A Synthesis of Three Traditions that guide Communication Theory

This document examines the Sociopsychological, Sociocultural and Phenomenological traditions in which Communication Theory is entrenched. In each tradition, there is a chronological presentation of scholars or leading ideologies that guide the thinking of each tradition.
Introductions

Communication Theory has very strong roots in Sociology since time in memorial. Initially, the Functional, Structural, Phenomenological and Conflict Traditions were considered as the key areas that Communication Theory is entrenched in as an area of study. In the book ‘Theorizing Communication’ by Craig et al (2007) these traditions have been further split into seven traditions namely: the Rhetorical; Semiotic; Phenomenological; Cybernetic; Sociopsychological; Sociocultural and the Critical Tradition. In this paper, I choose to explore the Sociopsychological, Sociocultural and the Phenomenological Traditions.

The Sociopsychological Tradition

The Sociopsychological Tradition is considered one of the newest traditions in social scientific communication studies. This tradition is premised on examinations of how psychological processes are involved in communication. The tradition is normally seen to be in contrast with humanistic approaches like Rhetorics. Communication is viewed as a process of social interaction, based on this, leads to social influence and forces that can be scientifically proven. The Sociopsychological tradition is distinguished by the use of experimental testing in particular contexts of communication at the interpersonal, organizational, group, mass media and at the problem-solving level. Other areas of interest in this tradition include, studies on conflict, persuasion and relational communication.

Sociopsychology studies are grafted around two approaches in understanding behaviour: sociological and psychological approaches. The sociological approach focuses on human interactions from a societal point of view. Communication here is considered as symbolic.
interaction. The psychological approach looks at human interaction from an individual’s point of view. Here, the influence of individual interactions on cognition, emotions and behaviour is examined. These interactions may be face-to-face or through various media.

It is for this reason that, in the presentation of this section, the Sociopsychological tradition is represented through a review of the work of various scholars believed to be eminent contributors to the tradition. This presentation therefore lacks the apparent overlaps in various studies or linkages overarching ideas that seemingly flow from one scholar to others. This section therefore may not reflect coherent influences from one scholar to the other but, is based on individual contributions that form the whole perspective of this tradition.

**Contributions from Scholars in the Sociopsychology Tradition**

Kurt Lewin is considered the founder of Modern Psychology and the seminal theorist who is acclaimed for his influence on the theory and practice of informal education. His key areas of expertise include experimental learning, group dynamics and action research. He developed a niche in studying social processes and in the 1940’s, undertook applied research initiatives after the war. He established a center for group dynamics research at the Michigan Institute of Technology where he undertook action research in religious aspects and racial prejudice.

He is attributed with developing the Field Theory that has its roots in the Gestalt Theory. The Gestalt school of thought considered as a coherent whole that focuses on the individual’s mind and also on reality. The Field Theory asserts that a field is about coexisting facts considered mutually interdependent. There exist tension between self and environment that is created in series of ‘lifespaces’. These lifespaces define behavior that is influenced by force vectors. These
forces are the needs that determine behavior which is normally influenced by group pressures. He talks about the interdependence of fate by asserting that it is the psychological aspects that are used to define groups. People join groups because they associate their fate with that of the group but not because of having similar characteristics with group members. This enables individuals to undertake necessary responsibility for the well being of the group. Members also create powerful group dynamic that is acquired through interdependence that is aimed at achieving the goals of the group. There can be two outcomes that all the members will ensure that all in the group succeed or fails. These are cooperation or competition respectively.

He advanced the Frustration-Aggression Theory which gives reasons why people join groups that has members with very different dispositions. When group members share common objectives, they are likely to work towards meeting a shared goal. This interdependence on each other creates group dynamics. When cooperation is adhered to, people discuss more issues and are less aggressive as compared to when group members are in competition. In observing groups, he further looked into the development of the class group leadership models and realized that groups guided by democratic leadership were friendlier and that members were group minded.

In 1946, at the Research Centers for Group Dynamics, Lewin and his colleagues developed a training programme that helped to encourage group discussion and decision making among participants who treated each other as peers. It was observed that the teaching took place in the face of tension, conflict, experience and attachment. This study led to opening of the National Training Laboratory in Group Development in 1947.

