

**HERMENEUTICS AND THE ENGLISH SCHOOL:
GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS AND WIGHT'S APPROACH TO
INTERNATIONAL THEORY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

BY

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

DECEMBER 2004

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ABSTRACT

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December 2004, 98 Pages

This thesis attempts to discover the hermeneutic orientation of the English School's approach to international relations. It is argued that the English School approach has a distinctive interpretivist character. The thesis concentrates on the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Wight. Martin Wight's anti-positivism, the historical character of his analysis of the traditions in international theory, and the centrality of language in his studies shows strong resemblance to Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. The main purpose of this thesis is to show the relationship between the hermeneutics and the English School approach by discovering the common points between the thoughts of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Wight.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Gadamer, English School, Martin Wight.

ÖZ

HERMENÖTİK VE İNGİLİZ EKOLÜ: GADAMER'İN HERMENÖTİĞİ VE MARTIN WIGHT'IN ULUSLARARASI KURAMA YAKLAŞIMI

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Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. A. Nuri Yurdusev

Aralık 2004, 98 Sayfa

Bu tez İngiliz Ekolü'nün uluslararası ilişkilere yaklaşımındaki hermenötik eğilimi göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tezin amacı İngiliz Ekolü yaklaşımının yorumsamacı karakterini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Tez, Hans-Georg Gadamer ve Martin Wight'ın çalışmaları üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Martin Wight'ın uluslararası ilişkilerin teorik geleneğine dair analizlerinin anti-pozitivist ve tarihsel karakteri ve çalışmalarında dile verdiği merkezi konum Hans-Georg Gadamer'in hermenötüğü ile yakın benzerlikler göstermektedir. Bu tezin temel amacı hermenötik ile İngiliz Ekolü arasındaki ilişkiyi Hans-Georg Gadamer ile Martin Wight'ın düşüncelerindeki ortak noktaları açığa çıkararak göstermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hermenötik, Gadamer, İngiliz Ekolü, Martin Wight.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere appreciation and gratitudes to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nuri Yurdusev for his guidance and insight through the research. Without his guidance I would never be able to write on such a difficult topic and reach any conclusions. I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Necati Polat and Mustafa Aydın for their encouraging words and advices during the final stage of the study. I also thank to my friends Hasan Yıldırım and M. Emre Yılmaz for their endless support and help.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the hermeneutics and the English School of international relations. The similarities between the methodology of the English School and the hermeneutic tradition will try to be illuminated. The thesis will focus on the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is the most eminent thinker of the hermeneutic tradition in the twentieth century, and Martin Wight, who can be conceived as the most profound thinker of the English School. The relationship between the two thinkers and the common points in their approaches will tried to be analyzed.

English School has emerged in the late 1950s with the formation of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics. The meetings of the committee which brought together people from different academic disciplines and also from diplomacy gave rise to the development of the school as a distinct theoretical approach to international theory. Contrary to the mainstream realist approach of the day, scholars of the English School did not adopt a positivist methodology. Their analyses remained historical in character. Members of the English school also rejected the twofold realist-idealist classification, rather the members of the English School adopted Wight's threefold classification (realist, rationalist, revolutionist) as the main traditions of international thought.

'International society' is the core concept of the school. English school thinkers did not confine themselves with the system of the contemporary international realm but they analyzed the systems developed throughout the history in order to illuminate the formation of today's international society and the rules and norms that prevail among the members of this society. Its historicity, centrality of language in its analysis and its interpretivist methodology gave the school its distinctive character. Martin Wight played a key role in the development of the school. The lectures that he gave in London School of Economics and Political Science during the 1950s had deeply influenced the international relations studies in Britain, and his writings, although they were very limited, formed the basic texts of the English School approach.

Hermeneutics can simply be defined as the study of the relationship between the meaning, interpretation, and understanding. It began as a method of interpreting biblical texts, and then became to be used for the interpretation of history, and finally the social sciences in general. Friedrich Schleiermacher, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, associated hermeneutics with the task of understanding and emphasized the grammatical and psychological character of understanding. Wilhelm Dilthey, following him, argued that hermeneutics could provide a general methodology for the human sciences. He made a distinction between the explanation and understanding, and claimed that explanation is the task of natural sciences while understanding is the goal of the human sciences. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Heidegger gave understanding its ontological character, and stated its relationship with one's being in the world. Gadamer, in his monumental book, *Truth and Method*, in a sense, reformulated hermeneutics. With Gadamer hermeneutics

gained its philosophical character. He mainly expressed that all understanding is interpretation and it is expressed and bounded by the medium of language.

Similar to Gadamer, Wight defined international theory as a philosophical subject. The central place that he gives to history and language are also the common points with Gadamer's hermeneutics. His threefold classification and his approach to traditions in international theory can be associated with Gadamer's conceptualizations of 'tradition' and 'horizon', as well. All these points will be raised in the following pages and the hermeneutic sensibility in Wight's works will be shown.

The thesis is comprised of four main chapters. The second chapter deals with the development of modern hermeneutics until Gadamer. The aim of the chapter is to put a general overview of the development of the hermeneutic tradition in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in order to show the background of Gadamer's thought. Second chapter is divided into three main sections. In these sections Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger will be examined respectively. Since it is aimed to summarize the development of the hermeneutic tradition in order to reach a better understanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics these three thinkers will not be analysed in depth, they will be handled briefly. The aim of the third chapter is to outline the thought of Gadamer. Basic features of Gadamer's thought will be examined. The fourth chapter deals with the general characteristics of the English school. Methodology and the basic features of the school will be examined. And in the last chapter the relationship between works of Gadamer and Wight and the hermeneutic sensibility in Wight's approach will be analyzed.

CHAPTER 2

HERMENEUTICS BEFORE GADAMER

Webster gives the following definition for the term hermeneutics: ‘Hermeneutics (Hermeneutic means *interpretive*), is a branch of continental European philosophy concerned with human understanding and the interpretation of written texts. The word derives from the Greek God Hermes in his role as patron of communication and human understanding.’¹ The etymology of the word begins with the ancient Greek god, Hermes, who was a messenger between the gods. Hermeneutic enterprise in ancient Greece dealt with the grammar, style and the ideas of the texts. Later it became an integral part of the theological culture of the middle ages, but only after the Renaissance and Reformation, and thereafter hermeneutics as a special discipline came into being.²

Before the nineteenth century hermeneutics is conceived as a part of philology. The aim was to grasp the single valid meaning placed in the text. In the nineteenth century hermeneutics took a different direction. Schleiermacher(1768-1834) emphasized the need for the psychological empathy with the author’s personality. He placed understanding at the core of hermeneutic theory, and stated

¹ www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Hermeneutics.

² Mueller-Volmer, Kurt (eds.), *The Hermeneutic Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, New York: Continuum Press, 2000, p.2.

that it has a linguistic and psychological character.³ With Schleiermacher, hermeneutics raised from a technical discipline to a form of humanistic interchange. Schleiermacher tried to establish an independent method for understanding. For Dilthey(1833-1911), human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) must have a method of their own. He rejected the idea that the methodology of the natural sciences is applicable to human sciences. He drew a line between science and humanities. The aim of natural sciences is explanation, but human sciences aim at understanding. Dilthey argued that all understanding is historical.

Hermeneutic enterprise is deeply influenced by Heidegger's (1889-1976) ontology of human existence. Heidegger brought hermeneutics from theory of interpretation to a theory of existential understanding. His works influenced his student Gadamer (1900-2002), whose works, in broadest terms, marked a shift from a methodological hermeneutics to a philosophical hermeneutics, a shift from understanding as methodology of the human sciences to the universality of understanding and interpretation.⁴

The general shift in the hermeneutic tradition in the twentieth century can be summarized under three headings. Firstly, contrary to the tradition since the Enlightenment hermeneutics no longer concerned itself exclusively with the understanding and interpretation of written documents or speech. Secondly, unlike the theory of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the aim of understanding did not focus on

³ Rajan, Tilottama, , 'Hermeneutics: Nineteenth Century', in Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (eds.) *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, New Jersey: Catham House Publishers, 1995, pp.1-2.

⁴ Risser, James, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997, p.3.

the psychology of the other person. Thirdly, with Heidegger hermeneutics extended into ontology.⁵ While the studies of Schleiermacher and Dilthey concerned methodology, Heidegger left these methodological claims and dealt with the ontological character of understanding.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the development of the hermeneutics till Gadamer by concentrating on three major thinkers who shaped the hermeneutic tradition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter will be divided into three sections. The contributions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger to the hermeneutic tradition will be examined respectively. The aim of this chapter is to show the background of Gadamer's hermeneutics, not one of examining the genuine contributions of these thinkers to the hermeneutic theory. So the three thinkers will be handled relatively briefly.

2.1. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher's contribution to hermeneutics can be considered as a major turning point in the development of hermeneutic tradition. He tried to formulate a systemic method of hermeneutics based on the system of the language and the inner system of the thought. His endeavour laid the foundations for the hermeneutic philosophy of the nineteenth century.

Hermeneutics first developed as a method for the interpretation of the biblical texts. The basic principles of the interpretation of the Holy scripture are based on the

⁵ Holub, Robert C., 'Hermeneutics: Twentieth Century', in Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (eds.) *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1995, p.18.

ideas of Martin Luther. According to Luther the verses of the Holy scripture cannot be seen as related to the historical circumstances; its words can only be taken in the literal sense and it should be interpreted in itself.

Friedrich Ast and Friedrich August Wolf were two important philologists of the late 18th and the early 19th centuries. With them hermeneutics came to be conceived as philology. They advocated that every work of literature should be interpreted in the same way according to same rules. Ast and Wolf presupposed a unity in the author's world-view and in the spirit of the age. The task of any interpretation is to make a literary work express this overriding spiritual dimension.⁶

Schleiermacher attempted to base his approach to hermeneutics on the concept of "understanding". Schleiermacher explains that hermeneutics is not only the art of understanding the meaning of discourse, but it is the art of avoiding misunderstanding. Causes of misunderstanding include: indeterminacy in the meaning of words, ambiguity in the meaning of words, contradictoriness or inconsistency in the usage of words, inattentiveness to the setting or context in which words are used, and mistaken preconceptions of the meaning of words. Errors in the interpretation of the meaning of discourse may be quantitative (formal) if they cause misunderstanding of the rules or principles according to which discourse is developed, or may be qualitative (material) if they cause misunderstanding of its content.⁷

⁶ Bleicher, Josef, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p.7.

⁷ Shapiro, Gary-Sica, Alan (eds.), *Hermeneutics: Question and Prospects*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, p.43.

Schleiermacher was the first who sought to make the process of understanding an independent method of its own. Contrary to Wolf and Ast he argued that understanding should not be restricted to foreign language or to the written word.

For Schleiermacher understanding and speaking were analogous activities. Both derive from man's knowledge of language. Every man is equipped with the grammatical rules of the language of its time. For Schleiermacher knowing a grammar is the same as knowing a language. Men express their thoughts and feelings and also understand other people through their linguistic competence. There is an activity of the clarification of linguistic usage in the text through a consideration of such things as the language that was used at the time of author's writing. This activity refers to grammatical interpretation of the texts.⁸

Beside grammatical interpretation there is another aspect of interpretation which is called psychological interpretation. What is to be understood is not the objective meaning of the words in a literal sense but also the individuality of the author. The internal history of the author is also important. The author can really be understood only by going back to the origin of the thought. Thus hermeneutics is concerned with the reconstruction of the author's intended meaning. This requires a total re-experiencing of the mental processes of the text's author as well as his feelings and intentions expressed in the text. In other words, the interpretation of a

⁸Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.122.

text involves an attempt to identify oneself with the author.⁹ On this way individuality of the author can be directly grasped and the text itself comes to be properly understood.

For Schleiermacher grammatical and psychological interpretations are dependent on each other. These two aspects of interpretation are equally important. Whereas the psychological interpretation looks for what is subjective and individual in the text the grammatical one is concerned with the general grammatical laws and the objective historical content of the text.

Understanding takes place only in the coinherence of these two moments:

1. An act of speaking cannot even be understood as a moment in a person's development unless it is also understood in relation to the language. This is because the linguistic heritage (*Angeborenheit der Sprache*) modifies our mind.
2. Nor can act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person (later addition: because an individual is able to influence a language by speaking, which is how a language develops).¹⁰

Schleiermacher maintains that while grammatical interpretation is a method of understanding how meaning is determined by the way in which language is used, psychological interpretation is a method of understanding how spoken or written language represents the thoughts of the person who is speaking or writing. Grammatical and psychological elements are always combined in discourse, and discourse is never purely grammatical or psychological. The elements of discourse

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutic Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, p.11.

are never purely objective or subjective. Thus, hermeneutics is concerned with understanding the similarities and differences which may occur between these objective and subjective elements.¹¹

Schleiermacher's another important conceptualization is the 'hermeneutical circle'. For him this circle has two aspects: the understanding can take place only within this subjective and objective whole. As the single word belongs to the sentence, so the single text belongs to the writer's whole works and the latter belongs to the whole literature. At the same time, the same text also belongs to the whole of its author's inner life. Thus the objective as well as subjective reconstruction of a text progresses " both comparatively (as in comparing the various parts of a text or a partial self expression with one another) and intuitively or as Schleiermacher sometimes prefers to say divinatorily (as in grasping the meaning of the text as a whole)."¹² This intuitive process becomes significant especially in translating the grammar of a text into expressions of the author's individuality and in grasping this individuality as a whole.

Schleiermacher is considered as the father of modern hermeneutics as a general study. He based his approach on the concept of understanding and he was the first who tried to establish an independent method for understanding. His approach is based on grammatical and psychological interpretation. For Schleiermacher structure of the language and internal history of the author were equally important for achieving an objective understanding of a text and they were dependent on each

¹¹ Floistad, Guttorm, "Understanding Hermeneutics," *Inquiry*, 1973, 16:448-460.

¹² *Ibid*, p.449.

other. Hermeneutical theorists of the later nineteenth century were indebted to the hermeneutical thinking of Schleiermacher. Among these we will discuss the contribution of Wilhelm Dilthey in the following section.

