

IMPURE PHENOMENOLOGY: DILTHEY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND INTERPRETIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract: Responding to critiques of Dilthey's interpretive psychology, I revisit its relation with epistemology and the human sciences. Rather than reducing knowledge to psychology and psychology to subjective understanding, Dilthey articulated the epistemic worth of a psychology involving (1) an impure phenomenology of embodied, historically-situated, and worldly consciousness as individually lived yet complicit with its naturally and socially constituted contexts, (2) experience- and communication-oriented processes of interpreting others, (3) the use of third-person structural-functional analysis and causal explanation, and (4) a recognition of the ungroundability, facticity, and conflict inherent in knowledge and life.

Keywords: Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Human Sciences, Interpretation, Psychology

1. Introduction

Despite the scholarly research clarifying Dilthey's psychological writings, it is still a common prejudice to associate Dilthey with psychologism.¹ In this

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Dilthey references are to the pagination of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS) and, when available, translations in the *Selected Works* (SW): GS 1: *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften: Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte*, ed. B. Groethuysen, fourth edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959; GS 5: *Die Geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Erste Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. G. Misch, second edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957; GS 7: *Der Aufbau der Geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. B. Groethuysen, second edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956; GS 8: *Weltanschauungslehre: Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie*, ed. B. Groethuysen, second edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960; GS 13: *Leben Schleiermachers: Auf Grund*

story, Dilthey reduced propositional validity-claims to claims about mental states, and the contents of the mind to a subjective emotional understanding, thereby eliminating the possibility of objective knowledge and truth. Although this legend is clearly a misinterpretation, it is a powerful myth repeated by canonical figures from Husserl to Gadamer and reinforced by a picture of philosophy as separate from other forms of inquiry such as empirical psychology.

Dilthey's descriptive and analytic psychology (*beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie*) has been misconstrued by its positivist, phenomenological, and Neo-Kantian critics, primarily because of its place between experiential interpretive description and structural-functional analysis and causal empirical explanation.² Dilthey's distinction between understanding (*verstehen*) and explanation (*erklären*) was rejected in positivism and later scientism for the sake of a causal or correlational explanatory method that would unify the sciences. The distinction was taken as definitive in the wake of the Neo-Kantian separation of validity and facticity and the phenomenological reduction and bracketing of the empirical or causal world. Despite Dilthey's proximity to Neo-Kantianism and early phenomenology, he never posited an absolute or metaphysical difference between nature and spirit, materiality and ideality, facticity and value, or explanation and interpretation.³ Although Dilthey's methodologically systematic—albeit not ontologically unlimited—distinction between understanding and explanation has led to the identification of his thought with the affective interiority of understanding, the absence of an absolute difference between reality and ideality, object and subject, has led to the association of Dilthey with positivism, as when Heidegger criticizes

des Textes der 1. Auflage von 1870 und der Zusätze aus dem Nachlaß, ed. M. Redeker, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970; GS 18: *Die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte: Vorarbeiten zur Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften (1865–1880)*, ed. H. Johach and F. Rodi, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977; GS 19: *Grundlegung der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte*, ed. H. Johach and F. Rodi, second edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997; GS 24: *Logik und Wert*, ed. G. Kühne-Bertram, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004; SW I: *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, ed. R. Makkreel and F. Rodi, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; SW IV: *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, ed. R. Makkreel and F. Rodi, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; DP: *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, tr. R. M. Zaner and K. I. Heiges, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.

² On the crisis and conflict provoked by Dilthey's psychological writings, see U. Feest, "Hypotheses, everywhere only hypotheses!": On some contexts of Dilthey's critique of explanatory psychology," *Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci.* 38 (2007), pp. 43–62; N. D. Schmidt, *Philosophie und Psychologie: Trennungsgeschichte, Dogmen und Perspektiven*, Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1995, pp. 37–60; F. Rodi, "Die Ebbinghaus-Dilthey-Kontroverse: Biographischer Hintergrund und sachlicher Ertrag," *Ebbinghaus-Studien*, 2 (1987), pp. 145–154; Karl-Otto Apel problematically interprets Dilthey as psychologistic and dualistically reifying the distinction between understanding and explanation in his *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984, respectively pp. 12–15, 3.

³ Mario Bunge perpetuates this misunderstanding of Dilthey in his *Social Science Under Debate: A Philosophical Perspective*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000, pp. 9–12, 308.

Dilthey for a “higher positivism” that does not eliminate causally known nature.⁴ Isolating these two moments of subjectivity and objectivity, affective responsiveness and scientific endeavor, and setting them into opposition, Gadamer concludes that Dilthey is incoherently committed to both romanticism and positivism.⁵

In this article, I develop an alternative more coherent way of interpreting Dilthey’s psychology that indicates its continuing significance. Dilthey’s project, oriented by a hermeneutical and anti-reductive empiricism, promoted an “impure” epistemological reflection in the context of the complexities of lived-experience and an interpretively oriented methodological pluralism in the sciences.⁶ His project is not obscured but disclosed in his psychological research. In a series of remarkable writings, which integrated interpretive and explanatory aspects of psychological inquiry, Dilthey formulated an alternative strategy to one-sidedly relying on either causal-explanatory or descriptive-phenomenological methodologies. Psychology emerged as an experiential interpretive human science (*Geisteswissenschaft*) in contrast with its being an explanatory natural science, as in Neo-Kantianism and positivism, or a phenomenological description of consciousness, as in Husserl. Psychology cannot then be disconnected from human scientific inquiry, with its causal-empirical and meaning-oriented tasks, without distorting its object of research: the concrete, embodied, and worldly human subject. This psychology was an element of Dilthey’s articulation of a postfoundational and postmetaphysical philosophy in relation to the conditions and contexts of human life, which include the non-harmonious and dis-relational—i.e., the radical lack of ground or ungroundability (*Unbegründbarkeit*) and unfathomability (*Unergründlichkeit*)—in which life is inherently disruptive of ideal unitary representations and theories.⁷

⁴ M. Heidegger, *GA 27: Einleitung in die Philosophie*, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1996, pp. 348–350.

