

When Words Fail: On the Power of Language in Human Experience

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Abstract

Beyond the ordinariness of experience in daily life there are times when we encounter an experience for which words seem inadequate to express and communicate the experience. The focus of my remarks for the first paper will explore this situation of the potential limits of language for understanding experience. The question of these limits depends on an analysis of just what takes place in experience and (the hermeneutic experience of) language. Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory for an answer to the question, I will show just how experience and language are interrelated, and, as a result, I will show how the dynamic of language formation expands to accommodate what appears to be inaccessible and inexpressible, while allowing experience to sustain its own richness.

Keywords

Philosophical hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, language, experience, failure of words

Presenting the Difficulty

How often have you had an experience, especially one that is deeply profound, after which you exclaimed "it so moved me there are no words to say what it means"? Words have failed to take hold of the meaning of the experience, and yet, presumably, you do want to speak about it, you want to bring it to its understanding, if not to yourself, then to another. Let me give you two examples of this kind of experience. The first is an experience of what we would call the sublime. My example comes from the philosopher Immanuel Kant. In an essay on our ability to know ultimately reality (Kant means here knowledge of God) by reflecting on nature, Kant writes in

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relation to a microscopic observation of a single drop of water:

When I contemplate the intrigues, the violence, the scenes of commotion in a single particle of matter, and when from there I direct my gaze upwards to the immeasurable spaces of the heavens teeming with worlds as with specks of dust—when I contemplate all this, no human language can express the feelings aroused by such a thought; and all subtle metaphysical analysis falls far short of the sublimity and dignity characteristic of such an intuition. (Kant, 2003, p. 159)

What kind of experience is this really? As a truly sublime experience, it is an experience in which what is being presented in it is something literally unrepresentable, in this case the intricacies of life and the immeasurable quality of the cosmos. As Kant tells us, the thought of this exceeds the ability of thought to comprehend it, where even the feeling aroused by the thought of this cannot be captured in language.

So, what is really taking place in this profound experience that is excessive to the point that we are at a loss for words? What, in other words, is the precise break that is responsible for language failing to achieve its function, which is to express and communicate, not just to others but even to ourselves? In the most profound experiences, we see that they are often, if not always, accompanied by what the ancient Greeks named as the experience of wonder. Wonder is after all more than fascination, and certainly it is not the same as mere curiosity. Modern media wants us to be curious, but has little interest in having us be captivated by wonder. Wonder is a deeper phenomenon that draws us into the strange and the challenging. The experience of wonder signals a certain placelessness with respect to what we are experiencing—a being out of place because we cannot go further in our thinking and speaking with the categories of expectation involved in our experiencing. As in the Kantian experience of the sublime or any one of those human experiences in which a gap opens between word and feeling, word and expression, we are, in a sense, left almost speechless in wonder. *Almost* speechless, but not totally speechless, for while indeed speech may desert us when it comes to articulating a certain experience, such desertion is not necessarily evidence of the complete failure of speech, and thus the end of speech. Quite the opposite. To be left almost speechless in wonder, one can say, is to be at the opening of thinking and speaking. Certainly one can well imagine that in the attempt to communicate a profound experience of joy, one wants to say so much that one does not know where to begin.

This experience of the insufficiency of words is not restricted, of course, to experiences of the sublime. The second kind of experience like this is more far-ranging. It can be found in not only in those deeply personal experiences that range from the traumatic to the blissful, but also in the awkward situation of speaking in the face of death. The case of psychological trauma is an extreme case in this regard. Trauma is the shattering of an experiential world in such a way that there is an unbearable affect. These traumatic affects remain experientially unintegrated. The movement toward understanding is not just thwarted, separating a person from the normal flow of life, but often times inaccessible. As such, there is an additional difficulty when it comes to speaking. Unlike the overpowering thought of the intricate order of life and the cosmos, our deeply personal experiences are often inseparable from memory—or better stated, from memories-in-transition, from the return of experience that is infected with loss. In this memory-in-

transmission it is especially so that words face the prospect of failing, of not being able to say what has been experienced.

