part of the interpreters' new pre-understandings and is folded into their horizon. She does lean in this direction by saying, "One's understanding of the other is always colored by certain prejudices and [that] the process of learning from the other also involves some degree of transformation or reinterpretation of the self-understanding of the other."[154] But the participation of prejudice in Gadamer's hermeneutics, specifically its role in the hermeneutical circle, is unclear in Cornille's exposition.

Cornille bases the foundation of interreligious hermeneutics in Gadamer's philosophy, however, Gadamer is not sufficient because she also employs and relies on the support of Ricœur.[155] Cornille supports David Tracy's use of a Gadamerian hermeneutic by utilizing a "suggestive possibility" closely aligned with Gadamer's "substantive rightness."[156] Elsewhere Cornille emphasizes David Tracy's exposition of Gadamer's hermeneutics but is cautious to fully accept its concept of "a fusion of horizons," which is contrary to Hedges' support of a Gadamerian-inspired hermeneutic.[157] Therefore, Cornille finds it necessary to support Moyaert's and Hustwit's supplementation of Gadamer's hermeneutics by including supporting work by Ricœur. However, Cornille's assessment of Gadamer's hermeneutics is missing key points of

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[154] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 187.

[155] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 70.

[156] Cornille, *Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2008), 92.

[157] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," 9. See Catherine Cornille, "Types of Misunderstanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics," in *Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Interreligious Hermeneutics: Ways of Seeing the Religious Other*, ed. Emma O'Donnell Polyakov *Currents of Encounter* vol. 58 (2019): 11-12.

Gadamer's hermeneutic which limits her horizon of philosophical hermeneutics and thus its applicability for comparative theology.

6.6 Key Player, Paul Hedges

Paul Hedges draws on the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer to create a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutic. Hedges prefers to term Gadamer's fusion of horizons the "opening of horizons," for several reasons. First, he critiques Gadamer's notion of fusing horizons because even if someone gains knowledge from another horizon or worldview, this does not mean that they have fully understood and fused with the worldview of the Other. Hedges agrees with Tracy, noting, "our worlds may have come together, but not 'fused' or 'merged' as one thing."[158] Second, he argues that fusion seems to suggest merging two separate parts. He notes this is not necessarily applicable to most interreligious dialogue, especially comparative theology as understood by Clooney. Therefore, two religious concepts come together not to create a new religious concept, but more to inform the home religious tradition from the other religious tradition.[159]

As Hedges asserts, Gadamer uses the metaphor of play as an analysis of how he sees language, meaning, and reality itself. Gadamer sees play (when defined as playing a game) as a model for ontological explanation. When we play, different people and elements come together and follow certain rules that shape the game and unite the people in a shared experience. They are taken up in a shared, complex activity that has a life of its own, and each of the players enters the play of the game. They do not lose their identity or individuality but contribute their

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[158] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogical Studies* 4 (2017): 19.
[159] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue," 12.

individuality in a dynamic new reality.[160] This is a dialectical model of different elements coming together to shape a new pattern.

One is not just an individual that sees the world, but rather is part of a dialectical complex activity, which is the play of the world itself. This is how Gadamer expresses the nature of language. Players are within the larger game; according to Gadamer this leaves space for creativity. Each game is created by the players and is not necessarily something that determines them, and each player is the creation of the elements that make it up.[161]

An important aspect of the concept of play is that it is not within the "normal seriousness" of the world. It creates its own world in itself.[162] Therefore, the movement of play has no end goal but "it renews itself in its constant repetition."[163] An important note that Gadamer makes is that if play is performed for another then it becomes something else; it is no longer play, it is now an "art."[164]

Gadamer's suggestion is that there is a "curious lack of decisiveness in the playing consciousness" that it cannot "decide between belief and non-belief."[165] Hedges argues that Gadamer's meaning here is that it is sometimes difficult for adults to suspend consciousness and lose themselves in another world that they may believe or "perceive as lacking in reality."[166] This is where the metaphor of play may fall short.

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[160] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue," 10-13.

[161] Paul Hedges views this as a metaphor and model that may not only be suitable for certain areas within the human sciences but especially within comparative theology. Gadamer hints to us that the purpose of play is fulfilled when the player "loses himself in his play." That is to say, one may become lost in fascination as we are taken over by the game itself, and if "playing fully" we live within the world of the game.

[162] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue," 10.

[163] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 108.

[164] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.

[165] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 109.

[166] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue," 15.

6.7 Key Player, Marianne Moyaert

In her article "Interreligious Hermeneutics, Prejudice, and the Problem of Testimonial Injustice," Marianne Moyaert illustrates Ricœur's hermeneutics. Philosophically, Ricœur is significantly aligned with Heidegger and Gadamer. Moyaert explains that Ricœur, agreeing with Gadamer, holds the view that everyone has prejudice and adds, "claims to neutrality or objectivity are not only overstated, but should be met with suspicion."[167] According to Moyaert, Ricœur also emphasizes self-reflection. However, Moyaert argues that Ricœur insufficiently addresses "the issue of power and how it may affect the encounter between self and other."[168] She goes on to note that often the self and the Other are "marked by unequal power relations."[169] In this case it seems as if Moyaert understands that the hermeneutical cycle of understanding is interrupted or disturbed to the point where understanding cannot be achieved. Moyaert highlights this valid observation that is not solely related to students of comparative theology, but also describes comparative theologians.

Some comparativists, over and against others, "have primary access...to means of interpretation and communication in society."[170] Moyaert encourages the recognition of privileges and examination of their horizon and its relation to social power structures and hermeneutical injustice.[171] What Gadamer significantly highlights is the unavoidable relationship between one's prejudice and one's tradition. In referring to an encounter with tradition and the experience of tension, "the hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by

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[167] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Hermeneutics, Prejudice, and the Problem of Testimonial Injustice," *Religious Education* 114, no. 5 (2019): 613.

[168] Moyaert, "Interreligious Hermeneutics," 614.

[169] Moyaert, "Interreligious Hermeneutics," 614.

[170] Moyaert, "Interreligious Hermeneutics," 621.

[171] Moyaert, "Interreligious Hermeneutics," 622.

attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out."[172] Connected to this, Gadamer highlights that the tradition of the Other is not disconnected or dislocated from the interpreter's tradition.[173] The recognition of this connectedness may aid comparativists in their journey of self-reflection, and thus awareness of prejudices and privileges.

Although comparative theologians have given attention and credit to Gadamer's philosophical concepts of fusion of horizons, model of conversation, and play for comparative theological insight, little attention has been developed in terms of his concept of prejudice, and when prejudice is addressed, it is hardly connected to Gadamer's philosophical understanding and its value for comparative theological understanding.

6.8 Key Player, Michelle Voss Roberts

In Michelle Voss Roberts' study "Comparative Moments: A Comparative Theological Orientation for Theological Education"[177] (2020), Voss Roberts explores the pedagogical implications of comparative theological processes that she currently employs. Voss Roberts highlights the development of faith, learning outcomes, and emerging comparative moments.

In comparative theological education, Voss Roberts understands how students come to know, engage, and understand their own faith more fully through interreligious encounters and studies.[178] Through interreligious comparative studies, students begin to ask new questions, that encourage them to seek answers, drawing from and reflecting on their previously understood renditions of their own theological journey and faith. The process of interreligious comparative studies encourages students to discover the unknown of the Other and their own faith or religious

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[172] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.
[173] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317-319.
[177] Michelle Voss Roberts, "Comparative Moments: A Comparative Theological Orientation for Theological Education," *Religious Education* 115, no. 3 (2020): 343-348.
[178] Voss Roberts, "Comparative Moments," 344.

tradition. The invitation to travel to the unknown for new theological insights is a unique feature of the comparative process. This is because learning from the Other, sparks curiosity regarding the self, especially in relation to faith. Lastly, the interreligious comparative project encourages students to consider different horizons. The consideration of other perspectives, different-ness, other-ness, allows for students to engage openly and honestly with their own prejudices and pre-understandings.

Voss Roberts highlights Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) rooted in interreligious comparative theological education. These include, consideration of the student's own theological positions, test doctrinal categories, and engagement in theological reflection in light of religious diversity.[179] These SLOs distinguish comparative theological education from other theological education because of the focus on otherness and diversity in the student's particular religious contexts. In this way, students engage with the religious Other in part because of their own understandings of their religious belonging but also despite lack of understanding.

Concerning students who consider themselves belonging to multiple religious identities, comparative theological education may seem even more attractive as it allows for students to engage both (or more) of these identities without the pressure to dismiss, discourage, or dismantle one or many of their religious identities. Voss Roberts argues, "Student experiences of multiple religious belonging, spiritual-but-not-religious identities, and other forms of plural affiliations or non-affiliation can usefully trouble the seemingly neat demarcations between traditions in some comparative theological writing."[180]

Lastly, Voss Roberts highlights the emerging comparative moments of religious art and rituals. More and more, these comparative theological studies have become part of the

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[179] Voss Roberts, "Comparative Moments," 346.
[180] Voss Roberts. "Comparative Moments," 347.

comparative theology agenda. Opening the field to non-textual understandings of religions, opens the horizons of understanding.

6.9 Prejudice as a Means for Understanding

The German term Gadamer uses for "prejudice" is *Vorurteil.* Etymologically, the term is separated into pre-judice. Therefore, judgment is made possible by the prefix, "pre." Gadamer explores the juridical use of the Latin *praejudicium*. In this sense, prejudice does not have a negative or positive value attached. This is because prejudice is a provisional legal verdict set before the final verdict in the court.[181] Thus, all judgments are conditioned by pre-judgments. Our attention is drawn to the premodern understandings of prejudice, "whereas the familiar understandings of prejudice is an unreflective judgment or over-hasty reasoning, resulting in bigotry of purely subjective opinion or the unreflective parroting of purely received wisdom."[182] In today's context, the term prejudice usually has a negative connotation. Gadamer highlights that this is influenced by the Enlightenment's emphasis on eradicating prejudice to bring about absolute knowledge and truth, and specifically links this shift to disempowering tradition as he claims, "there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power."[183]

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[181] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283. Donatella Di Cesare also makes note of this in Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, Niall Keane, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 89.
[182] Niall Keane and Chris Lawn, *The Gadamer Dictionary* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 115.
[183] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.

Gordan Allport, an American psychologist, developed extensive research on prejudice theory in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954).[184] Allport's work is the manifestation of the transformation of the semantics concerning "prejudice."[185] At the beginning of the twentieth century, the term "prejudice" was infrequently unqualified. For example, psychologists studied "race prejudice" and "national prejudice."[186] Fishbein asserts that this is due to understanding of human rationality—that human information processes lead to distorted and prejudiced presuppositions. According to Fishbein, the human mind is ill-equipped to process the complexities of the social world and therefore distorts information in order to process it.[187] There is not any less prejudice now than previously, but the term has taken on new meaning; a semantic shift has occurred.

Current understandings have attached a negative connotation to the term prejudice because "its prototype is not an opinion formed without judgment."[188] In *The Social Psychology of Prejudice,* Howard Ehrlich researches sixteen definitions of prejudice between 1950 and 1966, coincidentally the same time *Truth and Method* was published, and finds the commonality to be "an unfavorable attitude directed towards others because of their membership in a particular group."[189] Gordan Allport differentiates between "ordinary prejudgments," which all of us periodically engage in, and "prejudice," a special type of prejudgment. Although Allport makes a

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[184] Gordon W. Allport, "The Nature of Prejudice," Unabridged 25th Anniversary Edition (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1979).

[185] Allport, "The Nature of Prejudice," 6.

[186] Michael Billig, "The Notion of 'Prejudice': Some Rhetorical and Ideological Aspects," in *Beyond Prejudice: Extending the Social Psychology of Conflict, Inequality and Social Change,* ed. John Dixon and Mark Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149.

[187] Harold D. Fishbein, *Peer Prejudice and Discrimination: The Origins of Prejudice,* 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 2002), 34.

[188] Billig, "The Notion of 'Prejudice,'" 149.

[189] Howard Ehrlich, *The Social Psychology of Prejudice: A Systematic Theoretical Review and Propositional Inventory of the American Social Psychological Study of Prejudice* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 8.

distinction between prejudgments and prejudice, he concludes, "prejudgments become prejudices only if they are not reversible when exposed to new knowledge."[190] Defining prejudice in such a way is not limited to the social sciences; in the second edition of "A Dictionary of Philosophy" (1979), prejudice is defined as any belief, whether correct or incorrect, held without proper consideration of, or sometimes in defiance of, the evidence."[191] This definition expresses the interests of rational, scientific reasoning not yet applied to prejudgments.

In Voltaire's "Philosophy Dictionary" (1764), prejudice is defined as "an opinion without judgment."[192] Voltaire's use of prejudice is distinguished from the current understandings of the term because it is not tied specifically to perceptions of people groups and does not necessarily have a negative intention. This is the reason why Voltaire also mentions justifiable prejudices like physical, historical, and religious prejudices.[193] Therefore, as Michael Billig argues, "the processes of reasoning have not been applied to the prejudiced opinion. In this way, an opinion is prejudiced if the judgments on which the opinion is based are faulty or even totally lacking."[194] However, Gadamer understands prejudice to be more nuanced than how the social sciences in his era defined it.

One of Gadamer's concerns is rehabilitating the term "prejudice," seized by Enlightenment philosophy, by suggesting that "a person who imagines that they are free of prejudices, basing his knowledge on the objectivity of their procedures and denying that they are influenced by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that

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[190] Allport, "The Nature of Prejudice," 9.

[191] Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy,* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1979), 286.

[192] Francois Voltaire, *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary* (New York: Carlton House), 251, E-book by Project Gutenberg, 2006. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18569/18569-h/18569-h.htm.

[193] Voltaire, *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary*, 252-254.

[194] Billig, "The Notion of 'Prejudice,'" 147.

unconsciously dominate them as a *vis a tergo* (force acting from behind)."[195] The Enlightenment

ideal emphasized the removing of all prejudice to come to the absolute and original truth. In a

way, Gadamer understands that the Enlightenment was "prejudiced against prejudice."[196]

Holston argues that Gadamer's efforts are not driven by the desire to undermine the idea of the

universal; he was merely attempting to "rethink" or "transform," even deepen, the metaphysical

tradition in western thought.[197] Gadamer understands that prejudice or "pre-understandings" are

not a hindrance to understanding but a necessary prerequisite. Therefore, eradicating prejudice is

both unnecessary and impossible. It is within the realm of understanding that one's prejudices

come to the surface. Although Gadamer holds that one is never fully aware of one's prejudices,

within the act of understanding, they may come into play.[198]

Gadamer asserts that understanding is not a theoretical activity in which one scrutinizes

the material before one's self as a passive object, as shown in Figure 1. The subject-object

dichotomy, which was heavily influenced by Descartes, is based on the idea that the subject is

"here" and the object is "over there" autonomous, objective, and neutral. There are some who

strongly disagree with this approach to understanding. For instance, influenced by Gadamer,

Ataman suggests the "subject and object belong together and constitute a total unity."[199] Within

the process of understanding both the interpreter and the interpreted are active participants, not

detached from one another. Just as Gadamer argues for the interpreter and their prejudice and

tradition. The interpreter is not detached from their own prejudice and tradition but they are part

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[195] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 369.
[196] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.
[197] Ryan R. Holston, "Two Concepts of Prejudice," *History of Political Thought* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 192.
[198] Keane, *The Gadamer Dictionary*, 142.
[199] Kemal Ataman, *Understanding Other Religions: Al-Biruni and Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizons,"* vol. 19 (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 36.

and parcel of who the interpreter is and how they experience their horizon and the horizon of others. Gadamer's dynamic hermeneutic, that seeks to rehabilitate the concepts of prejudice, tradition and authority, as I have noted previously is based on Gadamer's reinterpretation of Plato dialogues.

6.10 The Personal and Hidden Prejudices

As Keane claims, Gadamer understands prejudice as pre-understandings that may or may not be known to the individual, that stems from the individual's tradition, and that can be altered through cross-cultural encounters, critical self-reflection, dialogue, and/or temporal distance.[200] Gadamer differentiates between two types of prejudice: personal and hidden. Personal prejudices are biases that are usually recognized by the interpreter, and can actively be confronted or questioned.[201] Hidden prejudices are understood to be presuppositions specific to the hermeneutical theory that are effective in the world through history and/or tradition, and are not directly accessible.[202] Gadamer also distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate or productive and unproductive prejudices by highlighting that prejudices can have a negative or positive value attributed to them.[203] A prejudice is considered "false" or unproductive if the "part" does not fit within the "whole." The "whole" is the existing meaning of something and the "part" is the meaning as it applies in the new context.[204] For example, metaphorically, before a film begins the audience may already have pre-opinions or pre-understandings of the film. These may be productive prejudices as they help the audience understand the film or unproductive

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[200] Keane, *The Gadamer Dictionary*, 142.
[201] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282–83.
[202] Hans-Helmuth Gander, "Gadamer: The Universality of Hermeneutics," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, 142. These may be metaphysical notions, cultural, political, aesthetic, religious history, which enable us to form a continuous dialogue between interpreter and text.
[203] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 283.
[204] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 289. See also, Mootz, *Gadamer and Ricœur*, 107.

prejudices that do not lead to understanding the film. There might also be hidden prejudices in the audience's worldview that may come unhidden through the film or the audience might have personal prejudices that may be validated or invalidated by the film. As the audience watches the film, they may encounter things that conflict with or affirm their pre-understandings and may become more aware of their prejudices.

Legitimate and Illegitimate Prejudices

In the same way that our prejudices direct us to new experiences and understandings, prejudices can also be negative because they dismiss, dismantle, or discourage interreligious studies. This is why Gadamer, as noted above, encourages the testing of one's prejudices. In the same way that prejudices help us recognize similar points of interests in comparative study, they also strike our attention at points of conflict, disagreement, and discouragement. This may be because the comparative study does not fit our prejudice. Dorschel notes that "a critical aspect of science is discovery, which involves novelty and surprise. Yet an empty mind… could not be surprised."[205] This should encourage the comparative theologian to explore and research the conflicts that arise in comparative studies – they may lead to new pre-understandings that have yet to be discovered. As Robert Sokolowski notes about *Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics*, "Prejudgments are harmful only when they are frozen; without prejudgments, we would not be participants in the human conversation and would not be able to react to the insistence of things."[206]

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[205] Andreas Dorschel, *Rethinking Prejudice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 52.
[206] Robert Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1997), 227.

Very similar to the experience of our unawareness to our own prejudices, the unawareness of overcoming illegitimate prejudices may also be present. Often it is when our illegitimate prejudices are no longer part of our horizon that they are recognized. Supporting this, Gadamer writes, "the prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings."[207]

It is the comparative process that can often promote the separation of legitimate or illegitimate prejudices. When comparing the horizon of the religious Other and our own, we may experience the provocation of hidden prejudices that are unhelpful to our understanding. In this case, invalid or unhelpful prejudices still are part of our understanding and may encourage deeper learning through exposure and reflection. Prejudice may also provoke tension within the comparativist's horizon, and this now becomes part of their understanding. In this case, the comparativist is encouraged to continue to engage with the religious Other in the manner in which they feel most comfortable, because this may lead to further processing, reflection, and understanding within the comparativist's horizon.

Regarding illegitimate prejudices, it can be challenging to determine how they are discarded from our horizon. It seems that Gadamer does not directly address this outside of his description of temporal distance. However, it is not the lapse of time that naturally separates illegitimate prejudices from legitimate prejudices; it is the continuous reflection on our prejudices that may separate them.[208]

6.11 The Effect of Temporal Distance

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[207] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 306.

[208] Georgia Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* vol. 53, no. 1 (1997): 97.

To distinguish between productive and unproductive prejudices, Gadamer highlights the

helpful process of temporal distance, or distancing one's self from "unverifiable prejudice."[209]

Gadamer argues that concerning the past, processing prejudices may be easier because they may

personally concern us less than events that may have an immediate impact on our lives.[210] There

are two points to make about temporal distance. First, distance in time and history does not

inevitably lead to critical insight or discernment of productive versus unproductive prejudices.

Second, temporal distance is not the sole hermeneutical process to produce hermeneutical

insights. Other experiences, such as dialogue, may provoke prejudices through confrontation

with otherness, and cultural experiences may also lead to critical insights that may legitimate or

illegitimate prejudices.[211] As Gadamer notes:

> The important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive
> condition. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and
> tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us. Here
> it is not too much to speak of the genuine productivity of the course of events
> enabling understanding.... Temporal distance obviously means something other
> than the extinction of our interest in the object. It is what first lets the true
> meaning of the object fully emerge. The discovery of the true meaning of a text or
> a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process.... New sources of
> understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of
> meaning.[212]

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[209] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 308.

[210] Keane, *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 275. Gadamer originally noted that temporal distance was the "only" way to differentiate between productive and unproductive prejudices. In the fifth edition of *Truth and Method,* he changed "only" to "often": "I have softened the original text … it is distance, not only temporal distance, that makes this hermeneutical problem solvable." (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 391, fn44).

[211] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 289. See also, Mootz, *Gadamer and Ricœur,* 90.

[212] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 308–9.

Within the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, temporal distance would be applied throughout this process. The dismissal of unproductive prejudices, possibly encouraged by temporal distance, would occur in the application and recognition of productive prejudices that inform the interpreter's tradition and therefore, horizon.

6.12 Application for Comparative Theology

Comparative theologians utilize Gadamer's philosophical concept of prejudice, pre-understandings, or presuppositions. However, some miss the link between prejudice and its participation in the formation of one's horizon, as Gadamer lays out in his magnum opus in *Truth and Method*. Cornille references Gadamer's philosophical concept of prejudice in *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, and yet does not connect it to its influence on one's horizon or to how prejudices, as pre-understandings, are folded into the hermeneutical circle of understanding.[213] Additionally, Cornille and Tracy do not reference temporal distance as a tool for deciphering between unproductive and productive prejudices. Cheetham suggest something similar to temporal distance and names it as disengagement, "with encountering the *real* other, there is a constructive purpose in a certain disengagement in order to review, imagine and model the difference and commonalities between the various systems and objects of belief."[214] In this, Cheetham clarifies that this is not just a physical or ontological disengagement but an "intentional forgetfulness" for the purpose of setting aside strong differences that distract from the imagination of the comparativist. He connects this directly to a serious intentionality of

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[213] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 73.
[214] David Cheetham, "Comparative Philosophy of Religion," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays,* ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 113.

play.[215] Cheetham connects this type of playfulness to cultivating an aesthetic space that allows

for opportunities of serious interfaith engagement.[216] Paul Hedges addresses Gadamer's notion of

prejudice adding that "they form the basis upon which we come to know anything, but they are

not a limit to what we can know."[217] Therefore, this study further adds to interreligious

hermeneutics by focusing closely on Gadamer's work in *Truth and Method* and connecting the

concepts of prejudice and temporal distance to the process of fusion of horizons.

Awareness of one's own bias is central to understanding. Gadamer notes, "one must be

aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its

own truth against one's own fore-meanings."[218] This understanding of prejudice poses some

challenges for comparative theology. Gadamer understands that the task of hermeneutics is based

on the "polarity of familiarity and strangeness."[219] This, for comparative theology, will remain a

never-ending challenge of testing and re-testing of prejudices. This space can be uncomfortable

for many people and can discourage comparative studies. This may be challenging for

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[215] Specifically, Cheetham states "... Such a free hermeneutics is not an irrelevant conceptual idleness, but could be characterized as a form of play which, as during childhood, has an important role in apprehending and understanding reality." David Cheetham, "Comparative Philosophy of Religion," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays,* ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 114. See also David Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* (Burlington, VT; Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 194; Cheetham directly connects Gadamer's philosophical concept of play with ontology, stating: "Gadamer argues that hermeneutics is an ontological activity where the 'players' are absorbed into and enveloped by the object (or text) being interpreted. Notice that it is not only the players themselves that are the primary focus, but also the spectators (Gadamer's 'fourth wall')."

[216] It is here that Cheetham suggests "creating a particular sort of aesthetic space for meeting of religions." Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions*, 127.

[217] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Iss. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 63-64.

[218] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282.

[219] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 306.

parishioners, lay leaders, clergy, and students who do not necessarily have the time to commit to life-long comparative theological study in this capacity.[220]

Also, in connection to Moyaert's comments on power of privilege in interreligious encounters, deep learning across religious boundaries may not always produce re-evaluation of the comparativist's prejudices. As shown in Figure 2, even challenges and tensions, reinterpretation of understanding, and expansion of understanding are possibilities after encountering the Other that may influence the comparativist's pre-understandings, which transform their horizon for the hermeneutical circle to begin again with the next encounter with the Other.

Gadamer's philosophical understanding of prejudice also offers useful implications for comparative theology. Gadamer's understanding of prejudice allows the opportunity to embrace and understand the interpreter's home tradition and recognize that self-understanding is imperative to understanding the religious Other. Prejudice does not have to be viewed as a barrier to understanding the Other. This understanding of prejudice can allow for prejudices to initiate the conversation with the religious Other and can encourage deep theological study with critical reflection of the comparativist's tradition.

In the field of religious studies, the qualified methodological process is the idea that the legitimate way to understand is to "step back from our own understandings."[221] This is accomplished by reconstructing the historical world of the author, linguistic usages, and literary forms to enable us to recover the original intent of the religious text. Historical criticism, or

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[220] In certain cases, prejudices may be rooted in traditions that are invalid. Therefore, understanding your tradition allows the opportunity to recognize prejudices, which influences your questions and dialogue with the religious other. Comparative theologians are encouraged to acknowledge these prejudices by naming them, reflecting on them, and sharing them in research.

[221] Adam A. Sandel, *The Place of Prejudice: A Case for Reasoning within the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 160.

historicism, understands that in order to properly and genuinely access the meaning of a text (in our case, a religious text), the interpreter investigates the historical world of the author through the study of original languages, historical events, worldview of author, and historical context. Religious studies scholars tend to focus primarily on studying religious texts, languages, history, rituals, rather than learning from them in the manner of a practitioner. They search for information, not guidance. This type of religious study tends to conceal the relationship between the historical quest and the influence of our own lives by detaching attitudes of the interpreter with their past, tradition, and history.[222] However, "we cannot quite silence its claim on our own lives."[223] Sandler highlights how this type of study is similar to "a collection of relics rather than a guide to our own practice."[224] Contrary to this understanding, Gadamer affirms that the relationship between history and our current horizon is inseparable.[225] The usefulness of temporal distance, recognizing the space that time and history have influenced and which is connected with the interpreter, operates as a filter function that may allow for unfertile prejudices to cease. By embodying a practice of temporal distance, comparative theologians may better recognize and distinguish between understandings and misunderstandings of the religious Other. Therefore, it is only by the interpreter's prejudices—folded into their horizon, influenced and formed by their tradition—that historical understanding of the religious Other may be informed, because prejudices are the condition for understanding and also the product of understanding.

Prejudice enables the comparative theologian to understand the religious Other, whether that is by sharing similar rituals, symbols, myths, or encountering stark differences in religious encounters. All of these different encounters of religious modes are reflected back upon the

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[222] Sandel, *The Place of Prejudice*, 159.
[223] Sandel, *The Place of Prejudice*, 160.
[224] Sandel, *The Place of Prejudice*, 159.
[225] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 301.

comparativist's horizon through dialogical reflection. Prejudices hold a dual role in understanding. First, they are the immediate way in which approaching and understanding the religious text, liturgy, or mode happens; and yet, prejudices can be exposed through the process of understanding, which may cause conflict, resistance, or inadequate interpretations. The interpreter is presented with and invited to the task of interpretation through dialogue with the Other. Thus, misunderstandings or errors in understanding are not irrelevant to the task of understanding; these discontinuities of the interpreter's prejudice may even encourage or alert them to further inquiry.