2.2. Wilhelm Dilthey

Dilthey's hermeneutics represents the watershed between the theories of the nineteenth century, which were emanated from Romanticism and those of the twentieth century which comprise philosophical hermeneutics and the methodological concerns of the social and historical sciences. Dilthey's goal was to provide a philosophical foundation for the human sciences and to develop a methodology with the highest possible degree of certainty.

Dilthey started by trying to provide an epistemological basis for his studies. He aimed at completing Kant's Critique of Pure Reason with a Critique of Historical Reason. Dilthey asserts that historical reason needs just as much justification as pure reason. Critique of pure reason dealt with the reason in the world of nature and answered the question how pure science is possible, on the other hand, critique of historical reason dealt with the reason manifested in the human world and tried to answer the question how historical experience can become science. Dilthey sought to discover the categories of the historical world that would be able to support the human sciences in clear analogy to the Kantian question.¹³

He made the capital distinction between the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). For him,

¹³ Hans Georg, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p.221.

methodologies of the natural sciences look for the explanations based on the principle of causality; natural sciences analyze natural facts and try to find regularities which it calls laws. However, formulation of laws or casual analysis does not have any place in human sciences. Human sciences do not deal with brute facts it deals with the meaning. In parallel to this the orientation of the knowing subject to its attitude with regard to objects will be different. In natural sciences we can control this physical world through the study of its laws. To do this, we must exclude the experience of the subject. Whereas the position of the subject in human sciences is distinguished by unrestricted experience- that is his experience is not limited by the experimental conditions of systematic observation.¹⁴ This difference also causes different conceptualizations of experience and theory in natural and human sciences respectively.

Dilthey emphasizes the distinction between *verstehen*(understanding) and *erklaren*(explaining). Natural sciences try to explain things by depending on the causality, but the subject matter of the human sciences which is life experiences (*erlebnis*) is not a subject of empirical perception, it is rather a subject of subjective understanding. The main reason for the difference of the methodologies of natural and human sciences is the completely different characters of the objects they study: “This understanding does not just designate a distinctive methodological approach that we assume over against such objects. The difference between the human and natural sciences is not just about the stance of the subject toward the object; it is not merely about a kind of attitude, a method. Rather, the procedure of understanding is

¹⁴ Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, pp. 147-150.

grounded in the realization that the external reality that constitutes its objects is totally different from the objects of the natural sciences. Spirit has objectified itself in the former, purposes have embodied in them, values have been actualized in them, and understanding grasps this spiritual content that has been formed in them.”¹⁵ Language is used as an analytical tool for the objectification of subjective understanding. So the best sources of human sciences are the written ones.

As emphasized above Dilthey was seeking a firm foundation for the Geisteswissenschaften. As a follower of Schleiermacher, Dilthey began his project by asking the question that how is it possible for a knowing subject to gain knowledge of the thoughts and experiences of another subject. Dilthey accepted Schleiermacher’s notion that the aim of understanding is to reconstruct the subjective intentions of the author. Dilthey, like Schleiermacher, emphasized the psychological aspect of understanding. The mental states of author should be re-experienced in the process of understanding. The final aim of the hermeneutics is to understand the author better than he understood himself. To achieve this goal the historian would seek to minimize the effect of the prejudices. So we come to the argument that the subjective intentions of the author become the objective data of the human sciences. According to Dilthey it is this homogeneity of the subject and the object that makes historical knowledge possible.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Dilthey, ‘The Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences’, in Sullivan, Robert R., *The Hermeneutics reader: texts of the German tradition from the Enlightenment* New York: Continuum Press, 1989, p.165.

Life is a central concept in Dilthey's search for founding a method for Geisteswissenschaften. For Dilthey what we understand as human sciences is always a manifestation of human life. Understanding itself is also a manifestation of life, acts of understanding are lived by us and they constitute the living experience (erlebnis). He rejects any idea of universal subject of transcendental ego. Meaning emerges from the historical reality of life. The object of understanding is the living experience. Human sciences should study the temporal flow of the "life-experiences" which are a part of a coherent whole. Dilthey answers the questions like what is history with reference to the concept of erlebnis. For him history is comprised of individuals and their life-experiences. These life-experiences constitute individual's life history and the life histories of the individuals constitute the history at large.¹⁶ According to Dilthey all pronouncements of truth are historically conditioned and as such they were not a reflection of objective reality but rather an expression of the human experience of it.

According to Dilthey life experiences express themselves in the objective world in concrete forms. These experiences become concretely manifested in what Dilthey calls objectifications of life. By this way, life-experiences become accessible in the world in which we live. As Dilthey stated, "Thus the concept of cultural science is determined, according to the range of phenomena that it comprises, by the objectification of life in the external world. The mind only understands what it has created. Nature, the object of natural science, encompasses that reality which is

¹⁶ Wachterhouser, Brice R. (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p.78.

brought into being independently of the activity of the mind.”¹⁷ On the other hand, what historians seek to understand is what they themselves have produced. Hence temporality and historicity is the very nature of life-experiences.

Following Schleiermacher, Dilthey accepts the notion that understanding takes place in a hermeneutical circle. This hermeneutical circle is also defined by historicity. Meaning is a part of the historical-hermeneutic circle. Dilthey defined this as this: “ 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. It is not something above or outside history but a part of a hermeneutical circle always historically defined.”¹⁸

Dilthey had made important contributions to hermeneutics project, and had been generally accepted as the father of the modern hermeneutics. Roy J. Howard suggested that the essence of his hermeneutic thinking can be distilled into three major elements: “ The first is his distinction between the fields of the natural and human sciences; the second is his thesis of ‘experience’ and ‘life’ as the unifying elements within the field of the human sciences; and third is his logic for the interpretation of ‘life’ as objectified in historical documents.”¹⁹ And, he summarized Dilthey’s contribution to hermeneutics as follows: “ Without Dilthey’s presentation of the history of hermeneutics and without his reinterpreive elaboration,

¹⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, ‘The Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences’, in Sullivan, Robert R., *The Hermeneutics reader: texts of the German tradition from the Enlightenment*, New York: Continuum Press, 1989, p.171.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.175.

¹⁹ Howard, Roy J., *Three Faces of Hermeneutics. An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.132.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics would have hardly achieved the character of a paradigm; without his unending epistemological efforts to make 'understanding' the basis of all 'sciences of the acting man' and of the 'socio-historical reality', Heidegger's project of 'existential hermeneutics' would hardly have been possible; without his foundation of the human sciences, critical of metaphysics and speculative idealism as it was, Gadamer certainly would not have attempted to develop philosophical hermeneutics as the 'prima philosophia'.²⁰ But certainly there are problems and deficiencies in the theories of Dilthey. He argued that understanding is historical, if so that its conditions, its prevailing preferences change from one period to another. So it is impossible to lay down the rules of historical features of understanding, and then how can we call such a process as a methodology? Methodological rule must be one, it must be constant. This difficulty led the hermeneutics to transform from methodology to historical ontology.

Dilthey was a follower of Schleiermacher's project of developing a general hermeneutics. His aim was to establish a method for objective understanding. He made a distinction between human sciences and natural sciences and showed that the methods of the natural sciences are not applicable to the human sciences. According to Dilthey human sciences should study human sciences. He was the first who emphasized the historical character of understanding. Dilthey laid the foundations for Heidegger's thinking on the temporality of self-understanding.

²⁰ Ibid.

2.3. Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger's ontology of human existence or *Dasein* (being-there) had important influence on the philosophical hermeneutics of the recent decades. He elaborated his views in his famous book *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger's work presented a departure from the point of view of hermeneutics. Heidegger has given a new meaning to the term hermeneutics by associating it closely with his specific philosophical endeavor. Heidegger's investigation of the hermeneutic concepts like understanding, interpretation, and explanation has changed the character of traditional hermeneutics. Heidegger redefined the theory of understanding. As seen, Dilthey was unable to free his thought from the traditional dichotomy between subject and object. Heidegger, on the other hand, maintains that before any object is posited for a subject, both of them are bound together by a fundamental relation of belonging to a world. So, he presupposes a totally new starting point. World is prior to the subject that relates itself to objects in knowing and acting. The epistemologically motivated distinction of subject and object, inner and outer are questioned by Heidegger.²¹

Heidegger does not search the conditions under which a knowing subject can understand a particular object, but rather he begins with an ontological inquiry into the nature of that being which is capable of such activities, that is into the nature of *Dasein*. As he puts it: "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities... It is peculiar to the entity that with and through its being, this being is

²¹ Ormiston, Gayle L.-Schrift, Alan D. (eds.), *The Hermeneutic Tradition. From Ast to Ricoeur*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, pp. 122-123.

disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's being.”²²

Heidegger gave an ontological character to understanding. Understanding is an ontological characteristic of Dasein's being-in-the-world. It is not just a method of human sciences. Understanding means to understand one's position within being, and it is achieved by projecting one's own most possibilities. Understanding is Dasein's mode of being in it is potentiality for being. In other words, what we are, who we are is determined by the concrete possibilities we take over in taking a stand on the project of our lives.²³

Like the interpretation of a text, the interpretation of Dasein must always be circular. “As our lives involve a back and forth between partial meanings and some of the whole uncovering structural items of Dasein and a pre-understanding of the totality.”²⁴

The hermeneutical circle is constitutive of dasein's Being. It is an entity which has ontologically circular structure. Heidegger describes the circle in such a way that the understanding of the text is determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding. “It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of

²² Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. By J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p.32 cited in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* edited by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge: University Press, 1981, p.40.

²³ Ormiston, *The Hermeneutic Tradition. From Ast to Ricoeur*, p.124.

²⁴ Mueller-Volmer, *The Hermeneutic Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, p.237.

a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowledge.”²⁵

In the interpretation of a text, it is “understanding that requires of itself to be thus understood.”²⁶ We do not see the text (in Dilthey’s terminology) as an instance of historical objectification of understanding. The meaning of the whole cannot be determined in terms of the object of understanding alone. The understanding transcends its objects. In fact, understanding is not to make any clear-cut distinction between objective and subjective aspects of the hermeneutical circle as accepted by Schleiermacher.

What we are trying to understand is not an external object alone, but our own self-understanding in the process of seeking clarity and depth about what it is to be in our lives. Hence every interpretation operates within a fore-structure of presuppositions, which is determined by our goals, interests, and needs. This fore-structure of presuppositions is projected in advance over what one is interpreting. This means that every interpretation is shaped and regulated by a set of assumptions and expectations about the meaning of the whole. Thus understanding has always projective character since a person who is trying to understand a text is performing an act of projecting about the meaning of a text.²⁷

The interpretations are drawn from what Heidegger calls “tradition”. The tradition is the medium from which we draw all our possibilities of understanding.

²⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, cited in, Hans Georg, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, pp.235-236.

²⁶ Floistad, "Understanding Hermeneutics," p.453.

²⁷ Shapiro, *Hermeneutics: Question and Prospects*, p.82.

Our beings are characterized by historicity. The way one reasons and reflects upon things is determined by his past. An individual's history enables him to have a definite world.²⁸ However, Heidegger's concept of historicity is different from historical relativism of Dilthey in the sense that Heidegger makes history itself the ultimate ground of all intelligibility.

Heidegger conceives "history as having an underlying core of meaning which gives it continuity and coherence."²⁹ He sees history as a meaningful totality that unites our "heritage" and "destiny" into a cohesive narrative with a beginning and end. And "since we are all participants in this world historical happening, we always have an access to the sources of intelligibility of our heritage."³⁰ This undercurrent of history is the ultimate ground of all our possible ways of understanding Being.

Heidegger brings hermeneutics from a theory of interpretation to a theory of existential understanding. The hermeneutics of Heidegger has important implications. With Heidegger problem of hermeneutics has gained universal framework and a new dimension which is caused from his transcendental interpretation of understanding. Moreover, any idea of a presuppositionlessness is rejected by Heidegger. Together with this point, the idea that the hermeneutical process involves self-understanding as well as understanding of the other, was taken over by Gadamer. How Gadamer developed the concepts that he taken over from

²⁸ Ormiston, *The Hermeneutic Tradition. From Ast to Ricoeur*, p.126.

²⁹ Floistad "Understanding Hermeneutics," p.453.

³⁰ Ibid, p.454.

Heidegger and the general hermeneutical theory of Gadamer will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS

Gadamer mainly deals with the question that how understanding occurs. The methodological questions pertaining to scientific understanding have been the preoccupation of hermeneutic theory since Schleiermacher's time. Gadamer contends that this preoccupation has distorted the universality of the hermeneutical phenomenon by isolating the kind of methodological understanding which is not confined to *Geisteswissenschaften*. Understanding is a much broader process which occurs everywhere in human life.³¹ He points out this just at the beginning sentences of the introduction part of his *Truth and Method*: 'These studies are concerned with the problem of hermeneutics. The phenomenon of understanding and of correct interpretation of what has been understood is not a problem specific to the methodology of the human sciences alone.'³² Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics is ontological rather than methodological: 'My real concern was and is philosophical: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.'³³

³¹ Linge, E. David, 'Introduction', in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. by David E.Linge, Berkeley: University of California, 1976, p.xi.

³² Hans Georg, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p.xxi.

³³ Ibid, p.xxviii.

Scleiermacher and Dilthey identified the meaning of a text with the subjective intention of its author. The aim of understanding was to understand the author as he understood himself. For Dilthey, historical understanding is subjective, and therefore, one has to transcend its historicity in order to reach an objective understanding. Gadamer rejects such a notion. For Gadamer, it is not possible for knower to leave its present situation, and transcend his historicity: "When we understand a text we do not put ourselves in the place of the other, and it is not a matter of penetrating the spiritual activities of the author; it is simply a question of grasping the meaning, significance, and the aim of what is transmitted to us... The meaning of hermeneutical inquiry is to close the miracle of understanding texts or utterances and not the mysterious communication of souls. Understanding is a participation in the common aim."³⁴

For Gadamer, the meaning of a text cannot be equated with the author's intentions. His hermeneutics embodies the development of a theory of interpretation that avoids reference to the "subject" or "subjective intentions". Together with Heidegger, he argues that the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. This means that understanding is not merely a productive, but always a productive activity as well.³⁵

Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics has two original claims: the ontological significance of hermeneutics, and the claim for its universality. Hermeneutics is no longer conceived as a method of human sciences. In fact it is very related to the

³⁴ Gadamer, Hans George, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 5:1, 1975, p.44.