But here too, more so than in any experience of the sublime, the prospect of the failing of words does not signal the impossibility of speech, but just the opposite. Here I am simply following Gadamer. In his words: “The breakdown of language actually testifies to one’s capacity to search out an expression for everything In actuality, speaking has not come to an end but to a beginning” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 93). The issue of the breakdown of speech thus becomes the question of where we are to find the words for what we cannot say. Now, the short answer to this question is actually quite simple: it is from language itself that we find the words for what we cannot say. But this simple answer depends considerably on a certain understanding of the nature of language, and along with it, a certain understanding of the intimate relation between language and experience. In my remarks that follow, I want to present the hermeneutical account of language and experience that will allow us to see the full force of this answer to the question. I will divide my remarks into three parts.

Part 1: Language and Experience from a Hermeneutical Point of View

So first of all, let us put aside a notion of language and of experience that is inadequate for what I want to say in this regard. Regarding language, then, our ordinary understanding of language seems to be shaped by how we think language works in language acquisition, let us say in a child learning words from her mother. As if this were the beginning of language, the mother says the word “ball” and rolls the object in front of the child, repeating the association so that the child comes to name the object with the word “ball.” One can well imagine more sophisticated examples of the same phenomenon: a drug company invents a name for a chemical compound because the name of the compound by itself would not suffice for the demands of marketing the compound (How do they come up with those names?); or, a computer technician gives the name “flash drive” for a newly created device for media storage. But coining a term or simply giving names to objects is not language in its fullest sense. It is not even our basic linguistic relationship to words, as if the use of language is at the whim of the user of language, something in front of the speaker at his or her disposal like a tool (Gadamer, 2007, p. 105).

Sooner or later, we will run out of nouns and have to use a verb! We will not just utter a word, but try to say something in speaking by relating one word to another. Giving names to things is not yet discourse where meaning unfolds through the relation of words in combination and play. More to the point, what is implied by these examples of naming is that the word functions merely as a sign, as the word “ball” is a sign signifying the round object of play for the child. To regard language as a system of signs is to assign to language an instrumental character, for the nature of a sign is to refer to something beyond itself and thus has no meaning within itself. As signs, words are effectively detached from the reality that is being spoken about, a reality that is presumably already known. To understand language in this way raises the problem of how linguistic instruments can effectively express non-linguistic material. This is the epistemological problem that Nietzsche sees with language and that he “solves” by turning this broken connection into a radical theory of interpretation. A simple physical object such as a leaf, with all its sensible particularity, will always be drained of its particularity when translated into words, which, ultimately, as the work of concepts, can only convey the general. In going from the thing

to the word, there can only be a dissimulating transference. For Nietzsche, then, words cannot say what we experience sensibly and accordingly cannot render intelligible what we see.

How, though, is language to be understood otherwise? To say the least, as Gadamer presents his case in *Truth and Method* a word is not just a sign, but is more like an image (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 416). What he means is that, unlike the arbitrariness of a sign, the word bears a deeper connection to the appearance of what is named in the word. But when he says the word is more like an image, he is not suggesting that a word is a mere copy of reality in the way some think that art copies, or imitates, reality. Gadamer wants to claim that language is not a second order presentation: first reality presents itself, then language comes second to re-present the reality in words. For Gadamer, who follows Heidegger in this regard, the nature of language is to be disclosive of reality, it allows something to show itself, to reveal itself. Such coming to appearance is to be understood phenomenologically. What comes to appearance in the word is, to use the German word, *die Sache*, the issue or the matter at issue, the thing that is meant.¹ Language allows the matter to come to appearance in its understandableness, that is to say, in its meaning. Therapeutic conversation illustrates this point very well. The reality of a client's stress, for example, may have produced physical symptoms, but the worldly reality of that stress is precisely what is coming to word in the dynamics of speech where there is never simply one word.