He is also acclaimed for developing the Lewin Change Theory that has three steps, unfreezing, movement and refreezing. Unfreezing is about creating doubt in the individual’s belief system.
Movement involved emotionally engaging with their beliefs in a detached manner in a bid to encourage them to observe themselves. Having made considerations based on their observations, they decide to maintain what is considered appropriate is maintained through the process of refreezing.

Kurt Lewin is acclaimed for action research used in Social Management or Engineering used to research on various forms of social action. He developed a spiral of steps used in action research. Some scholars supported his approach as assisting the tradition scholars in giving them a framework that guides perspective into the research process. Information is collected systematically so that interpretation can be considered as truthfully representing the situation. This form of action research lost popularity but in recent time has been adapted for use in community–based an action research. Kurt Lewin’s greatest contribution to Social Psychological Studies was to develop a variety of empirically verifiable theories through experimental learning.

Gordon Allport (1945-1970) is considered another key scholar in this tradition. Allport is acclaimed as the Father Of Personality Theory. He believed in the unique individual hence studying the traits and consistencies in personalities. In his study, he established various personality traits namely individual, cardinal, central, motivational, secondary, and stylist traits that people use to exhibit proactive behavior. This way people can gain personality and are considered as psychological health as being consciously motivated to reduce tension within themselves.

He called his study the Individual Morphogenic Science that is a method commonly used to study groups. He referred to personality as the dynamic organization of psychological systems
that determines an individual’s character, behavior and thought. He established that people tend to have overlapping levels of personal discomposition. Cardinal disposition are obviously observed by others and each individual tends to have about 5-10 central disposition or characteristics.

In a bid to develop a theory on motivation, Allport asserts that as people mature their motives they are driven by present needs and wants. People therefore shape their environment to meet their own needs. To have psychological health, people need to create tension that help them shape their environment. He is also recognized for his controversial Theory Of Functional Autonomy that proposed that what motivates humans is independent from original motive of a particular behavior.

To Allport, people always strive to be psychologically healthy by being proactive rather than reactive. Accordingly, a psychologically healthy person will have an extension of the sense of sel. They will tend to have warm relationship with others; display emotional security and self-acceptance. They will accept reality as it is; have insight; a sense of humor and a unified philosophy of life.

Allport was one of the pioneer scholars to accept self-reports a data collection method in his research. Being a religious person, Allport is acclaimed to have developed the Religious Orientation scale. He discovered that there were people with extrinsic and intrinsic orientation to religion. Those with the former were capable of having high racial and social prejudices unlike those in than the latter group. The latter group are considered as psychologically healthy while the former unhealthy.
To Social Psychology, Allport brings in the need to study human beings as individuals who are rational, proactive and purposeful and not as just members of groups. To him, the individual is unique and can take proactive conscious action to influences his own psychological health.

Stanley Milgram (1933 - 1984) was a graduate from the Queens College in New York City and attained a PhD in Social Relations in Harvard University. Stanley Milgram’s story is told in a book ‘The Man Who Shocked the World’ that highlights twenty experiments that he designed to understand how people comply with authority. His keen interest was to understand how Germans during the Nazi era followed orders given by their bosses. He wished to establish the number of people who would punish others as directed by their superiors. He further pursued the study on group opinion and its impact on conformity. His aim was to understand the degree to which a group opinion influences the opinion of new members.

In his first experiment, he asked 40 people to role play as ‘teachers’ who administered electric shock voltages on the increase and level to 300 volts for every mistake the made by their purported ‘students’. He found that women were likely to obey authority without question as they had no problem administering the highest voltage as advised by their superior. Both men and women from different cultural and nationality had this innate need to obey authority regardless of their background or gender. He also found that albeit the fact that people had little knowledge about the motives of their superiors, they were still inclined to complied with the demands of authority. Milgram is also recognized for the development of the Six Degree of Separation concept that established that everybody on earth is connected to each other through at least six intermediaries.
Solomon Eliot Asch (1907-1996) was born in Warsaw, Poland. It is said that he learnt English through reading Charles Dickens and later joined the college of the City of New York before moving to Colombia University. He is considered the pioneer scholar of Social Psychology and Gestalt psychology. He used experiments on conformity to demonstrate the power of social influence. As a student of Stanley Milgram, he was inspired by his influential research on obedience. In his studies, he demonstrated how peer pressure often has a negative influence on social behavior in spite of the fact that people tend to be decent to each other.