³⁵ Warnke, Georgia, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1987, p.105.

questions concerning what human beings are. Understanding is shown to constitute man's being. Understanding is not one type of activity of a subject, but it is universal in a sense that it underlies and pervades all activities. The other aspect of universality is "language". For Gadamer language is not to be understood as an instrument or a tool what we use; rather it is the medium of all understanding and all tradition. Obviously, the conceptualization or *verstehen* is revised by Gadamer. It is no longer psychological phenomenon but rather phenomenological.

The concept of prejudice is one of the original elements of Heidegger's hermeneutics which is taken over by Gadamer. The argument of Heidegger is that any idea of a presuppositionless understanding is misconceived. It is because, all understanding necessarily involves pre-conceptions that are products of an historical setting. Gadamer defines these pre-conceptions as prejudice. It constitutes the most striking criticism of the old hermeneutics. Understanding is always understanding from the point of view of one's own historicity. The historian must bring his own historicity into the situation and not attempt to attain some misconceived notion of objectivity by trying to eliminate it. This "historicity of our existence entails that prejudices... constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world."³⁶ Prejudice is not something that must be eliminated on the way to truth.

³⁶ Gadamer, Hans George, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. by David E.Linge, Berkeley: University of California, 1976, p.9, cited in Bernstein, Richard J., *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p.127.

Hence the concept of objectivity is redefined and by doing this, Gadamer criticizes the Enlightenment ideas of reason that is posited as the antithesis of all prejudice and tradition.³⁷ Objectivity is no longer the absence of prejudice, it is “the verification a prejudice finds in its working out.”³⁸

Neither interpreter nor author can be free from prejudice. It refers to the given life-world or experiences of an individual. One’s given experiences should be active in one’s question to and interpretation of some text. Without any preconceived notions of what we are to look for in a text we become unable to discover anything about it. Prejudices are the very basis of understanding. In fact: “The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. By the light of this insight it appears that historicism... is based on the modern enlightenment and unknowingly shares its prejudices. And there is one prejudice of the enlightenment that is essential to it: The fundamental prejudice of the enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which deprives tradition of its power.”³⁹

What is needed, for Gadamer, is a fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Thus , he makes a distinction between the legitimate prejudices and the others that are to be suppressed by reason. However, how can we distinguish legitimate prejudices from all the countless other ones? Here the answer is closely related with the concept of

³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.241-245.

³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.252.

³⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.239-240.

“authority” and the typical reaction of Enlightenment to it. This reaction is based on a dichotomy between faith in authority and the use of one’s own reason which supposed by the Enlightenment. It was accepted that “if the prestige of authority takes place of one’s own judgment, then authority is a source of prejudices.”⁴⁰ However, Gadamer argues that this does not exclude the possibility that it can also be a source of truth. It is what the Enlightenment failed to see. Authority is conceived as a question of blind obedience and despotic power by the Enlightenment:

but the authority of persons is based ultimately... on recognition and knowledge-namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with blind obedience, but rather with knowledge.⁴¹

This acceptance of authority, as Gadamer calls objective or legitimate prejudice, is the essence of tradition. Sources of our prejudices are found in tradition. Again, Gadamer rejects the Enlightenment antithesis between tradition and reason. Such a distinction is meaningless as all reason functions with tradition. Our rootedness in our own traditions gives us a perspective, which makes understanding possible. In other words, the projection of meaning which governs understanding stems from the tradition to which one belongs. Gadamer says:

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.247.

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.248.

In our continually manifested attitude to the past the main future is not, at any rate, a distancing and freeing of ourselves from what has been transmitted. Rather, we stand always within tradition, and this is no objectifying process, i.e. We do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us...⁴²

Then Gadamer asks, “what follows for understanding from the hermeneutic condition of belonging to a tradition?”⁴³ The answer lies in his conceptualization of hermeneutical circle.

As stated earlier, hermeneutical circle gained a new meaning with Heidegger. Hermeneutical circle is no longer a methodological circle, but describes an ontological structural element in understanding. This ontological character of the circle indicates something basic about our being-in-the-world. The old hermeneutics accepted the circular structure of understanding, but always within the framework of part whole relation-that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole. The circular movement of understanding runs backwards and forwards along the text and disappears when it is perfectly understood.

As against this approach, hermeneutical circle is described by Gadamer, following Heidegger, in such a way that the understanding of a text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding. We understand text on the basis of expectations of meaning which are drawn our earlier relation to the subject. In that sense, Gadamer follows Heidegger in supposing that understanding is projective. What occurs in perfect understanding is not the

⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.250.

⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.258.

dissolution of the circle of the whole and part, but, on the contrary, is a full realization of it. “The circle is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of tradition and the movement of interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the communality that binds us to tradition.”⁴⁴ In that sense hermeneutical circle does not involve only the mediation between part and whole but also involves the mediation between past and present.

Understanding is both dialectical and reflexive. It is dialectical process as understanding of a text involves being aware of the effect of the text on the interpreter’s own understanding of it.⁴⁵ It is reflexive as it involves an openness to tradition to speak to us. The text is made to speak through interpretation. To think historically always involves establishing a connection between these ideas and one’s own thinking. To try to eliminate one’s own concepts in interpretation, for Gadamer, is not merely impossible, but absurd. To interpret means to use one’s own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us. Gadamer states:

Hermeneutics must start from the fact that understanding is related to the thing itself as manifest in the tradition, and at the same time to a tradition from where the thing can speak to me. We found the hermeneutical task precisely on the tension that exists between the familiar and the foreign character of the message transmitted to us by tradition.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.261.

⁴⁵ Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p.32-33.

⁴⁶ Gadamer, “The Problem of...”, pp.45-46.

The intermediate area between historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition is the true home of hermeneutics. This hermeneutical situation serves to emphasize the question of temporal distance and its meaning for understanding.

Gadamer rejects the generally accepted idea that time is a chasm which we could bridge over in order to recover the past. In fact it is the ground, which supports the arrival of the past and in which the present is rooted. It was the naive assumption of historicism that “we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age and thing with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own and thus advance towards historical objectivity.”⁴⁷ Hence, historicism assumes that temporal distance must be bridged if we want to obtain superior understanding, which depends on a realization that places the interpreter on the same level as the author. However, for Gadamer, just the opposite of this assumption is true- that is the principle that subsequent understanding is superior to the original production (superior understanding) is based on an inevitable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by the temporal distance between them. In that sense, temporal distance is the basis of the positive and productive possibilities for understanding. As he says:

The real meaning of a text... does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for... it is always partly determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.264.

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.263.

The meaning of a text goes beyond its author. Thus understanding is not merely a re-productive, but always a productive attitude as well. “Because what we are now concerned with is not the individuality and what it thinks, but the objective truth of what is said, a text is not understood as a mere expression of life, but taken seriously in its claim to truth.”⁴⁹

Temporal distance also has another meaning. It lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. However, the discovery of the true meaning of a text is never finished; it is an infinite process. It is because as time passes, fresh sources are excluded and there emerges continually new sources of understanding which reveal unsuspected elements of meaning. Temporal distance assures this by isolating the false prejudices by which we misunderstand from the true ones by which we understand. This isolation requires the suspension of its validity. However, we cannot be aware of it as long as our mind is influenced by a false prejudice. Thus what is needed is the temporal distance. “Hence, the hermeneutically trained mind will also include historical consciousness. It will make conscious the prejudices governing our own understanding, so that the text, as another’s meaning can be isolated and valued on its own.”⁵⁰

As stated earlier, Gadamer argues that historicism has forgotten its own historicity. A proper hermeneutics must demonstrate the effectivity of history within

⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.264.

⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.266.

understanding itself. Gadamer refers to this as “effective history”. “Understanding is an effective-historical relation.”⁵¹

If one is trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance, he is always subject to the effect of effective-history. Effective-historical consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. “The situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand.”⁵² We are always within the situation. However we can never describe this situation fully; simply because we are historical beings. To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be completed.

The concept of “horizon” constitutes the essential part of the situation. “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.”⁵³ The horizon is something into which we move and that moves with us. If a person has no horizons, he cannot see far enough and thus he is limited to what is the nearest. In contrast, a person who has horizon is able to see beyond what is nearest.

Understanding of the past requires historical horizon. “But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by placing ourselves within a historical situation. Rather, we must always have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within a situation.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.267.

⁵² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.269.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.271.

What occurs in understanding, Gadamer labels, the “fusion of horizons” as both the text, and the interpreter of the text have horizons that are historically conditioned. However, since the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past, we cannot speak of two distinct horizons. Then if this is the case, how can we speak of “fusion”? Gadamer answers:

...historical consciousness involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation but consciously bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project on historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present.⁵⁵

This act of fusion is the text of the effective-historical consciousness. This task constitutes the central problem of application that exists in all understanding.

For Romantic Hermeneutics the act of understanding included three elements: understanding, interpretation and application. Gadamer, on the contrary, argues that understanding is always an interpretation and this unity leads to third element-application. Understanding always involves the application of the text to the present situation of the interpreter, application is an integral part of the hermeneutical act together with understanding and interpretation. It is because the text “must be understood at every moment in every particular situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.”⁵⁶ If understanding is historical then the text will be understood in a different way in every time. Here, the problem of the relationship between the universal and the particular comes into being.

⁵⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.273.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.275.

Understanding, then, is a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation. Here Gadamer introduces the Aristotelian ethics as a kind of model for this problem of hermeneutics. Aristotle makes a distinction between *phronesis* (ethical know-how) and *episteme* (theoretical or scientific knowledge) and *techne* (technical know-how). For Gadamer rather than the distinction between *episteme* and *phronesis*, the distinction between *phronesis* and *techne* is more important.⁵⁷ The object of moral sciences is man and what he knows of himself as an acting being. This kind of knowledge has a purpose of governing his action. On the other side, *techne* refers to skill of an artisan who knows how to produce something. Hence, obviously, “ethical know-how and technical know-how have this in common: neither of them is an abstract of knowledge instead, in the definition and direction of activity, both of them imply a practical knowledge fashioned to the measure of the concrete tasks before them.”⁵⁸

However, we know also that they are not the same thing. Clearly, one cannot make himself in the same way that he can something else. Thus there must be another kind of knowledge. According to Gadamer “Aristotle catches this difference in a bold and unique way when he calls this kind of knowledge, self-knowledge, i.e. knowledge for oneself.”⁵⁹

Gadamer makes three points to state the difference between *techne* and *phronesis*. Firstly, we can learn and forget a *techne*. However, we do not learn and

⁵⁷ Topkara, Sevgül, *Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: The Debate Between Habermas and Gadamer*, Bosphorus University, Pils 1993, T 62, unpublished master thesis, p.26.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, “The Problem of...”, pp.118-119.

⁵⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.282.

forget moral knowledge. We are always in a situation that we must apply moral knowledge. Secondly, the conceptual relation between means and end is different in *techne* and *phronesis*. *Phronesis* has no particular end, but is concerned with true living in general. However, all *techne* is particular and serves particular ends. Moreover, while *phronesis* requires new means in each occasion, technical activity does not demand such a thing. Lastly, *phronesis* requires the understanding of other human beings whereas *techne* does not.⁶⁰

According to Gadamer, Aristotle's description of *phronesis* obtains an excellent model to guide us in the elucidation of the hermeneutical task. In hermeneutics, together with Aristotle, application is a constitutive moment. Here, Gadamer gives the example of the judge. The judge does not simply "apply" determinate laws to particular situation. He must interpret law for each case. Such a codetermination of the universal and the particular is the characteristic of *phronesis*.⁶¹ In addition, "just as the application is not a subsequent or occasional part of *phronesis* in which we relate some pre-given determinate universal to a particular, this, Gadamer claims, is characteristic of all authentic understanding and interpretation."⁶² Application is not the relating of some pre-given universal to particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a text seeks to apply it to himself. However, in Gadamer's words, "this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he understands it as such and only afterwards uses it for

⁶⁰ Topkara, *op.cit*, p.27.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² Bernstein, Richard J., *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p.148.

particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal thing, the text.”⁶³

Every interpretation is an explanation, It signifies that an interpretation is performed with some practical aim in view. The practical aims of an interpretation concern the relation between past and present. The application occurs in and as the dialectic of question and answer between one’s existence and the historical text. This dialectic is the core of the hermeneutical experience.

Now, we came to the last topic which completes whole picture of hermeneutics of Gadamer. We can begin with the concept of “experience” firstly.

Effective- historical consciousness has the structure of experience. Gadamer uses the word “experience” in two different ways: “to refer to the experiences that fit in our expectation and confirm it, and to the experience that we have.”⁶⁴ This latter is always negative. Simply because if we have an experience of an object this means that we have not seen things correctly hitherto and now know it better. In fact, experience is primarily an experience of negation. However, this negativity has a productive meaning. Gadamer calls this kind of experience as dialectical. We cannot have the same experience twice. In other words, the same thing cannot become again a new experience for us. As a result, an experience always contains an orientation towards new experience. The dialectic of experience is based on this openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself.

⁶³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.289.

⁶⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.317.