For Gadamer, this coming to word connects not only thinking and speaking, but also the deep accord between word and thing. A person who thinks something—literally, says it to himself—means by it the thing that he thinks.² There is no reflection when the word is formed, just as there is no consciousness of our speaking when we speak, for the word is expressing the matter intended. So Gadamer says, “the starting point for the formation of the word is the substantive content that fills the mind” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 426). Whether there are factors that may hinder the understanding and the articulation of the intended thing in word, as we see in therapeutic conversation, or whether in our human speaking we ever completely say what we mean are developments within the enactment of speech that do not affect the principal intention of speech. To say this in another way, Gadamer does not think that human speaking must find a way to cross a bridge between a wordless world on one side, and a worldless word on the other. Our words are worlded from the start; the reality of language is that the world is presented in it.³

Accordingly, for Gadamer language is nothing other than the experience of the world. And what then of experience? As experience of the world, it too should be understood accordingly. “Experience,” Gadamer insists, “is not wordless to begin with only to be made an object of reflection by being named by being subsumed under the universal of the word. Rather, experience of itself seeks and finds words that express it (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 417). To understand this idea of experience requires that we let go of the inadequate idea of experience that Gadamer is rejecting here, namely, the idea that experience is a part of knowing, in the same way we think of data. Considered in this way, experience is nothing more than a basic component of knowledge that completes itself only through an act of reason, that is, in the establishing of patterns and generalizations from the data of experience. So understood, experience is something to be made available to mastery by the act of knowing. It is what is given over to the power of the knowing subject, and thus stands within the framework of calculation and repeatability. As data, experience stands

in relation to the proposing subject who finds order in the world through reason. When considered in this way, experience has little to do with language and understanding.

So, against this view, Gadamer holds that experience is actually a more encompassing phenomenon when we think of it in terms of human experiencing; that is to say, when we consider experience as that which we undergo and gain something from. This is experience that is taking place in time and is something the individual is involved in. The idea of experience here is actually best described by Heidegger. He writes: “To undergo an experience with something, means to attain it along the way, by going on a way” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 73). To ask then about how the experience of something becomes intelligible, that is to say, to ask how experience can be at once an experience *of* understanding, is to turn to the experience of language. It is to turn to language that seeks and finds words for itself. Accordingly, Gadamer says that through language “the order and structure of our experience itself is originally formed and constantly changed” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 457). But this claim that language characterizes our human experience of the world is for some quite bold. To defend this claim, which brings us to the very core of what Gadamer calls hermeneutic experience, let me turn to my second set of remarks.

Part Two: The Intimate Unity of Language and the Experience of the World

Up to this point I have only been concerned with setting aside certain notions that make it difficult to speak about the problem of finding words for our experiences. I wanted to set aside the idea that language is simply a system of signs because ultimately this notion robs language of its power, a power by which it can expand beyond what appears to be its limit. I also wanted to set aside the idea that experience is data because this notion removes experience from the sphere of life and language, removes it from the world we inhabit. Following the indications just given, let me now expand upon these more positive notions in an attempt to make clear the intimate unity of language and the experience of the world.

If we look back at the history of hermeneutic theory, we see that Gadamer was not the first to talk about the experience of understanding in relation to the experience of life. We find it already in Dilthey, one of the early pioneers of the human sciences, who famously writes that “thinking cannot go back behind life.” This means that when we attempt to understand what Dilthey calls the “expressions of life,” which include all human thought and action as well as the communication of experiences, we do so from within life. We understand *within* the nexus of life. We cannot put life-expressions in front of us like an object because of our own involvement in life. For Dilthey then, to understand life-expressions, that is, to comprehend living human experience, will involve transposing ourselves into the life of another. It involves a re-experiencing the world of another. When Gadamer follows the basic outline of this position in his reformulation of the hermeneutic circle, which involves relating what is to be understood from our pre-understanding in life, he does so by emphasizing that we are not just situated in historical life—at this point agreeing with Dilthey that we interpret life from life. Gadamer also says that we are affected by historical life whenever we attempt to understand it. We are conditioned by the affects of historical life, by historical life working on me behind my back, so to speak, which affects the context in which we attempt to understand life. Because of this I can never understand life in a free and neutral way in an even deeper way than Dilthey thought. Because of this affection and involvement in life, which Gadamer calls the hermeneutical situation, understanding will always occur

as an event–understanding happens or occurs as a result of this involvement and is not produced by me in the manner in which we ordinarily say we know something. I am in history when I come to understand an event in history. I am already in language when I come to understand the meaning of something said. The event of understanding is a moment of the actualization of meaning but never can it be the ideal meaning, the one true meaning. As with Dilthey, life is intelligible but it is also unfathomable—one does not get to the bottom of it in understanding.