Roger Brown (1925-1997) started his education at the University of Michigan albeit an interruption when he enlisted himself to US Navy during the Battle of Okinawa. He is renowned Social Psychology trainer at Harvard University and for the extensive of his book ‘Social Psychology’ as a course text. In 1957 while on sabbatical leave, he wrote his first synthesis between the uses of language and thought in an attempted to demonstrate the relation between two people's use of phonemes that had symbolic connotations. He further studied the role of spontaneous conversations between mother and child in language acquisition.

Leon Festinger (1991-1989) was a graduate of City College and University of Iowa where he worked with Kurt Lewin. He is renowned for his niche in studying ‘group dynamics’ by mathematics and statistics to develop one of the earliest no-parametric tests (Festinger 1946). In 1948 having joined the Group Dynamic Center of the University of Michigan he moved on to University of Minnesota, Stanford and finally to the New School of Social Research in 1968 at the Michigan Institute of Technology.

It is there that he undertook studies that focused on social influence and communication. The studies were triggered by the use of sociometrical questions that asked students who they see
most at a social level. The findings demonstrated that those who are sociometrically close were of similar attitude. Those with deviant attitudes were social isolates. These findings triggered the development of experimental laboratory programs of research that turned into systematic experimental Social Psychology. Festinger and his students worked on manipulating social variables such as affection, social cohesion, group structure, and deviancy and were able to establish the effects on influence, exertion, acceptance and communication. He is considered one of the ‘balance’ theorists because he studied consequences of forced compliance.

Fritz Heider (1896- 1988) was an Austrian born Gestalt Psychologist known for what he proposed as Common Sense Psychology. He attained his PhD from the University of Graz at the age of 24 and was a close associate of Kurt Lewin. His famous book ‘The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations ’ published in 1958 where he promoted the Attribution Theory. In this Theory, he asserts that people attribute the behaviour of others to their own perceptions as acquired in specific situations based on long held beliefs. In other words, behaviour is attributed to dispositions like motives, attitudes and personality traits. Behaviour can also be attributed to situations such as external pressures, social norms ,peer pressure ,acts of God, chance and accidents just to mention a few.

Heider is celebrated for the development of the ‘Balance Theory’ that focuses on the formation of sentimental relations among individuals. In this theory, Heider aimed at understanding the relationship between three things: the perceiver, another person and an object. In this theory two people in a dyadic relationship should have similar sentiments to have a balance. Both must either like or dislike each other. It is the individual’s prerogative to choose his interpersonal relationships and any change in sentiments creates tension or force that affects balance
Heider is commended for several influential ideas about social perception based on principles that are guided by physical object perceptions.

Carl Hovland (1912-1961) took his undergraduate degree at the Northwestern University and graduate studies at Yale University in 1936. He was appointed as faculty in the Psychology department after attaining his PhD in 1939. Hovland is celebrated for having made the largest single contribution to the field of Social Communication, experimental, social and cognitive psychology that deals with human learning, attitude change and concept acquisition.

During the years 1942 - 1945, he was recruited by a peer Stouffer’s to head the Experimental Section of Scouffer’s research branch under Major General Frederick Osborn’s Information and Education Division. He was tasked with evaluating the training program and use of films as training materials in the army towards attitude formation. His research on a number of films entitled ‘The Battle of Britain’ established that although the films were use to invoke the spirit of patriotism in army rookies, the only aspect that interested them in these films was knowledge about air warfare. The films have little impact on their attitude towards patriotism. He also found that many messages are recalled based on ‘the recency effect’ and lost due to ‘the sleeper effect’.

After these studies, Hovland went back to Yale and formed the ‘Yale Communication and Attitude Change Program where he carried out studies on how best verbal representation of information changes a recipients opinion and beliefs. The studies focused on the manipulation of a person’s prior position on an issue, self-esteem, credibility of source, extremity of position, and ordering of arguments. Other variables considered included the impact of one-sided and two-sided messages on people’s emotions.
Muzafer Sherif (1906 -1988) is not just considered a pioneer scholar in the study of Social Psychology but one of the key scholars who drove the growth of the area of study. His key interest was in group processes and the impact of social norms on group conflict. He was of Turkish origin and studied at the American International College of Izmir; pursued his Masters of Arts studies at the University of Istanbul and another at Harvard University. His PhD was attained at the Columbia University.