Prejudice directs our attention towards aspects of the religious Other that may otherwise go unnoticed.[226] Catherine Cornille highlights that prejudices may inform and direct interpretation efforts that aid in determining comparative research. An individual's prejudice situates them and influences their research questions, interpretations, and understanding. Cornille highlights that to avoid the problematic issue of projecting one's prejudices onto the religious Other or generalizing, the new wave of comparative theology encourages choosing specific texts or religious modes for comparison.[227]

Comparative theologians involved in the understanding of the religious Other (no matter the mode), are already immersed in a given religious context, which supplies their prejudice. Therefore, denying the prejudice of the comparativist is, in Gadamer's words, unnecessary and impossible. Prejudice influences which religious modes the comparativist clings to, focuses on, and creates as foundational narratives to their theology. Prejudices of the theologian influence and shape preferences for areas of study, key questions and findings, similarities, differences, that in turn can be incorporated within the comparativist's tradition and horizon.

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[226] Dorschel, *Rethinking Prejudice*, 52.
[227] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 147.

Finally, Gadamer's concept of application may prove to be fruitful for comparative theology. According to Gadamer, application involves "co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle."[228] Hermeneutical application is the art, not science, of applying general principles to particular situations. For the comparative theologian, application is as necessary as interpretation and understanding. This is because, as Gadamer asserts, true understanding *is* application. Therefore, comparative theologians should find it important, even necessary, to apply their theological research contemplatively and confessionally to the horizon which informs their prejudices.[229]

6.13 Comparative Work in Processing Prejudice

Comparative work can be an aid in the dismissing and dethroning of illegitimate prejudices. When comparing otherness to oneself, illegitimate prejudices are often brought to the surface. Therefore, comparative theology is a fertile mode that encourages the encounter with otherness against the backdrop of our pre-understandings of the Other and our own tradition, which make up our horizon.

The fusion of horizons occurs when comparativists incorporate their understandings from the encounter with the religious Other as part of their whole understandings, whether that is through agreement, disagreement, or misunderstanding. As previously noted, it is more often than not that the comparativist will encounter disagreement, tension, or misunderstanding, and through these reflective outcomes the comparativist can still incorporate these and learn from these through application within their horizon. It is important to note that within a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutic, agreement is not synonymous with understanding or fusion of

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[228] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 37.
[229] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 333. For example, Gadamer uses the law: "It is only in all its applications that the law becomes concrete (335)."

horizons. However, as displayed in Figure 2, various types of reflective outcomes may become part of the comparativist's prejudice.

Viewing prejudice in a nuanced fashion, as described by Gadamer, may aid in interpreters' journeys through interreligious hermeneutics. By utilizing Gadamer's philosophical concept of temporal distance, interpreters allow themselves to be pulled into their interreligious quest contemplatively and accept the outcomes of their dialogue with the religious Other to affect their own tradition through confessional application.

> Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something- whereby what we encounter says something to us. This…does not mean we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, "Nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity… we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true.[230]

6.14 Summary and Conclusion

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is a dynamic process that authentically demonstrates Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics. What is unique to this process is the emphasis on various outcomes of the reflection process being equally valid. Therefore, whether reflection includes tensions that have arisen, reinterpretations discovered, or expansion of understandings, these are all outcomes of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle that are applicable to one's prejudice. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle emphasizes embracing the home religious tradition in order to engage

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[230] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writing*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 82.

hermeneutically with various religious modes (text, dialogue, liturgy, etc.). This is a very unique aspect of interreligious hermeneutics because it does more than respect the home tradition; it supports the idea that understanding your own tradition is imperative to understanding the other religious tradition. Finally, prejudice does not have to be viewed as a barrier to understanding the Other with the unrealistic goal of simply being "objective" and ignoring one's own historicity. The Gadamerian philosophical understanding of prejudice, as expressed through Figure 2 below, aids the interpreter through understanding of self and Other, for the sake of fresh theological insight. Comparative theological insight relies on the interpreter's prejudice and tradition as a starting place for understanding the religious Other. This exposition of Gadamer proposes a reinterpretation in the contemporary meaning of prejudice, its role in comparative theological understanding and application, and its use for "faith seeking understanding."[231] In the following chapter, I will explore exactly what a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutically informed methodology encompasses, by using interreligious dialogue as a foundational model with the philosophical foundation of prejudice explained in this chapter.

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[231] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, *10.*

CHAPTER 7: A Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Method

> "To understand at all is to understand for and within genuine dialogue allowing
> real manifestations of the other's truth and thereby mutual transformation."[232]

7.1 Introduction to the Hermeneutical Circle

The hermeneutical circle of understanding is an event we experience rather than a method that is controlled.[233] It is the process of how we come to understand and interpret the world and the experiences within it. In the same way, comparative theology understands the experience with the religious Other. "Comparative theology can be thought of as a never-ending hermeneutical circle which moves between identity and openness, conviction and critique, commitment and distanciation."[234] The method by which understanding arrives, starts with the interpreter as it experiences otherness dialogically – partnered with questions to and responses from the religious Other. This dialogical conversation is then processed by the interpreter in self-reflection, as the experiences of otherness collide with the interpreter's prejudices and tradition. Fusion is on the other side of self-reflection in the forms of challenges, expansion, and reinterpretation. These equally valid forms of understanding become part and parcel of the interpreter's pre-understandings and tradition, as the interpreter begins the process of

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[232] David Tracy, "Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue," *Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs* 1 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), 44.

[233] Georgia Warnke understands the hermeneutical circle as "a means for testing our interpretation of a given text." In "The Hermeneutic Circle Versus Dialogue," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 65, no. 1 (2011): 94. Therefore, the circle serves in an ontological purpose, it is "the condition for understanding (98)."

[234] Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (January 2012): 26.

understanding again, cyclically, spiraling through constant dialogical encounters, with otherness and self.

Comparative theology has lacked the clear hermeneutical connection between methodology and understanding.[235] In this case, Gadamer's philosophical concepts can be used to make this clearer, suggesting a more defined process of how interreligious understanding comes to be. It may seem ironic to create a method using Gadamer, as he discouraged a particular scientific method for understanding in the humanities.[236] "Gadamer suggests hermeneutics is not a method but a fluid set of guiding principles aiding the human search for truth in the concealed forgetfulness of language."[237] However, what I am proposing is less of a method and more of a process of formation, in which hermeneutics is a cycle of understanding that encounters phases.[238] The circle is an on-going, circular process that does not end at a certain point.[239] At certain phases, the circle can be reversible, whereas a particular scientific method

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[235] See the following: Marianne Moyaert, "Comparative Theology in Search of a Hermeneutical Framework," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People,* ed. David Cheetham, Ulrich Winkler, Oddbjorn Leivik and Judith Gruber (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 161. See also, Hugh Nicholson, "Comparative Theology after Liberalism," *Modern Theology* 23, (2007): 229, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfp036; Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Iss. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 23.

[236] Gadamer shares again elsewhere, "I cannot help but repeat again how, with respect to my own work, I was very far from introducing a new method in the humanities." Hans-Georg Gadamer and James Risser, "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences," in *Research in Phenomenology* 9, no. 1 (1979): 78.

[237] Paul Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Concepts of Reading, Understanding and Interpretation," *META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (2012): 291.

[238] Warnke argues, "To the extent that the hermeneutic circle is not primarily a method of interpretation, but a condition of our understanding at all, it is also embedded in historical traditions handed down from one generation to the next." In "The Hermeneutic Circle Versus Dialogue," 99.

[239] Jean Grondin, "The Hermeneutical Circle," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016), 399.

would discourage that interaction. Gadamer's theory provides the basis for a new method for interreligious hermeneutics.

7.2 Play as a Hermeneutical Model

A precursor for the interpreter's engagement within the hermeneutical circle is the willingness and openness to the experiences of the Other. The concept of *play* is significantly incorporated into Gadamer's theory of philosophical hermeneutics because the interpreter "loses himself in the play."[240] For Gadamer, play is a hermeneutical tool that allows for a free flow of opportunities in engagement. "Playing is *Dasein's* motivation to be open to possibilities and suspend disbelief and still read on."[241] Players in the hermeneutical game of interpretation are motivated, informed, and influenced by their own understandings through their prejudice and tradition. As Regan puts it, "they are filled with their own ideas (tradition); they may be resistant or even hostile (ideologically) but become motivated by the game itself. In time, disbelieving ideas may dissolve so long as there is game on."[242] To participate in the game, one must temporarily disengage and commit to the game to allow themselves to play. Hermeneutically speaking, the game illuminates, like a dance between texts.

As explained in the previous chapters, Paul Hedges goes into the application of play for interreligious hermeneutics. Specifically, Hedges connects Gadamer's metaphor of *play* to the process of understanding the religious Other. In some ways, the interpreter will have to suspend their own rules of the game, in order to *play* by the rules of the Other.[243] These rules may apply to theology, ideology, concepts of language, ethics, etc. The goal of suspension for the

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[240] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 107.
[241] Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," 300.
[242] Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," 301.
[243] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 4 (2016): 8.

interpreter is not to leave their rules behind, but to temporarily suspend or set aside their rules for the sake of understanding the religious Other for the possibility of gaining a fuller understanding, appreciation, and expansion of their horizon. This process can be achieved creatively through comparative theology. John Thatamanil claims that comparative theology is "…best suited for such work, the work of nurturing hybrid communities in a time of multiple religious participation and belonging."[244] James Fredericks suggests that comparative theology is the "best candidate for dealing responsibly and creatively with the plurality of religions."[245] Comparative theology is a responsible and creative way to playfully engage in "sacred seriousness" with religious otherness while also holding on to their own unique religious identity.

It is important to note here that total suspension of the interpreter's rules as they engage in play with the religious Other is not the end goal. Depending on the content or situation, the interpreter might find it easier or harder to temporarily suspend their rules to engage in play with the Other. Other times, the interpreter relinquishes their rules to adopt the rules of the Other, finding them more applicable, better for the game to be played. In any case, the interpreter returns back to their own set of rules for the game and processes their adequacy because of their experience playing with the Other by their rules of the game.[246]

7.3 Festival as an Embodiment of Play

In connection to play, Gadamer references the imperativeness of festival and how a festive mode embodies the performance of play.[247] Festival is rooted in a deep sense of ritual for

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[244] John Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), xviii.

[245] James L. Fredericks, "A Universal Experience?: Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions," *Horizons* vol. 22, no. 1 (1995): 67.

[246] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 15.

[247] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 3.

there are characteristics of festival that lean heavily into themes of ritual. Therefore festival, as an embodiment of play, represents a mode of communication that is applicable to the comparative and theological journey. Play and festival are in tandem together as Gadamer highlights in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*. This is because, as Gadamer observes, "Enactment is the festival's mode of being... in which part and present become one in the act of remembrance."[248] Festival designates a temporal space and the recurrence of festival establishes its own festive experience. Therefore, like play, festival "possesses its own sort of temporality."[249] Festival is communal and is meant for inclusion of all. Going further, Gadamer argues that festival "is an experience of community and represents community in its most perfect form."[250] In this way, festival unites participants and creates meaning to those who actively "play" in festival. Finally, Gadamer asserts the theological nature of festival but suggesting, "festival... and festive time has always been a theological question."[251] By this, festival establishes its own customary traditions and forms by intentionally creating space and time that interrupts ordinary time in order for the community to enact and participate in the reoccurring festival.

7.4 The Place of the Interpreter

The role of the interpreter is to engage the world hermeneutically through the medium of language. The process of interpretation encourages the interpreter to search for meaning.[252] The interpreter goes beyond the questions of understanding the original intent of the author, history,

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[248] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 59.
[249] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 58.
[250] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 39.
[251] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 39.
[252] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2004), 296.

use of language but seeks meaning that resonates with the interpreter.[253] The balancing act of

pairing the unfamiliar with the familiar depends on the interpreter's willingness to remain open

to the newness and challenges presented to the interpreter's worldview from the other.

Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle

Dialogue

Influences from the interpreter's traditions and pre-understandings

Questions from the interpreter

Interpreter

Text/Tradition

- Encounters challenges and tensions
- Reinterprets meaning
- Expands understanding

Answers from the text/tradition
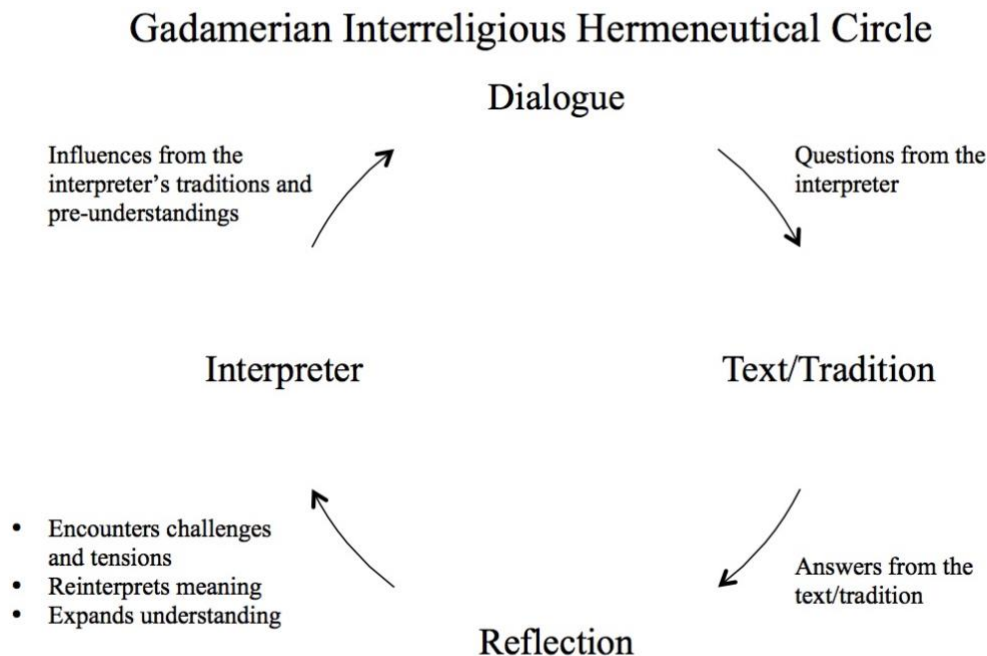
Reflection

Figure 2. "Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle." The horizon of the interpreter fuses as they dialogically encounter the text or tradition and process through reflection.

I elect to use the term "circle" in the title of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical

Circle for two reasons.[254] The first reason is because the Gadamerian Interreligious

Hermeneutical Circle is not linear. As seen in Figure 1, there is no final step in the process.

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[253] Georgia Warnke, "Experiencing Tradition Versus Belonging To It: Gadamer's Dilemma," *The Review of Metaphysics* 68, no. 2 (2014): 292.

[254] I recognize that some comparative theologians are hesitant to use the term "circle" to define the hermeneutical process in interreligious encounters. I do not use this term lightly but I do use it descriptively to help us imagine the process of understanding. I do not understand the hermeneutical circle to be impermeable. See footnote 103 from Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," 51. There are others who utilize the term "spiral" to express how the hermeneutical experience never returns to where it once began. See also Mohammad Motahari, "The Hermeneutical Circle or the Hermeneutical Spiral?" *International Journal of Humanities* 15, no. 2 (2008): 106.

There is only growth and expansion in the interpreter's understanding of the religious Other or, as Gadamer would phrase it, a "fusion of horizons." After this, the interpreter's tradition has been expanded to include the new understandings and is ready to begin the circle again. The second reason is to honor Gadamer's work. When Gadamer was in the early stages of writing *Truth and Method*, he titled his work, "On the Circle of Understanding" but because his publisher did not like it, he changed the title to *Truth and Method*.[255] With "circle" I am giving voice to Gadamer's original intention and to the development of the hermeneutical circle within the history of philosophy shown in chapter three.

Using Figure 2, you will see that before the interpreter encounters the text or tradition through dialogue, they are met by two very important influencers: the interpreter's tradition and pre-understandings. As Gadamer highlights, one's tradition is imperative to hermeneutics because it is the context and content by which the hermeneutical experience occurs. As we have seen Gadamer understands that the interpreter always approaches the text with pre-understandings. Gadamer does not encourage the elimination of these pre-understandings but actually encourages the understandings of these. Gadamer notes that these pre-understandings may spark a search for conversation.[256] In this Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, traditions and pre-understandings are vital to the process of understanding and therefore included in the hermeneutical process.

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[255] Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography,* trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 282.

[256] This is why Gadamer asserts that conversation is "a process of coming to an understanding." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 463.

7.5 The Tradition of the Interpreter

The interpreter's tradition informs and forms the interpreter's understandings. The tradition of the interpreter is formed by the interpreter's worldviews, theological tradition, prejudice, and the person's whole being and experience. Before the interpreter engages with the religious Other, they come to the "conversation, research, or project" with inalienable presuppositions developed and handed down to them by their worldviews and experiences. Tradition is not concrete; it is ever-changing by and through the interpreter's experience of the world. History acts in a similar fashion, "we study history in so far as we ourselves are historical."[257] Tradition orients and forms our interpretations before the event of understanding begins. At the same time, it belongs to and experiences tradition as an event, that is to be experienced.

The denial of connection to tradition is unhelpful to the process of understanding. "A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition..."[258] In some ways, relying on methodology prevents our interaction and influence of tradition to take place. Therefore, we deny exactly what makes us who we are and as we participate in the hermeneutical process of understanding we have lost our commencing foundation. In this way there are two mistakes to be noted here: first, relying too heavily on methodology that prevents experience of tradition; second, denying one's relationship to tradition.

Tradition, when open to it, "is not alien and divorced" from the interpreter but a past the interpreter understands from a particular horizon. As the interpreter moves beyond the past, temporal distance and new encounters of the world aid in the fusion of tradition and present

[257] Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," 298.
[258] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 369.

encounters. "We experience in the tradition a surprise value that can test our views and disclose our assumptions to us about both it and ourselves."[259]

Tradition is reciprocal that incorporates commonality and difference. It is connected to and separated from the interpreter and offers "invaluable perspective on ourselves."[260] Specifically, "…tradition enables the 'handing down' of traditional information of relevance to the interpreter's frame of reference and how what is read, written, spoken or heard is interpreted."[261]

One note that should be mentioned here is the relationship between tradition and prejudice and how both inform and form each other. These two concepts are influenced by one another.[262] The interpreter's tradition influences and informs their prejudices as they are oriented by their historically effected consciousness, which informs their tradition. This cycle is constantly reciprocated and dynamically changing with every experience of the interpreter. Without the experience of the text and tradition of the other tradition, the testing of prejudices and the tradition of the interpreter cannot occur. It is the comparative aspect of this theological endeavor that allows for the opportunity to separate or fuse with the truth of new understandings.

7.6 Dialogue as a Means for Understanding

Gadamer asserts that dialogue is the means for understanding:

> When one enters into 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 or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject

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[259] Warnke, "Experiencing Tradition," 362.
[260] Warnke, "Experiencing Tradition," 368.
[261] Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," 299.
[262] The term prejudice is taken up in depth in chapter seven.

matter [*die Sache*] is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other.[263]

Dialogue occurs when the interpreter questions the text or tradition and, therefore, is experiencing the text or tradition through a communicative process. Whatever the mode, it is imperative that the interpreter is open to the text or tradition in order to gather more insight and answers to the interpreter's questions. Gadamer understands true hermeneutical understanding to be achieved through dialogue – a question and answer open conversation – with the text or tradition. It is important to note here that Gadamer highlights that the text may also present questions to the interpreter and the interpreter should be open to the questions presented by the text.[264] Dialogue may go both ways, especially if the mode is another human as a dialogical partner. Gadamer's understanding of "game of conversation" as a movement of back-and-forth that takes over the interpreter through the play of said conversation.

7.7 Political Dimension of Dialogue

The political degree to which dialogue is influenced and influences must be noted here. The power dynamics between dialogical partners is prevalent no matter the participants. Even between texts, traditions, and religions, power, privilege, and prejudice remain present and active in dialogue.[265] First, understanding the religious Other on the interpreter's terms. Second, denial or dismissal of differences between the interpreter and the religious Other.

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[263] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* trans. David E. Linge (Berkley CA: University of California Press, 1976), 66.

[264] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 375 and 409.

[265] Hannah Arendt reminds Gadamer of the political nature of prejudices and authority and how these experiences may shock oneself from retrieving and experiencing tradition. Jonas Holst, "Retrieving Experience: On the Phenomenology of Experience in Hegel and Kierkegaard, Arendt and Gadamer," *Open Philosophy* 2 (2019): 481.

What is important to recognize is just because dialogue has taken place does not mean

that it is effective, productive, or has accomplished the goals set out by the interpreter. This is

true with dialogue between interpreter and text as well. Reading the text does not guarantee that

"fusion," in the sense that sameness and otherness have fused. Fusion, as I strongly assert, is

more concerned with the interpreter's prejudices and the fusion that occurs in this way is situated

within their own horizon and the outcomes of this fusion have multiple potential reflective

outcomes.[266] For example, Jonardon Ganeri suggests the practice of "'bold reading' of the texts...

to draw out from the text – from both its content and its form – an idea that engages with the

reader's sense of the important. A bold reading gives new importance to a text, suggests new

insights not only into the text itself but into the things that matter to the reader."[267] This is the

fusion of horizons, as Gadamer portrays it.

7.8 Philosophy of Dialogue

The philosophy of dialogue is relevant to the hermeneutical circle because it asserts how

dialogue can contribute to interreligious understanding. Gadamer understood interpretation as the

process of conversation or dialogue. Influenced by Dilthey, Martin Buber became interested in

interpreting Hasidic texts as a dialogical relationship. Steven Kepnes explains Buber's work as a

dialogical approach to interpretation by asserting, "Buber, before the work of Gadamer, spoke of

the text as a 'Thou' which addresses the reader; thus, he referred to interpretation as a process of

dialogue or conversation."[268]

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[266] Jonardon Ganeri, "The Study of the Self," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays,* ed. Cheetham, David and Rolfe King (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 85.

[267] Ganeri, "The Study of the Self," 85.

[268] Steven D. Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut: Relations to Dilthey and Gadamer," *The Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 2 (April 1988): 194. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, (2023), 20.

Kepnes highlights the term, "performative interpretation,"[269] as the interpretation of texts and music are differentiated by performance. He explains that literary interpreters focus on the literature, "as a series of insights and arguments that properly remain outside of the text."[270] Compared to literature, musicians and actors perform the piece in new ways, creating new interpretations. This understanding of interpretation as performance connects to Gadamer's understanding of interpretation as art. As Gadamer understood, art draws the interpreter to respond and ask questions, in a sort of dialogue with the text. Performative interpretation acts in the same way, drawing the interpreter into dialogue through active participation.[271]

Kepnes argues that in the 1920s, "Buber became less interested in perceiving the mind or life-experience of the author behind the text and more interested in the integrity of the text itself and in developing a dialogical relationship with the text."[272] For Kepnes, Buber's transformational understanding of Hasidism involved the philosophy of dialogue that encountered a developmental change as it moved the focus from the author towards concern for the text.[273] This differential shift "resulted in an emphasis on the dialogue between interpreter and text instead of the empathetic, mystical relationship between interpreter and imagined author."[274]

The encounter with the religious Other tradition, ritual, individual is dialogical by way of interaction. Like art, the religious Other evokes our attention to interact with response. "Art calls out to the interpreter. It urges the interpreter to respond. When the interpreter responds the work takes on life, it becomes a 'thou' and a dialogue is initiated. If the interpreter then gives concrete

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[269] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 200.
[270] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 200.
[271] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 160.
[272] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 201.
[273] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 201.
[274] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 201.

expression to this dialogue the result is an 'interpretation.'"[275] According to Gadamer, interpretation develops through a process like conversation between dialogical partners.[276] The process is dynamic and interactive. Gadamer, like Buber, connects the interpretive process to a work of art, both as passive and active. "Gadamer suggests that a good model for the process which takes place between the interpreter and the text is provided by dynamics of play."[277]

7.9 Dialogical Partners

There are different types of partners in dialogue and these are referred to in reference to "I-Thou relationships." The distinguishing factors between these types are the distance and interaction between the "I" and the "Thou." The first relationship is similar to the scientific study of objects in nature which places objects in categories and has an emphasis on analysis while refusing to be affected or involved with the object, or Thou. The second relationship understands that the Thou is understood as a historically unique entity. The relationship is one-way and the interpreter is not open to the otherness, and does not seek to understand the Other in its own terms. The goal here is to "understand the other better than the other understands himself."[278] Understanding the Other is a form of self-relatedness. This is why Gadamer claims the Thou "Is understood, but this means it is co-opted and pre-empted reflectively from the standpoint of the other person."[279]

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[275] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 205.

[276] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 401-403.

[277] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 206. See also Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 306. Gadamer claims, "It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."

[278] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 367.

[279] Gadamer, *Truth and* Method (2013), 367.

An acceptance of otherness of the Thou prepares the way for genuine relationship. As Gadamer notes, this is to "experience the Thou truly as a Thou, i.e. not overlook his claim and to listen to what he has to say."[280] This requires a sort of openness to the Other that allows our own understanding to be questioned by the Other; approaching the Other with receptiveness. The participating nature of dialogue, includes the interior dialogue with the self as well as the exterior dialogue with the Other. The other dialogical partner can include religious tradition, symbols, rituals, texts, people, art, etc.

7.10 Conflict in Hermeneutics

There are times when conflict arises in the hermeneutical process.[281] Some conflict is natural within the interreligious hermeneutical process. With any newness or otherness brought into the cycle of understanding, resistance is a natural response of our being. This can occur within the various phases, between the interpreter and text or tradition, and it can also occur within the self-dialogue of the interpreter in reflection. Conflict can be thought of as anti-interreligious, however, it can be healthy and even necessary for conflict to exist.[282] This is because conflict arises out of the irritation or disagreement between experience and prejudice. This reflects what Clooney claims, "...boundaries can be crossed in the course of intelligent

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[280] Kepnes, "Buber as Hermeneut," 208. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 369.

[281] On one rare occasion, Gadamer and Ricœur debated was centered on the topic of conflict in interpretation. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer," in Paul Ricœur and Mario Valdes, *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664883.

[282] Here I do not mean conflict in the sense of interreligious war, terror, physical or ideological harm. I use conflict as a reflective outcome of interreligious hermeneutics to express the diverse and valid hermeneutical interreligious understandings that may become present within the hermeneutical event. Although as Hannah Arendt strongly professes, there is connection between one's understanding and one's action, especially "the political dimension of human action." Ernst Vollrath and Hans Fantal, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 162. For an example of the use of Gadamer's hermeneutics in international conflict see, Tarja Väyrynen, "A Shared Understanding: Gadamer and International Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 3 (May 2005): 350, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305052017.

agreements or disagreements."[283] There are varying types of conflict that exist and within those types there is a spectrum of responses ranging from healthy to unproductive, and even detrimental.

Hermeneutical conflict is when prejudices are in conflict with the experience of the interpreter, and the interpreter may feel uneasy or conflicted on how to move forward in the hermeneutical process. Communal conflict can exist between religious traditions. Communal conflict may include violence, stereotyping, negative actions based on prejudice, privileges or preferences given to certain communities, and other forms of thoughts and actions that are due to the conflicting nature between the communities. Personal conflict can arise between interpreter and the religious Other. This type of conflict may be resolved at the personal level through communication and reconciliation. Understanding conflict as a natural experience in the cycle of understanding may help form productive, helpful, and healthy ways to lean into and respond to conflict. And according to Gadamer, "dialogue is a good model for the process of overcoming the structure of two opposing postures...Both partners to a genuine dialogue change and move and eventually find some small ground of solidarity."[284] However, there may be conflict that cannot be overcome as we saw in the comparative moment in chapter five between the Mennonites and the Lutherans.

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[283] Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford Publishing, 2001), 30.

[284] Gadamer's hope rings through when it comes to conflict in dialogue. His hope is that even small dialogical efforts may lead to lasting transformation. In Ricœur's response to Gadamer, he is not as hopeful. Ricœur shares that the presence of self-alienation may be "intractable" for hermeneutics. Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer," 232.