This conceptualization of experience involves a new element. It refers not only to experience in the sense of information that things give us, but refers to “experience which must constantly be acquired and from which none can be exempt. Experience here is something that is part of the historical nature of man.”⁶⁵ This historical nature necessarily contains the experience of human finitude. It is because the experienced man is one who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. He knows the limitedness of all prediction and uncertainty of all plans. It is because he continually experiences that nothing returns. Hence true experience is that of one’s own historicity. It has important results for the inquiry into the nature of effective-historical consciousness. As Gadamer says:

Hermeneutical experience is concerned with what has been transmitted in tradition. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that we learn to know and be in command of through experience; it is language, i.e., it expresses itself like a ‘Thou’ is not an object, but stands in a relationship with us... We consider that the understanding of a tradition does not take the text as an expression of life of a ‘Thou’ but as a meaningful content detected from all bonds of the meaning individual, of an ‘I’ or ‘Thou’.⁶⁶

Tradition is a real partner in communication like between I and Thou. For real communication in human relations what is needed is that one partner should listen to the other partner and should not overlook his claims. Hence, for achieving a real communication, ”openness” is necessary. The structure of openness recalls the importance of the “question”. Question is implicit in all experiences since to have experience is not possible without asking questions. The openness of what is in

⁶⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.319.

⁶⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.321.

question means that the answer is not settled. However, at the same time the openness of question is limited also. For Gadamer the essence of question is to have sense which involves direction. Limitedness of question is the result of this direction.

As a question is open, it always includes both negative and positive judgment. This is the basis of the essential relation between question and knowledge. Only a person who has questions can have knowledge. That is why the concept of question is so crucial for hermeneutical phenomenon:

Thus a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said... Thus the meaning of a sentence...necessarily goes beyond what is said in it. The logic of the human sciences...is a logic of the question.⁶⁷

Gadamer defines Dialectic as the art of asking questions, it is the art of conducting a real conversation. To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion."⁶⁸

Hence, dialectic is also the art of the formation of concepts as the working out of the common meaning. This is what characterizes a dialogue. In the process of question and answer, giving and talking and seeing each other's point, what emerges is the communication of meaning which is the task of hermeneutics. Gadamer seeks to examine the hermeneutical phenomenon according to the model of conversation

⁶⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.333.

⁶⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.331.

between two people. We can describe the work of hermeneutics as conversation with the text. Although they are different situations what is in common is that both are concerned with an object that is placed before them. Just as one person seeks to reach agreement with his partner about the object so the interpreter understands the object of which the text speaks. Remember that to understand what a person says is to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and re-live his experiences. Gadamer states that:

A conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree each other on the subject.⁶⁹

In addition he says “a conversation has a spirit of its own”⁷⁰ This means that a conversation is not the one that we want to conduct. Rather we are involved in it. Conversation reaches its own conclusion and merely people do not lead it, but led by it.

Now we can turn back to our hermeneutical task and ask how a conversation with the text can be achieved. For the text to be made the object of the interpretation means that it asks a question of the interpreter. Thus, interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked, of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question. To understand a question means to ask it. What does it

⁶⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.347.

⁷⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.345.

mean? It means that to understand an opinion is to understand it as the answer to a question.

The text that speaks to us from the past itself poses a question. In order to answer this question we must begin to ask questions. We must try to reconstruct the question to which the text is answer. This reconstruction of question takes place in the process of questioning through which we seek the answer to the question that the text asks. "A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon, for the historical horizon that is outlined in the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have responded to the word that has been handed down."⁷¹ Hence, it is a hermeneutical necessity to go beyond mere reconstruction. This dialectic of question and answer makes understanding appear as a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation. It is obvious that the text does not speak to us in the same way as a person, "making the text speak, is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but that, as a question, it is related to the answer that is expected in the text."⁷²

Now, we are coming to the problem of language. No text speaks if it does not speak the language that reaches the other person. The mediation between the text and the interpreter is the achievement of language and understanding of the object takes place always in a linguistic form.

⁷¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.337.

⁷² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.340.

Hence, we have to demonstrate the linguistic nature of conversation. Our starting point is that every conversation presupposes a common language, or, it creates a common language. “To reach an understanding with one’s partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one’s own point of view, but a transformation into a communication, in which we do not remain what we were.”⁷³

This finding of a common language is not simply a tool for the purpose of understanding, but rather coincides with the very act of understanding. “The text brings an object into language, but that it achieves this is ultimately the work of the interpreter. Both have a share in it.”⁷⁴

Language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized. Through the language object of understanding, namely, literary tradition, comes into words and at the same time language is the interpreter's own language. However, not only the object of understanding has a fundamental connection with language. It is because in order to express the meaning of a text we must translate it into our own language. In Gadamer’s words: “For man’s relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally linguistic in nature, and hence intelligible. Thus hermeneutics is... a universal aspect of philosophy, and not just the methodological basis of so-called human sciences.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.341.

⁷⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.330.

⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 432-433.

Language and understanding are inseparable structural aspects of being-in-the-world. They are not optional functions that man engages in or does not engage in at will. Language provides us with a relation to the whole of being. Our possession by language, is the ontological condition for our understanding.⁷⁶

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* opened up a new phase for the hermeneutical theory. With Gadamer, the older conception of hermeneutics as the methodological basis for the human sciences for the human sciences is left behind. Gadamer called the status of method into question. For him hermeneutics was not a theory for developing a methodology for the human sciences; it was a philosophical effort. He did not conceive understanding as a subjective process of man over an object, rather he defined it as the being of man himself. For Gadamer, understanding was an ontological process in man. He also emphasized the linguisticity and historicity of understanding. The result of these reinterpretations was a different kind of hermeneutical theory which can be defined as Gadamer's "philosophical" hermeneutics.

⁷⁶ Linge, 'Introduction,' p.xxix.

CHAPTER 4

ENGLISH SCHOOL'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL THEORY

The aim of this chapter is to show the basic features of the English school approach. A general overview of the English school approach will be given. General characteristics of the English school and its contribution to the international relations theory will be handled. The distinctive features of the school will try to be highlighted. The chapter also aims to describe the theoretical tradition that Martin Wight belongs to; in order to provide a better understanding of Wight's thought.

The origin of the English school, as a self-conscious intellectual movement, can be traced back to the 1950s. It begins with the formation of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics which started meeting in the late 1950s. The earlier roots of the school could be traced in Charles Manning's and Martin Wight's thinking about international society.⁷⁷ English school has begun to develop in the 1960s, and it can be said that it began to be recognized as a distinct school in the study of international relations in the 1980s.⁷⁸ At the beginning the

⁷⁷ Buzan, Barry, *The English School as a Research Program: an overview, and a proposal for reconvening*, Paper presented at 'A Reconsideration of the English School: close or reconvene?' BISA Conference, Manchester, December 1999, p.4.

⁷⁸ The symbolic origin of the English school is accepted as the first formal meeting of the British committee on international politics, in January 1959. For instance, see Tim Dunne. *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School*, London: Macmillan, 1998. And Roy Jones' famous 'case for closure' can be said as the starting point of the debates regarding the English school

British Committee organized series of meetings, which are sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, and brought together the people from different academic disciplines and also people from diplomacy who are not professional academicians. The debates that took place in the meetings of the Committee led to the publication of books which took their inspirations from these discussions.⁷⁹

Waever suggests four phases for the development of the English school which is useful for having a rough idea about the evolution of the school:

- *Phase 1* runs from 1959, with the founding of the British Committee, to the publication of Butterfield and Wight's *Diplomatic Investigations*. In this period, Committee developed the focus on international society as its preferred approach to theorizing about international relations.
- *Phase 2* is the period between 1966 and 1977. In 1977 the foundational texts of the English school appeared: Bull's *The Anarchical Society* which focused on the nature of Western international society, and Wight's *System of States*, which opened up the exploration of international society in a world historical context. Also a younger generation began to emerge, most notably with Vincent's 1974 book *Nonintervention and International Order*.
- *Phase 3* runs from 1977 to 1992. This era marks the end of the British Committee phase and beginning of the period of a young generation. The British Committee continued its meetings till the mid-1980s but after Bull's death regular meetings

as a distinct school ,Roy Jones 'The English School in International Relations:A Case for Closure', *Review of International Studies*, 7, 1981, pp.1-13.

⁷⁹ Buzan, *op.cit.*

came to an end. The main products of this period can be summarized as the followings: 1984 book edited by Bull and Watson *The Expansion of International Society*, Watson's 1992 book *The Evolution of International Society*, Vincent's main books; *Foreign Policy and Human Rights* (1986), and *Human Rights and International Relations* (1986), J.D.B. Miller and R.J. Vincent edited the book; *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations* (1990); and Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury and Adam Roberts edited, *Hugo Grotius and International Relations* (1990). These were extensions of the British Committee tradition. There were also some other follow-on groups that were inspired by the British Committee tradition which adopted similar assumptions and similar working methods. The most important and productive of these groups was the one based at the LSE which started in 1974. This group produced three edited volumes: Donelan, *The Reason of States* (1978), Mayall, *The Community of States* (1982), and Navari, *The Condition of States* (1991), and also generated two important monographs: Mayall's 1990 *Nationalism and International Society*, and Donelan's 1990 *Element of International Political Theory*. After Vincent's death this group moved away from the mainstream English school agenda to the political theory. During this phase English school got its name from Roy Jones.

- *Phase 4* runs from 1992 to the present. In this period a new generation of English school writers most of whom with no direct links to the British Committee emerged. This new generation of scholars is more open to working with English school ideas and approaches in the wider context of developments in

international relations theory generally (e.g. neorealism, regime theory, constructivism, globalization). In this fourth phase the English school has successfully reproduced itself both through the force of its ideas crossing three generations of scholars, and the influence of several of its central figures, but the sustained discussions and forums that played important role in stimulating and orienting the work of the earlier generations could not be achieved during the 1990s.⁸⁰

English school is also called as international society approach. The core concept of the school is international society. This concept is the main focus of the English school thinking and it is the distinctive element of the approach. According to Barry Buzan one of the core elements that define the distinctiveness of the English school is its three key concepts which are *international system*, *international society* and *world society*.⁸¹ These concepts emanate from Martin Wight's three traditions, and for Buzan these terms are now understood as the followings:

- International system (Hobbes/Machiavelli/Realism): It is about power politics among the states. It puts the structure and process of international anarchy at the center of international relations theory. International system is broadly parallel to mainstream realism and neorealism and is thus well developed and clearly understood. It is based on an ontology of states, and is generally approached with

⁸⁰ Waever, Ole, 'Four Meanings of International Society: A Trans-Atlantic Dialogue' in B.a. Robertson ed., *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory*, London: Pinter, p. 85-89, cited in , *op.cit.*, Buzan, *The English School as a Research Program*, pp.5-6.

⁸¹ Buzan, Barry, *Rethinking the Solidarist-Pluralist Debate in English School Theory*, paper presented at ISA Panel 'Solidarity in Anarchy: Advancing the new English School Agenda', p.3.

a positivist epistemology, materialist methodologies, and mechanistic structural theories.

- International society (Grotius/Rationalism): It is about the institutionalization of common interest and identity among states. It puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the center of international relations theory. It is the main focus of English school thinking, and the concept is quite well developed and relatively clear. In parallel with international system, it is also based on an ontology of states, but is generally approached with a constructivist epistemology and historical methods.
- World society (Kant/Revolutionalism): It takes individuals, non-state organizations and ultimately the world population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts transcendence of the state system at the center of international relations theory. World society clearly does not rest on an ontology of states, but given the transnational element neither does it rest entirely on one of individuals.⁸²

English school rejected the conception of international anarchy and its members developed the notion of international society, reinterpreting modern political history and recovering past political thought. Martin Wight argued that the fundamental task of any student of international relations is to define the idea of international society.⁸³

Wight reflected upon three international societies which are Ancient Chinese, the

⁸² Buzan, *op.,cit.*

⁸³ Almeida, Joao Marques de, "Challenging Realism by Returning to History: The British Committee's Contribution to IR Forty Years On", paper presented at BISA Conference, Manchester University, 1999, p.8.

Greco-Roman and the modern society of states and concluded that they had emerged in areas in which there was already a common language and culture. Of equivalent importance to this, the constituent parts felt that they belonged to a great civilization which was vastly superior to the other cultures with which they had contact. This awareness of their 'cultural differentiation' from the semi-civilized and barbaric peoples living elsewhere made it easier for political systems to communicate to determine the rights and duties which would link them together in a bounded international society.⁸⁴

Hedley Bull is also a very important figure of the English school and Bull's classification and explanations about the issue has an important impact upon the overall school. His conceptualizations have similarities with Wight's such as developing a historical analysis and emphasizing common norms and values but at some points he differs from Wight as well. The book of Hedley Bull; "The Anarchical Society", where he sets the distinction between system of states and society of states, as understood from its subtitle ,is 'a study of order in World Politics'. The issue is examined in the context of international order. Bull defines order as: 'a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society.'⁸⁵ The members of the international society or system, are only the states according to Bull. Other actors in the international realm are not taken into consideration by Bull. A state is defined by Bull as a

⁸⁴ Linklater, Andrew, 'Rationalism', in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1996, p.97.

⁸⁵ Hedley, Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p.8.

sovereign and independent political community that has internal sovereignty, final authority over its own territory and population, and external sovereignty, independence of outside authorities.⁸⁶ City –states , dynastic-states, nation –states, or multinational states are examples of states. But the entities such as the principalities of Western Christendom which did not possess internal or external sovereignty cannot be counted as states. International relations, is understood and used by Bull, as the relations between the states. So his distinction between system of states and society of states is based on the type of relations between the states.

A system of states is defined by Bull as : ” a system formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions, to cause them to behave-at least in some measure-as parts of a whole.”⁸⁷ The first condition for the existence of a system of states is the existence of at least two states, and the other necessary condition is that these states must be in regular contact. In this sense China and ancient Greece in the fifth century B.C. cannot form a system of states due to their lack of contact with each other. Only when there is a regular contact and interaction to a degree that makes the calculation of each other necessary we can talk about a system. There is no stipulation for the type of the interaction between the states in order to form a system. Interaction between the states can be direct or indirect, or it can be in form of co-operation or conflict, or even neutrality.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.10.