In reference to Einstein and Infeld’s book ‘The Evolution of Physics’ (1942), Muzafer built his Realistic Conflict Theory that focused on inner group conflict, negative prejudices and stereotypes that are the basis for competition for resources within a group. Muzafer argued that groups have their own reality based on resources availed to them. In the case of limited resources, there is competition which tends to create negative relations. In building positive relations, there is cooperation and reciprocal interactions. Should there be limited resources, intergroup relations tend to deteriorate.

Muzafer is also acclaimed for his contribution to learning theories by developing the Social Judgment Theory that focuses on the effects of persuasive messages. He argues that it is the evaluation of the position of a message in relation to other alternative messages that influences attitude articulated as latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment.

**The Social Cultural Tradition**

In the Socio-cultural tradition considers communication as a process that involves concepts like social structure, norms, rituals, identities and collective belief systems. This tradition focuses on the effects of the production, maintenance and reproduction of social formations from small
groups to a global phenomenon. This tradition encompasses the development of both macro social theories such as Functionalism (Merton 1957) and Structuralism (Levi- Strauss 1963). There are also micro social theories that deal with Symbolic Interaction (Blumer 1968), Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967/1987) and Dramaturgy (Goffman 1959). Due to the focus on individual action and creativity.

The Sociocultural tradition was curved out from the Social Psychological tradition as it focuses on how individuals make choices about their interactions with others. In this section of the paper, this tradition is presented through an exchange of arguments and counterarguments presented by key scholars in this tradition. In this tradition, it will be noted that the views propagated by Garfinkel and Goffman on Symbolic Interactionism will be presented as isolated viewpoints as they do not fit into the patterned arguments by other scholars from this tradition.

**Contributions of Scholars to the Sociocultural Tradition**

At the Macro social level, Functionalism as articulated by William James (1842-1910) as an attempt to consciously look at the internal psychological processes through which humans adapt to their environment. James is acclaimed to have developed a clear concept of the self that has three components: the material, social and spiritual self. The material self is defined by what gives us identity; the social self is as defined by others and the spiritual self is based on our general cognitive style. He concluded that, humans tend to view themselves as objects that develop self-feelings and attitudes toward themselves. Based on Darwin’s theory guided by survival for the fittest, the functionalist approach examines the function and purpose of the mind and behavior paying special interest on mental processes and how they relate to behaviour.
Claude Levi-Strauss (1908 - 2009) is considered as the Father of Structural Anthropology because by using anthropological investigations, he was able to discern what underlying patterns of human thought determines worldviews that produce cultural categories. From a Structuralist perspective as guided by Marxist and Freudian thinking, the existence of internally determined causes, motive and forces guide a person towards self-portrayal based on interpersonal systems. Levi–Strauss in his study, borrowing concepts from de Saussure Semiology to carry out an anthropological study that investigated how Brazilian families developed sets of rules and structures as defined by kinship and myths. His findings that were represented in quasi-mathematical terminology indicated that marriages among the Brazilians were a basis of reciprocal exchanges among social groups. Levi-Strauss proposed that culture is governed by hidden rules known to members of a society. Accordingly, he prescribed Structural Anthropology as the best way to identify these rules.

In the Social Cultural tradition the micro-level theories to be discussed in this section are Symbolic Interaction (Blumer 1968), Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967/1987) and Dramaturgy (Goffman 1959).

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is eminent for having a great influence on the Symbolic Interaction social perspective albeit the fact that his student Herbert Blumer (1900-1931) is acclaimed for turning his ideas into a more systematic sociological approach. Mead contribution to this perspective offered ideas on how people become their social selves in a changing world and on how social order is maintained during the change.

In his view, an individual’s social self is not determined by society but by its binary nature. This nature includes ‘me’ that represents an organized set of group attitudes learnt from past
encounters. The other component is ‘I’ that embodies the present moment’s response to others that is spontaneous and creative. ‘Me’ is credited with the ability to maintain social order and has a stronghold in traditional ideas. ‘I’ on the other hand, is attributed to instigating free will and orderly social change by introducing new, unique and original ideas.

Accordingly, the social self undergoes four stages of development starting with ‘pre-play’ stage where one is unable to see the self as being separate from others. The second stage is ‘play’ which includes role-play. The third stage is the ‘game’ where the social self emerges as rules are followed and the actions of others are anticipated. The last stage is’ self-realization’ which empowers the individual to relate with the self as mirrored by the attitudes of society.

Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), as prior mentioned, is commended for keeping Mead’s concepts at the heart of the tradition right into the 1950’s. In 1937, Blumer’s coined the term Symbolic Interactionism that focused on the peculiarity and the distinct character of interaction that takes place between human beings. What is peculiar is that what defines an interaction are actions towards each other rather than reactions to these actions. Responses are based on meaning attached to these actions other than direct action. Human interactions are therefore determined by the meaning of one another’s actions.

In reference to George Simmels (1858-1918) ideas, Blumer outlined the characteristics of symbolic interactions. Simmels is acclaimed for laying the foundation of Sociological Anti-positivism. Whereas Positivism was about science and facts, Anti-positivism, as defined by Simmels is hinged on culture where individuals participate through cultivation, produced over time by the human agency. Accordingly, form is synonymous with content within a specific
context. To Simmels, society is a form of high unity in which all forms of association are based on a sum of separate individuals justifying the need to study interpersonal influences in a group.

Blumer borrowed four characteristics from Simmels with the first referring to the ability of humans to creatively use symbols to communicate and convey meaning associated with interpretation, action and interaction. Symbolic interaction is creatively shifts and is flexible to adjustments and a change in individual interaction has impact on norms and order. Habits, routine and shared meaning is susceptible to reappraisals and adjustments. The other characteristics focus on the importance of active human agency in an active social world that allows for the adjustment and the organization of central feature of social interaction. The self is flexible and is constantly being adjusted by others. An individual develops a biography while social order is recreated by social forces.

The third characteristic has to do with the nature of interactions that displays duality in actions. Blumer advocates that the individual and society are engaged in joint acts through which their ‘lives are organized and society is assembled’ (Blumer 1937 p224). Joint actions lead to mutual responses and adjustment in an actor and others. The self emerges from the views of others and vice-versa. The last characteristic is the ability to carry out empirical studies of human interactions. Human interactions are an observable given that is studied carefully and in detail, can determine what is routine and acceptable to society.

Manford Kuhn (1911-1963) who developed the Twenty Statements Test is believed to have attempted to carry out experiments to deal with defining the concept of self as articulated by Mead. Kuhn and his collaborator McPartland carried out the studies with the assumption that human behavior is organized and each individual’s self- attitude and concept is defined by the
norms of this organization especially, as prescribed by Mead, through language which is a tool of socialization. They found that individual’s normally ascribed to consensual attitudes in forming their own self-attitudes. As deduced by Mead, language as a tool of socialization has played an important role in holding consensual and sub-consensual attitudes used to influence an individual’s self-attitudes. Self-conception can therefore, as articulated by Mead, be understood as a plan for behavior.

Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) is credited for entrenching Ethno methodology as a field of inquiry in Social Science. He was an undergraduate student of accounting at and a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Capitol Hill and later was a student of Parson’s at the Harvard University. Ethno methodology is the study of people as they live their lives ordinarily as a way to make sense of their real world. Garfinkel is acclaimed for laying down ground rules and concepts that guide these studies. His approach was to understand how actors continually interpret, contextualize, and find underlying patterns, meanings, and unities in the “objective” facts before them. Garfinkel advocated for the use of documenting interpretation of actual appearance other than from a presupposed underlying pattern. Underlying patterns are apparently derived from the documentary evidences from expression that are create a self-evident or self-explanatory sense.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) is a renowned scholar who provided a way to analyze interaction orders in social situations or given environments through observation. He gave a description and insights as to how people interpret and act in ordinary situations. In his writings ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’, studies focus on total institutions and how individuals use various orthodox and unorthodox means to maintain the self of their selfhood. He studies also
exposed unexamined assumptions that we make in various situations and encounters we find ourselves in.

In reference to the concept Dramaturgy, Goffman lays out how people present a face or image of self in social relationships, interactions and encounters. In his writings ‘On Face-Work’ (1955). Here, he isolated techniques used by people to convey impression and create their self. The Self, accordingly has a dual sense similar to the ‘I’ and ‘me’ theme as cited by Mead. Goffman’s dual sense has one described as the ‘image’ that creates a face derived from the views and perspectives of others. The other sense is that of a ‘player’ in a game guided by a set of rules and rituals.