7.11 Text and Tradition

Drawing from comparative theologians, this section of the hermeneutical circle may include different modes; textual research, language study, secondary research, interviews, dialogue with religious Others, encountering rituals and practices, etc. The next component in the interreligious hermeneutical process to allow the *text or tradition* speak to the interpreter. This is achieved by being open to the voice of the text or tradition and absorbing the fresh insights and material that is revealed. The text or tradition has its own pre-understandings, history, culture, rituals, etc. Therefore, by letting the text or tradition speak for itself a hermeneutical space is created.[285]

Four different types of ways to interact with text or traditions have been noted by scholars. These include: reproductive, eclectic, heuristic, and dialectic.[286] Reproductive is the direct imitation of text or traditions. In this way, the interpreter would mimic the text or tradition in such a way that it is a direct copy into their own interpretation. Eclectic is the utilization of text or tradition in way to the text's or tradition's original context or content. Heuristic is the process of defining the text or tradition through the reframing, rewriting, or modernizing of the text/tradition. Finally, dialectic is the practice of interpreting texts or traditions in a way that creates and produces meaning of the text or tradition. In this way, text and tradition have

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[285] Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 82, also adds that "the pre-understandings of the text is a necessary condition for any understanding at all."

[286] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1982; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 178; Steve Moyise, "Does the NT quote the OT out of Context?*" Anvil* 11, no. 2 (1994): 133-143; Jeremy Putt, "Paul, Hermeneutics and the Scriptures of Israel," *Neotestamtica* 30, no. 2 (1996); 377-425.

influence on the interpreter and the interpreter can speak into the text or tradition.[287] The

interaction between interpreter and interpreted involves the process of reflection.

7.12 Reflection

Everything that is received by the interpreter goes through a process of understanding.

This process is *Reflection*. Reflection is the next component of the process of interreligious

hermeneutics. Reflection is an essential phase in understanding that allows pre-understandings,

tradition, etc. to be influenced by the text or tradition. Reflection can come in various forms such

as challenges and tensions, reinterpretations, and expansion of understanding. As Gadamer

highlights, "creative tensions" are likely to occur because of the "shock or newness" of the

interreligious encounter. Gadamer asserts, "Every encounter with tradition that takes place

within historical consciousness involve the experience of a tension between the text and the

present. The hermeneutical task consists in not covering this tension by attempting a naïve

assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out."[288] Gadamer claims, "Reflection on the

hermeneutical experience transforms problems back to questions that arise and that derive their

sense from their motivation."[289] The hermeneutical task in reflection is not to masquerade this

tension but to consciously expose it for reflection. Reflection can be processed through

reinterpretation of the interpreter's theology. The interpreter may encounter understandings that

change interpretation, allowing for a reinterpretation of their theology. The interpreter may also

encounter understandings that add to their existing theology. Because the method of this

hermeneutical process is not conclusion-driven, all forms of reflection are equally valid, in the

sense that they are fully welcomed.

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[287] Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 42.
[288] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 317.
[289] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 385.

Reflection differs itself from critique of ideology. Part of this reason is its sensitivity to judgments and assertions by the interpreter's pre-understandings. Self-reflection alone is not adequate enough to bring into question prejudices, this is where the necessity of the other and the comparison plays a role. The internal self-dialogue of the interpreter through question and response from the self, gives the interpreter the opportunity to process and understand the product of their hermeneutical experience with the encounter of the religious Other.[290]

In reflection, the interpreter may experience tension between the dialogical encounter with the religious Other and their own tradition. Marianne Moyaert maintains, "the comparative theologian does not solve the tension between identity and otherness, but rather stands in the midst of this tension."[291] This tension cannot be completely resolved, it can activate or produce lingering effects of dialogue that can aid in reflection. Attention should be paid to the issues that resonate or are stirred up in interpretation as these may effectively contribute to understanding the tradition of the interpreter and of the religious Other.

Reflection is a universal characteristic of human understanding and does not occur outside of tradition. Reflection is situated within the interpreter's own historical consciousness; therefore, it cannot be separated from the tradition of the interpreter. Also, the tradition of the religious Other is necessary for reflection to occur because it is the otherness of the text and tradition that provide and help form the reflective process.

Interreligious theological reflection is influenced by the interpreter's prejudices, tradition, and history, as well as through the interpreter's dialogical interaction with the text and tradition.

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[290] What is not explored in this research, but may prove to be helpful to the field, is the affect mental and psychological states have on the process of understanding as it pertains to understanding the religious other. Those who have difficulty processing language, for example, through auditory processing disorders, may experience the process of understandings differently or interruptedly.

[291] Moyaert, "Recent Developments in Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 47.

This interaction, facilitated by reflection, develops new prejudices and becomes part of the interpreter's tradition. Therefore, "[m]an is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding which in turn is brought into question via hermeneutical reflection."[292]

7.13 The Fusion of Horizons

Finally, where does fusion of horizons occur? In the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, I argue that fusion of horizons occurs when new understandings from the religious Other become part of the interpreter's pre-understandings, ready for the hermeneutical circle to begin again, encountering the religious Other through dialogue. The interpreter is key to the fusion of horizons. This is because fusion occurs in the interpreter's understanding as prejudices and tradition collide with new experiences presented by the religious Other through a reflective and dialogical process.

As some have assumed, fusion is not the agreement between interpreter and text and/or tradition.[293] An assumption of agreement between two would dismiss the unique qualities that both the interpreter and the text or tradition bring to the hermeneutical process. Although agreement can be a byproduct of understanding, in the same way, disagreement can as well. Fusion is the realized understanding that becomes part of the interpreter's framework *for* understanding. With the example of interreligious dialogue, there will be times when the partners in such dialogue will not agree but that does not preclude fusion from occurring. In fact, we learn much about our own faith and religious tradition from the differences and disagreements from other traditions. One area of growth for comparative theology is the development of applicable

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[292] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 41-42.
[293] As a reminder to my reader, fusion of horizons is discussed in further detail in chapters 4 and 5.

hermeneutical models that allow for the inclusion of conflicting and challenging reflection

outcomes; Gadamer's philosophical concepts can be used to enhance this area.[294]

Repeatedly, Gadamer emphasizes that the starting point for interpretation is with the

interpreter through the hermeneutical task, including their prejudices. Recognition of prejudices

acts as a pre-condition for understanding. Before we understand ourselves through self-

examination or reflection, we understand ourselves with regards to the family unit, society, and

worldview in which we are located. And that is why Gadamer states that "the prejudices of the

individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of their being."[295]

Gadamer explains further:

> A person understanding a text is prepared for it to tell them something. That is
> why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to
> the text's [otherness]. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality'
> concerning content nor extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and
> appropriation of one's fore-meaning and prejudices.[296]

Gadamer insists that application is a *pro*ductive activity of interpretation, rather than

*re*productive.[297] Application is not separate from interpretation and understanding: As if the

interpreter understands, and only then can application take place. Rather, the application is part

and parcel of interpretation and understanding. Therefore, the application is the very

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[294] What I am proposing is less of a method and more of a process of formation, in which hermeneutics is a cycle of understanding that encounters phases. I go into more detail of this in Mariah T. Cushing, "The Circle of Understanding the 'Religious Other': Toward a Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Method" (Fresno: Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, 2017), E-Thesis.

[295] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 289.

[296] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282.

[297] Gadamer illustrates this with the example of "understanding an order." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 342-343.

understanding of interpretation.[298] Gadamer highlights that "understanding always involves

something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation."[299]

Therefore, understanding, interpretation, and application go hand-in-hand as an interrelated and

integrated process.

7.14 Summary and Conclusion

I began by describing some key components of Gadamer's philosophy that have proven

to be meaningful and relevant to comparative theology by several comparative theologians. Then

I emphasized the methodological process, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle,

that explains how understanding occurs in interreligious hermeneutics by using key Gadamerian

components and describing in detail each part of the process in the method. Within this

hermeneutical process, there are several interlocutors that play a key role. First is the interpreter

who is met, consciously or unconsciously, with their prejudices and tradition. The interpreter is

first because within interreligious hermeneutics we only understand through our own lens of

understanding, which is comprised of our worldview and pre-suppositions.

Through a dialogical encounter with the religious Other (text or tradition), the interpreter

encounters newness, difference, and otherness. The political and power dimensions of this

dialogical encounter cannot go unmentioned because of the role they play in the interreligious

encounter with dialogical partner(s). The rise of conflict within the hermeneutical process is

prevalent because of the engagement with otherness and its influence on the interpreter's

prejudice. This is the essence of Gadamer's fusion of horizons. The reflection process within the

hermeneutical process is imperative to understanding as various reflective outcomes are possible.

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[298] Francis J. Mootz III & George H. Taylor, *Gadamer and Ricœur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 47.
[299] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 318–19.

These reflective outcomes can range and are described in more detail in chapter eight. In the next part of this research, the applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle will be explored through various comparative moments involving interliturgies.

PART III: THE APPLICABILITY OF A GADAMERIAN INTERRELIGIOUS HERMENEUTIC

Part III explores the applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. Throughout this research the "text and/or tradition" component within the hermeneutical circle is critiqued for limiting the work of comparative theologians. Therefore, interreligious liturgies are explored as a viable comparative text and an appropriate comparative dialogical partner that moves the comparative theological agenda beyond text. To demonstrate the applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, attention is drawn to the hermeneutical circle to tie together new and fresh components of interreligious liturgies. Interliturgies are explored through specific comparative moments to express the applicability of liturgy as a successful dialogical counterpart within comparative theology. The outcomes of interliturgical application involve the importance and reliance of prejudice and the tradition of the interpreter, dialogical participation, engagement of reflective outcomes and the significance of fusion of horizons. Finally, this research addresses the promising ontological nature comparative theology can gain by utilizing a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutic, therefore, allowing comparative theology to embrace its ontological nature of "being and becoming."

CHAPTER 8: The Applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle

> "Thus the experience of living by insight, living one's life as a voyage of discovery in which one is constantly going on from one horizon to another, is comparable to the experience of passing over to God."[1]

8.1 Drawing Attention Back to the Hermeneutical Circle

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle describes interreligious hermeneutics as a cyclical philosophical process when understanding encounters various phases. These phases include the theologian starting with themselves, their prejudice and tradition; then encountering the religious Other through a dialogical process between self and Other; then engaging in a reflective process with outcomes that can be presented as acceptance, expansion, adaptation, challenge, conflict, or rejection. The process ends with fusion of the reflective process with the theologian's pre-understandings and tradition. This chapter will explore the research of comparative theologians and recent theological comparative studies and how they experience the various phases of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. The significant hermeneutical tools necessary for the comparative theological enterprise consist of the following: the interpreter's prejudice and tradition, the interpreter's ability to engage with the religious through the philosophical concepts of play, festival, and theological reflection through fusion.

A significant theme in this chapter is the exploration of ontology and its relation to interreligious understanding. This is the defining attribution Gadamer adds to interreligious hermeneutics, the process of understanding that comes into being rather than methodological

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[1] John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 225.

formation. In this way, understanding as it occurs in comparative theology, is the way in which

human experience from encounters with the religious Other are quantified, qualified and/or

processed. This section will share the ontology of interreligious hermeneutics and how it adds to

the discussion in comparative theology.

It is important to define the use of ontology in this research because there are several

ways to qualify the use of ontology in philosophy and distinguish between them. The use of

ontology in this setting is what is already at play within the experiences of meaning, the

foreground of what "is." Therefore, hermeneutics is the reflection upon these experiences and

meaning that is facilitated as someone encounters the religious Other by any means.[2]

Gadamer was one of the first of his time, since the start of the Enlightenment period, to

expand and rehabilitate the philosophical concepts of prejudice and tradition, especially relating

to the mode of fusion of horizons.[3] Fusion of horizons is properly understood to represent the

ontological process of understanding. It is shown in this research to be a beneficial way of

representing the interreligious hermeneutical experience that occurs in comparative theology.

The secondary themes gathered from Gadamer include play, dialogue, reflection, and

consciousness. All have a participatory and pivotal role in hermeneutics and understanding as set

out by Gadamer. This research particularly illustrates the role of Gadamerian philosophical

themes in the process of interreligious hermeneutics through the Gadamerian Interreligious

Hermeneutical Circle.

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[2] Nicholas Davey, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Ontology," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 48, no. 3 (2017): 180.

[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2013), 317.

8.2 The Participatory Roles of Play and Festival

A metaphorical posture of play has been noted to be useful for comparative theology as it allows the theologian to create the space and environment for productive interreligious theologizing.[4] Hedges highlights Gadamer's thought, "The movement which is play has no goal which brings it to an end; rather it renews itself in its constant repetition."[5] This type of understanding of interreligious hermeneutics allows for an open and inviting hermeneutical exchange to occur.

Gadamer uses the metaphorical concept of play to share the way in which hermeneutical encounter with the Other can be engaged in. The players play by rules of the game, going back and forth guided by the rules of engagement. The players are immersed within the game, engaging with one another realizing that they are playing, so they do not lose themselves completely in the game and yet taking the game seriously enough that it can be played. Each player has a role in the game, acting out significantly enough that they contribute to the overall experience of the game.

Along with the concept of play, Gadamer uses the example of festival to illustrate this metaphor further. Festivals occur at a certain time and participants in the festival are enticed into a festive state and transformed. Gadamer understands that "We do not describe a festival as a recurring one because we can assign a specific place in time to it, but rather the reverse: the time in which it occurs only arises through the recurrence of the festival itself."[6] Those who

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[4] "Play" is elaborated in more detail in the previous chapter, "A Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Method."

[5] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies,* Institute of Dialogue Studies 4 (2016): 11.

[6] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 41. See also Jean Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer: On the Theme of the Immemorial in His Later Works," in Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 46.

participate in the festival "are embedded in a play that goes beyond their subjective choice, activity, and intending."[7] Additionally, festivals exist not just because of their commemorative event but through the lived experience of reenactment. Within the festival, the horizons of the past and present fuse, despite their temporal distance. The act of participation within the festival is key to celebration and to fusing the horizons of past and present.

Gadamer utilizes the metaphorical examples of play and festival to describe the way in which understanding comes to be. There are several ways by which play and festival speak to the act of understanding. First, it is a movement which is participatory. This means that understanding is not stagnant, immoveable, and objectifiable. Second, the act of participation in play and festival is communal. Third, participation in play and festival transforms the person's tradition and prejudices.

8.3 Provocative Prejudices and Their Role

For comparative theology, no matter the initial instigation of interest (whether a question or statement provoked by the religious Other or a theologian's own tradition) the comparative theologian constantly returns back to their own theological and faith understandings. In this return, the theologian – in a reflective manner – will process their new understandings comparatively with their pre-understandings. Just as Hugh Nicholson understands, a theologian's pre-understandings and presuppositions should not be neutral or objective, but they should be acknowledged and open to revision.[8]

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[7] Jean Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual," 46.
[8] Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation,* ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 59.

Temporal distance is the distance in time between different events of understanding. Gadamer highlights that temporal distance may be fruitful in distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. Related to temporal distance is the helpfulness of forgetfulness:

> [O]nly by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity.... It is not enough to observe more closely, to study a tradition more thoroughly, if there is not already a receptivity to the 'otherness' of the work of art or of the past.[9]

Forgetfulness in the hermeneutical process aids the interpreter by allowing space for otherness to become familiar to the interpreter. This temporal distance of forgetfulness creates space, allowing for newness to speak to the prejudices of the interpreter.

8.4 Tradition as an Aid to the Interpreter

Gadamer's philosophical concept of "tradition" is as dynamic as his recovery of prejudice and equally related to hermeneutics. Gadamer uses the term, *Überlieferung*, which can be translated as "transmission" of which he says: "transmission, is likewise never closed off; genuine tradition is always open-ended, always underway."[10] Tradition, according to Gadamer, situates the interpreter because it is formed and informed by the interpreter's prejudice and therefore their horizon. Tradition, whether realized or not, influences the interpreter. Leiviska claims Gadamer understands tradition, "as an inherently reflective ontological structure that is in

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[9] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 15-16.

[10] Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, "Translator's Preface," in Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), xv. See also, *Walter* Brogan, *Basic Concepts of Hermeneutics: Gadamer on Tradition and Community, Duquesne Studies in Phenomenology* 1, no. 1 (April 2020): 7, https://dsc.duq.edu/dsp/vol1/iss1/3.

a continuous state of revision and self-transgression through processes of understanding where historically inherited presuppositions (prejudices) are relentlessly questioned and challenged."[11]

The problem for Gadamer was that Romanticism's idea of tradition "as an absolute source of validity against which all reason must remain silent is ultimately just as prejudiced as the Enlightenment's ideal of presuppositionless reason."[12] It must be noted that our understandings, whether realized or unrealized are guided, interpreted, and expressed by tradition that may also go beyond our reflective actions.[13]

The self, and arguably the Other, are oriented by tradition. In this way, we are situated and directed by the forces of tradition that go beyond our power to define and operate. The self is also formed and informed by tradition. This relates to our previous discussion about prejudice and the role prejudice has with tradition, forming and informing our prejudices and tradition. Within the relationship between prejudice and tradition, clear understanding of prejudice helps recover the power of tradition. Tradition is something that can be given, inherited, and received.

> It is not some pre-given third site that stands above each dialogue partner or each tradition and to which one dialogue partner and another can appeal in order to find common ground and agreement. Rather, it is what allows us to be embedded in our situatedness and the concreteness of our particular lives while at the same time being open to what is other than ourselves, open to challenges from the unfamiliar and foreign that promise to alter our rigid perspective and allow us to grow towards what is beyond the limits of our own being.[14]

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[11] Anniina Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition to the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* 65, no. 5 (2005): 582.

[12] Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition," 585.

[13] Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition," 585.

[14] Brogan, *Basic Concepts of Hermeneutics,* 12.

Tradition can also be rejected if one has the awareness to grasp the whole sense of the specific aspect of tradition. Finally, we always speak, listen, think, understand, and act within tradition. This is why Gadamer insists, "history does not belong to us; we belong to it."[15] Others also understand Gadamer in this way. For Pickering:

> Reason and rational method have to be understood historically, just as have tradition and prejudice, for it is only as a result of the Enlightenment tradition that we have come to think of reason and rationality as somehow outside of and unaffected by historical forces and circumstances, and thus as diametrically opposed to tradition and prejudice…[16]

The postmodern movement away from tradition is just an example of the impact that Enlightenment idealism has on our current situatedness. The understanding that tradition is simply an object that is unrelated or disconnected to the postmodern human is a defining characteristic of Enlightenment residue. This, I argue, is not the case. Tradition runs deeper than presupposed by postmodernism. Nicholas Davey claims, "while traditions are always open and allow for both movement and play, their shared practices and common texts facilitate a staying power or permanence that endures for decades and even centuries."[17]

Comparative theologians, who follow the new trail blazed by Francis Clooney, have noticed the struggle for some to balance the traditions of self and Other.[18] As other theologies

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[15] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 288-289.

[16] Michael Pickering, "History as Horizon: Gadamer, Tradition and Critique," *Rethinking History* 3, no. 2 (1999), 183.

[17] Davey, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Ontology*, 184.

[18] For example, Moyaert suggests the various outcomes that are potential when ethically reading interreligiously. Marianne Moyaert, "On Vulnerability: Probing the Ethical Dimensions of Comparative Theology," *Religions* 3, no. 4 (2012): 1146, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3041144. Related, Cornille addresses the challenge of multiple religious belonging and overcoming this challenge. See, Catherine Cornille, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 2-6.

have critiqued the use of tradition, Warnke argues "that tradition does not block critical reflection but is rather bound up with it."[19]

Within interpretation, specifically interreligious interpretation, the interpreter is not subjected to tradition or held down by the weight of their tradition. The interpreter participates in their tradition and out of that, "understanding is the interplay between the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter"[20]:

> The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition. But this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves.[21]

Highlighting the tradition of the interpreter, accepting the influences and formation of their tradition are the grounds upon which interpretation and understanding can occur. Equally so, tradition is the way by which interpretation can be transferred and transformed by the new horizon of the religious Other.[22] New horizons, or understandings, from the religious Other can mold, revise, modify, or transform the interpreter's pre-understandings.[23] It is argued that tradition is so engrained into our being that it is an invisible medium by which we exist and it is

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[19] Georgia Warnke, "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *History and Theory* 15 (December 2012): 9.

[20] Tarja Väyrynen, "A Shared Understanding: Gadamer and International Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 3 (May 2005): 350.

[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 293.

[22] Angelika Rauch-Rapaport, "Gadamer Needs Lacan: Gadamer's Approach to Tradition," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 34, no. 3 (2003): 314, https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2003.11007412.

[23] Pickering, "History as Horizon: Gadamer, Tradition and Critique, Rethinking History," 181.

"as invisible as water to a fish."[24] Therefore, tradition adds these main contributions to

understanding: first, they provide meaning to present events and actions; second, they orient us

towards the present; and third, they are limited by the particularity of their past.[25]

8.5 Dialogue, the Means of Understanding

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is dialogical in nature, both internal

dialogue with the theologian and external with the religious Other. Out of these types of dialogue

can come many different types of reflections. Clooney notes, "only when an interreligious

theological conversation is actually taking place can there be progress in drawing conclusions

from it and about it, either to reaffirm or revise established theological positions."[26] Between

interpreter and text or Other, there is an interaction or exchange that exposes them to each other

to search for common ground between interpreter and text and/or Other.[27] This takes place with

the model of dialogue, the to-and-fro motion of question and answer, through conversation,

through language. As the dialogue continues, it becomes part of the dialogue of the interpreter

and part of the interpreter's self-dialogue.

8.6 The Various Reflective Outcomes

Reflective outcomes are an embedded component to hermeneutics. This is because, "If

hermeneutic understanding were understood as just the linear progress towards an ever more

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[24] Pickering, "History as Horizon," 180.

[25] Warnke, *Solidarity and Tradition,* 19.

[26] Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28.

[27] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer," in Paul Ricœur and Mario Valdes, eds., *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 222, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664883.

accurate account of a final truth, no recursive looping would be possible. As a consequence, the reflective understanding which emerges from recursive looping could not occur."[28]

A strength of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is the emphasis on reflection. Reflection in comparative theology is part and parcel of the learning and understanding experience. Although many comparative studies focus on expansion, acceptance, and adaptation, little attention is given by comparative studies to conflicting interpretations, challenges, and rejections. These types of reflections should be seen as equally valid in comparative studies as they promote otherness and healthy conflicting views, which in turn may help the interpreter understand their own tradition and the tradition of the religious Other. It is here that I should discuss various types of understanding in comparative theology.

Catherine Cornille shares various learning outcomes of such theological endeavors. First, *intensification*, described as "juxtaposition of similar texts or teachings of different religions, which may lead to reinforcement or intensification of their meaning and truth."[29] Second, *rectification*, understood as "the restoration of proper understanding of the Other, and thus a new understanding of one's own tradition in relation to the other."[30] Third, *recovery*, understood as "rediscovery of figures, teachings or practices of one's own tradition that were neglected, forgotten, marginalized or even declared heretical." [31] Fourth, *reinterpretation*, seen as "reinterpretation of one tradition through the categories or philosophical framework of another."[32] Fifth, *appropriation*, understood as "the appropriation by one tradition of new

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[28] Davey, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Ontology*, 182.
[29] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 116.
[30] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 121.
[31] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 124.
[32] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 129.

elements derived from another religious tradition."[33] And sixth, *reaffirmation*, shown as "a new appreciation or reaffirmation of the truths of one's own tradition."[34]

Although Cornille details several learning outcomes of comparative theology, I do think that her categories are more positively influenced than she might realize. In many comparative studies, there are times when the comparative theologian is challenged, conflicted, and rejects the outcomes of their study. These learning outcomes should be included in comparative theology as it is hard to imagine that all comparative theological studies are unequivocally idealistically optimistic and that learning is only measured in agreement or consensus with the religious Other. What is avoided in Cornille's assessment, therefore, is acknowledgement of learning that comes from disagreement, conflict, and challenge.

The comparative project set out by comparative theologians allows for varied responses in reflection. These include but are not limited to acceptance, expansion, adaptation, rejection, challenge, and conflict. Below I use comparative moments to briefly survey comparative theological studies to validate each of these responses.

Acceptance – In "Discipleship in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology" by Catherine Cornille, she explores the various forms of interreligious learning identified as: intensification, rediscovery, reinterpretation, appropriation, or reaffirmation. Cornille explores the notion of church through Hindu understandings of discipleship. In this way, Cornille accepts the Hindu notion of discipleship and seeks to encourage the established institution to reimagine discipleship in light of living gurus and the Hindu tradition.[35]

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[33] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 134.
[34] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 137.
[35] Catherine Cornille, "Discipleship in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2016): 880.

Expansion – Axel Oaks Takacs in "An Interpreter not a Judge" uses the methodology inspired by von Balthasar for comparative theological studies, realizing that the comparative theologian expands their horizon by "her own process of realization – the signs in the cosmos, the self, and in her own tradition."[36]

Adaptation – Perry Schmidt-Leukel in "Christ as Bodhisattva: A Case of Reciprocal Illumination" claims how the comparative theological endeavor can illuminate hidden or "hitherto unnoticed features if seen in a reciprocally illuminating light."[37] By exploring Bidhisattva Schmidt-Leukel shares the potential of new understandings, features, and transformations.

Challenge – Francis X. Clooney's "Seeking Comparative Theology's Really Difficulty Other" in *How to Do Comparative Theology* uses the example of Mīmāṁsā ritual thinking of the Vedix and Hindu traditions. Clooney encounters Other as Other, in a difficult and challenging comparative study due to its highly intense theological frame. "It catches hold of us and demands that we revise our thinking so as to see the importance of what had … detail revelation."[38]

Conflict – Bede Bidlack, "What Child Is This? Jesus, Lord Lao, and Divine Identity" in *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* displays conflict through uncomfortability due to similarity between the birth narratives of the Highest Venerable Lord Lao and the birth of Jesus Christ. Bidlack argues that the reading of these two birth narratives

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[36] Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, "'An Interpreter and Not a Judge': Insights into a Christian-Islamic Comparative Theology," in Francis X. Clooney, *How to Do Comparative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 116.

[37] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Christ as Bodhisattva: A Case of Reciprocal Illumination," in *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Andreas Nehring (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 204, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474285162.0020.

[38] Francis X. Clooney, "Seeking Comparative Theology's Really Difficult Other," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, 226.

strikes several outcomes for the comparative theologian. First, striking similarities should not panic or unnerve the reader. Second, comparative theologians should not ignore religious difference, or be dismissive.[40]

Rejection – The Other in a comparative theological study could result in rejection of the home tradition or of the other tradition. Again, because fusion of horizons does not mean agreement or assimilation, this allows for understanding to take all different forms. One of these forms may be rejection, a comparative theologian who rejects part or all of their traditional understanding or the tradition of the Other. An example of a rejection response can be seen in John Makransky's study, "A Buddhist Critique of, and Learning from, Christian Liberation Theology." In this study, Makransky recognizes pitfalls in both Christian Liberation Theology and Buddhism and how the two can learn from each other. Makransky does not fully accept the theological positions of liberation theology suggesting that the boundedness of liberation theology's preference for certain groups of people, especially marginalized, is harmful, and he highlights how Buddhist understandings can help. Makransky also suggests, "liberation theology can help Buddhists further awaken the compassionate attitudes and actions that can unfold only through increasing awareness of the fuller social realities."[41] By rejecting certain theological points, Makransky demonstrates that both traditions can learn from each other.

Each of these responses acts as a "fusion" as they adhere to the theologian's horizon and become part of their pre-understandings, or prejudices, forming and informing the theologian's tradition. In this way, Cornille's categories could fit within *acceptance, expansion,* and

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[40] Bede B. Bidlack, "What Child is This? Jesus, Lord Lao, and Divine Identity," in Michelle Voss Roberts, ed., *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* 1 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016): 195-215.

[41] John Makransky, "A Buddhist Critique of, and Learning from, Christian Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (September 2014): 652. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563914541028.

adaptation. However, what is important is to also recognize the significance that difference, conflict, challenge, and rejection have in interreligious hermeneutics and how these valid reflective outcomes influence the horizon of the comparative theologian.