Now, the way that Gadamer will present this unfathomable character of life in its understanding—what we can simply call our finite comprehension of the world—is through the claim that interpretive understanding unfolds very much like the experience of experience itself. Real experience, Gadamer tells us, is something I am involved in and occurs only in individual acts. And if experiencing is itself a form of knowing, this knowing, obviously so, will emerge from the actual encounter with the experienced object in the manner of an event. For Gadamer, this encounter is everything, for what is at stake is more than an inductive knowing in which we look for the constant confirmation of experience. Sooner or later, real experience will refute our expectation for confirmation. This new experience effectively asserts its own truth against the expectation from our preliminary or pre-understanding. The new experience amounts to the birth of experience as an event over which no one has control, and becomes valid until it is refuted by a new experience. With the occurrence of new experience not only does the experienced object change—what is experienced is now no longer what it initially was—but also the experiencing mind changes as well—I am now different as a result of being experienced. Since real experience can always involve new experience, the process of experience has its fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but, as Gadamer says, “in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 355). Thus, Gadamer insists, in being experienced one not only recognizes the limits of one’s knowledge, but remains in a state of openness regarding what is other. Presumably, a person who takes the experience of experience seriously would be naturally inclined to a state of humility.

Hermeneutic experience, and with it the event of understanding, unfolds accordingly. In the attempt to understand—whether it be a historical text, a work of art, the words spoken by another or even that experience that is strange and challenging—we are not mastering an object, but placing ourselves in the open where we encounter the breakdown of our expectations. Being in the open is a condition of exposure that is required for letting the meaning that is beyond our expectations emerge. It is here that Gadamer also insists on the linguisticity of understanding, for it is language that accomplishes this expansion of meaning and understanding of what is other. To state the matter succinctly: bringing something into the open is a function of the question, and the logic of question and answer, that is to say, conversation or dialogue, becomes the structure for understanding. But to say that Gadamer has a dialogical version of hermeneutics only tells us one half of the story; it tells us only that understanding is accomplished in the communication of meaning with respect to the address of the other which is brought about by the question. By itself, this does not tell us enough about the movement of language in dialogue. The interplay between conversational partners in dialogue is itself caught up in the interplay that language itself is undergoing. This interplay is the movement of language in its possibilizing condition. Language is not a stockpile of words but a virtuality of words, which is simply that of an open potentiality with respect to the performance of meaning in language. Gadamer describes this movement as the speculative dimension of language. The term “speculative” actually comes

from 19th century German thought where it was used to convey the way concepts relate to one another, as one can begin to see from the root word *speculum*, to mirror. Language is speculative in the sense that the subject matter is “mirrored” in it but not just in a simple way; think of it more like a hall of mirrors. Meaning in language is not complete when one simply makes a statement; it unfolds, it comes to appearance by thinking further in words. In the speculative dimension of language “finite possibilities of the word are oriented to the sense intended as toward the infinite” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 469). This coming into word, this enactment of meaning that is language, is nothing less than the raising into intelligibility our experiencing of the world. It is not the case, then, that something is first understood and then subsequently put into words, but rather, we are always seeking and finding words to make ourselves intelligible to the other and also to ourselves. In all knowing of the world the moment of understanding has to be worked out.

Let me conclude this section of my remarks by emphasizing from what has just been said the distinctive dynamic of hermeneutic experience. Two comments: First, to say that the moment of understanding has to be worked out means that at least in principle we may not succeed in finding words for what we want to say. Despite the overt optimism of Gadamer’s position—an optimism that speaks to the fundamental humanism of Gadamer’s position, a point I will make in my third talk—there are indeed limits to the communication of meaning. Most notably for Gadamer there is the case of translating and understanding poetic texts where the very character of the poetic word may make translation and understanding impossible. I am thinking here of Gadamer’s analysis of the poetry of Paul Celan, where the opacity of meaning approximates a form of hermetic poetry. This limit situation is actually attached to language from the outset. Certainly there is the awareness of every speaker in seeking the correct word for what he or she wants to say that this word is never completely attained. What has been said in words is always less than what is meant, as those deeply personal experiences often attest to. And yet, can we not also say that “an unstilled desire for the appropriate word” constitutes the true life and essence of language (Gadamer, 2000, p. 17).