⁵ H.-G. Gadamer, “Wilhelm Dilthey nach 150 Jahren: Zwischen Romantik und Positivismus,” in E. W. Orth (ed.), *Dilthey und die Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Freiburg: Alber, 1985, pp. 157–182, and *Hermeneutik in Rückblick*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995, pp. 9 and 186; J. Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003, pp. 34–35.

⁶ Such oversimplifying confusion is evident in Paul Ricoeur’s binary opposition of explanation and understanding in Dilthey. Ricoeur contends that it “is heavy with consequences for hermeneutics, which is thereby severed from naturalistic explanation and thrown back into the sphere of psychological interpretation” (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 49). Dilthey held the opposite: (1) explanation and interpretation presuppose each other and merge in scientific inquiry such that they do not constitute two separate ontological realms (GS 5: 334/ SW IV: 253); (2) explanation does and should occur in the human sciences with an awareness of its limits in subsuming the singular under the universal (GS 5: 337/ SW IV: 257). On the necessity of explanation in the human sciences and how it complements understanding see GS 5: 334, 337/ SW IV: 253, 257.

⁷ GS 7: 331.

2. *Epistemology or Psychology? A False Dilemma*

Dilthey's rich and textured development of a pragmatic interpretive psychology in the 1880's–1890's has been accused of psychologizing knowledge and reducing universal validity and ideal value claims to the psychological and historical facticity of the conditions and contexts of human life. This critique—formulated by Heinrich Rickert and others—presupposes that the distinctions between validity and facticity, normative ideality and empirical actuality, are secured and stabilized, and begs the question inasmuch as validity and facticity are mutually entangled and illuminating. Their tension and connectedness cannot be eliminated without removing what is to be understood: human individuals with their thoughts, feelings, volitions, and actions in the context of their natural and social-historical conditions. Dilthey distinguished himself from Rickert by arguing that value and validity can only be pursued through their mediation and expression in the reality of human life.⁸ Whereas the relation between pure normative validity and merely causal psychic processes becomes incomprehensible in Rickert and Neo-Kantianism, Dilthey establishes the “acquired psychic nexus” (*erworbener Zusammenhang des Seelenlebens*), i.e., the self as the formative result of causal, interpretive, and normative structures and processes, as the site of their agonistic and complementary interactions.

Psychology is applicable to epistemology, and thinking to what is thought, even if the latter should not be “reduced” to the former. Dilthey's psychological research is a decisive element of his transformation of modern epistemology, which ought to take the concrete embodied acquired psychic nexus as its point of departure, since knowledge is caught up in the life of the knower. Individual life is generative and formative, occurring within its psychological, material-physical, and social-historical nexus of relations, which it acquires, configures, cultivates, and individuates in its own way. Epistemology is the theory of scientific and other ways of knowing and yet constantly fails to overcome the facticity of the knower. It is itself to be investigated through empirical sciences such as anthropology, history, linguistics, and psychology. Epistemology is more than a purely theoretical discipline; it plays a crucial role in the human sciences that investigate the multiplicity of human life for the sake of understanding that life. The doubling character of knowledge in knower and known entails both the unavoidability of subjectivity and the impossibility of reducing the object to it. Whereas Dilthey contextualized without eliminating subjective and felt aspects of human existence through the “art” of understanding and interpretation, the increasingly dominant tendency in psychology and the social sciences was toward their elimination.⁹

⁸ GS 24: 302.

⁹ On Dilthey's reception, see Rodi, “Die Ebbinghaus-Dilthey-Kontroverse,” *op. cit.*, pp. 145–154; Z. Todd, *Mixing Methods in Psychology: The Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative*

For contemporary proponents of “naturalizing psychology,” who assume that a conditional individual-biographical and social-historical self is as unnatural as a metaphysical or supernatural soul, comprehending psychology as a human science “would condemn it to the status of lay (or folk) psychology.”¹⁰ Although Dilthey rejected naturalism as a doctrinal metaphysics entangled in irresolvable aporias, he is a broadly naturalistic and empirically oriented thinker who opposed limited conceptualizations of the natural and empirical. Whether in the arts or in the sciences, naturalism ought to broaden and deepen rather than diminish and dissolve reality.¹¹ His post-metaphysical principle of immanence does not eradicate the subjectivity of the individual’s first person perspective, as this is an element of the phenomenon to be understood and interpreted. Philosophical and human scientific inquiry cannot exclusively articulate their objects of research from a third person perspective. Psychological programs promising the de-contextualization and de-individuation of the self cannot evade the social-historical life of individuals and issues of self-reference, self-reflexivity, and self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) arising from the first-person perspective. Basic categories of knowing and ordinary life such as meaning, validity, and truth occur relative to this “internal” first-person perspective—in both its plural (we, you) and singular (I, you) forms—as distinguished from the objectivizing “external” third-person perspective.¹²

All science requires art, even the most automated and mechanical mathematical and scientific activities are learned and habituated skilled behaviors. But the doubling character of knowing is intensified in the human sciences, as the researcher and her object both fall within the social-historical world. The human sciences presuppose the researcher’s self-reflexivity, which is prior to human scientific inquiry. The researcher understands her objects, individuals, groups, and societies, before she studies them. The form of such pre-understanding forms the basis and limits of the human sciences, and is its strength and weakness in contrast to natural science. The environment and milieu, and epoch and generation, of the life of individuals constitute the nexus of researcher and researched. The human sciences presuppose and employ—explicitly and implicitly—common “folk” history, language, psychology, and their theoretical forms.

Psychology in Dilthey’s sense is significant for the self-understanding and clarification of the human sciences since they cannot be reduced without

Methods in Theory and Practice, Hove: Psychology Press, 2004, p. 19; W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination: A Weberian Perspective*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 475.

¹⁰ Bunge, *Social Science Under Debate*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹¹ On naturalism in Dilthey, compare Benjamin D. Crowe, “Dilthey’s Philosophy of Religion in the ‘Critique of Historical Reason’: 1880-1910,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66: 2 (April, 2005), pp. 281–282.

