Gadamer's analysis of the hermeneutic phenomenon in *Truth and Method* demonstrates how, with respect to modes of experience that transcend the sphere of control of scientific method, understanding is an event into which we are drawn. The event of understanding, which is never an originating act of consciousness, takes place in response to a claim that is made upon one. The one who understands is "always already" drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself.

The event of understanding, which Gadamer sees as inseparable from experience itself, instantiates Gadamer's version of the hermeneutic circle and provides us with a model of human knowing that by its very nature is distinct from theoretical knowing. This model of human knowing, based on the circularity of understanding, must account for knowing that always anticipates itself. Historically, the myth of recollection in Plato's dialogues was put forth as providing such an account. Leaving aside any critical discussion of the Platonic myth of recollection itself, the notion of recollection is instructive about the nature of inquiry that is circular.

Following Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, I want to argue that the model of knowing commensurate with hermeneutic experience must be understood as a form of recollection. Expressed negatively, what is known in the event of understanding is made-present-again, but not as a retrieval or a mere repetition of a past actuality. Because of human finitude (and this means here the fundamental historicity of all understanding) the repetition in the recollection precludes the literal repetition
of a prior past, or even, for that matter, a retrieval of origins. In fact, as we shall see, to suggest a “backward” movement in recollection (as the term itself might lead one to believe) is misleading. The positive possibility of a recollective understanding requires that we first of all say something about hermeneutic experience and its connection with memory.

Hermeneutic Experience

According to Gadamer, the original meaning of the concept of experience (Erfahrung) has been obscured by the attitude of modern science. Modern science, and in particular the logic of induction, has stripped experience of its fundamental character, its “inner historicity” (Geschichtlichkeit). The historical element of experience is what gives experience its dimension of unfolding and undergoing. This element of experience has no place in the methodological procedure of objectification, which demands that experience be capable of literal repetition. But this means that experience, by its very nature, abolishes its history. Any attempt to restrict the universal structure of experience to scientific universality remains one-sided.

As Gadamer sees it, experience is defined by three interrelated elements: 1) in every experience there is an openness to new experience; 2) every experience contains, by its very nature, a dialectical element; 3) experience is something constantly acquired and from which none are exempt. Gadamer draws on Aristotle and Hegel respectively in order to establish the first two aspects of experience.

In its scientific form as well as the experience of daily life, experience is valid if no contrary instance is encountered. This, Gadamer tells us, is in accord with the analysis of the concept of induction in Aristotle. The unity of experience always proceeds from individual perceptions. This unity, Gadamer indicates, is the unity of a universal (Allgemeinheit); we abstract a general concept from individual perceptions. However, in Gadamer’s view, the universality of experience for Aristotle is not yet the universality of science. Whereas modern science starts from the universality of the concept, in which case future experience can only affirm the identity of experience, Aristotle stands intermediate “between the many individual perceptions and the true universality of the concept.” Using Gadamer’s example: “If experience shows us that a particular remedy has a particular effect, this means that something common has been noticed in a number of observations, and it is clear that the actual medical question, the scientific question, is possible only on the basis of this kind of observation: this is the question of the logos.