8.7 More on Conflict

Conflict is a natural repercussion of hermeneutics because of the nature of transforming prejudices. Pre-understandings situate themselves neatly in our tradition, therefore conflict arises when agreement is not met by new understandings. This is also the same with the case of religious otherness. Therefore, as Gadamer emphasizes,

> [The goal is]…to discover that the process of dialogue and all that is involved in its unfolding actually consists in an ongoing effort to bridge any form of alienation and to bring persons together so that nobody stays rigidly where he started, but rather integrates and appropriates what is other. Both partners to a genuine dialogue change and move and eventually find some small ground of solidarity.[42]

Hermeneutical conflict should be expected in interreligious and comparative studies, for if each of the religious traditions holds their own horizons, there are likely areas of disagreements or conflicting interpretations. To believe otherwise is to presuppose that the goal of learning in comparative theology is "agreement" which is not necessarily the case. I argue that this realistically is an unproductive goal in interreligious learning. Difference does not have to be viewed in a negative connotation. In fact, difference is what allows the Other their "otherness"

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[42] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer," 223.

which promotes diverse perspectives and interpretations when it comes to interreligious hermeneutics.[43]

Therefore, understanding fusion as "agreement" in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics would defeat his emphasis on "otherness" in the hermeneutical process. As Gadamer claims in relation to art, "It is not enough to observe more closely, to study a tradition more thoroughly, if there is not already a receptivity to the 'otherness' of the work of art or of the past."[44] That is why it is important for Gadamer "to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and this asserts its own truth against one's own fore-meanings."[45] Furthermore, "interpreting (which means elaborating our experience in life as a legitimate way to develop self-understanding)"[46] is the process of fusion, the process of self-understanding, when new understandings join pre-understandings in self-understanding.

Another way of understanding conflict in hermeneutics is visualizing competing interpretations. Gadamer uses the example of the various reproductions of Beethoven. He highlights how we have the text, the notes and the different possibilities of performance. "An interpreter of these interpretations would claim: Well, I see some points which are covered better in this, better in that interpretation."[47]

Comparative studies in religion seem to avoid reflecting on conflicting interpretations between religions. In this circumstance, comparative theology gains more than it loses by

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[43] Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy has been used in international conflict and peace studies and may prove to show be a fruitful piece to interreligious hermeneutics. See Tarja Väyrynen, "A Shared Understanding: Gadamer and International Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research*, 42, no. 3 (2005): 347-355, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305052017.

[44] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 16.

[45] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 282.

[46] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* trans. David E. Linge (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1976); Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer," 221.

[47] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations," 240.

reflecting on differences and disagreements surrounding interpretations. This is due to the pivotal perspectives of the Other's horizon, as Other. Understanding the religious Other as distinctively Other and different adds to the interreligious conversation of understanding the religious Other for who they genuinely are or share themselves to be. Ricœur supports this by stating, "Perhaps I cannot incorporate the Other's interpretation into my own view, but I can, by a kind of imaginary sympathy, make room for it… recognize the limit of my own comprehension and the plausibility of the comprehension of the other."[48] In this way, by recognizing and appreciating the religious Other's otherness, this may also encourage the interpreter to appreciate their own religious horizon and tradition.

8.8 Fusion as Understanding, Not Necessarily Agreement

Gadamer's fusion of horizons has been misunderstood as agreement or consensus-making with otherness.[49] However, this is not how Gadamer's philosophical metaphor is solely understood. "For Gadamer, however, this fusion actually refers to the incorporation of the reflective knowledge acquired through the dialogue into the self-understanding of the present, and it therefore results in the enlargement of the present horizon and transformation of the tradition broadly conceived."[50] At this point it is important to highlight two types of horizons that are explained by Gadamer.

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[48] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations," 241.

[49] See David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (2010), 4. Habermas states, "We can reflexively transcend our respective hermeneutic starting points and reach intersubjectively shares views on disputed issues. Gadamer describes this as a 'fusion of horizons." Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 43.

[50] Leiviska, "The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Tradition," 591.

First, and foremost, for Gadamer the metaphor of horizon reflects the ontological process by which understanding occurs.[51] This conceptual metaphor describes the way in which understanding occurs through a dialogical process. Ontologically, meaning, "what it *means* to be,"[52] within the realm of interreligious hermeneutics describes the way in which understanding the religious Other occurs. The other way to understand Gadamer's horizon is within the particular aspects of understanding. Gadamer's use of ontology in hermeneutics is centered on the nature of linguistics and being in relation to the world. These two ways of understanding Gadamer's horizons are not disconnected. The particular contributes to the whole on a micro-level and the whole reciprocates that interconnectedness. For comparative theology it is necessary to understand that the particular studies of another religious tradition contribute both to the whole understanding and the specific understanding.

As Rose Drew notes, "...the theologian must try to determine whether what is encountered in the tradition studied is in fact true and valuable, a process which requires an attempt to relate the claims of that tradition to the claims of one's home tradition."[53] This, in so many words, is the process of interreligious hermeneutics as described through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. Several comparative theologians connect to various phases of the hermeneutical process. Francis Clooney highlights the "transformational nature of interreligious study."[54] Drew recognizes Clooney's examples of rediscovery of Mary in the

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[51] "Understanding is, primarily agreement… Coming to an understanding (Verständigung), then, is always coming to an understanding about something." Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 186.

[52] Christopher Dawson, "Gadamer's Ontology: An Examination of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Being in Relation to Heidegger, Plato and Hegel," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1996), 16, https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.6696.

[53] Rose Drew, "Challenging Truths: Reflections on the Theological Dimension of Comparative Theology," *Religions* 3 (2012): 1044.

[54] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, 39.

Jesuit Christian tradition by "reflection on Hindu devotion to Laksmi and Devi (93-99)."[55] This

is an example of the "fusion phase" in the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle

because the theologian is fusing a new understanding with their pre-understandings.

Clooney supports the attempt to view the horizon of the religious Other as an insider.

This is not the purpose of fusion of horizons nor is it practical. As Drew notes, "...comparative

theologians always carry their own religious baggage with them, including their presumptions

about the tradition studied."[56] Fusion of horizons does not mean being able to view someone

else's horizon completely. It happens when the horizon of the Other's understanding fuses with

the theologian's pre-understandings, which can occur with any of the reflective outcomes noted

above.

The fusion of different theological understandings may become part and parcel of the

interpreter's pre-understandings and religious horizon. Clooney notes, "One becomes enough of

an insider that the tradition's realities work powerfully and invite assent."[57] This does not

necessarily mean that the comparative theologian has disavowed or disowned their tradition.

"This transformation of one's perspective need not signify an abandonment or distortion of one's

tradition."[58] It merely means that their horizon has expanded to include the Other's perspective.

Because comparative theology is a practice of interreligious hermeneutics, it utilizes the

technique of passing over to another religious tradition and returning to one's own tradition. This

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[55]Drew, "Challenging Truths," 1044.

[56] Drew, "Challenging Truths," 1047. Noted here is the negative connotation of presumptions being considered "baggage" and not tools or helpful aides to the process of understanding the religious other. Paul Knitter also uses this tone, "while we have to be aware that we bring our theological baggage to the journey of dialogue, that doesn't mean that during the journey we may not have to rearrange, or even dispose of, some of that baggage." Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions,* 236.

[57] Clooney, Francis X. "Neither Here nor There: Crossing Boundaries, Becoming Insiders, Remaining Catholic," in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 2004), 102.

[58] Drew, "Challenging Truths," 1047.

is achieved through a comparative approach of exploring a religious tradition through specific studies in various dimensions. Understanding, as a philosophical concept, is achieved through a cyclical process of hermeneutics. Gadamer describes understanding as a process that enters phases and finally comes to fruition through a fusion of horizons. Agreeing with Hedges, understanding fusion of horizons as an "opening of horizons" better describes Gadamer's understanding of fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, understanding does not end at a certain point therefore ending the process of understanding, it is a cyclical process that is continuous. The comparative theological project can include various religious dimensions; practical and ritual, experiential and emotional, narrative or mythic, doctrinal and philosophical, ethical and legal, social and institutional, and material.[59] Using the examples from comparative theologians above, we will highlight how the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is being applied without the authors explicitly implying so.

Albertus Bagus Laksana shares a study, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations Through Java*, highlighting the shared theological structures of the religious experience of pilgrims in the Java community. Laksana goes beyond similarities and differences by exposing the sacramental worldviews of Catholic and Muslim traditions in Java. Sharing both the fundamental framework of communion and shared religious sites, Laksana highlights the inclusive quality of shared religious spaces, practices, and history.[60] Specifically, Laksana explains the crucial role of Javanese ancestors as inclusively communal. This framework influences the understandings of sainthood and ancestors that "play a crucial role in the

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[59] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

[60] Bagus Laksana, "Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations through Java," *Ashgate Studies in Pilgrimage* (Farnham, U.K.: Routledge, 2014), 193-195.

pilgrimage traditions both among Muslims and Catholics in south central Java."[61] This study claims at its core the sacramental worldview of God's presence that can be manifested in the mundane and religious Other.

With textual studies, much has already commenced. Several comparative theologians, especially Francis Clooney, have produced exquisite comparative examples using text.[62] However, an example using this dimension that is more appropriate to our conversation is Michelle Voss Robert's comparative study, "Flowing and Crossing: The Somatic Theologies of Mechthild and Lalleśwarī."[63] In this study, Voss utilizes Lalleśwarī as an example of embodiment with the presence of suffering and the utilization of breath control for detachment. She highlights, through Mechthild's examples of the limitations of the body, "the tantalizing hints about the body's joyful participation in divine love."[64] Voss goes on to suggest that theologies should include disability, and perfect body that is considered divine. She argues, "each body will be disabled – if not from injury, trauma, overuse, genetic variation, or chemical imbalance, then certainly because of the helplessness of being born and the deterioration of age."[65] In this way, Voss not only compares texts but also eloquently compares the theology of disability and feminist theories of embodiment.

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[61] Laksana, "Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices," 203.

[62] One main point worth mentioning regarding Francis Clooney's connection to interreligious hermeneutics is Clooney's emphasis on the literal approach to interreligious hermeneutics through textual interpretation. Comparative theologians like Clooney focus heavily on textual interpretation, original languages, and literary theory in their approach to comparative theology. A specific study of Clooney's, relevant to our conversation here is *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Srivasinavas of South India*.[62]

[63] Michelle Voss Roberts, "Flowing and Crossing: The Somatic Theologies of Mechthild and Lalleśwarī." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (2008): 638-663.

[64] Voss Roberts, "Flowing and Crossing," 659.

[65] Voss Roberts, "Flowing and Crossing," 659.

Daniel Scheid, in "Comparative Theology and Ecological Ethics," explores the ethical dimension of religions by using the approach of "eco-constructivist," viewing religious traditional texts as organically developed through an ecological vantage point. Scheid advocates for ecological ethicists from various religious traditions drawing on theological principles between their traditions.[66] From each tradition, Scheid identifies a theological principle; Hindu concept of *dharma* (cosmic order), Buddhist understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence), and the Lakota concept of "*mitakuye oyasin*" (all my relations) to enhance a Catholic "cosmic common good."[67]

As discussed above with several examples of comparative theological projects, the scope of direction is left open to include various dimensions of religions. The reflective responses grown out of comparative projects have a range of fusions with understanding, from acceptance to rejection; expansion to conflict. All of these are valid fusions as they adhere to the theologian's pre-understandings influencing their tradition, religious, and faith understanding. In this way, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle provides the context to explain the methodological process of interreligious hermeneutics through comparative theological projects such as the ones listed above.

8.9 Summary and Conclusion

Comparative theology is not just an effort to do something unusual. Understanding is always a matter of comparison and therefore a core activity in theology. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is not a method of interreligious hermeneutics but the process by which understanding the religious Other occurs. Another way of appreciating this is

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[66] Daniel Scheid, "Comparative Theology and Ecological Ethics," in *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016), 124.

[67] Scheid, "Comparative Theology and Ecological Ethics," 126.

to say, "Interpretation is an ongoing process of life in which there is always something behind and something expressly intended. Both an opening of a horizon and a concealing of something take place in all our experiences of interpretation."[68] The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is the ontological process of understanding that occurs in interreligious hermeneutics. Reflection can be developed in several ways and we see this in the authors above who had very different reflective applications.

The reflection process in the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is as fruitful as it is challenging. The reflection phase is fruitful because it helps process the knowledge learned from the dialogue with the religious text and tradition. This phase is challenging because one cannot control what reflections will come out of the dialogue with the religious other. This makes the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle dynamic so that it authentically demonstrates Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics. What is also unique to this process is the emphasis on various outcomes of the reflection process being equally valid. Therefore, whether reflection includes tensions that have arisen, reinterpretations discovered, and expansion of understandings, all are outcomes of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle that are applicable.

Reflective outcomes that are challenging to an interpreter are common encounters while encountering interreligious otherness. This is because otherness within its own being can be a challenge to the interpreter because it seems so different or unfamiliar. This should not stop the interpreter from exploring interreligiously, because it is common that in this space of unfamiliarity, new and fresh theological insights might be present. However, it must be said that there are in fact many theo-ontological points of contention between religions. Some of these are

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[68] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations," 222.

surrounded by theological beliefs like the nature of divinity, and they are present within liturgies, symbols, and present in interreligious dialogue. To Gadamer, these contention points are not to be ignored or passed over without reflection but we must approach these contentions with sincere interest and openness to what the other has to say.

Conflict in interreligious hermeneutical reflection is also a common outcome. Along the same lines as challenges, conflict also can be present within the religious other due to uneasiness of unfamiliarity and difference. It must be noted here that conflict also has a more aggressive turn when not properly addressed. Interreligious conflict that contributes to violent acts against religious people groups has been present in world history for ages. One of the promising pieces of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is that violence is the failure of openness to the other. This failure is derived from one's prejudices being so situated and cemented that they are unable to invite in the horizon of another. This brings us to the reflective outcome of rejection.

Rejection of interreligious otherness can occur, especially in the beginning stages of one's own interreligious hermeneutical journey. Some rejection is a natural response to otherness because of the newness and vulnerable nature that interreligious encounters stimulate. But it should be noted that rejection is not a "bad" reflection outcome. Some rejection occurs because the encounter is not easily fused with the horizon of the interpreter and this is because there are distinctions that exist in the interpreter and the other. These distinctions, as Gadamer rightly contributes, exist because of their "historically effected consciousness" that influences their distinct horizons.

Fusion is not understood as the final understanding of a theological concept but the molding of new perspectives within the interpreter's pre-understandings and tradition.

Cornille notes that fusion in some cases in interreligious dialogue does not occur. Moyaert hesitates to use Gadamer's notion of fusion.[69] This negative view of fusion understands that not all experiences of comparative theology can end in fusion. This might be true if some understand Gadamer's metaphorical example in a way that sees fusion as the end point. This is not the only way to understand this metaphor by Gadamer. Paul Hedges understands Gadamer's metaphor of fusion of horizons as "opening of horizons."[70] He argues that Gadamer's philosophical metaphor can lean towards an opening of understandings.

Comparative theology needs to move beyond text and interpret the process of meeting each other. Although many comparative theologians highlight the textual or mythic dimension of religions, comparative theologians explore other dimensions through textual analysis. The examples provided share how comparative theologians are exploring other dimensions of religions comparatively for the purpose of faith seeking understanding.

Moyaert highlights non-textual and nonlinguistic ways of engaging in comparative theology through artistic expression and ritual practices.[71] Perhaps an area that could see more growth in research for comparative theology is in ordinary people and their experiences, how they encounter religious otherness in day-to-day engagements that are not prescribed or presupposed. Observing and researching these encounters may help comparative theologians have a better sense of how communities, societies, and cultures interact and naturally understand one another.

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[69] Marianne Moyaert, "The (Un-)translatability of Religions? Ricœur's Linguistic Hospitality as Model for Inter-religious Dialogue," *Exchange* 37 (2008): 355, n76.

[70] Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and the Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 17.

[71] Moyaert, "Comparative Theology: Between Text and Ritual," in *The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Terrence Merrigan and John Friday (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017), 13.

Moving beyond text and highlighting the benefits of experiences of the religious Other are important for the public, lay people, and students. Hedges argues, "there is certainly a need therefore to move comparative theology away from textual analysis, or even the supposition that this represents the best way to undertake the discipline."[72] Connected to this, and as we will see, connected to interreligious liturgy, Gadamer notes that "interpretation is the element in which we live, and not something into which we have to make entry."[73]

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is applicable to comparative theology as it demonstrates the way by which interreligious understanding occurs on an ontological level. Through the dialogical dance between interpreter and text and/or tradition, the interpreter is confronted by their own prejudice and tradition, that has informed and formed their perspective by those influencers to encounter the religious Other dialogically. Through the to-and-fro motion of conversation, the interpreter interacts with the reflections that come to be present from the interreligious encounter. These reflections are more than similarities and differences juxtaposed against each other, although those may be present. The reflections can manifest in acceptance, expansion, adaptation, challenge, conflict and rejection. Understanding that reflection can manifest through conflict with the Other's tradition and/or text, the interpreter may find deep religious meaning through differences encountered with the religious Other and their own tradition and prejudice. Therefore, "fusion" is not merely agreement with the interpreter's dialogical partner but genuine interaction between self and Other, exposing the presuppositions and tradition of the interpreter that leads to deeper, more meaningful interreligious understanding. Moving on to the next chapter, we will see how the themes of

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[72] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Iss. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 39.
[73] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations," 221.

fusion, reflection, and prejudice are apparent within embodied symbolism –interreligious

liturgies, and how they are applicable partners within interreligious hermeneutical encounters.

CHAPTER 9: Embodied Symbolism: Interreligious Liturgies as a Comparative Horizon

> "Everything that happens is a symbol, and, in fully representing itself, it points towards everything else."[1]

Before more modern understanding, symbolism was understood as a way of thinking religiously and more recently, religion is understood as a way of thinking symbolically.[2] Religious symbolism is defined as something within a particular religion that is known, recognized, and holds particular meaning as representational of the religious act or thing itself. Within a religious body, members are usually aware of certain symbols that hold significant meaning. The meaning of these symbols is derived from and confirmed by the religious tradition. Further, symbols primarily are developed within their religious tradition and hold particular significance through facilitation of meaning. For a symbol to function in its proper form, the symbol must first hold meaning that is known and recognizable by the religious tradition. A symbol holds value because it is produced by a community and its content is valuable. It is through the symbol that the community is able to recognize each other. Gadamer maintains that "whether it is a religious symbol or appears in a secular context -as a badge or a pass or a password- in every case the meaning of the symbol depends on its physical persona and acquires a representational function only by being shown or spoken."[3] Therefore, participation with the symbol or symbolized is essential to the symbol's being. Specifically involving religious symbols, symbols can be representative within ritual, practices, myth, and theology. Robert

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 70.
[2] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith" in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson (Port Washington, New York: The Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1969): 64.
[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 66.

Cummings Neville suggests;"Far better it is to say that religious symbols are symbols found in rituals, spiritual practices, and reflections of religions that have the sacred or divine as their direct or indirect object."[4]

In, *The Relevance of the Beautiful,* Gadamer highlights symbols in relation to the symbolic power of art and how a symbol "does not perform the representative function of pointing to something already universally shared, but precisely in awaking a shared consciousness of something through its own expressive power."[5] He continues to describe the Greek verb for "symbol," *symballo,* meaning "to throw together."[6] Cyril Richardson adds to this definition by adding, "the noun of *symbolo* takes its meaning as a sign by which one knows or infers something, from the extended sense of *symballo*, to compare, hence to conjecture or infer."[7] To go on, *symballo,* "brings together" in three different ways, says Richardson. First, symbol brings together by accessibility. The symbol is the way in which something is made available for understanding. In order for this to take place, it is vital for the symbol to coherently bring concepts together in an understandable fashion. Second, the symbol brings together cohesiveness in the community through meaning. Richardson notes that "it is not the society which gives the symbol meaning, so much as the symbol which gives the society meaning."[8] Third, symbol brings together an infinite variety of meanings and connections. Uniquely, the symbol has the power to bring together complicated concepts into simple wholeness.[9] Gadamer

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[4] Robert C. Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 12.

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 150.

[6] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 70. "union of two things that belong together."

[7] Cyril C. Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism" in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson, 3.

[8] Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism," 4.

[9] Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism," 5.

claims that it is through shared consciousness or awareness that we recognize the power and

relevance that the religious symbol possesses.[10] The community then determines through

interpretation of the symbol two important elements; first, what the symbol points or directs their

attention to, and second, what is the meaning of the thing that the symbol points to and makes

present. For example, "icons and artwork are real symbols in the sense that they carry out the

presence of the symbolized object..."[11] Therefore, artwork brings together the presence of the

symbol and the reality of meaning.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer notes the difference between symbol and allegory. He

uses the term, *Solger*, defined like this: "the symbolic refers to an 'existent in which the idea is

recognized in some way or other.'" In this way, the symbol collides with the sensible, the thing

that can be understood with the non-sensible, the thing that is too Other to understand in itself.[12]

Schelling supports this understanding of symbol by mentioning the connection to *Sinnbild*,

meaning "image." The symbol is understood in its own terms, it is "concrete, resembling only

itself, like an image, and yet as universal and full of meaning as a concept."[13] For allegory to

function properly, the reference to what the allegory is expressing needs to be known

beforehand.[14] Symbols do not need to be known in advance as they point to meaning. For as

Gadamer rightly puts, "the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to

complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it."[15] Gadamer shares the example of modern

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[10] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 149.
[11] Zdenko Sirka, "Gadamer's Concept of Aesthetic Experience as a Possibility for the Orthodox Biblical Theology," *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 6, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 378–407. https://doi.org/10.2478/ress-2014-0130.
[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 70.
[13] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 70.
[14] Niall Keane and Lawn, Chris, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 408, E-book.
[15] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 32.

art because it presents something to the interpreter. Understanding the work of art is a process of experience. "We gain the experience through perceiving it, the artwork, and arrive at a fuller understanding of ourselves in understanding it."[16] Symbolism in this sense is the work of experience — it is experienced symbolism. This new role of symbolism is "regarded as a form of symbolic thinking."[17]

Therefore, the symbol is responsible for the presented and represented aspects of that which is symbolized. The responsibility of this representation is to do more than point or guide, it is to manifest the presence of what is absent. Gadamer notes how this is especially the case with religious symbols. Religious symbols therefore do not merely act as the representation of the sacred but present the sacred that is invisible as visible and therefore accessible to the religious community. In this way, religious symbols lead religious communities "beyond the sensible to the divine."[18] This is the case because symbols mediate beyond themselves by pointing towards what is above and beyond them. Specifically, we can see how symbolism is related to ritual in this way.

9.1 Ritual as Symbol

Practices such as prayer, meditation, fasting, religious quests, and communal life practices involve a symbolic dimension. Rituals "epitomize symbolically and rehearse the 'work' to be done in order to relate rightly to life relative to the sacred."[19] Rituals point beyond participatory actions towards meaningful participation, that includes history, story, and shared community meaning. Many religious rituals stem from religious myths that are situated within

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[16] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 32.
[17] Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith," 64.
[18] Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith," 67.
[19] Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols*, 10.

religious texts. Religious myths describe how religious communities and individuals relate to the sacred and/or profane through the use of symbolic language and communicative and literary forms.

Moyaert affirms that several contemporary comparative theologians include various symbolic practices in their studies.[20] These comparative theologians couple symbolic practices with textual analysis, showing a balanced act between the two realms. Another example that can be referenced here is from the 2019 Engaging Particularities Graduate Conference on "Perspective on Personhood: Comparative Insights into Self, Community, and Cosmos." At this conference Shivani Makkar shared a paper, "Tradition, Ritual, and Woman as Subject: A Case Study of Sati in the 20th Century."[21] Through an ethnographic study, Makkar explores the Sati ritual practice of burning the widow with her deceased husband. The lived experience of the Sati ritual connects mythologies, socio-politics, and symbolic rituals continued today in a symbolic nature still materialized through women's bodies. This portrays the embodied-ness of symbols.

In connection to embodied symbolic participation, comparative theology requires the participation in and with the theologian's own religious tradition and at the same time the religious tradition of the Other. This cannot be achieved through objective and subjective observation; rather comparative theology is encouraged to participate and engage dialogically with other religious traditions. In this way, the comparativist is invited into conversation with the religious Other by various means. This could be due to the comparative's quest, spark of interest, personal experience, etc.

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[20] Marianne Moyaert, "Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (2018): 3.

[21] Makkar's work was later published in July 2021. Shivani Makkar, "Religious Rituals and Woman As Subject: A Study of Women's Agency in the Practice of *Sati*," *Inclusive* 2, no. 19 (July 2021), http://www.inclusivejournal.in/posts/2021-08-spart-01.html.

In, *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy understands symbol as that which humans draw as analogy from the secular world to understand that which is beyond human's finite ways of expression towards the unseen sacred. Symbol is thus used as a tool or method used by the interpreter in order to do so.[22] By exploring deep into another religious tradition, the comparativist discovers meaning, the meaning discovered whether agreeable or disagreeable with the comparativist's tradition, provides mediation between religious traditions.

9.2 Laying the Groundwork for Liturgy

Hans-Georg Gadamer's metaphor of play in philosophical hermeneutics has been used to characterize what happens when comparative theologians participate in the process of interpretation. For example, Paul Hedges uses this Gadamerian concept to explore how it is applicable to interreligious dialogue.[23] In this same way, play can be used to understand, engage, and interpret various religious liturgies of our religious neighbors. This chapter explores the use of liturgy as performative text and fruitful religious mode within interreligious hermeneutics. I also explore how comparative theologians are able to understand their religious neighbors through "interliturgy" as a religious mode within interreligious hermeneutics.[24] Going beyond Hedges' description of play, I explore how Gadamer's hermeneutical concept of play invites us

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[22] Dillistone, "The Power of Symbols in Religion and Culture," 81.

[23] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 4 (2016): 5-26.

[24] By "interliturgy" I indicate liturgies of religious others that are engaged with. Moyaert gathers "inter-ritual" from Douglas Pratt in "Religion is as Religion Does," 60. He states, "Something takes place between (inter) the participants, and between their religious systems…" Douglas Pratt, "Religion is as Religion Does: Interfaith Prayer as a form of Ritual Participation," in Moyaert and Geldhof, eds., *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 59. Moyaert brings this further by claiming, "Inter-ritual hospitality is a particular ritual expression of interreligious exchange: the host community welcomes one or more quests who belong to another religious tradition to share in its ritual life." Moyaert, "Infelicitous Inter-ritual Hospitality," *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 3 (2017), 326.

into the ontological world of "being" in order to explore, learn, and grow from the liturgies of our religious neighbors. The comparativist's ontological world of "being" will be revisited in more depth in the following chapter. However, here we will explore how liturgy, as a religious mode, has been used in the field of comparative theology through some studies,[25] Gadamer's concept of play invites the contribution of interreligious hermeneutics to take a central role in the interreligious encounter, allowing theology that flows from the liturgies of the religious Other to speak to us again.[26] This type of interreligious hermeneutics within interliturgical studies broadens the scope of the comparativist's ventures.

The theological work of Clooney, Hedges, Moyaert, and alike center comparative theology as a fruitful endeavor in the theological and religious field of study. This is enhanced by the philosophical hermeneutical use for describing the process of methodology. However, the use of play in interreligious liturgy has not been explored in much detail. My question is not whether participation in interreligious liturgy is productive but how interreligious liturgy is a possible textual counter partner in the hermeneutical circle. Some work has been produced signifying the relationship between play and interreligious liturgy. For instance, more recently, Cheetham suggests, "that liturgies are not established rites as such but which are improvised, or simply 'apt', can be constructed for interfaith engagement."[27] The example he uses is with Ann Morisy, an Anglican theologian, who highlights that "apt theology" is liturgy devised "in the moment." This kind of liturgical move is in line with what Cheetham describes as, "an emphasis on the

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[25] For a recent example see, James Farwell, "Taking the Liturgical Turn in Comparative Theology: Monastic Interreligious Dialogue as a Supporting Case," in *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries*, ed. Marianne Moyaert (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019): 159-172.

[26] Hedges leans into this by referencing the liturgical calendar system in Christian theology. Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons," 11.