¹² M. Jung, *Erfahrung und Religion*, Freiburg: Alber, 1999, pp. 9–14, 274–275.

distortion to the discourses of ideal validity and universal laws governing cause and effect that have been typically applied to the natural sciences. The human sciences engage the society that informs them, along with the facticity and singularity of human motives, actions, volitions, and feelings. Whereas discourses of ideal validity, such as logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences can proceed in a third person perspective that successfully abstracts from and ignores the social-historical context, the human sciences are confronted with fundamental questions about their social-historical and self-referential character. To address such issues, Dilthey introduced a hermeneutical turn challenging modern epistemology and its overemphasis on—and dualism between—universal cognitive validity (mind) and efficient causal explanation (matter). The Cartesian-Kantian tradition is inadequate to the phenomenon itself, if the epistemic subject is also the concrete formative self and if consciousness is itself be referred to its wider contexts of bodily, social-historical, and biological-natural life in order to be understood.

3. *Resituating Rationality: Epistemology and the Human Sciences*

Reflecting the anxiety about Dilthey's recourse to the concrete interpretive subject, Jean Grondin remarks: "Nowhere does he [Dilthey] show how interpretive psychology could validate the objectivity of propositions in the human sciences."¹³ His analysis mistakenly presumes that Dilthey sought to deductively or directly ground epistemology in interpretive psychology. In contrast to views such as Grondin's, Manfred Riedel aptly argues that Dilthey developed a thorough critique of foundational reason and metaphysical justification.¹⁴ To further reconsider the relation between the theory of knowledge and psychology in Dilthey, the question of "grounding" or justification (*Begründung*) should be reposed, as Dilthey's use of grounding signifies contextualization.

Dilthey pursued a radical critique of foundational reason and its modes of justification without rejecting the possibility of rational objective knowledge and epistemic justification as such. Dilthey's moderate skepticism challenged the rejection of knowledge and rationality in "irrationalism," whether pursued for the sake of the pure intuition or lived-experience of life, maintaining the validity and worth of rationality and knowledge in relation to the immanent reflexive yet interpretive life-nexus.¹⁵ Dilthey reconceived reason and knowledge

¹³ J. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 86.

¹⁴ M. Riedel, "Dilthey's Kritik der Begründenden Vernunft," in E. W. Orth (ed.), *Dilthey und die Philosophie der Gegenwart*, *op. cit.*, pp. 185–210.

¹⁵ Contrast M. Bunge, *Finding Philosophy in Social Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 305–307.

in relation to the contextual, empirical, and historical character of the life to which they belong. It is a tendency of human life to endeavor to know itself; and, to better know itself, it must turn to its social-historical nexus.

Dilthey's unwillingness to abandon rationality and the possibility of knowing oneself, one's society, and world led Gadamer to assert the incoherence of his position. For Gadamer, Dilthey paradoxically attempted to ground knowledge while revealing its finite limits in the context of a celebration of the "irrationality" of life. Dilthey could not resolve the aporias of scientism and romanticism, rationalism and irrationalism, of Mill and Schleiermacher.¹⁶ Where Gadamer perceived an aporia, Dilthey identified Mill and Schleiermacher with two different ways of articulating the empirical and "empiricism."¹⁷ Dilthey criticized reductive empiricism while appropriating and intensifying its legitimate attention to the experimental character of knowledge.¹⁸

Dilthey's defense and elucidation of the empirical while rejecting its restrictions in classical empiricism, i.e., of maintaining the primacy of the phenomenal without the ahistorical abstractions of empiricism, indicates both a reply to Gadamer's critique of Dilthey and an alternative to the marginalization of the empirical and the material-physical dimensions of knowledge in twentieth-century hermeneutics. The empiricity and facticity of life do not undermine rationality and knowledge if they provide an interpretive orienting basis for them as possibilities of that life. Indicating the failures and limits of foundational reason and the ultimate unfathomability of life is then more rational than their reification and separation from concrete subjects. The aporias and incomplete character of knowledge and the agonistic finite character of life are not "logical contradictions" but constitutive of life and knowledge. Gadamer's incoherence thesis reveals the unifying fusing tendency of his thought. As Groethuysen remarked: "Every formation [*Gestaltung*] of life is always only particular; it can never present all the possibilities of life. Life is never given as a whole, in the entirety of its linkage [*Gefüge*]."¹⁹ The formative productive powers of life are characterized by conflict (*Streit*), and human life by interpretive conflict (*Widerstreit*), leading to the aporias and antinomies of conceptual thought when it systematically strives to unify life

¹⁶ H. G. Gadamer, "Wilhelm Dilthey nach 150 Jahren," *art. cit.*, pp. 157–182; 1995, pp. 9 and 186.

¹⁷ GS 18: 186. Adding more confusion, and continuing to miss the specificity of Dilthey's empiricism, Joseph Margolis endorses Gadamer's assertion of Dilthey's reliance on the model of the physical sciences and Mill's inductively-oriented empiricism and Ricoeur's contention that Dilthey excluded inductive explanation from the human sciences in *The Flux of History and the Flux of Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 142 and 148.

¹⁸ GS 5: 77; on Dilthey's empiricism, see E. S. Nelson, "Empiricism, Facticity, and the Immanence of Life in Dilthey," *Pli: Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.18, 2007, pp. 108–128.