And then secondly, let us not forget just how language works. To rephrase Gadamer’s characterization of language as speculative, “every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid to which it is related by responding and summoning” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 458). As the (finite) event of the moment the word is not everything and yet “there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 458). Every word has an inner dimension of multiplication, so that the task of understanding is, to say it once again, to find the right word.

Part Three: Finding the Right Word for the Sake of Understanding

To turn then to my final set of remarks, I want to consider here this notion of finding the right word. Let me begin here by rephrasing the initial question posed against the acknowledgment that words fail. The question is no longer where are we to find the words for what we cannot say, but where are we to find the right word for what we cannot at first say. This shift allows us to see the real problem for the experience of understanding. If I do not know fully what I want to say because the intention of meaning exceeds itself or if the experience I want to convey does not have an explicit identity already formed but is shadowy in my own mind, or I am in a dialogue

where there is a problem of translation even when we are speaking the same language, then what constitutes the right word? What, in other words, constitutes the success of speech and understanding? This further question leads us into still more complexities in the experience of understanding in language. Let us say, for example, that one of my parents had recently died and I wanted to understand my relationship to my parent in a way that I could not have considered before. This particular task of understanding would not be so different from the task of understanding other things, perhaps even a book that I had read. The success of understanding will depend on giving the matter, whether it be the relationship or the meaning in the book, the power to speak. This is after all, the central concern for the experience of understanding as conceived by Gadamer. What is to be understood should present itself in all its otherness, as if it were a new experience, so that it can assert its own truth against my own for-meanings. In the attempt to understand my relationship with a parent I begin with an awareness that encompasses conscious and unconscious relations which have directions and meanings that I can only vaguely be in touch with. My thinking in relation to this awareness brings with it feelings and orientations, the latter because it is situated in history. The point here may be obvious: the relation between awareness and a thinking that is directed at understanding is not at all similar to the awareness in simple act of perception or to the simple recall of memory that we call reminding. In this personal experience, but also in the understanding of life in general, the awareness and the thinking are inseparable from memory in a deeper sense. Here awareness and thinking are caught up in memory-in-transition where they are involved in an elemental forgetting and loss while coming to mind. Forgetting and loss are at work in the occurrence of memory in such a way that memory enacts not a re-presentation but a recreation as a present happening. Memory, in other words, is a transformative occurrence, and thus always a form of interpretation.

It should not be surprising in this context to learn that Gadamer will say at one point that “language signifies memory” (Gadamer, 1992, p. 90). But in saying this, the issue is more than transformative occurrence since memory is after all a form of preserving. For Gadamer, this preserving is not a matter of an unquestioning clinging to what is, as if one could not forget, as if one can hold oneself back from the forces of transformation. Rather, in the effort to continually renew what we hold to be true, and thus engage in preserving, memory becomes a way of confronting ourselves, and this is precisely what language accomplishes. If in our experiencing we are caught within the experience of time where all things escape us, living language can bring about a recovery from this loss. And what then of my attempt to understand an awareness in memory of my parent? To the extent that my awareness needs understanding, and thus brought into the play of language, this play is working at the fringes of identity, caught not just within the passing of time but also within an experience of strangeness at the edge of familiarity. The experience of understanding is to make this crossing in language from strangeness to familiarity. As Gadamer notes, “the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 295). As a first approximation to the answer to our question, then, let us say that the right word is the word that has made this crossing and is a word that has found its time.

But this word is in some sense not my word; that is to say, it is not a word I possess that I fit into the matter to be understood. Rather, in the play of language the word that crosses into familiarity is the appropriate word that presents itself in the unfolding of the word’s own naming power. And this coming forth of the word brings with it not just meaning, but new meaning in a double sense. In one sense, the new meaning comes forth as an addition to my awareness and thus to my