Bull criticizes different conceptualizations about the international system. He objects to the classification of Martin Wight . Wight claims that ‘suzerain-state systems’ such as China forms an international states system with their vassals. Bull rejects this on the grounds that the vassal states in such a case does not posses sovereignty and for that reason cannot be counted as states. Bull, also asserts difference of his approach from Morton A. Kaplan’s usage of the term. Kaplan tries to explain and predict international behavior when he uses the term international system, but Bull uses it only for specifying a particular kind of international constellation.⁸⁸ By asserting his difference from the other thinkers Bull makes it explicit that by the term system of states he implies a group of states, at least two, which involve in regular interaction regardless of the type of that interaction. The reason why these states form a system is that they are effected by each other to the extent that necessiates them to take into consideration the other states when making calculations about their behavior.

The second term society of states is defined by Bull as; ‘a situation that exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.’⁸⁹ In society of states we observe that the type of the interaction between the states is defined. A society of states is beyond the mere constellation of states. First there has to be common interests and common values prevailing among the

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.11-12.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.13.

society of states. This means that every group of states cannot form a society even if they intent to create one. Society of states can be formed only by a group of states that share common values and interests. States that form a society are bounded by certain rules against each other such as respecting the independence of each other. And also they have to co-operate in the same institutions such as international law, diplomacy, international organizations etc...

The major difference between the society of states and the system of states is that the states in the former are conscious of common interests or values, but for the latter there is no such a condition. Also in a system of states, the states that form the system do not have to share common institutions or abide by common rules. Bull cites some historical examples in order to clarify his distinction between international system and international society. For instance, before the Treaty of Paris in 1856, Turkey was a member of the European dominated international system, but only after 1856 Turkey became a member of the European dominated international society. Before the Treaty of Paris Turkey and Europe did not possess any common interests, or they did not share any common institutions. Only after the Treaty of Paris Turkey and Europe became conscious of common interests and began to share common institutions.⁹⁰

The main point of critics who argue that the distinction between two classifications is not meaningful is the impossibility of putting concrete borders between the two. Is it possible that a group of states that involve in interaction with each other would not share any common interests or values, or they would not put

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.14.

any rules for their relations, or they would not work in some institutions to an extent? It is very hard to claim possibility of such an option. Interaction or at least communication requires some rules and some commonality, however they are primitive or simple, in order to maintain that interaction or communication. Not only in society of states, but also in a system of states there has to exist an institution such as diplomacy. Otherwise an interaction between the parties cannot be expected. From another perspective, it is not easy to claim that states in a system are not motivated by common interests. Common interests can also prevail among the members of a system. Indeed, a perpetual conflict among the parties is illogical and maintenance of such a system cannot be at stake.

The reason for the difficulty of making such a distinction is that system of states and society of states are not two distinct formations. International system is embedded into international society. These two are not distinct formations, but international system exists in the international society. For this reason they can share commonalities and this does not work against such a distinction. In Bull's words: 'An international society in this sense presupposes an international system, but an international system may exist that is not an international society.'⁹¹ The difference between system of states and societies is not at the type of the relations between the states ,but rather the difference lies at the 'degree' or the power of these relations. States in a system does not necessarily share common values or institutions, but this does not mean that they cannot share common values or operate through common institutions. The difference between the system and society lies at the question 'to

⁹¹ Ibid, pp.13-14.

what extent these states share common values?', or 'to what extent do they use the same institutions?' So the problem is in fact the degree of the features that create international society. Of course it is a difficult task .Bull is also conscious of the difficulty. He expresses this difficulty as; 'Whether or not these distinguishing features of an international society are present in an international system, it is not always easy to determine.'⁹²

The common features of the international society conceptualized by the English school thinkers can be summarized as the followings: It consists of sovereign states. The system is "anarchic" which means that there is not a government performing the task of ultimate authority. The states in the society recognize each other's sovereignty and common interests. International society is a historical, conscious and volitional entity. The members of the society accept and obey the rules and norms which they established for regulating their relations. An international society manifests itself in certain institutions such as diplomacy and international law.⁹³

History plays a key role in the analyses of the English school. Members of the English school were impressed by the use made of the concept 'states-system' by the Göttingen school of historians at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Some of the key ideas developed by the English school are foreshadowed, in the historical

⁹² Ibid, p.15.

⁹³ Yurdusev, A. Nuri, *Civilizations and International Systems: Toynbee, Wight and Bull*, British International Studies 27th Annual Conference, London School of Economics, December 16-18, 2002, p., 8.

manual first produced by Heeren in 1857, after the Napoleonic Wars.⁹⁴ According to Heeren there had been several states-systems in the past and the European states-system was the most sophisticated one. Although he acknowledged that a primitive form of the balance of power existed in the Greek and Italian city-states-systems, he emphasized that none of the earlier states-systems was as mature as the European states-system. The English school adopted same kind of argument. According to English school complexity of any states-system was determined by the complexity of ideas and institutions developed by the states in the system, and balance of power, diplomacy, international law and sovereignty were all ideas that had only flourished in the European states-system.⁹⁵ Also some of the early members of the English school, Martin Wight in particular, were deeply influenced by Toynbee's attempt to develop a world history. But unlike Toynbee, members of the English school wanted to advance the study of world history within an international setting.⁹⁶

According to Yurdusev, English school (British School) of international relations can be distinguished from the Realist and Behaviouralist Schools in three respects in their conception of international system. First one is the nature of interaction among the members of the system. In realist school, the main motive of the states is seen as survival, and the interactions of the states are defined as anarchical, competitive, and in the form of struggle. For the behaviouralist school whether the nature of interactions is competitive or solidary is constructed by the

⁹⁴ Buzan, Barry and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.29.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.408.

analyst. But for the English school, the interactions can be solidary, they derive from the common interests and values shared by the states. Secondly, for the realists and behaviouralists, do not pay much attention to the historical process, they try to deal with the present system and neglect the historical background. On the other hand, for the English school, an international society had emerged at some point in time and ceased at another or still going on. So, it has a historical character and historical analysis is emphasized by the English school contrary to other two. And finally, for English school an international system comes into existence when the constituent members view themselves as parts of a whole and their actions are conditioned by this conception of the volition of the members. On the other hand, realist and behaviouralist schools have mechanistic and atomistic conception which is in contrast with the English school.⁹⁷

The scholars of English School reject the positivist social science methodologies. Understanding the society of states is not a question of applying the social-science models. Rather it is a matter of becoming familiar with the history of international relations as experienced by the people involved, such as diplomats, presidents, military commanders and others who shape the foreign affairs of the states. Scholars of the English School do not see international relations theory as a value-neutral science in which models and hypotheses are applied and tested. States are not things; they do not interact on their own. States do not exist independent from human beings. States are composed of human beings and these people act on their behalf. International relations is a branch of human relations that occur in historical

⁹⁷Yurdusev, *Civilizations and International Systems*, pp. 9-10.

time and it involves rules, norms, and values. Instruments such as diplomacy and international law regulate the relations between the states.

The English school approach also rejects the mechanistic view about the international systems. According to mechanistic view international systems are similar to the physical ones. Mechanical systems obey laws, and if we understand these laws we can understand the system and this leads us to predictive capabilities. In mechanical systems units interact with each other in ways which are structurally determined. The aim of the analyst is to discover what these laws are. The English school scholars reject such a methodology by claiming that social systems are different from the physical ones on the basis that when units are sentient, how they perceive each other is a major determinant of how they interact.⁹⁸ If the units share a common identity such as religion and language, or even just a common set of rules or norms these intersubjective understandings condition their behaviour, and also define the boundaries of the system. Scholars of the English school underpin the importance of the common rules and norms for the formation of international society and emphasize that these rules and norms would define the type of relations between the member states.⁹⁹

Buzan and Little point out the pluralistic methodology of the English school. According to Buzan and Little, behaviouralist, neorealist and constructivist schools

⁹⁸ Buzan, Barry and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, p.104.

⁹⁹ Waever, Ole, 'International Society: Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 27:1, p.114.

of international theory reflect methodological and theoretical monism.¹⁰⁰ According to behaviouralists every aspect of reality can be characterized in terms of interacting units that form a system. They use statistical analyses for generating a systemic perspective. Behaviouralists concentrate on the unit as the level of analyses. A true understanding of the system can only be achieved by analyzing the patterns of behaviours of the units (states) that form the system. If analyst concentrates on the system he cannot fully capture the relations between the units. The rules that provide in the system can only be achieved by taking the unit as the level of analysis.¹⁰¹

For neorealists international system is system-dominant. A system is something more than the accumulation of its parts. A system is constituted by interaction of its units, but once the system has formed it imposes its rules upon the units. Behaviours of the units are determined by the structure of the system. So one must concentrate on the system itself rather than the units in order to understand how the system operates. As Waltz argues; when you understand the rules of the market you learn the rules which every firm obey. Similarly when we find out the rules of international system we can predict the behaviours of the states. International system possesses an independent structure that constraints the behaviours of the states.¹⁰²

Constructivists on the other hand reject the distinction made by neorealists between the structure of the system and the structure of the units. According to

¹⁰⁰ Buzan, Barry and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, pp.35-48.

¹⁰¹ Stern, Geoffrey, *The Structure of International Society: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, New York: Pinter, 1995, p.19-23.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.26.

Wendt, structure of the system and the structure of component units are one and the same thing. Wendt argues that the way in which units conceive of the international system is constrained by their collective or intersubjective view of themselves. And it is this intersubjectivity which provides the mechanism that structures their actions.¹⁰³

The three approaches summarized so far, all operate through methodological monism. On the other hand the English school follows a pluralist methodology. The English school's systemic perspective is much more complicated. The English school does not adopt a strict, unique description of international system. Rather, members of the English school argue that international system, international society and world society coexist, and have relations with each other. So it would be wrong to take one of these as the unique level of analysis will exclude the other two.¹⁰⁴ Even the international society cannot be handled as the sole or dominant element. Members of the English school accept the anarchical character of the international system, but they also emphasize that common rules and norms shape the relations among the states, and they also accept the existence of a world society made up of individuals rather than states. When the members of the English school deal with the features of the international society they do not develop their explanations at the expense of recognizing the significance of the anarchic features of the international

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp.28-30.

¹⁰⁴ Buzan, Barry and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, pp.46-47.

system and the transnational forces operating within the international society.¹⁰⁵ All three elements exist in the international realm in varying degrees.

The English school does not fully exclude behaviouralist, neorealist and constructivist approaches. Members of the English school adopt systemic level of analysis and try to achieve a comprehensive picture of the international system, but they also accept that any international system/society is composed of sovereign states and these units should also be analyzed. Members of the English school also emphasize that a common culture and shared rules and norms is necessary for the formation of in international society; so they take into account the self perception of the units those form the international society. But while accepting the existence of all these dimensions, the English school also shows that their degrees of influence are not equal and emphasize that the features associated with international society.

If we conceptualize the theory of international relations as a spectrum which has classical realism on the one side and the classical liberalism on the other English School lies somewhere between the two. It does not fully accept the state egotism and conflict notion of realism or the human goodwill and cooperation notion of liberalism. On the one hand it rejects classical realist view of states as the entities dealing with each other on the basis of narrow self interest. English School does not conceive international relations as a state 'system' which is prone to continues discord and conflict. On the other hand it rejects classical liberalism's optimistic view of international relations as a developing world community which will lead to unlimited human progress and perpetual peace.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The English school approach contributes our understanding of international relations with its distinctive characteristics of emphasizing historical analyses and pluralist methodology. Its conceptualization of 'international society' has different characteristics from the mainstream international relations theories' conceptualization of the international system., and it provides a new perspective to the student of international relations about the international system. As pointed out above, the English school approach had entered different phases throughout its history, and its scope of research had enlarged. This chapter had not focused on the works and ideas of the younger generations of the school due to its aim of making a general overview of the school by emphasizing the classical works of the early members in order to pave the way for examining the thought of Martin Wight. The next chapter will focus on Wight's approach to international theory, and the intersection points between his thought and Gadamer's hermeneutics will be examined in order to show the interpretivist character of the English school approach.

CHAPTER 5

WIGHT AND GADAMER

Martin Wight is one of the founding fathers of the English school approach. His approach to international theory had a profound effect on the international relations studies in the United Kingdom. This chapter aims to examine the very basic features of his approach to international theory, and to compare his approach with Gadamer's hermeneutics. The hermeneutic sensibility in Wight's approach to international theory will try to be highlighted.

The very basic features of the hermeneutics of Gadamer, which are tried to be concisely touched upon in previous chapters, shows commonalities with the methodology of the English school. As Epp states: ' a similar hermeneutic sensibility has been implicit all along in the work of English school even in the absence of any self-conscious and sophisticated metatheoretical ambition.'¹⁰⁶ There are points of intellectual intersection between Gadamer and Martin Wight, who can be considered as the founding figure of the English school. The similarities between the two can be seen in the appreciative echoes of Edmund Burke, and the R. G. Collingwood. Collingwood had a considerable influence on Gadamer. Gadamer translated Collingwood's major work, *The Idea of History* , into German. And Wight recommended *The Idea of History* as an 'obligatory' reading for the international

¹⁰⁶ Epp, Roger. "The British School on the Frontiers of International Society: A Hermeneutic Recollection", *Review of International Studies*, 1998, 24:1, p.52.

affairs students who wants to examine the foundations of his thinking. There are also many striking similarities in critical characterization of the two. The comments on Gadamer describing his work as not a theory , but a mere descriptive phenomenology can be used for Wight as well.¹⁰⁷

Wight defines his enterprise as a philosophical one. His analyses of international theory aim at providing a better understanding of the ongoing traditions of thought in order to show the true nature of the international thought. Wight's studies are not methodological. He does not try to invent a general methodology for international studies. He does not aim at establishing rules for a theory of his own but rather he emphasizes the philosophical character of international thought and tries to show the ways for entering into this philosophical endeavour. The most striking similarity between Gadamer and Wight is in their general approach to their subject of study. Gadamer, similar to Wight, did not try invent a methodology, and he also defined his approach as philosophical. Hermeneutics gained its philosophical character with Gadamer. Gadamer, like Dilthey, rejected the notion that the methodology of natural sciences are applicable to human sciences. Because human sciences deal with different types of modes of experiences which do not exist in natural sciences. But he did not attempted to create a methodology for human sciences. Rather, Gadamer concentrated on the question that what makes them possible in the first place. Gadamer is not directly concerned with the practical problems of formulating right principles for interpretation, rather he tried to bring the phenomenon of understanding itself under the light.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

According to Wight politics 'is a realm of human experience', and studying politics means 'entering this tradition, joining in the conversation' and speculating about the main institutions and concepts in order to reach a better understanding. For Wight, this tradition, in one form or another, maintains since Plato and Socrates. And international theory 'is the corresponding tradition of enquiry about relations between states'. Wight states that 'international theory is the political philosophy of international relations'.¹⁰⁸ As Palmer noted Gadamer's approach is closer to the dialectic of ancient Greek philosophers than to modern manipulative and technological thinking. For ancient Greek philosophers knowledge was not something that they acquired as a possession but it was a tradition that they participated allowing themselves to be directed and even possessed by their knowledge.