¹⁹ GS 8: x.

into an integrated totality that would exclude other possibilities.²⁰ If relational interdependent difference and conflict (*Widerstreit*) are constitutive of life, and not expressions of contradictory motives, these cannot be easily pushed aside as in Gadamer's incoherence criticism.²¹

Dilthey's critique of historical reason—as developed in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* of 1883, a philosophy of the historicity of rationality and the rationality of the human sciences—is both a continuation and transformation of Kant's critical philosophy. Whereas Kant's critiques concerned the universal, Dilthey's critique of historical reason aimed at the singular in history.²² Dilthey appropriated Kant's Copernican revolution while critically transforming it in relation to the question of the singularity and facticity of historical life. This is not merely a continuation of Kant's transcendental philosophy but a new form of critical or hermeneutical empiricism.²³ This corrects the assertion that Dilthey merely applied Kant's critical philosophy to a new area, as if a critique of historical reason did not involve the double genitive of articulating both the rationality of history and the historicity of rationality, and remained within Kantian epistemology.²⁴ Dilthey renewed epistemology by contextualizing its abstract ideational subject:

Although I found myself frequently in agreement with the epistemological school of Locke, Hume, and Kant, I nevertheless found it necessary to conceive differently the nexus of facts of consciousness which we together recognize as the basis of philosophy. Apart from a few beginnings [...] previous epistemology—Kant's as well as that of the empiricists—has explained experience and cognition in terms of facts that are merely representational. No real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought. A historical as well as psychological approach to whole human beings led me to explain even knowledge and its concepts [...] in terms of the manifold powers of a being that wills, feels, and thinks [...].²⁵

Dilthey resituated knowledge in its interpretive context, challenging both its abstract formulation and its denial for the sake of intuition. Dilthey transformed epistemology by reorienting transcendental philosophy and recontextualizing its categories within the immanence of life, as the “transcendental” can

²⁰ On the priority of possibility in contrast to its closure in identity and unity see GS 1: 402/SW I: 235; GS 18: 104; GS 19: 42/SW I: 498.

²¹ GS 8: 98,152.

²² GS 7: 117.

²³ For transcendental readings of Dilthey, see J. D. Mul, *The Tragedy of Finitude: Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 52–53.

²⁴ Levinas assimilates Dilthey to Neo-Kantianism in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, tr. A. Orianne, second edition, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995, p. lvii.

²⁵ GS 1: xviii/SW I: 50.

only be expressed in reference to the empirical.²⁶ In his plans for continuing the critique of historical reason, Dilthey clarified his project's relation to Kant:

I incorporate the theory of the conditions of consciousness as instituted by Kant, but critically transformed, into the theory of self-actualizing knowledge and of the history of science. [...] Yet at the same time—and here lies the main difference between Kant and myself—the intellect also transforms its own conditions of consciousness through its engagement with things. Kant's a priori is fixed and dead; but the real conditions of consciousness and its presuppositions, as I grasp them, constitute a living historical process, a development; they have a history, and the course of this history involves their adaptation to the ever more exact, inductively known manifold of sense-contents. The life of history also encompasses the apparently fixed and dead conditions under which we think. They can never be abrogated, because we think by means of them, but they are the product of development.²⁷

Dilthey transformed epistemology through the recognition of the historicity of the historical conditions of consciousness and knowledge. The justification of the human sciences needs to be developed in the context of this historicity. The grounding of these modes of inquiry appealed to conditions and contexts that are transformed according to how humans encounter things and their own society. Justification does not proceed through a universal ground, since the justification of a practice or form of inquiry already entails its differentiation. The justification and the uniqueness of the human sciences are one and the same thing through the receptivity to how their objects are given. Understanding of givenness already occurs within everyday human life. The mode of givenness is how the given is understood and interpreted. This mediated and indirect interpretive access to the given in Dilthey was opposed by both his positivist and intuitionist critics who assumed direct access to physical or mental facts. For positivistic critics from Ebbinghaus to Bunge, *verstehen* is an unnecessary addition to scientific inquiry and an irrational projection of feelings of empathy and arbitrary guessing.²⁸ *Verstehen* is the experience of the other in the self rather than the reduction of the world to the primacy of human subjective activity. Historicity indicates facticity instead of the priority of the subject who makes and knows history. Understanding is more than subjective feeling and less than an objective totalization, as it is already structured in the life-nexus where it is bound to its "objects" prior to, yet not excluding, theoretical inquiry and the use of hypothesis-oriented causal explanation. The differentiation of the human and natural sciences is not a priori, transcendental or ontological. It occurs and is justified through responding

²⁶ Compare J. D. Mul, *The Tragedy of Finitude*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁷ GS 19: 44/SW I: 500–501.

²⁸ Bunge, *Finding Philosophy in Social Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

to and articulating the various modes of givenness of the life-nexus, which consists of structures and processes, activities and events, causes and reasons.

Dilthey is a modernistic enlightenment-oriented thinker, according to Heidegger and Gadamer, insofar as he is beholden to the modern project of epistemology and scientific knowledge. However, these only have a conditional justification because they are referred to the contexts and the conditions of the nexus of life, which they are incapable of transcending. The self occurs in its bodily relation to its world—this is the focus of his essay on the reality of the external world²⁹—and in its historicity. Scientific knowledge receives its legitimacy from within life; not from a metaphysical interpretation of nature, reason or spirit.

The natural sciences are oriented toward achieving a mathematically modeled explanatory construction of nature. As such, they are separate from and indirectly related to the nexus of historical life that is the basis of their practice and enactment. The difference between the natural and human sciences consists therefore in how they justify their respective claims. Epistemology emerges from this context with the issue of clarifying and differentiating the multiple modes of justification and validity in the various sciences. Epistemology is the systematic and historical description and analysis of conceptual knowledge, specifically how it occurs in the sciences. Dilthey's transformation of epistemology occurred through situating scientific and conceptual knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) in contextual understanding.

Epistemology clarifies and deepens a human practice through self-reflection. Epistemology is therefore not a pure construction of conceptual cognition from the fact of the independence of self-consciousness because consciousness is already tied to worldly and social-historical conditions. Epistemology is itself then a human science that cannot be appropriately undertaken without analyzing the empirical character of the enactment of scientific research and the practice of knowledge. Epistemology should proceed in relation to history and psychology, since knowledge has developed historically and depends on the behavior, comportment, and practice of those engaged in it. Even if validity is abstracted from facticity for various purposes, knowledge as enacted and practiced in life is impure and tied to beings that are not ideal but factual. Dilthey's "critique of historical reason" challenges rationalism and irrationalism with the historical self-formation of a worldly and embodied reason in its immanent factual life-conditions.³⁰

Epistemic practices are only comprehensible in relation to the structures, processes, events and actions of human life. Dilthey justified the tendency toward knowledge in the context of the life-nexus from which it emerges.