experiencing. What comes to understanding was not there in advance in some completed state only to be retrieved in recall, but was initially there in the shifting sensibilities of meaning where certain associations may interfere with one another. Perhaps what comes to understanding was at first glance something on the periphery, not unlike the peripheral meanings that are in play in every word. What comes to understanding then amounts to a coming into presentation in which there is an “increase in reality.” Gadamer uses this phrase—in German, *Zuwachs des Sein*—in several places. My friend Dennis Schmidt, who is well versed in German wants to translate this not as increase but as an intensification of reality. He does so, I think, because of the experience of art that is for Gadamer an intensification or a heightening of reality. But the German word *Zuwachs* is clearly a matter of an increase in the sense related to growth. And so, I would say that the increase in reality that accompanies hermeneutic understanding is at once an enlargement of my experience of the world. While indeed it may be for me in the particular example of understanding my relationship with my parent that I now see something new, what transpires in this play of language, in more general terms, is a “constant building up and bearing within itself the communality of world orientation” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 96). In letting my experience speak language is at the same time building up an aspect held in common. What is added, then, is not simply another opinion about the matter, one more opinion piled on top of others, but, to use Gadamer’s words for what takes place in genuine dialogue, “a transformation into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 379). As a second approximation to the answer to our question, then, let us say that the right word is the word that comes as an increase to meaning.

As to the other sense of new meaning, if it is a new meaning at least in the sense that it leaves something behind in us that we have not encountered in the same way before, then we should expect that it is a surprising meaning as well.⁴ This aspect of surprise goes hand in hand with the dynamics of language that cannot be reduced to logical calculations. Understanding in language does not unfold by moving in strict logical sequence from statement to statement. It does not unfold in a thinking that moves from one thought to another in linear fashion where there can be no surprise. Rather, it is a matter of a movement of language in which thinking can also move backwards, rephrasing against the particular horizon that is in view, and thus carrying the matter forward into other words. When one finds the right word within this dynamic, it is often a word unforeseen. And as unforeseen, the experience of the world that is brought to language, then, is not about an event that has happened but is happening. The experience retains its vitality—its life and liveliness—in coming to word. The richness of experience thus continues to be brought about by language and the experience of understanding. To the question where are we to find the words for what we cannot at first say, I would now answer, accordingly, in the evocative power of our words in living language—what I think can best be described quite simply as the future of our words.

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Notes

1. See Günter Figal (2002, p. 115), "The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Ontology of Language."
2. We are always thinking in language and we are already in language when we begin to speak. When a child speaks a "first" word it is folly to believe that the parents are witnessing the beginning of language. Such a word is always preceded by previous developments, by exchanges of looks and gestures, and nascent conversations from within the socialized linguistic world that the child inhabits. The child's first word is merely an opening into the child's ability-to-talk. See Gadamer (1976, p. 63).
3. Gadamer finds the general frame for this more substantial notion of language in the historical Christian idea of the inner word (*verbum interius*) where the very idea of the word as image first emerges. What intrigues Gadamer about this idea is the way in which human speaking is conceived in relation to the divine inner word as the source of intelligibility. When Augustine speaks of the inner word of God in order to approach the idea of incarnation he is following the Stoic distinction between *logos endiathetos* and the *logos prophorikos*. This is the distinction between an indwelling reason and the external word in which the thought dwelling within finds expression. Since the external *logos* is a secondary process to the internal reflection of thought, the external *logos* is but an imperfect manifestation of the reality. But the peculiar character of the Christian "speaking of the Word" does not allow it to be understood exactly this way, for in such speaking there is a becoming within this dynamic of language that does

not lessen itself by its emergence into exteriority; nor is the Word made flesh—the speaking of the Word—to be regarded as a mere appearance of something more essential behind it.

According to Gadamer, here the “miracle of language lies not in the fact that the Word becomes flesh and emerges into external being, but that which emerges and externalizes itself in utterance is always already a word” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 420). In this idea of the inner word the human word is formed in relation to the perfection of thought, but not as a reflective act. In reflection words are formed in a secondary process by turning back to the mind where they take hold of a completed thought that comes first. In the idea of the inner word, language has already entered thought and the spoken word is caught up in saying the thought; it is being formed in relation to the matter of thought.

4. In a sense, this coming forth that is a surprise is how Gadamer speaks about the experience of truth in hermeneutics. It is truly remarkable that the title of his major work has truth in the title, but there is no explicit discussion of truth as such. Instead, the issue of truth becomes the issue of the beautiful, which pertains to the fundamental character of reality to appear in its appearance.