[27] David Cheetham, "Creation, Sacrament, and Liturgy," in *Creation and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 125, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856665.003.0007.

phenomenology of liturgy and ritual [so that] there may open up the possibility for 'embodied' forms of spirituality and symbolic action…" within the interfaith context.[28] However, as I will display here, the obvious connections between the two will 1) tie comparative theological efforts more closely to Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics through the concept of play and festival, 2) support the understanding of interreligious liturgy as a participatory theological methodology.[29]

Smith specifically points to the dialogical nature between the relationship of philosophy and liturgy, by explaining, "that liturgical practice and formation does and ought to function as the condition of possibility for properly *religious* philosophy. So the complete picture will include not only a philosophy *of* liturgy, but a liturgical philosophy."[30]

9.3 Why not Liturgy?

Marianne Moyaert cites Catherine Cornille here from her text, *The (Im-)possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* "…it is through participation in the ritual life that one may gain a more direct comprehension of the affective and inner dimension of a religion and of the way in which religious beliefs become embodied within a particular tradition."[31] However encouraging this may seem to interreligious liturgical encounters, the difficulties utilizing liturgy still persist.

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[28] Cheetham, "Creation, Sacrament, and Liturgy," 125.

[29] This approach has been used in other capacities. Take for example, James K.A. Smith utilizes liturgy as a methodology in philosophy of religion. Smith asserts that liturgy should be more considered in the field of philosophy for its potential capacity for philosophical reflection. James K. A. Smith, "Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice: Liturgy as Source and Method in Philosophy of Religion," in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King(New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 135.

[30] Smith, "Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice," 138.

[31] Marianne Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality," *JASR* 27, no. 2 (2014): 227.

Joris Geldhof argues that the difficulties of liturgy in comparative theology stem from liturgies being confessional, too "tradition specific," and there being lack of methodology. Geldhof asserts, "The textual model is arguably no longer prevalent in liturgical studies, however, and liturgical theologians are actively searching for other ways to approach the subject of their study."[32] And yet, Geldhof is increasingly aware of the necessary turn towards liturgy by highlighting how interreligious participation in rituals and liturgies occurs and how it could contribute to the field of religious studies.[33] Along with the difficulty of the religious mode itself, liturgy also presents a difficult tension to the comparative theologian. The presence of tension in the form of exclusion, unknown boundaries, unfamiliarity and dissonance can occur in interliturgical studies. These are the risks that may occur while engaging in interreligious studies, whether of text, dialogue, or languages, etc. However, in the presence of liturgies, the tension may seem more obvious due to the physical need from liturgy. Therefore, the creative tension is embodied by the comparative theologians.

Comparative theologians are perhaps overlooking the use of common methodology rooted in philosophical hermeneutics and this research seeks to show how comparative theologians are using this model of hermeneutics and to reevaluate these through a Gadamerian philosophical lens. We will look specifically at three different "comparative moments."[34] The

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[32] Joris Geldhof, "Why is a Comparative Turn in Liturgical Theology So Difficult," in Marianne Moyaert, *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 175.

[33] Geldhof, "Why is a Comparative Turn in Liturgical Theology So Difficult," 177.

[34] Michelle Voss Roberts utilizes the phrase "Comparative Moments" as a focal point for students in her classes to study insights from another religious tradition. See specifically, "Comparative Moments: A Comparative Theological Orientation for Theological Education," *Religious Education* 115, no. 3 (2020): 343-348.

goal in this section is to re-inscript the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle with existing comparative theological examples utilizing liturgy.

Here, I will remind my reader that the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, shared with Figure 2 in part II, expresses the dialogical nature between interpreter (participant) and text (liturgy) as a continual process of engagement. This process always embeds the situation of the participant's experiences with their tradition and prejudices. Liturgy is an affable dialogical partner to the comparative theologian and can offer theological reflections to the participant and their theology, leading to a fusion of horizons. This fusion occurs when the participant reflectively absorbs new understandings, in whatever form they may present themselves, to the interpreter's prejudices. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle allows for the participant and interliturgies to "fuse" or intermingle what is "becoming," both in the understanding the participant's theological tradition and in the understanding of their religious neighbors.

In the instances of Clooney, Cornille, Moyaert, and Hedges, the intermingling of what is becoming is unstable and open to risk. This is certainly the case in the under-representational expression often related to comparative theology, "passing over and coming back."[35] This may presume that the returned destination and interpreter are ontologically unchanged. By this I do not mean that comparative theologians are unaware of the changes that occur when doing comparative theology, otherwise the venture would not be so promising, but that they limit these changes to those that can be seen, and not so much focused on the unseen, above and beyond the interpreter themselves. This ontological approach is underdeveloped and it is the hope that Gadamer's hermeneutical phenomenology can provide insights into the journey comparative

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[35] Paul Knitter, "The Vocation of an Interreligious Theologian: My Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue," *Horizons* 31, no. 1 (2004): 136.

theologians embark upon. "Becoming" language can be associated with comparative theological endeavors as an approach to understanding the religious tradition and that which exists between the "part" of the theologian and the "whole" of religious expression and experience. The themes of play and festival, developed by Gadamer, help comparative theologians understand the event of meaning experienced and the balance of the finite human experience of otherness and articulation of transcendence.

The use of liturgy as a mode of comparison that brings the comparative theologian ontologically through interpretation is shown in three "comparative moments" highlighted below.[37] A more recent focus in comparative theology has been a turn toward ritual including liturgy.[38] With liturgy, "the art is not so much in devising the liturgy, but in recognizing a moment when it would be significant."[39] Part of this significance is the spontaneous and improvised opportunity that liturgy offers. In the following case studies, the liturgical nature that is developed will be highlighted.

David Cheetham proposes, "the liturgy or ritual offer areas of further development for theological and philosophical thinking is resonant with much recent work that has been produced

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[37] I use the term "comparative moments" to share comparative enterprises that have shown promise in the field. Others may say comparative examples, illustrations, etc. However, I use moment here to describe how these exact points of time are particular to the comparative theological development of liturgy. The term, "moment" expresses both specificity and movement, a prime point of comparative theology is both specific and a general activity.

[38] Marianne Moyaert, "Ritualizing Interreligious Encounters: Mapping the Field of Interrituality, *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no. 2 (2017); Marianne Moyaert, "Toward a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Moyaert, "Infelictous inter-ritual Hospitality. *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 3 (2017). An important note is the more ritual turn in comparative theology shown by the conference theme of the 2021 Engaging Particularities conference, "Living Ritual: Through Memory, Language, and Identity." See conference program for more details:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/19i1RCC0sDf4biLqsPJcPSRfRFNX_2qZh/view.

[39] Raymond Fung and Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission* (London, U.K.: Continuum, 2003), 55.

by contemporary writers who are seeking new ways of doing theology and philosophy."[40] In agreement with Cheetham's assessment above, I would have to argue that there are challenges that arise with liturgy that are not as problematic with the utilization of texts. Outside of accessibility, as texts are becoming more and more accessible (languages, translations, editions, digitalization), liturgies may involve more of the physical presence of the participants. Additionally, exclusion from the community of the religious Other may be present within the desire of participating in interliturgies. Lastly, tension from the theologian's home tradition may be present. In "Infelicitous Inter-ritual Hospitality," Moyaert shares examples of when inter-ritual fails and when interreligious ritual goes wrong.[41] In some ways, reading and exploring another's religious text can seem less dangerous to concerned parties than participating and practicing religious liturgies. An issue that remains is that,

> The Reformed and Enlightened world became de-cluttered and sterilized. The concomitant effect on theology was to endorse a greater degree of rationalism in theology. Philosophy became the primary foundation for theological construction with 'contexts' being seen as instances that illustrate a more fundamental abstracted truth.[42]

Going on to explain that the "Enlightenment simple space that neatly organizes the world from a 'centre.'"[43] The Enlightenment understanding of temporality and space has greatly influenced the modern understanding of liturgy in religious settings and therefore, as a

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[40] David Cheetham, "The Interfaith Landscape and Liturgical Places," in *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas* Vol. 25, ed. D. Pratt, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 545.

[41] Moyaert, "Infelicitous Inter-ritual Hospitality," 339.

[42] Cheetham, "The Interfaith Landscape and Liturgical Places," 548.

[43] Cheetham, *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter*, 556.

theological moment for comparative theology. However, the promise of liturgies and other

rituals outweigh the potential challenges.

9.4 Liturgy as a Religious Dimension

Ninian Smart's helpful dimensions of religion categorize the different religious modes

based on various shared characteristics. This classification system places rituals and practices

(i.e. liturgy) together with symbolism, art, music, festivals and other ascetic practices.[44] Smart's

categories are not meant to alienate from each other for it is quite common to have mythic and

ritual dimensions share commonalities. Smart gives reference to several examples and claims,

"the primary context of telling a myth is ritual…"[45] Smart claims "for example, the myth and

ritual school were keen to show how the significance of myths could be illuminated and

explained by the ritual setting in which the myths were re-enacted."[46] Catherine Bell, an

American religious studies scholar who specialized in ritual studies, shows how this is

specifically relevant in, "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification

of Taoist Liturgy." She argues that the "interplay of text and rite is linked to the emergence of a

Taoist liturgical institution in Chinese religion and has remained a fundamental dynamic of

Taoist liturgy and identity."[47] However, even in her own growth as a scholar, Bell asserts the

transformative nature of the most recent liturgical movement by sharing, "The phenomenon of

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[44] Ninian Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion,* ed. John Hick (London: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1973), 42, 45.

[45] Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion*, 81.

[46] Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion*, 43-44.

[47] Catherine Bell, "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy," *History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 367.

the liturgical movement as well as the scholarship that it has generated challenges nonsectarian scholars of ritual to be... better historians of the traditions within their own cultures…"[48] Elsewhere, Bell also argues that liturgical studies "conducted from within religious traditions is another very vital area of reflection and scholarship."[49]

Bell highlights that very few have suggested how their specific traditions, histories, and practices have formed and informed the general category of ritual. Even more broadly, Bell shares, "[i]t is not common, however for feminist or liturgical studies to concern themselves with the idea of ritual in general."[55] For instance, Bell uses the example of Nancy Jay's "Study of the Way in Which Gender Issues are Involved in the Institutions of Ritual Sacrifice," and shows how gender informs the general category of ritual. In the same way, comparative theological studies can contribute to systematic religious categories, like liturgy and ritual, by being inclusive and focus-specific. This is not to take away from the comparative theology enterprise but to encourage comparative theological studies to contribute to the general field of theology in a broader way. In this way, comparative theologians can contribute to this conversation because of their unique ambiguous position for like Bell mentions to feminist scholars, "they stand somewhat outside their religious tradition's ritual history and the history of formal scholarship on ritual in general."[56] By way of example, in this same way, comparative theologians are a nomadic group of theologians that are part of their own traditions but also distinctly separated due to their comparative nature and reflective processes.[57] To speak in Gadamerian terms, the

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[48] Catherine Bell, "Ritual, Change, and Changing Rituals," *Worship* 63 (1989, repr., Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 41.
[49] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89.
[55] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 89.
[56] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 89.
[57] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 158.

comparative theological "horizon" can give shape to the fusion of horizons between comparative

theology and theology of religions for "the sake of fresh theological insight."[58]

Regarding methodology Bell argues that there is "the need for revised methodologies."[59]

This is exactly what Gadamer's enterprise hopes to accomplish:

> There are also attempts to formulate elements basic to "reflective" and "self-critical" forms of scholarly analysis. There may be other alternatives as well, perhaps even a reconstructed phenomenology – a phenomenology for the post-postmodern era, so to speak – in which the scholar and the conditions of the scholarly project itself are systemically included as part of the total phenomenon under scrutiny.[60]

Comparative theology, with the use of an interliturgical perspective, can seek to modify

methodology. The pioneering philosophical work of Gadamer allows for interliturgies to shape

methodologies and religious modes of comparative theology. This is because liturgy transcends

texts and other literary forms by including an embodied sense in the hermeneutical space.

9.5 Liturgy as Language and Text

A potential way liturgy can connect with interreligious engagements is how it represents

aspects of language and text. The language of liturgy employs the communicative abilities

developed through liturgy to the wider community through ritual action. This language, at its

essence, is theological because its expression describes particular religious tradition(s) through

participation and experience. Language, in this sense, is "a theological mode or 'language' that

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[58] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10. The specific quote shares, "...This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition."

[59] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 266.

[60] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 266.

expresses a religious tradition as it is *experienced* may be capable of penetrating elements of faith that are not readily accessible through the traditional propositional mode of theology."[61]

Like symbols, liturgy acts as a signpost, as it directs and guides us to what is beyond the individual and group. However, liturgy does more than this. Within the act of liturgy, expression is created through individuals resulting in group engagement. The vocabulary of liturgy is vast and can include physical, verbal, listening, smelling, touching actions, shown as outward expressions of inward theology. Meaning is created by the individual and collective group, and the sharing in action, attire, possibly recitation by the individuals creates a collective meaning within the group. Within liturgy, certain participants have specific roles, thus enabling communication among and with each other through meaningful dialogue. This can be the case in call and response liturgy, musical liturgy, and others where certain participants have differing roles. Something occurs or changes in the participant. As active participants, they become the liturgy, and become an active participant in understanding through liturgy, through the dynamic exchange of meaning that brings the participant through a cycle of interpretation. The liturgy does not exist outside of the participant, just like language does not exist outside of the participant who uses language.

Like symbol, liturgy changes and adapts, which is also similar to language. Through time, liturgy changes. What causes this change? Evolution and adaptation. In some circumstances, liturgy remains the same for centuries. Possibly language changes, to be more inclusive to those who do not understand the original languages. Just like language, liturgy evolves. Liturgy calls the participant to itself, for the sake of understanding through active

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[61] Emma O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition: Liturgical Performance as a Site for Interreligious Learning," *Cross Currents* (September 2012): 371.

holistic and meaningful exchange between the individual and the collective. As the participant is involved in liturgy, they can choose to engage or disengage. One can move through the motions of liturgy without engaging in the meaningful exchange, but they miss out on the understanding that comes with participation. In the same way, as someone can be disengaged in any dialogue, they miss meaningful exchange. Fully participating in liturgy, being swept away by its call, narrative, and exchange, can lead to deeper and more meaningful religious experiences. The same can be said about experiencing the liturgy of the religious Other.

In some ways, the comparative theologian may feel as if they are an outsider because of the specific language liturgies possess. Therefore, deep commitment to the religious Other may be beneficial and increase the willingness to engage on both sides. Some religious liturgies that invite the outsider in, are helpful in bridging this divide. For example, in some Christian traditions, the sacrament and liturgies of Holy Communion, are more inclusive and they may invite other Christians from different denominations or in some instances anyone to the communion table. Additionally, the invitation to participate in the religious liturgies from the Other are incredibly helpful in facilitating understanding. And at the same time, there are some religious liturgies that are staunchly exclusive.

9.6 Liturgy as Philosophical "Play"

Gadamer's philosophical concept of play has been used to describe the process of interreligious dialogue by Paul Hedges.[62] Hedges' use of play concretely expands the terms that comparative theology is concerned with. This is achieved by embedding Gadamer's philosophy as a "meta-methodology," enabling the theologian to engage with the religious Other in a

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[62] Paul Hedges, "Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the opening of Horizons," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 4 (2016).

tangible and holistic way.[63] Through the influence of Gadamer's use of play there can be a more

integrative relationship between "object" and "subject" or better said, "interpreter" and

"interpreted." Play exists as a metaphor to give us a conceptual understanding of the

metaphysical world that exists beyond our immediate grasp. This term can be specifically

connected to the theological interests of liturgy within the field of comparative theology.

In the edited volume, "Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual

Boundaries," Moyaert et al. do not strongly mention the hermeneutical applicability of rituality.[64]

If I may push back slightly and humbly suggest that comparative theology continues to be

dislodged and disconnected from interreligious hermeneutics. See for example, Moyaert's other

studies where she highlights the usefulness of Ricœur's hermeneutical influence on comparative

theology; therefore, it is surprising that there is little reference to hermeneutical

phenomenology.[65]

In "Toward a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology," Moyaert convincingly makes the

case that there exists a sense of complementarity between text and ritual.[66] I can see how

Gadamer would strongly support this claim, given his assertiveness in regard to the dialectical

relationship between "the things." What I struggle to see in Moyaert's work is how, in the

comparative exercise of theologizing, ritual and text find or create meaning. Going further she

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[63] What I mean here by "meta-methodology" comes from Gadamer's work on fusion of horizons as a metatheory in hermeneutics.

[64] There is one reference to hermeneutics as it relates to scriptural reasoning. Marianne Moyaert, "Scriptural Reasoning as a Ritualized Practice," in *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries*, ed. Marianne Moyaert, 91. This is surprising to me as Moyaert's specialty is hermeneutics. She claims that philosophical hermeneutics is so important to the field of comparative theology that the comparative theology program at Vrije University has interreligious hermeneutics as part of their core curriculum.

[65] I do recognize scholars cannot say in all places how certain fields apply, for example how philosophical hermeneutic would apply in the area of interrituality. However, Moyaert may benefit from what Gadamer has to add on the discipline.

[66] Moyaert, "Toward a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," 3.

argues, "reading texts really provides the best hermeneutical access to understand the particularities and subtleties of another tradition."[67]And although I do not disagree with this, Moyaert is unpersuasive in describing how reading texts, or observing and experiencing rituals can lead to comparative theologizing. What my research strives to display is how this happens hermeneutically between religious interlocutors. Specifically in this chapter, we explore how this occurs interliturgically.

There are already ways in which traditions are inter-participating in new religious experiences, rituals, and rites. Gadamer's concept of play shares with us how this is already at work within theological discourse. Therefore, I explain this concept as a "meta-methodology" because it already exists within our theological being and is above and beyond any methodology that is employed. Below I argue for the interconnection between play and liturgy, gathering from Gadamer's helpful metaphor of play as a state of being for interreligious liturgy.

9.7 The Philosophical Hermeneutical Concept of Play and Festival

An interreligious hermeneutic that employs a philosophical notion of play as described by Gadamer shows promise for incorporating non-textual religious elements like liturgy in the interreligious encounter. This is in part, because play takes seriously the presence of otherness as an embedded opportunity for experiencing truth. And also, play relies on our whole being to participate in a world that accepts our uniqueness and presents otherness in a way that incorporates the horizon of another. With liturgy, especially interreligious, the beauty that sparks curiosity and commitment is presented through participation. This embodiment of otherness is held together by the commitment of those who play with all seriousness.

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[67] Moyaert, "Toward a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology," 7.

The concept of play in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics began in *Truth and Method,* however, throughout Gadamer's work, he continually connects to play and it becomes a major concept of his hermeneutics. Connected to the concept of play are its sisters, festival and ritual, because they share common characteristics, as Smart suggests above. Festival is more developed in this chapter because symbols share common interests with Gadamer's work regarding festivals. Ritual is expanded throughout this chapter and connects to play, festival, and liturgy.

A key emphasis of play for Gadamer is the ability for one to "play along."[68] To "play along" is to participate in play with "sacred seriousness" because as Grondin claims, "even when we are playfully concerned with something, we are also seriously there, with 'sacred seriousness.'"[69] Fundamentally, play is a physical activity that requires willing participation from all sides. There is a spatial quality to play that players and performers are called to embed. Thus, the metaphor of play displays Gadamer's criticism of the "irresponsible, subjective understanding of art."[70] Gadamer claims, "I wish to free this concept of the subjective meaning that it has...When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art..."[71]

Art speaks to us and invites us to "play along" with it. Grondin supports, "The play of art does not lie in the artwork that stands in front of us, but lies in the fact that one is touched by a proposition, an address, an experience, which so captures us that we can only play along."[72] To express this "playing along," Gadamer uses the concept of festival.[73] For specific example

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[68] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 108. See also Jean Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer: On the Theme of the Immemorial in His Later Works," in Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 44.

[69] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 44. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.

[70] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 44.

[71] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 106.

[72] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 45.

[73] Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 58.

Grondin claims, "Festival is characterized by a certain temporality into which we are enticed. It occurs at a given time and all who participate in the festival are elevated to a festival state and, in the best case, are transformed into a festive mood."[74] Festival is the fusion of the past, present, and future. "In a festival it is clear that those who participate in it are embedded in a play that goes beyond their subjective choice, activity, and intending."[75] Gadamer, therefore, emphasizes coupling participation with festival by stating, "Whoever participates in a cultic act in this way lets the 'divine' emerge, so that it is like a palpable bodily appearance."[76] The participation evoked by the involvement in festival communicates through their being and presence with community. "For, whoever participates in a festival wants to communicate. Communicating means, however, not necessarily an exchange of words, but rather more a being with one another, involvement in others. Being and coming together is more important than agreeing about this or that."[77]

According to Gadamer festival is more than a religious dimension for community participation. Festival, Gadamer claims, is a concept that allows for us to understand the "idea of universal communication."[78] It is the various aspects of festival, the uniting of the community, the separation of time (celebration, recurrence, intentionality), and the transcendence of the participants, that allow for the "enactment" or "festival's mode of being... in which the past and present become one in the act of remembrance."[79]

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[74] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 45-46.

[75] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 46.

[76] Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image," in *The Gadamer Reader*: *A Bouquet of the Later Writing*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 213.

[77] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 46. See Gadamer on festival in *Truth and Method* (2013), 126-127.

[78] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12.

[79] Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays,* 59.

Grondin supports Gadamer and asserts the "forgotten rituals" of life that exist in our lives that are not expressed through acting, speaking, customs or that which can be merely "observed."[80] These are the rituals that have been passed down to us and hidden in our historical effectiveness. Therefore, to Gadamer, rituals, especially liturgy, encompass far more than what can be merely objectified by methodical observation. The objectification of otherness is overcome by the playful participation through ritual that allows us to encounter otherness beyond our thinking, speaking, and writing. Beyond interreligious text and dialogue, liturgy as a ritual with fused festival components moves us beyond objectification of otherness towards a shared ontological way of being in the world.

9.8 Liturgy as a Form of Play

As James Farwell describes, "…being the performance of a worldview, beliefs are in play in ritual…"[81] and thus, liturgies act as an axis for the connection between self, community, and divine. They allow for the self to connect directly to the divine through a period of suspension, where temporality and space dimensions are interrupted by the religious liturgy. Participation within liturgies allows for the participant temporarily to experience "being." For example, the liturgical calendar of the Lutheran tradition acts in this way, as a remembrance of the church's seasons, inviting participants to experience and "be" with the liturgy.

The experience of another's liturgy can be overwhelming and unfathomable. There are internal cues that are familiar to the liturgy that may be unmeaningful to the new participant. This, along with other reasons, are why liturgies must be experienced through tradition for them to translate well to the outsider. Rappaport affirms:

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[80] Grondin, "Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer," 48.
[81] James Farwell, "Response," in Moyaert, *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries*, 246.

We are confronted, finally, with a remarkable spectacle. The unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary, and the natural. This structure is, I would suggest, the foundation upon which the human way of life stands, and it is realized in ritual.[82]

Liturgies are full of metaphorical meaning, that are meant to translate to the participants. This is very similar to the philosophical concept of play. Players in the game need to be taught how to play the game so that they find meaning within the play. This contributes to the continuation of, or desire to continue, the game. The same ought to be considered for liturgy.

Liturgies can be transformed and informed by new generations, traditions, etc. This is because liturgies are living and transformable, not in the sense that they physically exist, although the case could be made, but that they metaphysically exist in a way that brings meaning and creates meaning. Therefore, liturgies can be transformed and altered through participation. Thus, liturgies do not exist to be merely observed by bystanders but they invite participants to experience the liturgies for meaning-creation.

9.9 Liturgies are Bounded Yet

For Gadamer, festival is the embodiment of play and the mode of experiencing and participating in ritual.[85] Liturgy, especially within the interreligious setting, engages the self and couples us with others in a life-event guided by the rhythms of ritual and tradition to enact a mode of being in the world – experiencing religious otherness. This experience of otherness is achieved by participation in a separated space in time that is shared with others who all utilize

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[82] Roy Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 217.
[85] Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 24.

behaviors of play enacted in the festival by means of solidarity, common space, time, and shared embodiment. The patterns, repetition, and careful construction of liturgies allow for the philosophy of play to thrive. The liturgies invite participation into the game, although some liturgies do not and we will discuss this more below. The invitation to play is with a sense of "sacred seriousness" where one is committed to the experience in an engaged and thoughtful way.[86] The invitation to participate in liturgy is both sacred and serious play of festival and symbolizes an embodied response to religious otherness.

Liturgy requires serious participation. This is similar to the ways in which participants are involved in a dance, or with play and games. Seriousness is requested by the game and other players so that the game may continue and be played well. We do not play just for the sake of playing but for the benefits of being consumed by the game. Comparative theologians allow for liturgy to consume them when they give themselves entirely over to the liturgies of the religious Other in a serious manner. Jack Williams explains, "Without immersing themselves in the full seriousness of the liturgy, the observer will never recognize the full meaning of what is happening and will miss at least part of what is really being presented."[88]

Liturgy is performative in that it calls forth a response by participating in the liturgical experience. These types of experiences are characterized by mediation, word, rite, embodied practice, and music. Text is shared within all of these categories. It would be a simplification to say text can be removed and separated from the category of liturgy, as text is embedded in and with liturgy. This can be seen in liturgical prayer, meditation, etc. when text is utilized and functions in liturgies. This can even be seen in meditation by way of thought and structure.

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[86] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.
[88] Jack Williams, "Playing Church: Understanding Ritual and Religious Experience Resourced by Gadamer's Concept of Play," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 79, no. 3 (2018): 328.

If liturgy is performative, then we, the participants, are the performers. We perform by playing within the world of the liturgy by its rules of engagement that are created through its traditions and history. This is achieved by immersing ourselves within the game of liturgy with "sacred seriousness." We allow ourselves to embody the tradition of the Other from our own horizon. We let the liturgy of the Other interact playfully and sacredly with our prejudices, teaching us and allowing us to reflect on our own tradition's liturgies and theology.

As O'Donnell and Moyaert share, traditions have a tendency to protect certain liturgies and therefore exclude outsiders from participation.[89] We, as participants, may not have the privilege to fully play in the liturgical experiences of the Other. The same can be said with sacred texts (for example, limits of language, and access). This does not mean that new or different understandings cannot be reached. It simply means that there are engagements of play that cannot yet be experienced. This can also be said about certain texts, dialogues or other modes of interreligious engagement. There are boundaries that may block our ability to interact with religious Others and these boundaries should be respected.

O'Donnell suggests, "to enter into the liturgical experience of the religious Other leads to real interreligious learning precisely because complete entry is impossible. Interreligious learning may be most fruitful when it encounters a limitation to full comprehension."[90] Going further, O'Donnell suggests, "The person who stands on the cusp of that limitation, gazing into the depth of what can only be remotely or incompletely known, is in a position to engage in deep interreligious learning…not one of propositions, but of further questions; it invites the acknowledgement of the mystery and dignity of the Other."[91] Gadamer's metaphor of fusion of

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[89] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 377.
[90] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 378-379.
[91] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 379.

horizons fits well with O'Donnell's description of the limits of our engagement with the religious Other's liturgies. These limits can be seen as an obstacle, blocking further inquiry. Or, the limits of our horizons of interliturgical experience provide the foundation for further questioning and dialogue.

9.10 Liturgy as a Comparative Means

Liturgy acts as a dialogical encounter through call and response. Some liturgy is an act of prayer and it involves tradition, ritual and community participation. Ritual encompasses the past, present, and the future. It is a holistic and an ontological act of being in the world that invites the Other to participate in its horizon of tradition. In *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, Martha Moore-Keish suggests, "liturgical action itself is theology… itself produces meaning."[92]

Liturgical encounters with all that encompass the holy, can bring transformation. This is referred to as *theologia prima*. What comes along as the reflection that sprouts from liturgical theological encounter with God and Other is considered "secondary theology." This is how Gadamer understands the circle of hermeneutics. Moyaert supports this as well, "The first encounter with the Other is processed through reflection afterwards, which organizes and critically assesses the knowledge of God that emerges in the liturgy and equips people to participate more fully in the act of worship."[93]

Liturgy is the locus between interpretation and action. Moyaert claims that theology and liturgy have been disjointed but should be interwoven and "it is important to realize that liturgy

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[92] Marth Moore-Keish, "Interreligious Ritual Participation: Insights from Inter-Christian Ritual Participation," in Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof, eds., *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* (London, U.K.: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 71.