²⁹ GS 5: 90–138.

³⁰ On "practice" in Dilthey, see E. S. Nelson, "Interpreting Practice: Epistemology, Hermeneutics, and Historical Life in Dilthey," *Idealistic Studies*, 38:1–2, 2008, pp. 105–122.

For Dilthey, we must be attentive to the various provenances of practices, discourses, and worldviews.³¹ For some purposes, the logic of truth and validity claims are legitimately isolated or abstracted in order to consider them for their own sake. However, for other purposes—such as the human sciences that study social-historical actuality rather than disembodied norms and values—the questions of genesis, historicity, and worldliness constitute their form of inquiry. A hermeneutics of the human sciences implies that the human sciences inform the epistemology of the human sciences. Their truth does not rest in a subsuming principle above, behind, or beyond them.

4. *Psychology and the Human Sciences*

Attending to the role of psychology in Dilthey's "middle period,"³² Dilthey's writings in the 1890's should be read in relation to an interpretive psychology that occurs in the intersection of knowledge and life. Dilthey's "The Origin of Our Belief in the Reality of the External World and Its Justification" (1890) provided the basis for such a project. There is a phenomenality or immanence prior to the intellectualism or metaphysical position of phenomenalism, and reality already has an independence from the subject within immanence. This is evident in the resistance and tension between self and world. Under the traditional form of proving the existence of the external world, Dilthey radicalized this canonical problem by anticanonically showing the bodily, generative, and individuated character of human life without suspending its causal and interpretive worldly interconnections. The self and its world are cogiven and their difference is a formative principle for individuals. This work illustrates how bodily being in the world is the point of departure for interpretive epistemology and psychology.

Dilthey developed the interpretive human science of psychology in his *Ideas Concerning a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* (1894) and in *Contributions to the Study of Individuality* (1895/1896). One task of interpretive psychology is correcting the abstraction and reified dualities of previous epistemology. Dilthey thus challenged the assumptions of Neo-Kantian epistemology that claimed the "absolute independence of epistemology from psychology. It alleges that Kant's critique of reason has in principle emancipated the theory of knowledge from psychology by giving it a particular [i.e., transcendental] method."³³ In contrast to the assertion of knowledge's ideal or transcendental validity independent of

³¹ Heidegger criticizes this ontic pluralism in GA 27, pp. 347–350.

³² On periodization of Dilthey's works, see M. Jung, *Dilthey zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1996, pp. 14–18, and J. Rüttsche, *Das Leben aus der Schrift Verstehen*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 33–45.

³³ GS 5: 148/DP: 32.

all facticity, Dilthey argued that knowledge addresses a factual existent knower and presupposes what he called the “acquired psychic nexus.” The acquired psychic nexus is the matrix of explicit “higher” and the implicit “elementary” forms of understanding, of the intertwined structures of surface self-understandings and unconscious depth, through which the self both structures and is structured by the world. The epistemologist abstracts the thoughts and laws of the mind from the living psychic nexus, and constructs the transparency, independence, and certainty of a self-consciousness unencumbered by the facticity of the world and the opaqueness of life. Epistemology, however, cannot be liberated from the impure empirical circumstances of knowledge without eliminating its pragmatic conditions of possibility.

The epistemologist presupposes the acquired psychic nexus while denying its role: “He presupposes it. He makes use of it, but he is not in control of it. Thus interpretations of this nexus in psychological concepts suggested by the language and thought of his times necessarily insinuate themselves into his epistemology.”³⁴ Instead of freeing knowledge from psychology, value from facticity, Neo-Kantianism and much of twentieth-century philosophy presuppose an inadequate and inappropriate conception of the psychological that undermines the purity of its own epistemic project. The abstract oppositions of Kantian and post-Kantian thought, such as the separation of intuition and intellect, and matter and form, “destroy the coherence of a living nexus.”³⁵

Under the guise of “anti-psychologism,” philosophy is unable to encounter and articulate the relations between knowledge and experience, knowing and its bodily, psychic, and social-historical circumstances. In contrast to “psychologism,” Dilthey shows how epistemology cannot be replaced by interpretive psychology even as it cannot do without it. It is unfeasible to have even the most thoroughly elaborated descriptive psychology as the foundation of epistemology, since so much surpasses the life of the individual and other discursive forms are needed, but an otherworldly presuppositionless theory of knowledge is illusory.³⁶

Knowledge and its theory occur in the tension of validity claims and facticity of those who make such claims and their world. This is not the logism of reducing psychology (or any other human science) to a foundational epistemology or the psychologism of reducing epistemology to psychological facts—whether introspectively intuited or causally explained. Dilthey argues for the symbolically mediated interdependence of the theory of knowledge and the knowledge achieved in the individual sciences. Epistemology concerns the founding of the sciences while itself being fundamentally founded in those sciences and the

³⁴ GS 5: 149/DP: 32.

³⁵ GS 5: 149/DP: 32.

³⁶ GS 5: 150/DP: 34.

practices of life. Dilthey established the founding/founded character of epistemology in the interdependence of the multiplicity of forms of inquiry.³⁷

The interpretive psychology informing epistemology is “psychology in movement; to be sure, in movement towards a determined end. It rests on the self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) that involves psychic life examined in its entire scope—questions of universal validity, truth and reality are only determined according to their sense.”³⁸ Epistemology cannot be deduced from self-knowing consciousness, since it is not transparent to itself, or from combining logic and psychology. Descriptive psychology is not a deductive foundation for the sciences. It cannot be posited as a final ground or foundation, as questions of meaning and validity are situated reflectively in the context of their worldly-bodily sense and social-historical signification.³⁹

Rickert and Husserl inappropriately identify Dilthey with “psychologism.”⁴⁰ Dilthey did not advocate psychological intuition or introspection. He emphasized the interconnectedness and mediation of experience, history, and language, and promoted engaging the facticity of consciousness and knowledge without reducing validity-claims to the contents of mental states. Psychologism as a reduction to the psychological states of individuals is incompatible with interpretive psychology. Although causal explanation arrived at through hypothesis and experiment plays a major role in psychology, validity-claims are irreducible to physiological-psychological effects of causal states or processes.⁴¹ Husserl’s confusion is due to his assimilation of Dilthey’s position to naturalism in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science.” Levinas remarked that Husserl’s problem with “psychologism” was its reliance on naturalistic ontology, yet Dilthey resists any reduction to a narrowly conceived naturalism, including the explanatory reduction to psychology.⁴²

Explanatory psychology reflects a unifying tendency that is inappropriate for the human sciences in being unreceptive to how its objects are given: It

³⁷ GS 5: 150–151/DP: 34.