**The Phenomenological Tradition**

The Phenomenology tradition is based on the reflections of fascinations that help understand life experiences in the human existence. In understanding everyday life, we get to know how people get involved with life. Heidegger asserts that in a bid to accumulate knowledge one has to be ‘in-being’ with life. The Phenomenological tradition orientation is built on questioning everyday life experiences, situations and relations. Phenomenology should act as a guide for creating formative relations between being ourselves and acting as another person. Key scholars in this area include Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

**Contributions of Scholars to the Phenomenological Tradition**

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the father of Phenomenology. In his PhD research program, he asserts that human beings communicate at semiotic levels of consciousness found in their perceptions and expression. These are the levels of consciousness that are at the emotional,
cognitive and at the connotation level. For effective reflections, the human relies on our primal impression, retention and potential aspects that emerge as we live our experiences. Husserl’s argues that the ultimate source of intelligibility is the primal impressional stream of preconscious life that helps us understand our life experiences. Reflection is the one way we can use to make sense of our life experiences.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is renowned for his interest in existential phenomena logical quest in the question of ‘being’. In 1975 he offers counter argument against Husserl’s view. He asserts that having a primal impressional consciousness is already a part of life hence should not be considered the origin of meaning. Heidegger further asserts that meaning is not derived from fantasy but from our actions and through the tactile things we have in life. Man must live within a context to actualize and realize what we understand through acting. Meaning is therefore derived from background practices that determine our activities and make it easy to understand objects (Dreyfus 1990).

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), attempts to carry forth Husserl’s viewpoint on the role of the unconscious in deriving meaning about life argues that there some things that are just beyond the grasp of consciousness which are intangible, not explicit and cannot be altered by voluntary, deliberate practices. This declaration provides a basis for a preontological understanding of the modes of being that exist in life. He posits that phenomenology cannot be articulated through actions only. In giving the example of the child who imitates people actions and not modes, children also pay attention to gestures and posture that have social meanings used to create subjective meaning of our life experiences.
Martin Buber (1878-1965) was keen to understand what drives genuine human relationships that apparently seem to be guided by dialogue but in reality is about individual monologues shared in dialogue. In Martin Buber’s ‘I and Thou’ (Ich und Du 1923) he asserts that man has been depicted as having a twofold attitude depicted by the combined primary word ‘I–Thou’. I-Thou connotes the essential existence of twofold nature of man that demonstrates the duality structure that man uses to formulate the ideas he believes in about his well-being and what may exist in people’s minds. Recognition of the duality of human nature helps in understanding abstract ideas that guide his existence. ‘I-It’ exist in a relations with natural components that cannot speak; when men connect through speech and in realizing that humans are living spiritual beings connotes the existence of mysterious relations that not easy to decipher. Buber’s characterizes experiences as being aware of the existence of the ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’. ‘I-Thou’ relationships man’s individuality while ‘I-It’ is about human experiences and internal aspects like feelings, perceptions, thinking and sense-making. All these experiences are important in the accumulation of knowledge which is later turned into knowledge.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002)is considered Father of Hermeneutics. His contribution to the phenomenological tradition is to understand the link between theory and practice. In his ‘Praise of Theory’ (1999) establish that in original Greek ‘theoria’ is conducted in the broader sense of life and a way individual project themselves. Gadamer is concerned with the apparent distinction given to given to practice and theory. According to him, the source of meaning in our lives is both in theory and practice. In order to acquire knowledge there is need to reintegrate theoretical knowledge with practice in our daily life. He asserts that ‘practice suggests what points beyond it’ (Gadamer 1998). In describing ‘theoria’ as a means to project them as being ‘completely present’, Gadamer emphasizes that meaning essentially is derived from theory and
practice. Gadamer is acclaimed for building on Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology by attempting to understand our lives as we encounter new situations. He asserts when faced with new experiences we tend to revert to tradition to check if these experiences violate tradition or if tradition can be reinterpreted in dealing with the new situations. In ‘Truth and Method’ Gadamer seeks to explore the ‘I-Thou’ relationship, he argues that Thou is experienced through language which is a channel of tradition. Tradition holds ‘historical effected consciousneses and this combines with the knowledge of human nature helps in understanding human existence.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) considered a protégé of Heidegger presents an argument against Gadamer view in an article in the book ‘Life.after.theory’ that is a compilation of interviews of scholars on the existence of theory in relation to real life. Derrida challenges Gadamer assertion of being ‘completely present’ as an impossibility and goes ahead to deconstruct the idea. He insinuates that theory hypothesizes the existences of consistency in life but this is only overtly presented in practice. Accordingly practice is therefore used to make theory.
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