[93] Moyaert, *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 71.

is not something added to theology, but rather an important locus where the community theologizes and develops her understanding of the divine."[94] This is connected to Gadamer's circle of understanding by the way that primary and secondary theology are interconnected.[95] They each inform and form the other to produce new meaning. In ways, liturgy acts as a symbolic representation within the comparative moment and "[l]iturgy is always seeking to make vivid the theological meaning of the tradition for its communities of faith…"[96] Liturgy invites participants to embody active participation, through prayer, text, and movement. The language of liturgy allows for participants to fully engage with community and the divine through active rituals that may encompass some or all senses. "…This language represents a symbolic universe in which the body is central: people bow and kneel, stride through a ship, smell the incense, sing the psalm in the choir, enter the holy place."[97] Liturgy is a holistic experience that serves to bridge the distance between the participant and religious experience. This is because, "liturgy is the locus where belief is enacted, formed and enhanced."[98]

The "momentary" explorations that follow explore the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle as it directly relates to methodologies that allow for interreligious encounters. I highlight gaps that have emerged and revisit the areas of comparative possibilities using examples that I have found to be applicable.

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[94] Marianne Moyaert, "Comparative Theology: Between Text and Ritual," in *The Past, Present, and Future Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017), 197.

[95] Marianne Moyaert distinguishes between primary and secondary religious knowledge by sharing, "The religious knowledge that emerges should not be mistaken for scholarly (theological) knowledge, which is secondary to the primary religious knowledge that is conveyed through symbolic practice and inscribed on the body experience." Moyaert, "Comparative Theology: Between Text and Ritual," 193

[96] Cheetham, "The Interfaith Landscape and Liturgical Places," 553.

[97] Marianne Moyaert, "Introduction: Exploring the Phenomenon of Interreligious Ritual Participation," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 8.

[98] Moyaert, "Introduction," 8.

9.11 Comparative Moments

To display the use of play through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, we will begin by exploring the use of this methodology with current comparative moments. These specific comparative moments intersect pedagogical, methodological, and dialogical encounters with religious neighbors as an opportunity for interreligious hermeneutics.[99] The hope here is threefold, first, to share how the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is implicitly being utilized in comparative theological endeavors. Second, by using different comparative moments we will see how the versatile Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is methodologically applicable. Third, I emphasize the religious mode of liturgy in interreligious encounters as a productive and engaging embodiment of understanding.

9.12 First Comparative Moment

First, SimonMary Aihiokhai stresses, quite urgently, the need for comparative theologians to enact and embody liturgical ritual as a form of interreligious practice. As a Roman Catholic theologian from Nigeria, Aihiokhai refers to the typography of the Dialogue and Proclamation initiated by the second Vatican Council and highlights the "dialogue of religious experience," situating liturgical rituals within this sphere of contemporary comparative theology. Aihiokhai specifically addresses Christian comparative theologians by reiterating "taking seriously the cultural realities of the people who celebrate the liturgy."[100]

What Aihiokhai misses are the ways in which hermeneutics are at play within these friendships and interliturgies. Aihiokhai approaches this by sharing, "[h]ow we understand and

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[99] The phrase "comparative moments" is inspired by Michelle Voss Roberts, "Comparative Moments: A Comparative Theological Orientation for Theological Education," *Religious Education* 115, no.3 (2020): 343-348.

[100] SimonMary Aihiokhai, "Making Way for Comparative Theology in the Liturgy of the Word: In Dialogue with James L. Fredericks," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 53, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 514.

celebrate the liturgy ought to reflect a broader hermeneutic that is grounded in alterity as the

pathway to encountering the divine."[101] Although Aihiokhai approaches the hermeneutical

importance related to interreligious engagement, unfortunately Aihiokhai leaves us asking "how"

liturgy is reflected through hermeneutics. First, Aihiokhai does not mention the depth or breadth

of the "broader hermeneutic" that liturgy should ascertain. Second, what Aihiokhai mentions

regarding interreligious friendship is important, however Aihiokhai does not describe "how"

these friendships lead to understanding that is transformative theologically and comparatively.

9.13 Second Comparative Moment

The second comparative moment involves Rev. Raggs Ragan, an Episcopal priest and

comparative liturgist as she reflects on liturgical Jewish and Buddhist practices to shape her

theology of death and dying in relation to her practice and teaching in chaplaincy.[102] By research

and interviews she was able to suggest several practices that could be especially helpful to

chaplains as well as theologians with a focus on death and the dying. Much like Aihiokhai,

Ragan emphasizes the importance of companionship with others. She describes relationships

with others, especially those who are dying, as a process and journey.

Prayer, texts, liturgies and meditation are all examples Ragan has found imperative to her

work as a hospice chaplain. In her thesis, "Companions for the Journey," she includes

appendices with Buddhist and Jewish prayers and liturgies for use with those who are dying.[103]

This type of comparative application is most relevant to the current comparative theological

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[101] Aihiokhai, "Making Way for Comparative Theology," 517. Aihiokhai is a comparative theologian from Nigeria and offers a comparative theological approach to virtue ethics by making space for an African perspective. This is a turn towards virtue found in the philosophy and culture of African communities.
[102] Raggs Ragan, "Comparative Theology Learnings for Deathbed Liturgies," *Liturgy* 33, no. 1 (2018): 41. https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2017.1375815.
[103] Ragan, "Comparative Theology Learnings for Deathbed Liturgies," 47.

agenda. Not only is Ragan emphasizing the comparative interlocutors, she also demonstrates the theological and practical applications of comparative theology. However, what is striking in Ragan's work is the inadequate hermeneutical work at play in her own comparative theological reflection. Hermeneutical richness is at a loss because it is not mentioned. However, this does not take away from the content of her work.

In both Aihiokhai's and Ragan's comparative theological enterprises involving liturgy, the interreligious hermeneutical analysis is absent. By this I mean that the author does not specifically mention their methodology, even by way of practice. The hermeneutics seem to be not as thought through as the application pieces are. This does not take away from their own comparative theological journeys or work. What I am not saying is that method needs to be spelled out in each comparative enterprise. But, despite clear methodology, interliturgical work is happening in comparative theology. However, these are comparative moments by which hermeneutical phenomenology can add to the reflective energy that already exists.

Interreligious hermeneutics as it can be applied in comparative theology is in the ways in which both Aihiokhai and Ragan have come to understand and express this understanding in their work. Quite possibly, if they were aware of how their own comparative work interacted and was shaped by interreligious hermeneutics they may be better equipped to build and continue their companionships, research, and understand religious Others through interreligious liturgical encounters and even include other religious modes.

9.14 Third Comparative Moment

The third comparative moment involves the dialogical nature of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and Jewish community and how they are engaged in an ontological mode of being. The culmination of the religious experience in Lutheran theology revolves around and

involves liturgy. The dynamism that liturgy serves in Lutheran theology incorporates prayer, the Eucharist, the Saints of believers (both past and present), and the central figure of Jesus and his gracious love for God, the father and neighbor. These neighbors include proximity (those close who are interacted with day-to-day perhaps) and theological neighbors (or interreligious) who are encountered on the religious and spiritual journey. "Lutheran liturgical theology is the communal meaning of the liturgy exercised by the gathering itself. The assembly uses combinations of words as signs to speak of God."[104] This is how the prayer of the Declaration is theological, because it invites us to participate in the act of prayer with others and God. In "Worship as Meaning," Hughes highlights, "people in a liturgical event of any kind will at least in part shape the meanings of those events out of stocks of meaning available to them."[105]

The process of re-evaluating theology through the engagement with other religions is expressed in the specific example of the on-going transforming relationship between the ELCA and Judaism. Martin Luther's staunch beliefs and rhetoric directed towards Jews and Judaism reflect the prejudice and tradition which influenced Luther.[106] Before going further, it is essential to address Luther's Anti-Semitic works in *The Jews and their Lies*. Of all of Luther's works, the most controversial piece within his writings is his 1543 work titled *The Jews and their Lies*. What is most interesting is the change in Luther's attitude towards the Jewish community over time. In 1523, at the height of Martin Luther's power in the reformation, he wrote a treaty called, *Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, also translated as *Jesus Christ a Born Jew*, which was written in a completely different tone towards the Jewish people.

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[104] Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: a Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 5.

[105] Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

[106] See for example, Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* (Los Angeles, CA: *Christian Nationalist Crusade*, 1948).

Our fools the popes, bishops, sophist, and monks, and -the crude asses heads-hitherto so treated the Jews, that anyone who wanted to be a good Christian would almost have become a Jew… They have dealt with the Jews as if they were Dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than to deride them and seize their property… If the apostles, who also were Jews dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews there would have never have been a Christian amongst the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such a brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner fashion.[107]

One can conclude that Luther's theological view on the Jewish people stayed the same throughout his life; however, it is Luther's practical recommendations in handling the Jewish people that changed. This is because later writings of Luther display a completely different sentiment. In *The Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Luther suggests the following:

…their synagogues are to be set on fire, with sulfur and pitch thrown in. What does not burn is to be covered with earth, so that no stone can ever again be seen. Their houses are to be destroyed, and they are to be herded together in stables like gypsies, in order that they might realize that they are not masters in the land, but prisoners in exile. Their prayer books, their Talmud and their Bible are to be taken from them, in order that they should no longer have the power to curse God and Christ. Their rabbis are to be forbidden on pain of death to give instruction, to praise God in public and to pray to Him. This is to stop the practice of blasphemy. Safe conduct and the right to travel on the roads of the Empire are to be withdrawn. They are to be forbidden to practice usury, and their money and jewelry, their gold and silver are to be taken from them, since everything they possess has been stolen through usury. Strong young Jews and Jewesses are to be given flail, axe, spade, distaff and spindle, in order that they might earn their bread in the sweat of their brows, although it would be in the interests of public

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[107] Wather I. Brandt, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," *The Christian Society* vol. 45 (Muhlenberg Press: Philadelphia, 1962): 200.

welfare that the Jews should be expelled as in Spain, France, Bohemia, and the imperial cities.[108]

This literature by Martin Luther can be dealt with by many different approaches. The first is the allowance and acceptance of teachings in the Lutheran church and throughout the secular world. However, this would only beget more violence in the world, which is not what Luther would have wanted. There is the method of ignoring them or excusing them to Luther's old age and mental health. Nonetheless, it can be shown that these attacks on the Jewish people by Luther's standpoint were not merely deviations caused by poor health and old age. These writings could also be condemned which will dissociate us from anti-Semitic attitudes in Christianity's history, however, it has been shown that these attacks are central to Luther's theology and thus run the risk of rejection of all Luther's works. Lastly and most importantly, we can seek to understand these attacks in their historical context and learn from them, thus providing evidence for a clearer understanding of Luther's theology.[109]

So, what changed in those ten years for Luther's words to become so intense and harsh against the Jewish faith? Some state that it was Luther's impatience on the conversion of the Jewish people and apocalyptic thinking. At the end of his years, Luther desired that Jews would convert in numbers to Christianity due to the changes through the reformation period. However, that did not happen, and Luther grew more impatient.[110] It has been noted that these attacks on the Jewish community are not aberrations, but they come from Luther's primary convictions and

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[108] Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies," *Luther's Works,* vol. 47, Franklin Sherman, ed (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1971), 121-306.

[109] Mark U. Edwards, "Toward an Understanding of Luther's Attacks on the Jews," in *Luther, Lutheranism, and the* Jews, ed. Jean Halperin and Arne Sovik (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1986), 16.

[110] Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism*, trans. Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83.

anxieties towards his theology from deviating adversaries. After Luther learned that some Jews were trying to convert Christians and even perform circumcisions his severity grew into the writings of *The Jews and their Lies.*[111]

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) has renounced these writings of Martin Luther and in 1994 issued the declaration to the ELCA Lutheran Churches on the Jews and Judaism due to the rising popularity of these writings. In 1998, the ELCA set guidelines for Lutheran clergy members on the topic of Jews and Judaism to encourage a more open relationship.[112] Over 500 years, Lutherans have grappled with these writings as they have proved to alienate and distort interreligious relationships. However, some Lutherans, especially those who belong to the ELCA have worked to move beyond Luther's writings and on April 18, 1994 adopted a new statement on Lutheran-Jewish relations in which the church repudiated Luther's anti-Semitic writings titled, "Declaration of ELCA to the Jewish Community."[113]

This declaration was transformed into an interliturgical prayer at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on October 31, 2017 in Washington, D.C. This prayer is a summative example of the comparative theological endeavor:

> P: "Holy Blessed One, we acknowledge before you that the treatment accorded the Jewish people on the part of Christian believers has been a tragic development in the long history of Christianity. This includes the horrors of the Holocaust of the 20th Century in places where Lutheran churches were strongly represented. With deep and abiding sorrow, we confess before you and one another, and in the presence of our Jewish neighbors, that we have too often been silent before, or complicit in, the sad contagion of anti-Semitism that continues to this day.
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> **C:** O Maker and Keeper of us all, reform our faith and our living to reflect more boldly your endless mercy…. (continues on.)

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[111] James M Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 274.

[112] Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism*, 89.

[113] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "ELCA, Reform Judaism Leaders Meet in Dialogue," 20 May 2003, https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/4935.

P: Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, today, on this 500th anniversary, we whose lives are held captive by your word ask your blessing upon our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for our Jewish neighbors. Empower us to stand in solidarity with each other to oppose the deadly working of every kind of bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us.

C: O Maker and Keeper of us all, reform our faith and our living to reflect more boldly your endless peace…. (continues on).

All: Amen[114]

The comparative moment of liturgy expressed through the call and responsive prayer of the Declaration shows us a tangible way in which comparative theology may be used by way of liturgical expression. This comparison transformed the Declaration into prayer and joint art therefore bringing us into a moment of understanding.

This liturgical prayer incorporates interliturgy in a way that embodies the religious Other by incorporating the remembrance of the horrors of the Holocaust and the silence and support of the Lutheran church in the area at that time. This is a unique way that the Lutheran church has been able to include the religious Other in their liturgical call and response prayer. Here we see how in the reciting of the prayer, one may begin the journey to understanding the religious Other's experience in a powerful and theological way. Ontologically, the congregation participating in this prayer would need to have a philosophical posture of play and sacred seriousness to more fully grasp the content of the Other's experience.

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[114] Other Resources: Also developed the "Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations" ELCA – Reform Judaism Leaders Meet in Dialogue. Muhlenberg College "Passing the Word" Conference, October 2020, *Windows for Understanding.* The Declaration was reaffirmed in 2021 by the ELCA. Rochelle L. Millen, "On the Jews and the Lutherans: The ELCA Confronts History," in *Remembering for the Future*, ed. John K. Roth et. al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001): 1513-1528. Karla R. Suomala, "The New (con)Texts of Jewish-Christian Engagement," *Intersections*, vol. 2011, no 33, article 6, (2011): 18-24, https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2011/iss33/6. Kathryn M. Lohre, "Building on a Firm Foundation: ELCA Inter-Religious Relations," *Intersections*, vol. 2014, no. 40, article 7 (2014): 27-30, https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2014/iss40/7/.

9.15 Application of Interliturgies within the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle

Applying the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle in interreligious liturgical settings involves participation and committed engagement to understand how individuals or communities interpret religious rituals, texts, festivals, and symbols during a liturgical event. The previous comparative moments give us insight and demonstrate how the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle functions.

Pre-understandings and tradition of the interpreter: Before participating in liturgies, an interpreter brings with them their own prejudices, perhaps pre-conceived ideas and notions of the content and experience of the liturgical event. These prejudices may be known or yet unknown to the interpreter prior to participation. It is the dialogical and embodied experience of religious otherness in interliturgies that may expose prejudices that the interpreter was previously not conscious of. These prejudices are imperative to the interliturgical event and should not be ignored but brought to the surface and exposed for further reflection.

In the case of the first comparative moment above with Aihiokhai who utilizes reciprocity and vulnerability as necessary conditions for interfaith dialogue and interliturgies, he observes that this type of engagement can only occur based on authentic relationships based on mutual trust. As a model for interreligious engagement, he argues that the interpreter and the Other build connection and friendship –moving from place of stranger to friend.[115] Specifically he utilizes the themes of Jewish ritual practices in Acts 15:1-35 and how they are embedded in Jewish ritual and liturgy codes from Leviticus.[116] This is an explicit example of how the prejudices of an interpreter lay a foundation and means for the process of interreligious

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[115] Aihiokhai, "Making Way for Comparative Theology," 503.
[116] Aihiokhai, "Making Way for Comparative Theology," 512.

hermeneutics. Here we see Aihiokhai using the Jewish contexts to understand the New Testament narratives of ritual and liturgy. He argues that "the inclusion of sacred text of other religious traditions demonstrates clearly a rich understanding of the work of God found in other religions."[117] We see here that Aihiokhai has a "fusion of horizons," where his previous prejudices are overcome, and his horizon has expanded to include sacred texts of the religious Other into his own tradition's liturgies. By utilizing Jewish liturgy and rituals, applying, and advocating for them in his own faith tradition, Aihiokhai has demonstrated that the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is not just possible but fruitful for interreligious liturgical encounters.

Dialogical participation in the liturgy: As the interpreter engages in various liturgical elements, old prejudices are being uncovered and new meanings are created. These new meanings can be developed through participation in festivals that have liturgical components, and symbols that have embedded meaning in tradition. Dialogical participation with religious Otherness is demonstrated in the third comparative moment listed above between the ELCA and Jewish tradition. It is specifically shown above that through medium of dialogue these two religious representatives moved in reconciliation and forgiveness for transgressions in order to be able to build a way forward between the two. The foundation of mutual trust and vulnerability, as Aihoikhai suggests, is demonstrated in this comparative moment. It is because of this posture that the ELCA is able to sincerely create their liturgical prayer that centers on their declaration of solidarity and repentance.

Reflective outcomes: The various reflective outcomes expressed in this research aid the interpreter in processing prejudices brought to the surface because of the interliturgical event.

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[117] Aihiokhai, "Making Way for Comparative Theology," 514.

This happens, for example, in the second comparative moment with Ragan and her experience with Jewish and Buddhist liturgical practices for the dying. One of her reflective outcomes is expansion, because she expands the horizon of her prejudices to include liturgical practices from Jewish and Buddhist death liturgy to her own Episcopal theology. She also expands her horizon by gaining a better understanding of the need for companionship, shared journeying with others, and meditative practices.[118] Additionally, she highlights the importance of exchanging forgiveness and reconciliation during the dying stages.[119] These are all characteristics she gathers from her interreligious experience with Jewish and Buddhist liturgies.

Fusion of horizons: The climax or point at which fusion of horizons occurs is when new understandings become part of the interpreter's pre-understandings. This fusion of transformed interpretation of the liturgical experience is the climax of the hermeneutical experience. Thus, the interpreter begins the circle again with new insights from various or multiple reflective outcomes. The interpreter is always coming to new liturgical experiences with fresh insight and their own tradition that is rooted in an effected historical context, whether they are consciously aware or not.

These are all ways by which various components of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle can be applied. This demonstrates that the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is an applicable method to understand the processes within interreligious encounters. These comparative moments also demonstrate the applicability and potential that liturgies can have within comparative theology. Interliturgies are not solitary experiences, it is with otherness and engagement in community that creates its context and shapes the hermeneutical space. Therefore, as interpreters learn new aspects from other religious liturgies

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[118] Ragan, "Comparative Theology Learnings for Deathbed Liturgies," 44-45.
[119] Ragan, "Comparative Theology Learnings for Deathbed Liturgies," 46.

this may lead to reinterpretation of their own religious liturgies, which may lead to a deeper

understanding of their own faith and the liturgies that are expressed through it.

9.15 The Obstacles of Liturgy

There are obstacles to the utilization of liturgies as a comparative mode. For example,

liturgies that are prohibitive are common among religious communities. There is a spectrum of

prohibitions that exist in religious liturgies and rituals. Geldhof claims, "Christian liturgy is

simply not designed for those belonging to other religions and, at least historically, can be said to

purposely mark a stark difference with rituals of other traditions, especially Jewish and pagan

ones."[120] Moyaert comments on Rachel Reedijk's interviews of interreligious peoples who are

active in interreligious dialogue, "the sharing of rituals with representatives of other religions is

considered problematic and actually prohibited."[121] Reedijk notes, "[e]xclusion is an obvious

effect of ritual practices when conducted in an interreligious context."[122] Although some may be

attracted to interliturgical studies in comparative theology, this does not assume that there are not

complications, restrictions, and boundaries.

As Moyaert cites from Laidlaw and Humprey, "[t]he peculiar fascination of ritual lies in

the fact that here… the actors both are, and are not, the authors of their acts."[123] This connects

directly to Gadamer's philosophical concept of play. Participation in interliturgies allows

comparative theologians to "play along" with "sacred seriousness," so that we may let liturgies

speak again to our own theological horizon. When boundaries and exclusion exist within the

interliturgical experience, meaning-making and understanding can still occur, just differently.

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[120] Geldhof, "Why is a Comparative Turn in Liturgical Theology So Difficult," 174.
[121] Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior?" 231.
[122] Rachel Reedijk, *Roots and Routes: Identity Construction and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 187.
[123] Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior?" 238.

Reedijk's interviewees experienced "lines of division," that can certainly lead to understanding their own traditions in new ways. Perhaps, for example, their experiences of exclusion allow them to think differently about their own religious liturgies and how they are exclusive to Others. Just because boundaries and exclusion arise, does not mean that theological understanding, especially in a phenomenological sense, does not occur. Just as prejudices give us opportunity to understand boundaries and exclusion, prohibition also may provide opportunities to learn from the religious Other.[124]

Liturgy acts as symbolism. It is "a mode that 'reads' the symbolic, embodied language of liturgical performance, and that seeks to grasp and communicate its complex extra-verbal content."[125] Liturgy acts as a ritual in the same sense that it is ontological. "…ritual communicates a process of *becoming*; it expresses doing rather than *being* expressed through metaphysics... the *doing* of liturgical performance contemplates the *doing* of divine action."[126] Symbols are related to liturgy in that the liturgy is a combination of symbols that have an embedded meaning that invite the participant to share in that meaning.

Going further, tradition "… is embodied in liturgical performance. Through liturgical performance, participants 'clothe' themselves in tradition, as the liturgical performance invites the participants to 'put on' the tradition and enact it in such a way that they become the image of tradition."[127] In this way, tradition is understood in a very static way and not dynamic, like Gadamer understands the influence of tradition to be.

However, liturgical performance is dialogue waiting to happen. "It is the embodied voice of a religious tradition, needing only the liturgically embodied voice of the 'other' to become a

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[124] More on prejudice is found in chapter six, "Gadamer's Philosophical Concept of 'Prejudice.'"
[125] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 371.
[126] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 375.
[127] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 375.

dialogue leading to interreligious learning."[128] This connects to Gadamer's notion of play, as

O'Donnell claims, "to enter into the liturgical experience of the religious other leads to real

interreligious learning precisely because complete entry is impossible…" with interreligious

liturgical encounters.[129]

Therefore, the problem with comparative theology is that "there is no clear or well-worn

methodological path."[130] This is how the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle aids

comparative theological endeavors. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle gives

us the language and means for understanding in comparative theology in a way that has not been

accessible to us prior to this. This approach of Gadamer's is holistic and embodies understanding

in a way that holds both the Other and self in relation to each other while recognizing and

appreciating the differences they each possess. In this sense, truth as encountered through

interliturgy, thereby it focuses on the journey and not the destination.

Gadamer has gifted us with a comprehensive way of understanding how tradition

expressed through liturgy is experienced by the religious Other and how comparative theologians

can learn through liturgical religious expressions outside of their own. This process also allows

the comparative theologian to grow deeper and become more engaged with their own religious

tradition, because by way of understanding the religious Other, we may be able to understand

ourselves more fully if we seriously engage in the process of the Gadamerian Interreligious

Hermeneutical Circle.

9.16 Summary and Conclusion

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[128] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 375.
[129] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 379. This is because we cannot fully grasp or claim the horizon of the other.
[130] O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition," 376.

The comparative theologian seeks to experience fresh theological meaning through the religion of another. Specifically, through the religious Other's liturgy, comparative theologians are able to engage with the religious Other in a meaning-making way. The purpose of this is not to reproduce the same meaning from the Other's experience, because that is not possible, but to create new meaning for the comparative theologian to bring with them to their own religious tradition. Therefore, it is not enough just to observe liturgies. One must engage through participation, when able, with the religious community. In this way, liturgy becomes more than an art to be observed. It becomes a play to be experienced and an experience of truth-seeking.

The comparative moments addressed here are specific moments of methodology within the nomadic movement of comparative studies. As seen in these comparative moments, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle serves as a "meta-methodology" that incorporates the ways in which comparative theologians do theology. In the same breath, one striking religious mode that has risen to the surface is the unique place for interliturgy to serve the comparative theological community. Liturgies are a valid and fruitful interreligious mode for comparative theologians. In the process of comparing theologies, liturgies act as a vessel full of meaning-making and understanding for the comparative theologian. They are full of symbolism, language, text, and engagement opportunities that allow opportunities for holistic participation and understanding. Liturgies offer a unique opportunity for individual and cooperate dialogue with the divine. This allows participants, both insiders and outsiders, to contribute to meaning-making and theological discovery. Interreligious liturgy is the participation with religious Others' liturgies that allow for the theological engagement with self and Other, a pivotal outcome of comparative theology. Liturgies desire and require participation. Therefore, distant observation and investigation is not enough for meaning-making to occur in this religious setting.

The participation in interliturgy is for the purpose of seeking truth found in the liturgical expressions of the religious Other. This desire is at the forefront of the comparative theologian's journey, as they welcome being shaped and transformed by the liturgical experiences of the Other. By participating in interliturgies, the theologian is open to the new horizons they may experience, bringing them to a fuller understanding of truth.

Truth, in this regard, moves away from the subjective and objective notions and relies on something that emerges from the engagement between theologian and religious encounter. Truth, in this sense, is developed through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle as it comes into being with the theologian. Therefore, this bears witness to the foundational thought that truth is not merely something that is objective or subjective, that one can grasp or attain through subjectivity. It is something that can be experienced through the hermeneutical journey. Therefore, the emphasis is on the verb, not the noun(s) of truth. This allows the theologian to be able to act upon and be affected by the truth experience, in this specific case, the liturgies of the religious Other.

Along these lines is the phenomenon of interreligious ontological ambiguity, which I lay out in more detail in Chapter 10, "Exploring the Ontology of Interreligious Hermeneutics." This is an instance that arises out of the comparative moment, described as the sense that the interreligious experience of the Other is an object of the world and also the subject of experience. In this case, the theologian recognizes that lines of ambiguity are present in the liturgical experience because they experience the divide of participant in and observer of religious liturgies of the Other. To bring to the surface the interreligious ontological ambiguity that may exist in these encounters, comparative theologians can recognize the process and work of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle and how it is at work in their process of

experience and understanding of the religious Other. Gadamer's philosophical concept of play is important for liturgy as a religious mode for comparative theological studies, because when engaged with sacred seriousness, it can evoke transcendent truth. Therefore, when playing with sacred seriousness, "The general concern of hermeneutics is to make understandable what is difficult to understand, and one special case of it is to reawaken frozen letters to speech, in other words, 'to let speak again' what is fixed by signs and letters."[131]

In reference to religious texts, Gadamer himself stresses "extend[ing] our question beyond that of the Gospel to the broader field of religious speaking and language."[132] And in terms of interpreting the New Testament, Gadamer suggests that "here hermeneutics acquires a profound religious character since it no longer has to do with a method or the skill of our rational faculty."[133] I would go even further to suggest that Gadamer would agree that hermeneutics, especially related to (inter)religious encounters, calls for the embodiment of dialogue, and thus is liturgical in itself. Comparative theologians should feel encouraged to practice a mode-of-being through the embodiment of play and openness to ontological ambiguous spaces, thereby allowing for the religious Other to speak to our prejudices in a way that invites our own religious traditions to "speak again" to us.

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[131] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Religious and Poetical Speaking," in Alan M. Olson, "Myth, Symbol, and Reality," *Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion* Vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 90.
[132] Gadamer, "Religious and Poetical Speaking," 92.
[133] Gadamer, "Religious and Poetical Speaking," 97.