³⁸ GS 5: 151/DP: 35.

³⁹ GS 5: 150/DP: 34; on the interpretive character of reflection, see E. S. Nelson, “Self-Reflection, Interpretation, and Historical Life in Dilthey,” *Dilthey International Yearbook for Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, vol. 1, forthcoming.

⁴⁰ Particularly E. Husserl’s “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1911) and H. Rickert’s *The Philosophy of Life* (1920); J. N. Mohanty explains in *The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1985, p. 108: “Husserl’s early antipathy to Dilthey’s *Lebensphilosophie* derived from his suspicion that the latter may lead to a sort of psychological relativism, a denial of the ideality of meanings and thought-structures, an immanence philosophy which seemed to be oblivious of the phenomenon of intentionality.” In his *Transcendental Phenomenology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 41–43, Mohanty contends that, even if Frege’s and Husserl’s criticisms of psychologism are unsuccessful in Dilthey’s case, Dilthey’s hermeneutics of lived-experience remains irrelevant to and cannot interrupt the (non-hermeneutical) logic of ideal validity.

⁴¹ GS 5: 146–147/DP: 30–31.

⁴² E. Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, *op. cit.*, p. lviii.

instead “sets up a causal system claiming to make all the manifestations of mental life intelligible” and presupposes that “it is able to derive from a limited number of well-determined elements an absolutely complete and transparent knowledge of the appearance of the mental.”⁴³ It dismantles the life-nexus replacing it with a constructed systematic totality.⁴⁴ Such strategies have their role and usefulness, even within the human sciences, but are inappropriate for an interpretive psychology concerned with individuality.

To the disapproval of positivist psychologists such as Ebbinghaus, and Neo-Kantians such as Rickert, Dilthey critiqued the assumptions of transparency and totality in explanatory psychology while resituating the legitimate use of causal explanation in the interpretive inquiry of the human science of psychology. The interpretive or hermeneutical dimension refers to phenomena that are constituted in relation to evaluations, intentions, norms, prescriptions, purposes, rules, and values. However, this dimension is evident in the context of the enactment and facticity of these phenomena rather than from a perspective that detaches them from their worldly social-historical embodiment, such as occurs in the subordination of the objects of the “cultural sciences” to questions of norms and values—understood as “goods” independent of desire, facticity, and particularity—in Neo-Kantianism.⁴⁵

Rickert’s categorization of the cultural sciences includes all of the human sciences “except for psychology.”⁴⁶ Psychology is excluded because it is concerned with facts that can be generalized rather than with the individuating values that distinguish cultural from natural science.⁴⁷ For Rickert, the difference between the cultural and natural sciences consists in the fact that the former is individuating, the latter generalizing.⁴⁸ By excluding psychology from the cultural sciences, Rickert rejects Dilthey’s claim that psychology is interpretive and fundamentally concerns individuation.⁴⁹ As Heidegger noted, Rickert treated psychology as analogous to mechanics and, therefore, placed it at the opposite end of those sciences concerned with validity (logic) and value (the cultural sciences).⁵⁰

It is a principal illusion of metaphysics, which continues to inform disenchanting and secularized epistemology, to maintain that the transcendent and transcendental can be known outside of the immanence and phenomenality of our interpretively experienced world. Transcendence and the transcendental

⁴³ Respectively GS 5: 139/DP: 23 and GS 5: 139/DP: 24.

⁴⁴ GS 5: 144, 175/DP: 28, 57.

⁴⁵ H. Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1986, p. 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45, 74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

⁵⁰ M. Heidegger, *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, GA 21, p. 89.

conditions of life occur within immanence from which they are to be receptively elucidated.

Dilthey's interpretive psychology is receptive and descriptive and analytic and diagnostic. Involving both interpretation and explanation, the elucidation of meaning and experimental empirical inquiry, it is an impure phenomenology. This psychology is relevant for epistemic issues, as humans encounter and understand each other and their world out of the co-givenness and proximity of self and world, and in their historicity. Humans are worldly historical beings, insofar as they act within a situation, i.e., an environment and epoch. Dilthey's descriptive and analytic psychology challenges a reductive naturalistic psychology without turning to idealism through recognizing this fundamental historicity of human life.⁵¹ Without the ontic, empirical, and temporal contexts and conditions of that life, epistemology is impossible and irrelevant. Likewise, it remains one-sided without the recognition of the psychology and practice of agents. The epistemological language of grounding and founding is transformed through his hermeneutics of history, language, and psychology.

5. *The Psychology of Factual Life and the Facticity of Psychology*

A central question for Dilthey is the question concerning the "grounding" (which for Dilthey is not absolute but conditional in relation to life) of the human sciences. The question reoccurs: How are the human sciences capable of being grounded and grounded, in this "how," in their own particular way? Why does Dilthey grant them a special justification?

Dilthey differentiated the human and the natural sciences through their referential context and the ways in which they enact life. The historical world of the human sciences and the natural world of the natural sciences are differentiated from out of the pre-theoretically given lived world. Even as the natural world has priority in the sense of being the basis of the historical world, the historical world has priority in providing the contexts of significance in which the explanations of the natural sciences make sense.⁵² The difference lies not in two different realms of entities or truths but phenomenologically in the *way or how* their objects are respectively given.⁵³ The difference is then neither ontological nor exclusively epistemological and methodological insofar as they constitute two distinct ways of expressing and responding to the givenness of life.

Whereas the human sciences remain within the object that they study (social-historical life), and thus are bound to the first person perspective of the

⁵¹ GS 5: 180/DP: 62–63.