Wight suggests that one can talk about international relations from the formation of the sovereign states onwards. International relations theorizing is state-centered and it can only be traced back to the sixteenth century:

One cannot talk properly about international relations before the advent of the sovereign state. This, the state which acknowledges no political superior, largely came about in Western Europe in the time of Machiavelli, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the threshold of 'modern history'.¹⁰⁹

According to Wight, this dominance of the state-centered approach in Western political thought is a result of three reasons. First, Europeans living in a

¹⁰⁸ Wight, Martin, *International Theory: the three traditions*, Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter, (eds.), Leicester and London: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991, p.1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

world of feudal relationships, of a Universal church, and of the Holy Roman Empire with universal claims, saw the need for the development of the sovereign state which would build up a central authority in order to provide internal order and external security. Modern international relations had developed as a by-product of the sovereign state. Second, the classical writings of the Greco-Roman civilization, which was rediscovered by the Renaissance, had been influential. Since the many political writings of the Graeco-Roman legacy is concerned with the Polis, independent and self governing city-states, they reinforced the state-centered tradition. And third is the efforts of the Humanists and Protestants about the political theory of the state. In order to abstain from the restrictions of the Catholic Church, which had universal claims, Humanists and Protestants developed ideas supporting the sovereignty and the autonomy of the state.¹¹⁰

Renaissance and Reformation had divisive effects upon European thought. International theory had been partitioned between the work of philosophers and the international law. In Wight's words the domain of international theory had an unhappy partition 'between philosophically minded international lawyers and internationally minded political philosophers'.¹¹¹ But this did not prevent the accumulation of a considerable body of writings related to international theory. There is a literature, and a deal of sources about the issue but it is scattered. And also the writings and the speeches of the some important politicians such as Machiavelli, Bismarck, Lincoln and Wilson are important sources for international theory.

¹¹⁰ Wight, *International Theory*, pp.1-2.

¹¹¹ Wight, *International Theory*, p.3.

Wight defines his lectures as:

in the first place an experiment in classification, in typology, and in the second an exploration of continuity and recurrence, a study in the uniformity of political thought; and its leading premise is that political ideas do not change much, and the range of ideas is limited.¹¹²

According to Wight, one should not develop any idea by neglecting history and bounding itself with the distortive spirit of its age: 'One of the main purposes of university education is to escape from the *Zeitgeist*, from the mean, narrow, provincial spirit...'¹¹³ He states that we should be aware of the continuity and recurrence in the political theory: 'One need read very little in political theory to become aware of recurrences and repetitions.'¹¹⁴ And he explains his aim in the sentences of Tocqueville:

It is unbelievable how many systems of morals and politics have been successively found, forgotten, rediscovered, forgotten again, to appear a little later, always charming and surprising the world as if they were new, and bearing witness, not to the fecundity of the human spirit, but to the ignorance of men...It is therefore possible by studying the most illustrious writers who have engaged in moral and political studies throughout the centuries, to rediscover what are the principal ideas in these fields which have been in circulation among the human race- to reduce them to quite a small number of

¹¹² Wight, *International Theory*, p.5,

¹¹³ Wight, *International Theory*, p.6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

systems- and so to compare them with one another and to pass judgment on them.¹¹⁵

As touched upon above history places a central role in Wight's approach to international theory. He emphasizes that the analyses that neglect the historical background of the facts and ideas will mislead the students. According to him the traditions of thought in international theory are embedded to history. They have been formed through a historical process and repeat themselves under different forms, and it is not possible for the student of international relations to have a comprehensive understanding of the international relations theory without taking into consideration its historical background. Wight's conceptualization of 'tradition' highly resembles the approach of Gadamer. First, Wight's analyses of tradition are historical. He treats the subject as a historical and changing concept. Wight stated that 'historical interpretation' is the counterpart of political theory for international politics. He wrote that: 'judging the validity of...the ethical principles followed by statesmen...is not a process of scientific analysis; it is more akin to literary criticism. It involves developing a sensitive awareness of the intractability of all political situations, and the moral quandary in which all statecraft operates.'¹¹⁶ This awareness can be achieved by studying history, starting with Thucydides and the literary works of Conrad, Hardy, Koestler etc...In his lectures Wight encouraged his students for greater historical knowledge. In Epp's words: 'Among the key elements of Wight's

¹¹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, Paris:Michel Levy Freres, 1866, vol.IX, p.125, cited in Wight, *International Theory*, pp.5-6.

¹¹⁶ Wight, *International Theory*, p.258.

thought is an insistence that a reading of history is embedded in any account of international politics... Wight suggests that diplomatic history was more faithful to the ‘record of international experience’ and the working of the state-system, in all its contingency, than was the self-consciously theoretical literature inspired by social scientific method.’¹¹⁷ And Bull notes that: ‘He notes that the only acknowledged classic of International Relations –Thucydides on the *Peloponnesian War*- is a work not of theory but of history. And he goes on to say that ‘the quality of international politics, the preoccupations of diplomacy, are embodied and communicated less in works of political and international theory than in historical writings.’¹¹⁸

History places a central role in Gadamer’s hermeneutics as well. For Gadamer, past is operative in the present. The present can only be understood through the intentions, ways of seeing, and the preconceptions that are bequeathed from the past. Past is not simply a pile of facts but it is a stream in which we move and participate in every process of understanding. According to Gadamer, past cannot be seen with an absolute separation from the present. Seeing past in terms of itself, and denying its relation with the present is contrary to the very nature of understanding.

Both Gadamer and Wight are against any clear-cut separation of past and present. Wight in his analyses, explains how the past in Gadamer’s terms ‘operates’ in present by showing the development of traditions of thought throughout the

¹¹⁷ Epp,Roger, “Martin Wight:International Relations as a Realm of Persuasion”, in Francis A.Beer and Robert Hariman (eds.) , *Post-Realism:The Political Turn in International Relations*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996, p.123.

¹¹⁸ Bull,” Martin Wight and the the theory of international relations.”, p.xxi.

historical process. Wight also emphasizes the necessity of studying history for becoming aware of the repetitions of the ideas in order to get a better understanding of the current theoretical debates: ‘ One need very little in political theory to become aware of the recurrences and repetitions. Thus, if one turns to E.H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* after Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, one cannot fail to note that the basic arguments are the same.’¹¹⁹ Differently from Wight, Gadamer’s approach to past-present relation is two sided. While Wight only emphasizes past’s effect on present, Gadamer also emphasizes the present’s effect on our understanding of the past. Gadamer, reconceptualized the concepts of prejudice and tradition. He rejects the pejorative approaches of Enlightenment to these concepts. Prejudice is not a barrier to understanding, on the contrary without any prejudice understanding is not possible. Understanding does not occur in a vacuum. Understanding occurs within a tradition or within a ‘horizon’ of consciousness. This horizon arises from history. For Gadamer, there is not any objective way to know history, and so, anything else in the social world. All our self knowledge arises from what historically pregiven to us. So our finitude is given by history. Human beings are historical beings. In Bernstein’s words: ‘Gadamer reminds us that we belong to tradition, history and language before they belong to us.’¹²⁰ We cannot understand past in its own terms, so we cannot recapture the original meaning of the past, it operates in us in ways in which we are not aware of. Our understanding of the present is shaped by the past but also the prejudices that are bequeathed us from history also shapes our understanding of past.

¹¹⁹ Wight, *International Theory*, p.6.

¹²⁰ Bernstein, Richard J., *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science Hermeneutics and Praxis*, Philedelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, p.181.

The centrality of language in international relations is one of the characteristics of the English school approach. Martin Wight, in particular, emphasized the importance of language in international relations, in his analysis. As Little states: “Wight, in particular, was very sensitive to the importance of language. He points to endless debates that take place in the international arena as statesmen try to reach an agreement about the nature of the problems that they are confronting. But at the end of the day, any agreement achieved necessarily involves language and often the creation of new language. All these debates, Wight insists, are ‘the stuff of international theory, and it (the stuff) is constantly bursting the bounds of the language in which we try to handle it.’”¹²¹ As Epp points out that the inquiries of Wight ‘invariably circle back to consider when and how the words that constitute the practice of international relations enter its vocabulary, are mediated historically in their meanings, and find institutional expression.’¹²² For Wight, the idea of international society presupposes an ‘international social consciousness’ which is manifested in the solidarities of language.

Wight argues that relations between political entities is achieved via language. Besides being the medium of relations language has significance as a constructive element. International disputes are settled via language and the language developed as a result of the debates between the statesmen shape the future by finding institutional expressions. For Gadamer all understanding is interpretation

¹²¹ Little, Richard. “The English School’s Contribution to the Study of International Relations”. *European Journal of International Relations*, 2000, 6:3, p.409.

¹²² Epp, Roger. “The British School on the Frontiers of International Society: A Hermeneutic Recollection”, *Review of International Studies*, 1998, 24:3, p.55.

because we understand via language. All our understanding is bounded by the medium of language. Language is fundamental for our being in the world, and we are ultimately linguistic beings. Gadamer argues that our being in the world is a continual process of interpretation. So language cannot be seen merely as a tool for communication, but it has ontological significance. For Wight the relations between nations is achieved via language and for Gadamer all understanding is achieved via language. In Wight's approach language is necessary for relations and it also has a constitutive character. Once a new language is created as a result of the agreement achieved between the parties the future relations between these parties are shaped by the language formed. So for Wight language is the medium for international relations which cannot be handled as an ordinary tool used for implementing diplomatic rituals. According to Gadamer language has ontological significance. Linguisticity permeates the way of being-in-the-world of man. He notes that the early Greeks had no word or concept for language itself; like being and understanding, language is medium, not tool. He summarizes his thinking about the inseparableness of thought, language, and understanding as the followings:

The language that is living in speech, language which encompasses all understanding and all interpreters of texts, is so fused with the process of thought (and therefore interpretation) that we have far too little in hand when we turn away from what languages hand down to us in content and wish to think of language as form. Unconsciousness of language has not ceased to be the authentic way of being for language.¹²³

The centrality of language in the English school approach can be observed in the importance attributed to diplomacy by the school. As Neumann states: 'As

¹²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.382.

pointed out by the English school, if one views world politics as an historically emerging and social phenomenon, then diplomacy plays a key role in it. The renewed interests in the English school and in social practises like diplomacy should, therefore, be mutually reinforcing.¹²⁴ Wight's choice of the title of the first book that emanated from the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics shows the centrality of diplomacy in the thought of Wight. In his famous article 'Why Is There No International Theory?' Wight contrasts political theory with international theory. The former is the succession of 'classics from Bodin to Mill', but there is no 'succession of first-rate books about states-system and diplomacy.' As known, 'politics' deals with the working of the *polis*, so there can be such thing as 'international politics' which is by definition develops outside the boundaries of polis: 'As a response to this situation, Wight fastened on the concept of 'diplomats' as a more accurate and more technically correct way of referring to his preferred object of study than 'the international' of everyday speech. Everything which is not 'politics', then, is 'diplomats'...' In his lectures on three traditions, Wight treats the foreign policy, the balance of power, and diplomacy alike under the heading of 'theory of diplomacy'.¹²⁵ He explains his reason for this as that the diplomacy signifies 'all international intercourse, its purposes and objects, in time of space'.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Neumann, Iver B., "The English School and Diplomacy: Scholarly Promise Unfulfilled", Paper presented to the Fourth ECPR IR Standing Group Conference, Canterbury, 17-16 September 2001, p.2.

¹²⁵ Neumann, *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹²⁶ Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, p.137, cited in Neumann, "The English and Diplomacy: Scholarly Promise Unfulfilled", p.3.

Wight defines diplomacy and commerce as the ‘ continuous and organized intercourse between these sovereign states in the pacific intervals: international and institutionalized intercourse.’¹²⁷ Diplomacy, both textually and practically, is central to Wight’s conceptualization of international relations.

For Wight, ‘diplomacy must be something other and more than the pattern of ideas in relation to which it exists. The practice is more than the theory about that practice.’¹²⁸ Wight argues that studying that practice must capture more than a pattern of ideas about it, but it should more concentrate on the speculation and rumination about diplomacy. It has to include the study of diplomacy as a practice. Wight states that ‘the constant experience of diplomatic life’ should be a crucial site of study.¹²⁹

Wight also makes analysis about the diplomatic history and the development of the historical institutions. He discusses the history of resident embassies and conferences. He tries to illuminate how these patterns get more complicated, and tries to show the emergence of these patterns of interaction by ordering them chronologically.

Wight makes important observations about the distorted forms of diplomacy. He points out the historical epochs when diplomacy was displaced with its perverted forms. He examines French directory, Soviet Russia and Wilsons new diplomacy and states that Revolutionary politics tend to break down the distinction between

¹²⁷ Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, p.7.