CHAPTER 10: Exploring the Ontology of Interreligious Hermeneutics

> "Ontology is about being, and being is about the relations between us and the world."[1]

10.1 Returning to the Cartesian Conflict

The Cartesian problem is connected to long-standing tradition going as far back as Platonism, commandeered by western civilization. The dualism of Platonic thought is central to this idea and is normally misunderstood by western thinkers, leading to its influence on Enlightenment thinking. In order to dislodge itself from the Cartesian hold, comparative theologians can learn from Gadamer's hermeneutics. The learning objectives should not only focus on specific subjects, religious dimensions, but also include large philosophical, theological, and ontological questions and hermeneutical methodology.

10.2 Studying Ontology to Enrich Comparative Theology

Gadamer practiced comparison with Plato's dialogues in such a way that it informed him ontologically and subsequently his philosophy. This transformation stems from his own comparative studies of Plato, especially concerning the comparisons between the later and earlier dialogues.[2] This is a tangible way to show how Gadamer is useful in interreligious hermeneutics. Interreligious hermeneutics is the exercise of understanding the Other as self-understanding because the Other and the self are considered an intertwinement of embodied praxis. Therefore,

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[1] Christopher Dawson, "Gadamer's Ontology: An Examination of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Being in Relation to Heidegger, Plato and Hegel," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1996), 25, https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.6696.

[2] Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 3-4.

when interreligious hermeneutics interprets between faiths there are commonalities between faiths and there is also a shared unity and characteristics that can exist beyond what is "in common."

The problem with the dichotomy of rational objectivism is its inability to transform a lived experience in the world. It is unable to be understood as "being" because it separates the subject and object in such a way that they cannot engage dialogically. This is expressed through the scientific study of religion where facts and statistics precede human lived reality. In comparative theology it is the extensive use of textual analysis and reliance on linguistic analysis, language comprehension, and semantic variation that is not only significantly based on western thought but also is a reaction to it and is counter from comparative theologians to theology of religions. Thus, comparative theologians continue to rely on the very strategies they seem to disagree with.

Comparative theologians have been imprisoned by the subject and object dichotomy. Instead, we need to take a totality view of the comparison event. This is the fusion of horizons and generates its own being. What I am describing here is a mode of being whereby the participation of otherness challenges our theological and philosophical experience and thus transforms our interreligious experiences and traditions. Understanding comparative theology as a mode of being in the religious and theological world transcends the field to an ontological sphere, where dialogical action moves comparative theology beyond itself into a metaphysical space of understanding. By viewing interreligious hermeneutics as an ontological force of being we move beyond the restricted systematic boundaries and categories of theology of religions that restrain us, and we give rise to a deeper, more meaningful theological journey away from traditional embeddedness and to a sincere quest of understanding through the religious neighbor.

Gadamer claims, "It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."[3] In a sense, comparative theology has begun to step towards ontology by its very nature, the nature of being in-between religious traditions, the familiarity of the home tradition and the strangeness of the other tradition. Then when the other tradition begins to feel like home, the home tradition begins to feel strange.

Comparative theology can be seen as a nomadic endeavor in academia. With its emphasis on the tradition of the theologian, it offers a path towards ontology that previously was not available. Additionally, the focus on prejudice being shaped by tradition and through lived experience also displays connectedness to ontological experience. Both tradition and prejudice exemplify the ways in which comparative theology already leans into a hermeneutical ontology. This ontological journey is both comparative and theological.

The very process of comparison, the interaction between text and reader and Other creates its own way of "being." It is the event of "being" itself. In this way, we move beyond the current dual-dimensional comparison. There is a meta-event that occurs when comparative theology is activated. In this way, comparative theology has promise to be dynamic.

The ontological argument is not interested in the search for other objects. The mode of being is better answered or answered differently in non-verbal forms and it is precisely due to this that the mode of being in comparative theology transcends Enlightenment influenced thought. When comparative theology is practiced in an ontological/metaphysical sense, the problems are no longer the issues comparative theology currently has at hand. Comparative theologians can move beyond text, include large scale theological discourse, and include those

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[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 306.

who do not associate themselves with a particular religious perspective. Thus, non-comparative ontologies from the Enlightenment period are much more restrictive in their quest for truth. But comparative theology in the dynamism of comparison is more inclusive and offers a richer ontology and complex space for ontology to thrive.

10.3 Back to the Critiques of Comparative Theology

Several critiques of comparative theology by comparative theologians themselves have risen since its new turn nearly 30 years ago. These critiques centralize on the possibilities, methodology, and a highly focused emphasis on textual analysis. These are valid critiques that I will explore in this chapter and I will attempt to explain how these weaknesses in comparative theology have been developed and influenced by Cartesian thought as Gadamer has supported. To answer this Gadamer takes us back to the Greeks, particularly Plato. Gadamer was sensing a similar push towards foundationalism in the field of philosophy by his contemporaries and so we look to this point in Gadamer's work for assistance.[4] This research provides a stepping point for other comparative theologians in terms of an ontological hermeneutic development.

The first critique is described by David Cheetham and involves the avoidance of meta-philosophical, theo-ontological questions in comparative theological projects. Cheetham asks, "how is it possible to compare religions without asking the more ontological questions…"[5] This is in response to Francis Clooney and how he finds it unnecessary to address these questions in comparative theological studies. Clooney maintains that comparative studies are best done "on very specific items such as certain individuals or groups, certain texts, certain objects, certain

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[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 17.
[5] David Cheetham, review of "Faith Among Faiths," by James Fredericks, *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 7, no. 3 (2000): 359.

practices, etc."[6] In this way, Clooney argues that one does not necessarily need to address the larger philosophical and theo-ontological questions when crossing religious boundaries.

Marianne Moyaert critiques that there is a privileged preference towards text in comparative theological study. Moyaert emphasizes that this is "rooted in a long complex history…"[7] I argue that this is also a response from comparative theologians to the disciplines of theology of religions and the scientific study of religion. Paul Hedges supports this by arguing that there is "a need to move theology away from textual analysis…"[8] Although there has been comparative research involving religious modes outside of text and narrative, they usually include an emphasis on textual support for religious rituals, symbols, liturgies, and other religious dimensions.

Catherine Cornille suggests the critique that there "remains a need for further reflection regarding what appear to be presuppositions and the methodology for this approach."[9] This has been addressed in previous chapters of this research, however, I will more clearly detail the connection between methodology and ontology.

I propose that the issue foundational to the preceding critiques is the unintentional focus on religion as being an object of study. This is inherent in western theology in itself; however, it has specifically gathered from western biblical theology and theology of religions. As I have explained in previous chapters and will continue here, this is influenced by Cartesian thought

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[6] Francis X. Clooney, "Reading Religiously Across Religious Borders: A Method for Comparative Study," *MDPI* 9, no. 42 (2018): 2.

[7] Marianne Moyaert, "Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems," *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (2018): 2, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000360.

[8] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Brill Research Perspectives in Theology* 1, Iss. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 39.

[9] Catherine Cornille, review of "Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions," by James Fredericks, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2001): 132.

that has seeped into western traditional religion. I offer in response to the critiques above alternative ways of interpreting the methodology of comparative theology, specifically as an overarching ontology for the purpose of interreligious hermeneutics.

10.4 Gadamer and Ontology

Over a hundred pages into *Truth and Method,* Gadamer finally mentions ontology and he does this by linking ontology with art and history. The ontological function is both transformational and an experience of truth through the representation of art and questioning of history and tradition. Experience, to Gadamer, is always experience of human finitude. "The intention of the conceptual analysis under consideration is, for all that, concerned not with the theory of art, but with ontology."[11] Here, Gadamer is highlighting the ontological nature of understanding that exists above theory. He came to this understanding through his encounter with Plato and the Greeks. We shall begin here, as Gadamer's understanding of Plato has not remained the same from the start of his philosophical journey.

Gadamer's central ontological theses are first, that being is self-presentation, and second, that understanding is always something that happens; something that occurs.[12] These central aspects are dependent on Gadamer's appropriation of Plato, Hegel, and Heidegger.[13] Gadamer attributes much of his philosophy to his own perspective of Plato's philosophy and the Greeks. The whole of Gadamer's philosophy is derived from the issues of classical metaphysics, especially from Plato and many of Gadamer's hermeneutical themes can better be understood in the context of Gadamer's Greek work. The later Platonic sources, *Parmenides, Sophist,*

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[11] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 138.
[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), "being is self-presentation...(112)" and "understanding...participating in an event of tradition (302)."
[13] These have been explored in more depth in chapter three.

Statesmen, and *Philebus* moved Gadamer's hermeneutics toward a "comprehensive ontological vision."[14] It is from the hermeneutical horizon of these texts that Gadamer transformed his understanding of Platonic thought to include the ontological process by which dialogue functions.

10.5 Gadamer's Orientation with Plato

Ontology has much to do with interpretation and is "the unending mode of inquiry of discerning 'the one in the many' and 'the many in the one.'"[15] Thus, Gadamer reshapes our focus on Plato's philosophy to go beyond Plato's universals and Ideas, to focus on Plato's philosophy as "the one and the many."[16] To Gadamer, "It is this very dialectic of the One and the Many which establishes the finite limits of human discourses and insight – and our fruitful situation halfway between single and multiple meanings, clarity and ambiguity."[17] This leaves the relationship between the "subject and object" or "self and other" open and dialogical.

To remind ourselves, Gadamer distinguishes his understanding of Plato from others by first, the way in which Plato engaged dialogically to uncover truth through understanding. This is different than Gadamer's contemporaries because they were using Plato as a means of interpreting Plato's dialogues as dogmatic doctrine *for* being.[18] Therefore, according to Gadamer, Plato's dialogues have much more to do with being than contemporarily understood by his peers who were caught in the dogmatic understanding of "two-world" ontology.

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[14] Brice R. Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999)*,* 5.

[15] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 66.

[16] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 119.

[17] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 119.

[18] More is explored regarding this in chapter 2.

Gadamer does not interpret Plato as having a two-world ontology. Gadamer understands ancient ontology as a genuine dialogical partner and encourages us to go beyond the subject and object dichotomy toward a "belonging together."[19] This belonging together goes beyond the correlation, relativity, or appropriation towards a relationship of "participation" rooted in the medium of language. Therefore, as Wachterhauser puts it, what is left for Gadamer to find in the Platonic dialogues is "inseparable from a linguistically constituted context of inquiry."[20] Within the arc between "one and many," "I and Thou," "subject and object," exists an ambiguity that prevails ontologically.

10.6 The "One and the Many"

The crux of Plato's philosophy, according to Gadamer, rests in Plato's account of "the one and the many." Therefore, "[a]ll things are what they are only in their infinite relationships to other things, including bother positive and negative logical relationships."[21] The focus on "one and the many" is foundational to Gadamer's ontology because it shows the multiplicity and relationship between "the things." Therefore, Gadamer's ontological perspectivism is considerably formed and informed by Plato's idea of the "one and the many."[22] "Being" is always "one and many" and the reality of "identity in difference."[23] For example, Gadamer uses numerical realities to show how this is also the case with mathematics. Numbers can only be defined and understood by their relationship to other numbers. This is what is central to the "one" and the "many" analogy Gadamer shares with us. All of these have contributed to Gadamer's reinterpretation of Plato's works that, as Gadamer claims, have been misinterpreted

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[19] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 369.
[20] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being,* 10.
[21] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being,* 8.
[22] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 120. See also, Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being,* 7.
[23] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being,* 7.

by Cartesian-influenced thinkers.[24] Summarized clearly here by Gibson, "... and so unlike the Cartesian attempt to isolate the self, the relation between self and world that hermeneutics describes necessitates the other and therefore the shared commitment toward a conceptualization of truth that is mutually determined in light of common ideas."[25]

Gadamer compared the later dialogues of Plato with the earlier dialogues and what he noticed was the way in which dialogue occurs and how this is hermeneutically shaped. Gadamer begins his own study of Plato directly with the information and tradition of Platonism passed down to him from Heidegger. Heidegger and contemporary German philosophy were Gadamer's pre-understandings that he came to the Platonic texts with. It is crucial that we summarize those two traditions as they capture the horizon of Gadamer's initial understanding of Plato.[26] However, Gadamer's view of Plato is a unique controversial reading and divergent from traditional German philosophy.

It was through the dialogical encounter with the Platonic texts that Gadamer's prejudices regarding Plato began to shift in divergent ways from his predecessors. Gadamer realized that Plato's development from the earlier to the later dialogues were not so concerned on the content of the "Ideas" but the process by which Plato engages both the "one" and the "many" in the texts.[27] This experience with Plato leads to Gadamer's development of his philosophical hermeneutics.

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[24] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 100 and specifically see chapter 2, "The Proofs of Immorality in Plato's *Phaedo*, 21-38.

[25] Christopher Gibson, "The Common Ground between Plato's Ontology of Ideas and Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," (PhD thesis, University of Ottawa, 2018), 283.

[26] See the "Translator's Introduction," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the *Philebus*," (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), xi. Wachterhauser's *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology* and for more content see Gadamer's "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, Trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1980).

[27] See specifically, Gadamer, "Plato's Dialectical Ethics," 77-78.

Essentially, for Gadamer, Platonism is based on "the dialectical relationship of unity and multiplicity that stands under them [the Ideas]."[28] Plato shows that an individual idea cannot produce enough knowledge, but the interconnectedness of the Ideas is understanding, "how it can be that one and one are two and how 'the two' is one."[29]

Gadamer recognizes his debt to Heidegger and is also critical of Heidegger. Ontology, dealing directly with Being or "the being of things," was part of Gadamer's hermeneutical endeavor derived from Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* or "Das...des...sein" known as, "the there(ness) of being,"[30] also known as, the thing that asks the question of being. Hermeneutic ontology is the interpretation of existence and experience of the world. Tradition and pre-understandings form the basis for how we interpret and understand the world and therefore other beings in the world.

Gadamer is a theorist of radical thought surrounding dialogue and the position of understanding and knowledge which thereby insists on exposure to newness and otherness. Additionally, Gadamer's theory of tradition highlights the difficulty to think outside of one's own tradition because we are so consumed by our tradition that we are unable to expose it. Exposure can be accomplished by engaging with themes outside of our own pre-understandings. In *Truth and Method*, specifically in chapter 2, "Ontology as Work of Art and Its Hermeneutical Significance," Gadamer signifies the perspective that tradition and history are not something distinguished from our own experiences of the world.[31]

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[28] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being*, 69. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Schleiermacher als Platoniker," in *Kleine Schriften,* Vol. III (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), 145.

[29] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 135. Emphasis added by Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being,* 69.

[30] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being*, 69. Citing and translating Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Schleiermacher als Platoniker," in *Kleine Schriften*. Vol. II (Tubinger: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), 145.

[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 106-178.

Ontology is "being in the world" and to Gadamer, being is not defined as something that can be understood but as Zabala claims "understanding *is* Being, since the understanding of Being represents the existential particularity of *Dasein*."[32] Gadamer links the issue of western hermeneutics to the problem of enlightenment thought and its emphasis on rational objectivism.[33] "Contemporary scholarly thinking about religion is bedeviled by the post-Cartesian legacy of dividing reality up into *res extensa* and *res cognitans*, subject and object,…"[34] Gadamer's insight leads us beyond the Cartesian effect on western thought and hermeneutics and towards an ontological approach.

10.7 What Comparative Theology Gains from an Ontological Approach

In regards to textual comparative projects, I am not arguing that the comparativists not study languages or texts in original languages. We already know that many comparative theologians have significantly shaped comparative theology through their language studies and projects, as well as learning the horizon of the Other. I am merely suggesting that comparative theology move beyond texts in their comparative studies. Moving beyond text can allow comparative theology to explore liturgies, symbols, rituals, and oral traditions with more attention. Some religious traditions have a history of oral narratives that have been passed down for generations.[35] This also allows for the opportunity to engage religious traditions that do not have a heavy focus on written text within their traditional understanding. The inclusivity of non-

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[32] Santiago Zabala, *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology after Metaphysics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 85.

[33] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 292.

[34] Stanley Stowers, "The Ontology of Religion," in *Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith*, ed. Willi Braun and R.T. McCutcheon (London, U.K.: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 437, E-book.

textual traditions has the possibility of sharing with us by expanding our views on "text" as well as draw our attention towards oral traditional patterns and rhythms of religion.

Conversely, and equally important to my point of ontology is the focus on theology through comparison. Comparative aspects involving or emphasizing symbols, architecture, ritual, etc. should demonstrate theological themes that are enveloped within these dimensions of religion. Many times, uncovering and interpreting these dimensions in specific studies discovers veiled theology. Here I will also mention historical and archeological discovery as equally relevant to theological endeavors, as they can supplement findings with context and content.

Specifically, let's take the physical world as an example of the comparative mode which a comparative study could incorporate. The various views and understandings of nature and creation within religious traditions should not be ignored or simply overlooked in the comparative project. This is a specific example of how our own tradition may overlook these because western traditions have dichotomized the connection between creation and creator. However, over and over again we can see non-western traditions highlighting aspects of creation like rivers, animals, harvest language, seasons which continually remind us of the connection between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. There should be more said about this in comparative theology.

Ontology releases comparative theology from its restrictive boundaries and invites the interpreter to participate in a theological study that engages with otherness and growth of the self by ways of categories, discoveries, modes of religious belonging, and expanding perspectives by including non-textual based traditions. Moving beyond the limited categories of theology of religions and scientific study of religion, comparative theologians immerse themselves in intricate and sacred spaces, moving to-and-fro between comparative and theological spaces.

Moving beyond the categories of similarities and differences allows comparative theologians to avoid getting trapped in by their own preconceived ideas of the religious Other. In fact, we are invited to think creatively through reflective dialogical exchange with the other tradition. By opening the horizons, comparative theologians welcome all forms of learning including expansion, rejection, adaptation, etc.

By highlighting the differences expressed in otherness, no longer given value by the positive or negative value system but addressed as beauty seen in the world, we learn to appreciate otherness as itself, with no pressure to explain itself or justify its difference as valid. Recognizing difference for what it is, we place value on it and we recognize the value of our own differences in relation to it. Although similarities and differences can be helpful categories, we can see how moving beyond these categories can encourage critical and theological thought to manifest our own understanding of truth and captivate us beyond what we could ever imagine possible in comparative theological study.

What comparative theology offers the rigid ontologies of the Enlightenment is the invitation to a mode of "being" where all participants play an essential role and learn by way of comparison. The mode is not exclusive to those who claim a particular religious tradition, but open to all who want to engage. In this way, comparative theology offers inclusivity and dynamism.

Comparative theology can contribute to ontology because hermeneutic ontology is derived from a particular horizon, that is, 19th and 20th century German philosophy. This hermeneutical lens allows for adaptations to its ontology. Comparative theology can allow for hermeneutic methods and ontology to be shaped by non-Germanic hermeneutics. This is because tradition is understood as formative and informative to our particular horizon and hermeneutics

is a product of that horizon. Connecting this back to Gadamer, we can see how tradition forms and informs our worldview and therefore our methodology, in this case. Encouraging comparative theologians to illustrate their methodology can contribute to learning of the Other through method. I am sensitive to Gadamer's arguments against development of a method, and in the end, there seems to be a better way to "do" comparative theological study. Not that interreligious hermeneutics can lead us better to discovering "truths" or "untruths" but it can help us better uncover and reveal truth in experience.

Therefore, when we recognize that our religious horizon is not complete and cannot be fully formed by our own self-understanding, we recognize our need for the Other, for difference, for otherness. We recognize that certain perspectives can share truths that resonate with our being and understanding. When we remain open to the newness expressed by diverse, fresh, different horizons, we anticipate the gift of truth to present itself. Comprehending the interreligious hermeneutical process ontologically helps us gain a holistic perspective of the event of understanding that occurs when we engage in comparative theology.

10.8 Remaining Critiques for Gadamer

A critique I still hold with Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is that his interpretations of tradition, historical effected consciousness, and horizon – essential to his hermeneutics entirely – are shaped and informed by the western philosophical tradition. Although Gadamer's hermeneutics is a fruitful way of understanding interreligious hermeneutics, it does not necessarily mean it is the only way. I encourage non-western tradition to develop hermeneutical theories outside of the traditional philosophical avenues normally contributed by centuries of dominant cultures, traditions, and world-views. These views tend to have very little space for non-dominant, minority cultures, gender identities, etc. leading to very limited research

contribution and overall horizon. In the case of expansion, more can be done in this field by inviting minority religious groups to participate, lead and give space for them to direct the dialogical nature of the field. This type of inclusion, I think, would not only be supported by Gadamer's hermeneutics but derived from it as a fulfillment of the hermeneutic ontology.

Christianity in America, both theologically and ontologically, has been shaped by outside horizons. For example, this is especially noticeable with Deism and rational thought. In a way, comparative theology may help determine these influences and possibly offer intentional correctives to unintentional theo-ontological shifts. This is because comparative theology in action is ontological. For example, this is also connected to why Deism is present in American Christianity, influenced by interpretation of Greek mythology and philosophy, specifically Platonic dualism, which are the roots of Enlightenment thought.[37] Gadamer's corrective is his interpretation of Plato's writings, especially regarding the understanding and application of dialogue and its relation to the object and subject dichotomy. The pendulum has swung too far with Enlightenment thinking and influence. Therefore, comparative theology offers western religious traditions a way forward towards better understanding for the sake of fresh theological insights. Gadamer offers a unique understanding here:

> Religions find themselves constantly setting up boundaries between themselves and other religions, whose adherents are the "unbelievers". In our enlightened times this is still with us… today we need to unite the claim to absoluteness which belongs to the nature of all holy knowledge, with the recognition of other traditions and even to develop a solidarity…[38]

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[37] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato,* trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 23-24.

[38] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image: So True and So Full of Being!" in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writing*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 198.

The main virtue of dialogue of this nature is to continually reorient the self and the self's understanding "from occupying the place of foundation."[39] Comparative theology transcends social constructs and functions by way of a meta-understanding. The comparative mind functions by way of continuous transformation through new and fresh understanding.

Contextualizing comparative theological studies through identification of meaning and value within original historical, social, and religious location for comparative value allows for us to move beyond these categories. The subjectivization of religious traditions threatens the notion that it transcends reality. The points of loci (social, historical, language) act as signs and/or symbols. As Roger Savage argues with Ricœur, "No culture exists without a system of symbolic representations through which individuals and groups articulate their social experiences, their positions in society, their feelings, and their dispositions… for human beings, there is not non-symbolic mode of existence."[40] Therefore, no one experiences the religious Other apart from their own tradition and self-understanding as well as the tradition and understandings of the religious Other. And therefore, "[w]e all stand in the ontological difference and will never be able to overcome it."[41]

10.9 Ontological Community

As mentioned previously in this research, language is more nuanced than strict boundaries of linguistic interaction. Language encompasses interaction, engagement and participation. Active language, language in action, is conversation. "Conversation is the medium

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[39] Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 318.

[40] Roger W. H. Savage, *Music, Time, and Its Other: Aesthetic Reflections on Finitude, Temporality, and Alterity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 10.

[41] Zabala, *The Remains of* Being, 79.

in which language alone is alive."[42] And for Gadamer, "Being that can be understood is language."[43]

Gadamer's ontology differs from Greek ontology entirely. "Thus Greek ontology is based on the factualness of language, in that it conceives the essence of language in terms of statements... On the other hand, however, it must be emphasized that language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*."[44] Subjects and objects have an intersubjective relationship, where being and language are inseparable. The intentionality is the interconnectedness of meaning between subject and object - in essence, subject and subject. It is a web of connections of human life that appear and manifest through interconnected intentional relationships. We can find the manifestations of these interactions in constant flux. This is an active and ongoing act that is not finalized through any typical method.

10.10 Ontological Ambiguity

Because phenomenology is concerned with the nature of human experience, we can use ontology to interpret human experience in the world. Human nature has an "ontological ambiguity." Humans are considered both objects in the world and subjects of experience. In interreligious studies, specifically, comparative theology, an ontological ambiguity exists. The text or religious mode of being studied or engaged with is both an object of study that can be examined, investigated, and researched, and it is a conscious lived religious experience. The conscious lived religious experience cannot be investigated like an ordinary object because it is being. This is the experience of the interpreter as they explore the religious Other. The dual

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[42] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 490.
[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2004), xxxi.
[44] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 462.

nature of this reality in comparative theology, I claim, is referred to as "interreligious ontological ambiguity."

Interreligious ontological ambiguity is "the sense that the interreligious experience of the other is an object in the world and also the subject of experience."[45] An example of this would be the study of a particular religious liturgy or ritual. Often the comparative theologian subjectively incorporates the religious object within their objective observation. In some studies, the theologian will be disembodied from the religious Other, and considers themselves as the subject investigating the religious object in the world. There are some consequences to this "way of being" and at least, a particular loss at stake. The separation between our selves, as subject, and the religious Other, as object, can produce a discomfort and confusion. There are a few notes to be said about this. First, religion should not be viewed as a fixed reality, but as a "becoming." Second, our relation to the religious Other always retains an element of ambiguity. This is seated in the nature of understanding. Third, ontological ambiguity "allows free movement between actual and possible worlds, enabling new phenomenal possibilities to be constructed."[47]

Ontological ambiguity describes the liminality of "that I am" and "who I am." For example, a specific religious text is always an object of study as it exists to be read, examined, and explored. However, the religious text is also a subject. Its existence and meaning is shaped by its tradition, being embedded and continually interacting with the world around it. Therefore, the religious Other is both an object in the world and a subject of experience. The interpreter acts in the same way. In the comparative theological realm, this is the essence between sacred and mundane, symbol and reality, self and Other. This is how comparative theological endeavors can

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[45] Quote used from page 292.

[47] David Gooding, "Putting Agency Back into Experiment," in *Science as Practice and Culture,* ed. Andrew Pickering (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 72.

also experience a "double ontological ambiguity." This double ambiguity exists because of the liminal space between the finite and the infinite.

The ontological ambiguity exists in the spaces between "I" and "Thou," between "theologian" and "otherness." This is the existential space that can be unsettling and uncomfortable but embraces the co-existence and shared tradition between the two. This tradition intertwines the bi-polar entities, connecting their "beingness." The Other is not Other because of its own tradition and commonalities, but the Other exists as a separate entity sharing differences that can bring beauty to the ontological encounter. This ontological ambiguity shares commonalities with the space that exists between Plato's forms and matter. This transcendent space, existing for transient space allowing for understanding to interact. The same interaction between Plato's forms exists between theologian and text, and the way for interaction occurs in dialogue, through dialectic. This space is the sacred space that exists for interreligious encounters, where prejudices are transformed, knowledge transmitted, and spirit is translated. "Beingness" is born from these sacred spaces of liminality within the interreligious context and carried forward in the ways comparative theologians' reflect on and write about these encounters.

Gadamer's hermeneutics welcomes, and at some level expects, tension that comes with dynamism and ambiguity. "The whole basis of language and speaking, the very thing which makes it possible is ambiguity or 'metaphor.'"[48] Therefore, as Gibson suggests, "the interaction between reader and text is a constant process of working out an inexhaustible array of possibilities, yet it is precisely because the text can speak to the reader in an unexpected way that

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[48] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, 111.

the reader brings his own prejudices toward meaning into question."[49] This is the crux of

hermeneutics, the axis – if you will, "...the space between reader and text, [is] created by the

simultaneous strangeness and familiarity of the text."[50]

Such ontological ambiguity is at the heart of comparative theology. Therefore, "Such

people are comfortable with both religious diversity and religious ambiguity."[51] The

interrelationship between I and Thou, between interpreter and religious Other, is ambiguous and

interdependent on each other. Together, as subject and subject, they inter-mingle, like dancing

partners who share the leading role. The religious Other becomes more than an object available

for subjectivity, it becomes part and parcel in the process of becoming with the interpreter.