⁵² R. Makkreel, "Reinterpreting the historical world," *The Monist*, 74.2 (1991), p. 151.

⁵³ GS 7: 89–90.

“who,” the natural sciences abstract from life in order to prescribe universal laws to decontextualized representational objects from the external third person perspective of the “what.” The human sciences can also adopt this perspective to an extent for different uses, but their goal of explicating life from out of itself in its facticity and singularity is undermined when they are subordinated to an external methodological model that misses their objects. The human sciences and their objects are misunderstood when this occurs. Significant facets of and approaches to historical life—which are disclosed “internally” in the first person perspective through understanding and interpretation—are leveled and closed off.

The human sciences require their reference to and dependency on lived experience and the social-historical life-nexus, because these are its concerns born of the interests and viewpoints of practical life itself. Natural scientific inquiry presupposes psychology, language, and history, yet the resulting theory and content aims at a validity abstracted from these presuppositions. Natural scientific knowledge factually depends upon the practices of natural scientists. These practices are implicitly informed by their own psychology, language, and history, which are presupposed without being interpretively thematized within these sciences. The human sciences are and reflexively study human practices within a social-historical context, and are bound to that context. Such research retains an immanent self-reflexivity. The human sciences cannot escape the interpretive circularity of self-reflection in studying the life-nexus within which one studies and lives: “Interpretation in the human sciences is circular in that it involves the reinterpretation of an already interpreted reality.”⁵⁴ The natural sciences face these questions and possibilities only when the perspectives of ordinary life and the human sciences are brought to bear upon them, as the history and sociology of science demonstrate.

Psychology, developed as an interpretive human science addressing individuation, is deeply relevant for the self-understanding and clarification of the human sciences, because they are interpretively and reflectively constituted on the basis of the self-referential and reflexive awareness of individuals within a social-historically lived world. If humans achieve some kind of self-knowledge, this is at best indirect because interpretively mediated through communicative and historical contexts and practices. As an interpretive lived practice under contingent and non-transparent conditions, thought cannot be mandated through an “ought” or a normative imperative abstracted and isolated from the “is” and the positing of a realm of non-temporal goods and values behind or beyond the temporal flux and multiplicity of human existence. Even the “know thyself” of Socrates was played off, Dilthey comments, against “the powerful and unfathomable which he designated *daimon*.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ R. Makkreel, “Reinterpreting the historical world,” *art. cit.*, p. 152.

⁵⁵ GS 5: 226/DP: 107.

Self-knowledge occurs in and through its enactment in the world, in the particularity of a social-historical context of relations. The self knows itself indirectly and interpretively through its world and thus through experiential and empirical inquiry into psychology, language, and history. This goal of self-knowledge is motivational: The self desires to understand itself and others in its and their complexity and individuality. If the singular resists and withdraws from presentation and representation, and cannot be articulated through intuition or representation, human self-inquiry is dependent upon psychology—the empirical-interpretive science of individuality that responds to the ineffability of the individual *qua* complex singular.⁵⁶

Psychology is an analytic and comparative science employing morphological types to interpret human behavior. It not only experimentally investigates common mental states and their psycho-physiological conditions. It concerns embodied social-historical individuals and their various affiliations, contexts, and conditions—i.e., what brings them together and sets them apart. For example, “The most general of all differences is that of sex.”⁵⁷ Sex is biologically given and socially-historically formed as gender.⁵⁸ Sex and gender, the facticity of sexual difference and the social construction of gender roles, can only be disentangled and clarified by psychology as an interpretive human science.

Psychology is structured by its factual situation, with all the shifting and more or less fixed assumptions that allow it to function as a language game, and as socially and historically constructed:

Human races, nations, social classes, professions, historical stages, individualities; all these are further delimitations of individual differences within the relative uniformity of human nature. If descriptive psychology pursues these forms of the particular in human nature, the intermediary between it and the human sciences is first found.⁵⁹

Natural and biological facticity cannot be excluded from inquiry into the psychological and social-historical dimensions of human life. Nature cannot be reduced to a mere construct of thought or product of history, although humans understand nature through their ways and forms of life.

Social-historical life is oriented in the human sciences toward understanding the uniqueness and singularity of the individual and the individual as the intercrossing of systems of practices, institutions, and significations. “History has its life in the progressive deepening of what is unique.”⁶⁰ However: “It is not the singular for itself, but precisely this relation [of the unique and the

⁵⁶ GS 5: 228–229, 231/DP: 108–109, 111; GS 13/1: 1; GS 5: 330/SW IV: 249.

⁵⁷ GS 5: 235/DP: 115.

⁵⁸ GS 5: 236/DP: 116.

⁵⁹ GS 5: 236/DP: 116.

⁶⁰ GS 5: 236/DP: 116.

uniform] which rules in history. This is indicated by the fact that the spiritual disposition of a whole epoch can be represented in an individual.”⁶¹ As historically enacted and mediated life, or the historical nexus of significance and facticity, history is the “intermediate” or “between” of the individual and the group, the unique and the general, of what is given in nature and formed in human life: “It is in it [i.e., history] that one finds the living relation between the realm of the uniform and that of the individual.”⁶² Contrary to Bunge’s contention that they are excluded by Dilthey, uniformity and regularity, structure and order, are crucial to the human sciences.⁶³

Psychology is justified and differentiated as a human science by the task of understanding the individuality formed in the context of historical life. This makes possible and limits the scope of interpretive psychology, which—in its focus on individuality—plays a founding role in the human sciences but, in turn, is founded on those sciences and in relation to the ordinary life-nexus as expressed in history and biography.⁶⁴ Like epistemology and history, psychology cannot be a foundational enterprise, because (1) it has a founded/founding character, and is interdependent with the other human sciences, such that it cannot be an independent first or final science; and (2) it confronts—like all conceptual knowledge (*Erkenntnis*)—an ungroundability and unfathomability that cannot be completely excluded or mastered without being haunted by the excess and remainder that forces all systematizing into aporia.