¹²⁸ Neumann, *op.cit.*, p.4

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

diplomacy and the espionage, he also points out the distinction between diplomacy and propaganda. While diplomacy is the attempt to adjust conflicting interests by negotiation and compromise; propaganda is an attempt to sway the opinion that underlies and sustains the interests. For Wight, information, negotiation, and communication are the three basic functions of diplomacy, on the other hand espionage, subversion and propaganda are their perverted forms in revolutionary diplomacy. Wight's distinction shows the importance placed by him upon the 'conversational' character of diplomacy. Information, negotiation, and communication are tools by which parties reach to a mutual understanding, and then to an agreement. On the other hand, espionage, subversion, and propaganda destroys the conversational character of the interaction between the parties, and an agreement that resulted from mutual understanding cannot be reached.¹³⁰

The English school approach, and Wight in particular, place diplomacy at the central of their search of the international relations. As Neumann states: ' they place the conduct of diplomacy squarely at the center of international relations, and that they give an account of how diplomacy has evolved historically.'¹³¹

Martin Wight's book *International theory: the three traditions* is based on the notes of his lectures that he gave at the LSE in the 1950s. He portrays international theory as a conversation maintaining through the centuries between different philosophies. He characterizes these traditions as realist, rationalist, and revolutionalist. These approaches relate not just to the academic world of

¹³⁰ Neumann, *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹³¹ Neumann, *op.cit.*, p.8.

international relations but also to the worldviews which have strongly influenced political leaders and statesmen. And these three approaches do not only relate to the contemporary world but also to the previous centuries.

Wight concludes that the leading ideas of the most outstanding classical theorists of international relations can be placed in three basic categories: Realist, Rationalists and Revolutionaries. Realists, or Machiavellians, emphasize and concentrate on the aspect of 'international anarchy'. Rationalists, or Grotians, concentrate on 'international dialogue and intercourse'. Revolutionaries, or Kantians, concentrate upon 'moral unity' of the society of states.¹³²

Realism is the doctrine that sees conflict as inherent in relations between states. Realists emphasize 'the element of anarchy, of power politics, and of warfare'¹³³ in international relations. Realism does not concentrate on the ideal- what ought to be-, it deals with the actual- what is happening. It is the avoidance from wishful thinking and 'a frank acceptance of the disagreeable aspects of life'.¹³⁴ According to realists morality is utopia and reality is power. Utopia and reality cannot be seen together, they are from different planes. Realists are pessimistic about human nature. Human beings are prone to be sinful and selfish. World politics cannot progress but always remains basically the same in different times and places. Realism denies the existence of international society. According to realism the only political society is the state. Realism does not accept any international obligations

¹³² Wight, *International Theory*, pp.6-7.

¹³³ Wight, *International Theory*, p.15.

¹³⁴ Wight, *International Theory*, p.16.

beyond or between states. Realist tradition has been developed by philosophers such as Bacon and Hobbes, and by politicians and states-men such as Frederic the Great, Napoleon and Bismarck.¹³⁵

Wight suggests that ‘one can detect three such ‘scientific’ presuppositions which successively or simultaneously have determined the Realist tradition; they are the mechanistic, the biological, and the psychological.’¹³⁶ The mechanistic theory has developed in the fifteenth century which was a characteristic conception of the Renaissance. With it, ‘the symbol of international politics is provided by a balance of pair of scales.’¹³⁷ Balance of power theory was introduced into politics at the end of the fifteenth century and it became fundamental to international theory. Machiavelli’s analyses of international politics is shaped by the balance of power theory. The second presupposition of realists, which is biological, stems from the workings of Darwin. The conceptions of ‘natural selection’, and the ‘survival of the fittest’ had affected international realism. Hitler, as known, justified his brutal actions on the premises of this biological theory of international realism.¹³⁸ And the third scientific theory that underlies realism is psychological: ‘The more comprehensive an explanation of human behaviour a psychological theory claims to give, the more it tends towards determinism, and more, therefore, it is implicitly derogatory to the claims of ethics. Underneath almost all modern psychology (unless

¹³⁵ Wight, *International Theory*, p.17.

¹³⁶ Wight, *International Theory*, p.18.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Wight, *International Theory*, pp.19-20.

perhaps Jungian) lies a behaviourist assumption about human nature which discards ethical values.’¹³⁹

Rationalists emphasize the international intercourse in an anarchic international environment. According to rationalists human beings are reasonable, they can recognize the right thing to do, and can learn from their mistakes and from others. ‘They believe that man, although manifestly a sinful and bloodthirsty creature, is also rational.’¹⁴⁰ Rationalists believe that people can reasonably manage to live together even when they share no common government, as in the anarchical condition of international relations. In its extreme form rationalism foresees a world of mutual respect, concord, and the rule of law. It is generally conceived as a *via media* between realism and revolutionism. Philosophers like Aristotle and Locke and politicians like Gladstone and Lincoln, who think that moral obligations should be respected, are placed in rationalist tradition.¹⁴¹ The core concept of Rationalism is international law. ‘To call this tradition Rationalist is to associate it with the element of reason contained in the conception of natural law.’¹⁴² For this reason Wight sees Grotius as the representative figure of rationalism.

Wight defines Revolutionists as; ‘those who believe so passionately in the moral unity of the society of states or international society, that they identify themselves with it, and therefore they both claim to speak in the name of this unity, and experience an overriding obligation to give effect to it, as the first aim of their

¹³⁹ Wight, *International Theory*, p.21.

¹⁴⁰ Wight, *International Theory*, p.13.

¹⁴¹ Wight, *International Theory*, pp.13-15.

¹⁴² Wight, *International Theory*, p.14.

international policies.’¹⁴³ Revolutionaries identify themselves with humanity and believe in the moral unity of human society beyond the state. They are ‘cosmopolitan’ rather than ‘internationalist’, and their international theory has a progressive and missionary character. They aim at changing the world for the better. Wight states that there are three outstanding examples of these international Revolutionaries: ‘the religious Revolutionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the French Revolutionaries, especially the Jacobins; and the totalitarian Revolutionaries of the twentieth century.’¹⁴⁴ Kant is the representative figure of Revolutionaries. Rousseau and the intellectual fathers of the French Revolution are also cited in this tradition. Revolutionaries goal is to achieve revolutionary social change. They aim at achieving an ideal world. This ideal world can be based on religious aspirations, or it can be based on ideologies. Revolutionaries do not conceive history as a mere sequence of events and happenings, but they believe that history has a purpose. Revolutionaries are optimistic about human nature. The ultimate purpose of international history is to enable human beings to achieve fulfillment and freedom. For Kant, revolution is to institute a system of constitutional states-‘Republics’- that would build perpetual peace. For Marx, revolution is destroying the capitalist state, overthrowing the class system, and instituting a classless society which would liberate and reunite human beings. For

¹⁴³ Wight, *International Theory*, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Revolutionalists, the only real society on earth is a world society embracing all mankind.¹⁴⁵

The central question of the Theory of International Relations- ‘What is the nature of international society?’- is answered by the Realists that there is no international society, the international law or diplomacy are fictitious. They argue that each state pursues its own interests, and they are not bounded by moral obligations. For Rationalists, international relations had to be described as international intercourse. The relationship between states does not have to be in form of conflict, it can be in the form of co-operation. States can form a society whose workings can be seen in institutions such as international law, diplomacy, and balance of power. States are not free of legal and moral restraints in their relationship with each other, they are bounded by the rules of international society of which they are a member. Revolutionalists reject the aforementioned two approaches. For them, international politics is not about the conflict among states or a mixture of conflict and co-operation among states. Rather, it is about the relations among the human beings. The community of human beings, who constitute the states, is the ultimate reality. Revolutionalists conception of morality is based on revolutionary imperatives that requires all human beings to work for the brotherhood of the mankind.¹⁴⁶ Wight concluded that ‘international Realism tends to describe international relations in

¹⁴⁵ Wight, *International Theory*, pp.9-13.

¹⁴⁶ Bull, Hedley, “Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations” , in Wight, *International Theory*, p.xi-xii.

sociological terms; and international Rationalism, in teleological terms; and international Revolutionism, in ethical and prescriptive terms.’¹⁴⁷

Wight warns us that there are no clear-cut distinctions between these traditions that he had outlined:

However, all this is merely classification and schematizing. In all political and historical studies the purpose of building pigeon-holes is to reassure oneself that the raw material does *not* fit into them. Classification becomes valuable, in humane studies, only at the point where it breaks down. The greatest political writers in international theory almost all straddle the frontiers dividing two of the traditions, and most of these writers transcend their own systems.¹⁴⁸

Gadamer’s conceptualization of traditions seems to prevent us from approaching other traditions or judging our own tradition. So the truth agreements between traditions seem impossible. Gadamer’s answer to this is that the legitimate prejudices involve ‘fusion of horizons’ of traditions. For Gadamer, traditions are not inflexible and closed entities. They are open and changing. He perceives tradition as a living and changing organism. Since the tradition is always in motion, it cannot have an ultimately closed horizon.

Wight states that Machiavellian, Groatian and Kantian traditions are merely paradigms, and each thinker can only approximate. They are not strict classifications that contain a group of thinkers who can only be placed in one of these categories. He says that even Machiavelli was not in the strict sense Machiavellian.¹⁴⁹ Bull states

¹⁴⁷ Wight, *International Theory*, p.24.

¹⁴⁸ Wight, *International Theory*, p.259.

¹⁴⁹ Bull, “Martin Wight...”, p.xiii.

that, Wight recognized that international theories requires more categories than three and so he showed ways through which three traditions could be subdivided: ‘the Machiavellian tradition into its aggressive and its defensive form, the Groatian tradition into its Realist and idealist form, the Kantian tradition into its evolutionary and its revolutionary forms, its imperialist and its cosmopolitan forms, its historically backward-looking and forward-looking or progressivist forms.’¹⁵⁰ The traditions are not clear-cut pigeon-holes, but organizing frameworks used to group closely related and often interdependent ideas together.

For Gadamer traditions or cultures are not fixed things at a certain time in past, or in Wight’s words they are not pigeon-holes. Their change throughout the history leads us to the possibility of understanding other cultures and traditions, because such an understanding rejects the fixedness or closedness. Traditions are susceptible to change and learning. Traditions are formed through our interaction with the world, our past, our future, and the other cultures. This motional character of traditions make understanding possible, because for Gadamer the nature of our understanding is dialogical. Gadamer describes understanding as the fusion of horizons and this fusion can occur between cultures as well.

Wight’s conceptualization of ‘tradition’ highly resembles the approach of Gadamer. Wight’s analyses of tradition are historical. He treats the subject as a historical and changing concept. Wight stated that ‘historical interpretation’ is the counterpart of political theory for international politics. He wrote that: ‘judging the validity of...the ethical principles followed by statesmen...is not a process of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

scientific analysis; it is more akin to literary criticism. It involves developing a sensitive awareness of the intractability of all political situations, and the moral quandary in which all statecraft operates.’¹⁵¹ This awareness can be achieved by studying history, starting with Thucydides and the literary works of Conrad, Hardy, Koestler etc...In his lectures Wight encouraged his students for greater historical knowledge. In Epp’s words: ‘Among the key elements of Wight’s thought is an insistence that a reading of history is embedded in any account of international politics... Wight suggests that diplomatic history was more faithful to the ‘record of international experience’ and the working of the state-system, in all its contingency, than was the self-consciously theoretical literature inspired by social scientific method.’¹⁵² And Bull notes that: ‘He notes that the only acknowledged classic of International Relations –Thucydides on the *Peloponnesian War*- is a work not of theory but of history. And he goes on to say that ‘the quality of international politics, the preoccupations of diplomacy, are embodied and communicated less in works of political and international theory than in historical writings.’¹⁵³

According to Gadamer, the fusion of horizons requires that the interpreter to have understood or encountered some applicable truth. So, in order to understand we must accept or recognize the presence of difference, and the otherness of the other. When we recognize the difference of the other, we must be open to the messages of the other horizon. This openness is an attempt to reach an agreement with the other

¹⁵¹ Wight, *International Theory*, p.258.

¹⁵² Epp,Roger. “Martin Wight:International Relations as a Realm of Persuasion”, in Francis A.Beer and Robert Hariman (eds.), *Post-Realism:The Political Turn in International Relations*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996, p.123.

¹⁵³ Bull,” Martin Wight and the the theory of international relations,” p.xxi.

and this is what Gadamer defines as ‘conversation’. As Wight points out the intersection points between the traditions in order to demonstrate how different traditions can combine, Gadamer also shows how understanding occurs between people who are from different cultural environments and different time periods. According to Gadamer we place ourselves on the other horizon and enlarge our own horizon on the other, in order to achieve the fusion of horizons. Understanding, Gadamer states, involves the fusion of horizons.¹⁵⁴

The point here is that difference does not preclude agreement, but understanding is based on difference, and the basis of learning is difference. But Gadamer reminds that the fusion of horizons is not a natural development, but it is a conscious act. People has to work for achieving it, it is not an inevitable end. We can reach an agreement by trying to understand other traditions.

Wight’s three traditions are open ended. They are neither parallel railroads going to eternity, nor static, unchanging entities formed in a certain time in past. Traditions are classifications that contribute our understanding, but as Wight warns us, taking one of them as the ultimate truth and completely rejecting the others would prevent the student of international relations from entering into conversation. As Bull states: ‘ In the hands of a lesser scholar the threefold categorization would have served to simplify and distort the complexity of international thought. But Wight himself was the first to warn against the danger of reifying the concepts he had

¹⁵⁴ Shapcott, Richard, ”Conversation and Coexistence: Gadamer and the Interpretation of International Society”, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 1994, 23:1, pp.72-73.

suggested... He was always experimenting with new ways of formulating and describing the three traditions.’¹⁵⁵

Wight’s approach to international theory is dialogical. According to Epp it is the most definitive, if neglected, feature of Wight’s multi-sided orientation: ‘contrary to the expectations of social scientists, international politics was not a closed system which yielded knowledge of a cumulative or falsifiable variety, theory was to be found elsewhere in the ongoing conversation among distinct but interwoven traditions of thought.’¹⁵⁶ Wight defines his traditions as ‘streams, with eddies and cross-currents, sometimes interlacing and never for long confined to their own river bed.’¹⁵⁷

Since, political theory is ‘entering this tradition’ and ‘joining in the conversation’ and ‘international theory is the corresponding tradition’, all the traditions of international theory that Wight classified are parts of an ongoing conversation. Gadamer argues that dialogue necessitates willingness and openness. Shapcott points out that in this sense the concept of international society, which is developed by Wight and Bull resembles the dialogical experience of Gadamer: ‘Of the theories of international society available to us, those of Bull and Wight, with their concern for the place of culture, prepare us best for an understanding of international society as something other than a means of perpetuating

¹⁵⁵ Bull, *op.cit*, p.xiii.