The continuous flux of becoming is the state in which the interpreter and religious Other

influence and shape each other's prejudices and traditions. They are the event of being that is

continually becoming. Becoming is the process of hermeneutics, a fusion of pre-understandings

with new understandings influenced by conversation-styled engagement with otherness. Like

hermeneutics, this is an art and not a science. There is room for interreligious ontological

ambiguity. A strong commitment from both subjects, as well as a willingness to engage, is

required for this type of deep religious learning. Objective notions of the religious Other in

interreligious engagement, allow for ontological ambiguity to be minimized but it will not

evaporate. Ambiguity will always be present in some form because of the relationship between

object and subject, notions of dual religious belongings, and natural ontological space between

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[49] Christopher Gibson, "One and Many in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Gnosis* 15, no. 1 (2016): 11.

[50] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2006), 295.

[51] Michael Atkinson, "Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology: A Theoretical Approach to A Practical Dilemma," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 3, no. 8 (2019): 51.

self and Other. The purpose, then, is not to rid oneself of this ambiguity but to recognize its presence, nature, and activity in the hermeneutical encounter.

The problem of rational objectivism is alive in the contemporary comparative theological endeavor. By understanding comparative theology as a mode of being, the religious and theological world transcends the field to an ontological sphere. In this way, comparative theology is an ontological way of being in the world through comparative understanding. Moving into an ontological mode, comparative theology brings the theological journey beyond its existing approach. In this chapter, interreligious ontological ambiguity is shown to be a natural by-product of interreligious hermeneutics that allows space for religious tradition, other, and self to be transformed by its own objectivism and subjectivity.

10.11 Being and Becoming

Gadamer utilizes the concept of play to display "the mode of being of the work of art."[52] The sacred seriousness of play invites the player into a "curious mode of being" that sways the player away from the objectification of play.[53] Gadamer's philosophical concept of play is more than a way of behavior, it is a mode of being. For Gadamer, "it is not aesthetic consciousness but the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art and thus the question of the mode of being of the work of art that must be the object of our examination."[54] Therefore, play helps us understand the subject and object relationship. This is why Gadamer claims that the players "are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players."[55] Therefore, understanding that play "Spiel" originally meant "dance," helps us understand the motivation of

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[52] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 106.
[53] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.
[54] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.
[55] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 107.

play. This is why Gadamer claims, "The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition."[56] However, the dance between being and becoming exists because "being emerges from becoming!"[57] Going even further, Gadamer describes the relationship between being and becoming as, "Coming-into-being, becoming is, after all, becoming being. It is being that has come to be."[58] Becoming is the fusion of horizons in the process of hermeneutics. The integration of horizons is an ongoing activity that embeds new horizons of experience with previous situated horizons. There is not an end to this process, so measurement is not based on the steps of method but on the movement towards being. Becoming is therefore directional, in the sense that one can move towards or way from their being. Being and becoming, understood in this way, allows for comparative theology to be similar to a symbolic liturgical dance between the "already" of the interpreter and the "to be" that is to be gained from experience with the religious Other.

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[56] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 108.

[57] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Artwork in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!' (Goethe) (1992)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (2006): 70.

[58] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, P. Christopher Smith, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 114.

CONCLUSION: Towards a New Horizon for Interreligious Hermeneutics in Comparative Theology

11.1 Introduction

Comparative theology is a constructive project in which theologians interpret the meaning and truths of one tradition by making critical correlations with the classics of another religious tradition. Francis Clooney's "passing over and coming back" as the hermeneutical methodology for comparative theology is insufficient as an approach to other religions.[1] And although Clooney does not mean for this to be the main framework of comparative theology, it functions and is utilized as such. Thus, the method of comparative theology begs more substance. This research developed a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutical process by gathering from philosophical concepts and several comparative theologians influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Explored throughout the previous chapters, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics contributes more to the methodology of comparative theology than how it is currently being expressed. He reaches for something above and beyond contemporary hermeneutical methods which he understands to be ontologically situated in the mode of being. Gadamer explains philosophical hermeneutics through various metaphors like fusion of horizons, play, festival, and symbol. By applying these hermeneutical insights specifically to the field of comparative theology, I demonstrated that comparative theology is more than "passing over and coming back," it is mode of being in the world – a mode of "being and becoming."

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[1] Francis X. Clooney, "Introduction to Comparative Theology in Australia and Asia," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 3, no. 2 (2020): 129-130. "The Vocation of the Interreligious Theologian: Paul Knitter's Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 58 (2003), 103.

Understanding comparative theology as a mode of being allows for deeper and richer theological engagements with others. Due to the nature of ontological ambiguity, comparative theologians are not studying the religious Other as an object but as a subject embedded in its own prejudice and tradition, formed by its own horizon inherently connected. This is supported by Gadamer's philosophical understanding of historically effected consciousness as embodied historical understanding that informs and forms all our understanding of the world. The engagement with the religious Other in this way, allows for the religious Other to speak into and inform the pre-understandings of the comparative theologian, allowing the transformation of their prejudices and traditions.

The goal of comparative theology is not just meaning-making, it is primarily truth-seeking and this is achieved through the process of interreligious hermeneutics. A more interreligious hermeneutical framework can strengthen and expand comparative theology by utilizing a Gadamerian hermeneutical method that guides one through the process of interreligious engagement. Therefore, the thesis of this research is *efforts in comparative theology are enhanced by the development and application of a hermeneutical approach based on philosophical insights from Gadamer, or what I will call a Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle.* This research developed a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutical process by gathering from philosophical concepts and several comparative theologians influenced by Gadamer.

11.2 The Problem

Comparative theology, from its inception, has employed a nomadic experience for the comparative theologian due to the lack of methodological insights that offer support beyond textual interreligious analysis. The mode of being within comparative theology is a unifying

hermeneutical experience transforming the comparativists' horizon. In this way, comparative theologians are concurrently experiencing faith formation, which creates a sense of unity. This speaks to the spiritual and formative process that comparative theology embraces and exposes theologians to. Although comparative theologians are on their own journeys, however nomadic they may feel, they do so together in a dialogical process with the religious Other, processing from their own theological viewpoint. The comparative theological journey is no longer an individualized process but one that invites otherness, difference, and is characterized by openness, ambiguity, and faith. The community of comparative theologians and all involved, exists in a way that is faithful to their own tradition and the tradition of the religious Other, holding on to tension, and balancing the ambiguous and unforeseen nature of faith. In this way, comparative theology is more than "acts of faith seeking understanding."[2] Comparative theology is a way of being in the world, open to otherness, and equally holding their own faith in tension with the religious Other.

Interreligious hermeneutics has been employed more recently to assist comparative theology in its theological endeavors. Many comparative theologians have looked to Gadamer's philosophy for support but there has been limited research on developing an interreligious hermeneutic based in Gadamerian philosophy. Therefore, there have been disconnections made between comparative theology and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Method in comparative theology is not expansive enough to include the diversity of religions and expressions of faith. There is too heavy of a focus on text, textual analysis, languages, and translation. By prioritizing texts, comparative theology unintentionally excludes non-textual religions, faith traditions, and theologians. The hyper focus to text steers our

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[2] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.

theological attention away from other theological dimensions of religion that have been pushed to the periphery. The methods comparative theology employs do well with a comparative focus on text but do not necessarily support the dimensions of symbols and liturgy embedded in lived religious traditions. The lack of attention to methods in comparative theology have restricted comparative theology to employ methods from other fields of academia.

A strong issue in methodology for comparative theology is situated within the cartesian confliction. Descartes' *cogito* is the point of contention for Gadamer because it centralizes the climax of rationalism's stronghold on the modern philosophical and theological enterprise. As described before, Cartesian rationalism has influenced western thought in a few ways. It heavily subjects truth and reason to the attributes of the scientific method. Therefore, the subject and object dichotomy is directly related to cartesian thought. Cartesian thought has also insisted on eliminating prejudices for true inquiry and knowledge to be produced. Therefore, the goal of complete objectivity is strongly held and supported by both the influence of the scientific method and elimination of prejudices. Therefore, according to modern western thought, true knowledge could be attained only through method.

11.3 The Resolve

Hans-George Gadamer expresses several components of philosophical hermeneutics that have influenced the new wave of comparative theology and comparative theologians. This study has explored Gadamer's historical context and how it relates to his philosophy and the central philosophical concepts and themes throughout *Truth and Method*. Throughout *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's main inquiry is the nature of human understanding. Truth is not fundamentally that which can be determined by a relatively set of criteria but through events or experiences in which we are engaged and changed.

It has not been my endeavor to systematically lay out Gadamer's philosophy but to highlight parts of Gadamer's work that seem fruitful for the project of interreligious hermeneutics, especially for the comparative theological project. I simply want to highlight the dialogical partners Gadamer has examined so we may have a better understanding of Gadamer's philosophical horizon as it fits within the realm of interreligious hermeneutics.

The main contributions Gadamer adds to comparative theology are wrapped around the philosophical concepts of play, prejudice, tradition, dialogue, reflection, and fusion of horizons and their effects on any interpreter. Through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, we can see how encounters with religious otherness can provide an opportune moment for interreligious understanding. This understanding does not necessarily mean that agreement or acceptance has automatically taken place. As seen in the various reflection outcomes of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, all reflections derived from the interreligious encounter of understanding can become present. These include, challenges, conflict, and rejection.

Gadamer provocatively asserts that the Enlightenment was "prejudice against prejudice..."[3] This is precisely because enlightenment influenced thinkers understood prejudice with a negative connotation as unjustified partiality or bias. Gadamer countered the Enlightenment ideal of unbiased knowledge and impartial understanding by arguing that it is *because* of tradition and prejudice we can internally process human experiences, and subject them to critical reflection. This is why Gadamer believes that certain models of rationality distort our horizon and the most radical of these is the justification of certainty found in Cartesian

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[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 273.

thought.[4] And so we now are able to accept the limits of truth and appreciate the added value. This is why interpretation primarily is in relation to understanding reality as it "discloses itself to us, and... the role that we play..."[5] This is the universal nature of interpretation. And thus, Gadamer's advice is a better approach to understanding our questions about ourselves and the Other.

11.4 Scope and Limits of Research

Due to the scope and limits of this research, certain specific philosophical concepts, comparative theological work was developed. Although more can be done in this area, as described in more detail below, this research opens a new frontier for interreligious hermeneutics specifically used for comparative theology. The specific philosophical emphasis on Gadamer is intentional for a few reasons.

First, Gadamer has often been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and overlooked in interreligious hermeneutics.[6] Take for example David Tracy and Anthony Thiselton's misinterpretation of fusion of horizons as "consensus" or "mutual agreement" discussed in chapter 2.[7] Although Gadamer has been used in interreligious hermeneutics prior to this research, it has been the case that Gadamer's philosophy was taken out of context, misrepresented, or dismissed altogether.

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[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2013), 284. See also Brice R. Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 20.

[5] Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being*, 19.

[6] Gadamer is often misinterpreted because of his use of high German and his frequent creation of new philosophical terms.

[7] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Cornille and Conway, 2. Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 317.

Through this research I hope to convey a better representation of Gadamer's philosophy and its significant contribution to interreligious hermeneutics, and the field of comparative theology. Second, Gadamer's specific philosophical hermeneutics, as described in depth in the chapters prior, demonstrate a significant correlation to comparative theology. Although Gadamer's intention was not primarily theological or interreligious, as we have seen, his philosophical contributions rest comfortably in this field.

Some of Gadamer's philosophical work was entirely left out of this research because of the limits of my research and time. Further development work needs to be done with the concepts of specific religious traditions such as Christian ecumenical hermeneutics, and non-textual religious traditions. Texts often are written by the majority, by those who are privileged in societies, those who are literate enough to express their religious understandings, (theologies, myths, etc.,) privileging one horizon and excluding religious traditions that do not have written "texts" within their religion. Developments in specific religious dimensions of religions such as aspects of worship, religious art and music, and worship space and aesthetic may serve interreligious hermeneutics as well.

In terms of comparative theology, this research focused on influential western comparative theologians like Francis X. Clooney, Catherine Cornille, Paul Hedges, and Marianne Moyaert. These theologians were chosen because of their significant nomadic hermeneutical processes developed "on the cuff." In some ways through this research, I resist and push back at these theologians, not to be critical of their work but to help them move forward in their quest for interreligious understanding. I hope this work will be encouraging and supportive to their comparative theological journeys.

11.5 Review of the Story: Summaries of the Parts and Chapters

This research is divided into three separate parts, a review of comparative theology and philosophical hermeneutics as connected to the philosophy of Gadamer; the pursuit for an interreligious hermeneutic influenced by Gadamerian philosophy; and the applicability of a Gadamerian interreligious hermeneutic specifically attuned for comparative theology.

Part I: Finding Gadamer's Hermeneutic Influence

The introduction of this study centered on the model of interreligious engagement and the development and approach of comparative theology. This discussion situated the comparative theological endeavor and highlighted critical concerns within the discipline. These concerns involved attention to and focus on text, specificity and particularity of comparative studies, and lack of a clear methodology. Several comparative theologians have highlighted the necessary move beyond text, often supporting other religious modes (like ritual) with text complementing the comparative study. The concern involving specificity is the avoidance of larger onto-theological questions within religious traditions. Last, comparative theology has been criticized for having unclear methods. These three criticisms are warranted and have been addressed throughout this research. A resolve to unclear methods in comparative theology is found in the support from philosophical hermeneutics, specifically through Gadamer's philosophy.

Chapters two and **three** served as the literature support for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Specifically, chapter two recognized the power and influence of Greek and Enlightenment thought on Gadamer. Gadamer, himself, traces the journey of hermeneutics to Greek thought and he specifically connects this to his revelations of dialogue found in Platonism.

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This gives Gadamer his foundational critiques of the Enlightenment as influenced by Descartes, supporting the objectification of interpretation in the process of understanding.

      Chapter three recognized the influences of German Idealism of 19th century philosophy on Gadamer and his reactions to contemporary philosophical developments. It is here that I highlighted the influences of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and others and how Gadamer is distinguished from them, specifically relating to the philosophy surrounding understanding, prejudice, and tradition.

Part II: The Pursuit for an Interreligious Hermeneutic

      Chapter four moved Gadamer's voice into the realm of interreligious hermeneutics by concentrating more thoroughly on the concepts of historically effected consciousness, the role of prejudice in the process of understanding, tradition, culture, truth, and fusion of horizons. This led us to Gadamer's emphasis on conversation as a model for hermeneutics.

      Chapter five illustrated the role of interreligious dialogue has in interreligious hermeneutics by recognizing the praxis of interreligious dialogue as the foundation for interreligious hermeneutics. This was achieved by laying out the current portrait of interreligious dialogical history, forms of dialogue and limitations. This section dived into theoretical approaches to interreligious dialogue like communication theories and philosophical hermeneutics by stressing the influences of Ricœurian and Gadamerian hermeneutics. Gadamer's hermeneutical use of conversation is explored as well as its use by David Tracy. It is here I argued that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, based in the model of conversation, shown by interreligious dialogue, can be a model for interreligious hermeneutics.

Chapter six explored more fully the role of prejudices of the interpreter within the interreligious hermeneutical process. This chapter started with an epistemological and historical overview of prejudice and the change that has occurred in the term, indicating how the times have changed our perception of our pre-understandings. Gadamer has the Enlightenment, Cartesian influenced, as the culprit for such misunderstandings of the role of prejudice. Gadamer develops the hermeneutical concept of prejudice by confronting the Enlightenment idea that accomplishing objectivity is possible by putting aside all prejudices. The Gadamerian philosophy of prejudice differs from modern understandings of prejudice influenced by the Enlightenment period, and how the term is expressed in modern social scientific definitions. This chapter surveyed Gadamer's philosophy in contemporary comparative theology and asked how hermeneutics in comparative theology can be enhanced with Gadamer's understanding of prejudice. The chapter ended by sharing challenges and implications from Gadamer's philosophy of prejudice for comparative theology in the twenty-first century.

Chapter seven developed the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, a Gadamerian informed methodology for interreligious understanding. This chapter explored specific philosophical concepts like play, prejudice, text/tradition, dialogue, reflection and fusion of horizons and their roles in the process of understanding. The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle was fully developed as a method to demonstrate the hermeneutical process that occurs during interreligious engagement.

Part III: Specific Components of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutic

      Chapter eight turned our attention back to the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle by diving into the cyclical and philosophical process of understanding religious otherness.

This chapter explored the applicability of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle with specific examples. This chapter explored the research of comparative theologians and recent theological comparative studies and how they experience the various phases of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. The hermeneutical tools emphasized for the comparative theological enterprise were the interpreter's prejudice and tradition, the interpreter's ability to engage with the religious through philosophical concept of play, festival, theological reflection through fusion. Within this chapter, the theme of ontology and its connection to interreligious understanding was examined, especially related to its ontological nature. This defining Gadamerian attribute complements interreligious hermeneutics by viewing the cycle of understanding "that comes to be" rather than choosing a method that is employed.

Liturgy as a comparative theological mode is explored in **chapter nine**. Gadamer's philosophical concept of play significantly underscored this chapter's theme, drawing the interpreter into the game of conversation through a mode of being in the world. Specific interliturgy comparative studies are shown here but this chapter emphasizes that interliturgy broadens the comparative theological agenda because of its emphasis on embodiment.

Finally, **chapter ten** embraces the ontological nature of interreligious hermeneutics by understanding comparative theology as a mode of being in the world that gravitates toward a more meaningful theological quest of understanding religious otherness. This is where the onto-theological method of "being and becoming" is embodied. This chapter highlights the ontological ambiguity that exists between the interpreter and religious Other, the dual natures of belonging that exists with the comparative theologian and how this ambiguity suits to serve rather than distract from comparative endeavors.

11.6 Research Implications

The implications of this research are specific to the field of comparative theology by way of a more complete approach of an interreligious hermeneutic. The first implication of this research is the applicability of Gadamerian philosophical concepts of prejudice, tradition, play, festival and symbol in relation to liturgy, and fusion of horizons in comparative theology. The second implication of this research is the development of a more complete interreligious hermeneutical approach that allows comparative theology to move beyond text. The third implication is that the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle encourages attention to diverse interreligious counterparts like symbols and liturgies that embody interreligious otherness. The fourth implication involves the development of ontological ambiguity that gives language to the dynamic comparative theologians experience within the in-betweenness of interreligious hermeneutics. The final implication of this research is it moves comparative theology into an ontological mode of "being and becoming," shaping the comparative theologian and their religious tradition. We will summarize each of these in turn.

The first implication involves Gadamerian philosophical concepts and their applicability to interreligious hermeneutics. Some of these terms are prejudice, tradition, play, festival and symbol as related to liturgy, and fusion of horizons. Prejudice has been held captive by Enlightenment thought and seen today to have a negative connotation. However, prejudice, as Gadamer has argued, is necessary for the interpreter in the process of understanding. Tradition is not a static, disconnected, and inherited entity but is transformative, influenced, and informed by prejudice and engagement with the Other. Festival is the achievement of past and present merged in ritual and remembrance. Gadamer describes this as a way of understanding communication as a universal idea. Play is described as a hermeneutical mode of being that involves the posture of

sacred seriousness in encountering religious otherness. Festival and symbol related to liturgy demonstrate the embodied play associated within liturgical events. Fusion of horizons is not the agreement or consensus of two or more perspectives but incorporating new understandings of the religious Other into the interpreter's prejudice and therefore, tradition. For Gadamer, being is dialogical in nature and is intertwined in becoming, because they are relationally joined with each other.

The second implication involves the development of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, which can serve as a useful tool for comparative theologians in interreligious hermeneutics. Developed from Gadamerian-sect philosophy, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle displays the process by which interreligious understanding comes to fruition through the cyclical process of engagement with the religious Other and self-reflection. Texts can be verbal or non-verbal; different religious modes are valid sources of interreligious engagement. Reflection outcomes can come in several forms that can range from acceptance to rejection.

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle focuses on otherness for fusing horizons. Gadamer maintains that one cannot fuse with another if they are the same. Explaining hermeneutics Grondin cites in his biography on Gadamer, "I understand the ability to listen to the other in the belief that he could be right."[8] This is why Gadamer emphasizes otherness in hermeneutics. It is only through otherness that one can fuse. The main influencers of the interpreter are prejudice and tradition. Through the process of conversation and dialogue with the religious text or tradition by way of a question-and-answer reflection by the interpreter, the interpreter is met with religious otherness. Through these experiences and encounters, the

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[8] Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 250.

interpreter is faced with reflections that can come to them in various forms, challenges, tensions, reinterpretation, and expansion of understanding. These reflection developments then become part and parcel of the interpreter's new prejudice and embed themselves in their tradition.

The third implication of this research is the applicability of liturgy as a textual counterpart within the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle. We see that liturgical participation is the act of "sacred seriousness" within the mode of play that presents as embodied symbolism. Interliturgies are an effective way for interreligious engagement as they allow the interpreter to participation in interreligious otherness while at the same time experiencing the embodied nature of religions.

The fourth implication is the emphasis on the presence of interreligious ontological ambiguity. Within the context of the interreligious ontological mode of being, exists a sense of ambiguity. This ambiguity is the liminal space between ourselves and Other, between mundane and profane, between finite and infinite. This ambiguity is the realization of objective and subjective encounters with the Other.

The final implication is the development of an interreligious ontological mode of being. Comparative theology is more than "comparative" and "theological," it is a mode of being in the world, creatively comparing the in-betweenness of religions, the interconnectedness of faiths, and the embeddedness of spirituality. This mode of being in the comparative theological field transcends it to an ontological sphere. This sphere moves comparative theology beyond itself into a metaphysical space of hermeneutics. Therefore, understanding interreligious hermeneutics as an ontological force of being, we can move beyond the static barriers that the typology of theology of religions offers. This moves us beyond, to a more meaningful embodied embeddedness in the sincere quest for understanding the religious Other.

To bring to a close what I have determined here, comparative theology has come a long way in its hermeneutical approach since its conception. In many ways, comparative theology has developed unsystematically, resulting in a less rhythmic methodology. Due to this, it has been criticized by other fields such as systematic study of religions, as being obscure and enigmatic. As a response to this critique, I argue that comparative theologians are heavily devoted to the study of religious texts. Although this in and of itself is not a problem, it does hinder the comparative theological field by missing some pertinent theological opportunities through different religious modes like liturgy. Influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle explains the process by which interreligious theological encounters are experienced and processed. This process is more than a methodology, it is the way in which humans come into the mode of being with the religious Other. This mode is always changing, altering, and influencing the self and by way of the Other. This process is always becoming. The most influential pieces of the hermeneutical circle, besides the religious Other, are the prejudices and tradition of the comparative theologian. In what I have argued through this research, the influences of comparative theologian's prejudices and tradition not only are the foundation of their hermeneutical experience but also guide the encounter and dialogue with the religious Other. And therefore, the comparative theologian's prejudice is influenced by the encounter with the religious Other and the reflective process that ensues from that encounter.

11.7 Suggestions for Further Application

I am well aware of the nature of using a western philosophically influenced hermeneutic for a meta-hermeneutical approach to interreligious engagement. Although the limits of this hermeneutical approach are still left to be determined, one point of contention is the lack of diversity within the philosophical tradition that Gadamer rests within. Chapter three described in

detail the significant philosophical contributors who have influenced Gadamer. These philosophers are concretely located within the German philosophical camp. Although this research allows for various hermeneutical approaches to be explored and applied to comparative theology, it focuses on one particular western-influenced hermeneutic. For further research, hermeneutic implications from various diverse perspectives could expand on what has already been developed in this research. I hope that by understanding interreligious hermeneutics in the ways I have described above, others will build upon and expand this hermeneutic by the use of diverse voices.

To comparative theologians, I hope this research encourages the use of various religious modalities and modes without pressure to justify theological work with religious texts. Just as interreligious dialogue functions, both metaphorically and literally, as the way in which we come to understanding, so can religious symbolism and liturgy. These religious modes allow us to see beyond our current horizons, invite embodied dialogue between self and Other, and allow opportunities for the fusion of new understandings to be shaped by prejudice. There is still significant work to be done with religious modes such as religious music, art, architecture, and aesthetics and their contribution to the comparative theological project.

In terms of various reflective outcomes of the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, comparative theologians should allow themselves space to explore disagreeable and large-scale questions of difference that may result in understanding through rejection. As Francis Clooney suggests, choosing smaller theological concepts or texts is encouraged over large and vast-sweeping theological statements or understandings. This is because taking on a smaller concept allows the interpreter room to expand and go deeper into the research.

For some time now, comparative studies have focused on commonalities, but by doing so there has been less attention to difference and disagreement. By understanding comparative theology as a mode of being, this allows for comparative theologians to explore large-scale questions of difference as well as dissenting topics that may otherwise go unexplored. Smaller topics give opportunities for deeper theological gain.

11.7 Conclusion

The relevance of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for comparative theology is resounding and encouraging to the possibilities that the field is open to. Even beyond philosophy and theology, Gadamer's influence has been growing in news fields in academia like nursing, psychology, and technology, as more of his later works are being translated.[9] This is because these areas are finding the relevance of Gadamer's thought, especially in reference to philosophical themes we have covered in this thesis, like fusion of horizons and play.[10] Gadamer's hermeneutics has been connected to biblical literature and theology. For example, Arie W. Zwiep holds, "[p]erhaps the most important event in the post-World War II period for biblical hermeneutics is the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's '*Wahrheit* and *Methode*' in 1960."[11] Not only has Gadamer's philosophy influenced other theological and academic fields,

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[9] See Gadamer's lecture, "Tasks of Philosophy in the Present Age," in Berlin on June 9, 1952, translated by Cynthia R. Nielsen and Ian Alexander Moore. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writing of Hans-Georg Gadamer* vol I., eds. Pol Vandevelde and Arun Iyer (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer* vol II, eds. Pol Vandevelde and Arun Iyer (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

[10] For example, a bi-monthly Gadamer reading group has been formed more recently. In this group, many Gadamerian scholars come together to read and discuss Gadamer's work. In this group there are many different fields represented in and out of academia. This shows the wide range of applicability of Gadamer's philosophical thought.

[11] A. W. Zwiep, "Bible Hermeneutics from 1950 to the Present: Trends and Developments," in *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken: Von Origenes bis zur Gegenwart,* ed. O. Wischmeyer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 945.

the research gap this thesis seeks to address is how a holistic understanding of Gadamer's philosophy is most applicable to comparative theology.

Outside of the hermeneutical direction needed in comparative theology, the field seems to lack a more complete hermeneutical approach. This has been shared by many comparative theologians and specifically in 2012, Paul Hedges shared, "I am not convinced that there is a Comparative Theology methodology – Francis Clooney has admitted the process he uses is often ad hoc – and so beyond fairness and detailed study of the original there is little ground in this undertaking."[12] Therefore, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics fits the lack of methodology that Hedges admits here.

In response to the debate of comparative theology and theology of religions in the approach to religions, it is helpful to think of the varying responses of theology of religions typology as an outward expression of a theologian's prejudices. The theological assessment of religion within the spectrum of different approaches to religious otherness is a byproduct of an individual's prejudice, formed and informed by their tradition. The varying frameworks and worldviews are cultivated from one's horizon and experiences; therefore, are open to engaging in the hermeneutical circle and the various reflective outcomes. It is not so easy to say that each of the typological responses are just approaches to religious otherness. They are, however, hermeneutical horizons and within each of these horizons one still must enter into the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle for interpretation.

The Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is more than an approach to religion, it is a meta-ontological way of understanding how humans come to understanding the

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[12] Paul Hedges, review of *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: A Basis for Interfaith Dialogue* by Máire Byrne, *Journal of Religious History* 36 (2012): 622, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2012.01245.x.

world and their experiences within it. But as we have seen, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is not just a meta-theory of methodology. Even in the particularities of interreligious dialogue, play, and liturgy, we can also see how it functions as an aid to interpretation. So, the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle is both a meta-ontological way of being in the world and a process of becoming, experienced in the on-going cycle of interpreting religious otherness as it encounters our own prejudices. In this way, comparative theology is more of an art than a practiced theory, because comparative theology is a way of being in the world while simultaneously interpreting the experiences of the world in the process of transformative fusion of sameness (self) and otherness (Other). In other words, the spirit of interreligious hermeneutics, as displayed through comparative theology, is modeled through the Gadamerian Interreligious Hermeneutical Circle, which demonstrates the cycle of understanding religious otherness as a natural dialogical process of the "already" and the "to be." Therefore, comparative theology is the integration of being and becoming.

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