¹⁵⁶ Epp, “Wight: International Relations as a Realm of Persuasion,” p.133.

¹⁵⁷ Wight, *International Theory*, p.266.

seperateness.¹⁵⁸ Wight defines traditions as intersecting. He does not argue that the philosophers that he associates with any tradition is strictly belong to that tradition with rejecting all the norms of the other traditions. In Gadamer's words there is always 'fusion of horizons'. Every tradition can enlarge its horizon on the other, and lets other traditions to place themselves in its horizon. As Gadamer states, we can reach agreement as a result of this fusion of horizons. Differences are not obstacles for the agreement. Wight's rationalist tradition reflects this notion. The international society which is central to the rationalist approach is based on 'continuous and organized intercourse 'between the sovereign states. The members of international society abide by common norms, and rules such as international law and diplomacy. This agreement is voluntary and it has developed throughout the history as a result of the interaction between the states.

As noted by Epp the dialogical character of Wight's thought has an additional implication which is 'the erasure of any sharp line between participant and observer, between the known and the knower in international theory.'¹⁵⁹ Wight's approach is philosophical in character, so he does not restrict his approach to the academic chains, or he does not put a hierarchy between the participants in the 'conversation' which forms the traditions of international theory. He does not put a distinction between the people who make history and who write history. Theory and practice are not clearly defined and separated, but they are interwoven. The statesmen and politicians are also part of the 'conversation' and their ideas also shape the tradition.

¹⁵⁸ Shapcott, "Conversation and Coexistence...", p.79.

¹⁵⁹ Epp, "English school on the frontiers of international society...", p.54.

The books of Bismarck and Churchill, theoretical writings of Lenin, the speeches of Gladstone, Lincoln or Wilson are all seen as the sources of international theory beside the writings of the philosophers, jurists or political thinkers: ‘The remainder of these scattered sources is to be found in the statements and policies of politicians. Here the distinction between theory and practice is not a hard-and-fast one... One can learn something about politics from listening to statesmen at press conferences or eavesdropping upon them when they are talking informally.’¹⁶⁰ As Epp notes: ‘ They are interwoven into a single tapestry that is constituted by, and bounded by, the language of practice broadly defined, which might be said to act as the ‘thing itself’¹⁶¹ to which all interpretation is tempered.

Andrew Linklater associates the threefold classification of Martin Wight with the current developments in social theory. Linklater argues that the recent developments in social theory have important implications for the theory of international relations. According to Linklater, positivism with its commitment to a scientific understanding of social regularities corresponds to realism.¹⁶² Critical theory with its interest in freeing human subjects from unnecessary social constraints corresponds to revolutionalism. Rationalism of Wight corresponds to hermeneutics, due to the focusing of hermeneutic approach upon the cultural and linguistic dimensions of human conduct: ‘... whereas the realist analyses the systematic constraints which are unique to the condition of international anarchy, the rationalist

¹⁶⁰ Wight, *International Theory*, p.4.

¹⁶¹ Epp, *op.cit.*

¹⁶² Linklater, Andrew, *Beyond Realism and Marxism(ch1)*, London:Macmillan, 1990, pp.3-4.

includes the normative principles which link states together in an “anarchical society. In its study of the of the normative dimensions of international relations rationalism therefore resembles the hermeneutic study of society.’¹⁶³ From a different standpoint, Shapcott makes a similar distinction: ‘ An application of Gadamerian hermeneutics to international relations would suggest that neither the realist goal of understanding the objective laws of international relations nor the emancipatory agenda of critical theory are suitable, as neither adequately recognize the importance of interpretation.’¹⁶⁴

What is the position of Wight between these traditions? Bull suggests that Wight is closer to Rationalist tradition, but it would be wrong to strictly classify him one of these traditions: ‘if we had to put Martin Wight into one or another of his own pigeon-holes there is no doubt that we should have to consider him a Groatian... Nevertheless, it would be wrong to force Martin Wight into the Groatian pigeon-hole. It is a truer view of him to regard him as standing outside the three traditions, feeling the attraction of each of them but unable to come to rest within any one of them.’¹⁶⁵ Wight does not associate himself with any of these traditions directly, in his course of lectures he has not wanted to favor any particular international theory. As aforementioned, Wight denies that any thinker can be placed into just one of these traditions, let alone placing himself, but his writings suggest us that he is closer

¹⁶³ Linklater, *op.cit*, p.15.

¹⁶⁴ Shapcott, *Conversation and Coexistence*, p.83.

¹⁶⁵ Bull, “Martin Wight...”, p.xiv.

Rationalist tradition when compared with the other two. He describes his own place as thee following:

I find my own position shifting round the circle. You will have guessed that my prejudices are Rationalist, but I find I have become more Rationalist and less Realist through rethinking this question during the course of giving these lectures. If I said Rationalism was a civilizing factor, Revolutionism a vitalizing factor, and Realism a controlling disciplinary factor in international politics, you might think I was playing with words, but I hope I have shown that there is more substance to international theory than that..¹⁶⁶

Wight asks the question that ‘Why is there no international theory?’ At first sight, an international theory, as the counterpart of political theory, does not exist. Wight states that; ‘I believe it can be argued that international theory is marked, not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty.’¹⁶⁷ According to Wight, there are two main reasons for such a theoretical poverty; ‘first, the intellectual prejudice imposed by the sovereign state, and secondly, the belief in progress.’¹⁶⁸ This prejudice emanates from ‘the belief in the sovereign state as the consummation of political experience and activity which has marked Western political thought since the Renaissance.’¹⁶⁹ And this belief ‘has observed almost all the intellectual energy devoted to political study.’ And as a result of this ‘it has become natural to think of

¹⁶⁶ Wight, *International Theory*, p.268.

¹⁶⁷ Wight, Martin, “Why Is There No International Theory?”, Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield(eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, London: Georg Allen and Unwin, 1966, p.20.

¹⁶⁸ Wight, “Why Is...”, p.20.

¹⁶⁹ Wight, “Why Is...”, p.21.

international politics as the untidy fringe of domestic politics.’¹⁷⁰ So, the study of international politics is conceived something restricted to the study of ‘problems of foreign policy’. At this point we observe a contradiction between Gadamer’s and Wight’s conceptualizations of ‘prejudice’. Gadamer rejects Enlightenment’s pejorative approach to the concept of ‘prejudice’. For Gadamer, prejudice is not an obstacle for understanding. On the contrary it is a necessary condition for understanding, because our prejudices are the natural results of the historical character of our understanding. So Gadamer attributes positive meaning to the term. On the other hand, Wight attributes negative meaning to the term. According to Wight, prejudice is not a concept which had developed naturally throughout the history, but rather it is an imposition of the sovereign state. For Wight prejudice distorted the intellectual efforts devoted to the political studies and prevented people from having a true understanding of their political environment.

Second reason for the intellectual poverty of the international theory is that; ‘international politics differ from domestic politics in being less susceptible of a progressivist interpretation.’¹⁷¹ Since the international politics is incompatible with progressivist theory, ‘international theory that remains true to diplomatic experience will be at a discount in an age when the belief in progress is prevalent.’¹⁷² So, Wight suggests that the intellectual poverty of international politics is the result of:

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Wight, “Why Is...”, p.26.

¹⁷² Ibid.

a kind of recalcitrance of international politics to being theorized about. The reason is that the theorizing has to be done in the language of political theory and law. But this is the language appropriate to man's control of his social life. Political theory and law are maps of experience or systems of action within the realm of normal relationships and calculable results. They are the theory of the good life. International theory is the theory of survival. What for political theory is the extreme case (as revolution, or civil war) is for international theory the regular case.¹⁷³

Here Wight states an opposition between domestic and international politics. Separation of political and international theories as a result of the prejudice imposed by the sovereign state and the lack of belief in international progress, is seen as a reflection of the realist view. And Wight's approach is evaluated by some as realist. Wight defined international politics as the 'realm of repetition and recurrence', and this also caused him to be evaluated as a realist. Assessing Wight as a realist would be a misunderstanding of his overall approach to international theory. Wight denies any totalizing claims of international theory. His tripartite division is a rejection to the positivistic approach to the international theory by emphasizing historical analysis. Almeida points out that in order to grasp Wight's intention: 'it is crucial to understand what he means by international theory'. He states that:

Wight used the expression international theory not only in one but in two senses: a broad and a narrow sense... When Wight presented 'Why is there no International Theory?', he was also concerned with presenting an alternative to the realist theory. The difference is that whereas in the lectures, Wight uses 'international theory' in a broad way, including almost everything written or said about international politics by theorists, politicians, diplomats, lawyers, and even novel writers, in 'Why Is There No International Theory?', he is

¹⁷³ Wight, "Why Is There...", p.33.

concerned with the narrow notion of 'international theory', meaning rationalism.¹⁷⁴

Wight himself was a perfectionist and published very little in his life time. But his approach to international theory had deeply effected the international relations studies in the United Kingdom in general, and the members of the English school in particular. His threefold classification of the traditions of international thought provided the theoretical framework of the English school. Wight' approach to international theory has many common points with Gadamer's hermeneutics such as historicity, centrality of language and the dialogical character of the relations. And there are also some departure points such as their conceptualization of prejudice. But in general we observe that two thinkers show striking similarities in their approach to their subjects. It is not claimed in this thesis that this had occurred as a result of a conscious effort. Even though there are intersection points between Gadamer and Wight, we do not have any proof which indicates that Gadamer or Wight was influenced by the other. The common points between Gadamer and Wight, point out to the hermeneutic sensibility that prevails in the English school in general.

¹⁷⁴ Almeida, Joao Marques de, "Challenging Realism by Returning to History: The British Committee's Contribution to IR Forty Years On", paper presented at BISA Conference, 1999, Manchester University, p.15.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate that the English School approach in general and Martin Wight's approach to international theory in particular has been informed by an interpretivist orientation that bears strong resemblances to the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The hermeneutic sensibility is seen as a distinctive characteristic of the English School approach and the basic features of the common points between the hermeneutics of Gadamer and the English School's approach to international theory has been examined with reference to Martin Wight.

Gadamer and Wight, both described their intellectual endeavour as philosophical. They neither restricted themselves with any methodological approach, nor tried to invent one. Rather they showed the inadequacy of the distinct methodologies and strict classifications. Gadamer left the methodological questions related to scientific understanding, and tried to illuminate the basic conditions of understanding without making any separation between the scientific and the nonscientific. For Gadamer the task of philosophical hermeneutics was not methodological but ontological. And Wight described international theory as 'the political philosophy of international relations'. For Wight politics was a 'realm of human experience'. Wight did not try to establish a methodology either. He described his studies as entering into a continuing tradition, joining in the ongoing

conversation, and speculating about the basic questions related to international theory.

History is at the center of the thoughts of Gadamer and Wight. For Gadamer we are historical beings. He does not divide time into spheres and does not separate the period in which we are living from the past. History is operating in us, we cannot deny the effect of past on our understanding. As emphasized before, the core concept of English School is 'international society', and it is a historical entity. English School approach studies the state systems throughout the history and try to understand the development of contemporary state system by following its historical development. Wight's threefold classification of the traditions in international theory is historical. Wight perceives tradition as an ongoing process which comes from past and stretches to tomorrow. He studies diplomatic history as a source of the international experience and the working of the state-system. Wight does not approach history in a positivist way. He does not try to extract scientific laws from the repetitions of the historical patterns.

The centrality of language in English School approach is another striking similarity with Gadamer's hermeneutics. As noted, for Gadamer all understanding is interpretation because understanding takes place via language. We are linguistic beings. For Wight language is very important for studying international society. We can examine the rules, norms and regulations of an international society by studying the language used. As noted, the study of the diplomatic practice is central in Wight's works; the language used by the statesmen during their intercourse is seen by Wight as a source for identifying the values, rules and institutions of the

international society of the time. Similar to Gadamer's notion that all understanding occurs via language, our understanding of the international societies also occurs via language used during their relations.

Wight's three traditions erase the sharp line between participant and the observer. Statesmen who achieve the practices of the interstate relations can also be the members of the theoretical traditions. Their speeches and writings are the sources of international theory, beside the writings of the philosophers and thinkers. Wight warns us that his traditions are not pigeon-holes. They are not clear-cut strict formulations. There are many subcategories between them. These features of Wight's traditions show strong resemblance to Gadamer's concepts of 'fusion of horizons' and the 'dialogical character of hermeneutics'. As Gadamer states that understanding is dialogical and there are not any sharp lines between the knower and known, Wight displaces the line between the participant and observer and by emphasizing the role of history and language he attributes a dialogical character to his traditions similar to the conceptualization of Gadamer. Also his subcategories can be seen as the 'fusion of horizons' between his three traditions. Gadamer's account of tradition is not static. Traditions are historically open-ended and intersecting. Similarly, Wight's traditions can be defined as open-ended, and intersecting. Wight emphasizes that his traditions are not railroad tracks parallel to infinity, but they have many intersections.

In sum, a hermeneutic sensibility is a distinctive characteristic of the English School approach. Although, it is not a self-conscious adoption of the hermeneutic methodology, the basic features of the school shows strong resemblance to

Gadamer's hermeneutics. Martin Wight, in particular, have many common points in his approach with Gadamer's philosophy. His anti-positivist orientation, the historical character of his theoretical approach, the centrality of language in his studies, and the dialogical character of his traditions are the main common points between him and Gadamer.

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