Psychology is a science of individuality that explores the relationality of the singular and the whole through the interpretive circle of what is unique in relation and as exception to what is typical. One way this occurs in the human sciences is through the morphological idea of the typical and the ideal representation of groups.⁶⁵ This is a precursor to Max Weber’s heuristic use of ideal types to develop causal explanations of social phenomena such as the relationship between capitalist economic practices and protestant religious feeling. Types are used to explore appropriateness according to a norm or classes. They primarily operate through picking out what Dilthey calls “family resemblances.”⁶⁶ These affinities help to organize a group of phenomena through an art of portraiture that simplifies and intensifies a finite number of elements. Types can simplify and intensify spatially (in, for example, the

⁶¹ GS 5: 236/DP: 116.

⁶² GS 5: 236/DP: 116.

⁶³ Bunge, *Social Science Under Debate*, p. 22.

⁶⁴ The importance of biography and individuality has been denigrated by critics such as Gadamer (Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, p. 34) and Bunge. Lacking the intermediaries between ordinary life and his idea of science, and judging what concerns the individual to be atypical and unscientific, Bunge rejects the roles Dilthey gives to history and biography in *Finding Philosophy in Social Science*, p. 154.

⁶⁵ GS 5: 229/DP: 109; GS 5: 270.

⁶⁶ GS 5: 279; GS 5: 281–282, 295.

political geography of nations) or temporally (in identifying and distinguishing historical epochs and generations). In approaching the singular and the typical, the human sciences are related to art, which is a primary way of presenting human individuation in the social-historical world.⁶⁷

The task of understanding individuality through art, history, and psychology faces inherent limits in articulating its object receptively from out of itself. The individual in its facticity cannot be known as such and only to some degree can one be brought into the process and event of mutual understanding. Since the individual withdraws, insofar as it is singular and fundamentally ineffable,⁶⁸ the movement toward the other in understanding the other is a transformation of the one who attempts to understand.⁶⁹ It is impossible to “lifelessly” copy or reproduce the other or the past for Dilthey. Both social and historical understanding change such that, even in memory, what is considered the same memorial image “is no longer the same under new circumstances, just as the same leaf does not reappear on the tree the following year.”⁷⁰ Understanding toward (*hin*) the singular other constitutes a self-transformation if understanding requires a fundamental responsiveness to the other. These possibilities of ordinary life can be more systematically developed in philosophical reflection, artistic expression, and scientific communication.

Human sciences such as psychology are enabled and limited by the goal of understanding the individuality of self and other. It is part of their meaning to be aware that the singular and the other escape being concluded business. The human sciences cannot achieve the value-neutrality of the natural sciences, which is itself a value of its practice, as they face and incorporate ethical and aesthetic values such as the importance of individuality. Such values are not goods existing outside of contingent and conditional nature and history. They are historically formed and informed aesthetic, representational, and practical values, grounded in the receptive spontaneity of the feeling of life. This affective dispositional attunement in a physical-historical environment orients world-views and -conceptions, yet it is fundamentally ontic.⁷¹

Psychology and the human sciences are neither purely descriptive-phenomenological nor causal-explanatory. They are interpretive-empirical sciences working through relations between the universal and the singular, the typical and the atypical, and structure and event.⁷² This relatedness is indicated in words such as *angewiesen*, *Bezug*, and *Zusammenhang*. It cannot be reduced to

⁶⁷ GS 5: 273–303; I discuss the relation of art and the human sciences in Dilthey in E. S. Nelson, “Disturbing Truth: Art, Finitude, and the Human Sciences in Dilthey,” *theory@buffalo*, Vol. 11, 2007, pp. 121–142.

⁶⁸ GS 1: 29.

⁶⁹ GS 5: 262–263.

⁷⁰ GS 5: 177/DP: 60.

⁷¹ GS 5: 266; compare de J. D. Mul, *The Tragedy of Finitude*, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁷² GS 5: 228.

one side or the other nor mediated in dialectic insofar as its complexity is the matter to be thought. Because the human sciences have both complexity and singularity as their tasks, their task is not exhausted by ordering particulars under universal laws. They are oriented toward immanently disclosing relations through understanding, interpretation, and comparative heuristic devices such as ideal types.⁷³ The human sciences observe the relations between individuals and the whole according to a model of coordination that articulates mutual affinities and dependencies.

The human sciences involve, when thought according to the model of reflective articulation and coordination articulated in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a kind of reflective judgment.⁷⁴ Whereas determinant judgment subordinates or subsumes a particular under a universal concept, reflective judgment moves toward the singular in order to move forth from it. Reflective judgment proceeds from the singular via coordination to a sense and an articulation of an appropriate type or whole, which offers rather than demands universal recognition. The idea of a hermeneutical science of the description and analysis of the historically singular unfolded from Kant's *Third Critique* to Dilthey's critique of historical judgment.⁷⁵ This tendency turns from a foundational to a hermeneutical epistemology shifting how knowledge is to be framed. The human sciences cannot achieve a systematic conceptual totality. They require an approach that recognizes the "immeasurable richness of differences."⁷⁶

The human sciences investigate the nexus of the singular and the whole, which consist of the affinities and differences of the processes and structures of history and society, and the human actions and events occurring in the context of these processes and structures. Life is a complex and differentiated nexus of structures and events, systems and actions, disclosed in reflection (*Besinnung*). Dilthey rehabilitated the temporal, historical, empirical and ontic dimensions of experience against an abstract and foundational epistemological and metaphysical thinking. Interpretive psychology is necessary if knowledge and the human sciences are irreducible to questions concerning ideal validity and universal values, which miss the facticity of existence and its processes of meaning formation. Overcoming such reifying tendencies allows interpretive psychology its legitimate role in social-historical inquiry. Knowledge is grounded in the historical, linguistic, and psychological contexts of human experience, and the study of these is necessary to the study of knowledge itself. Thought draws

⁷³ GS 5: 229.

⁷⁴ On the *Third Critique's* importance for Dilthey, see R. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*, second edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 21–25; and "The Feeling of Life: Some Kantian Sources of Life-Philosophy," *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*, vol. III, 1985, pp. 83–104.

⁷⁵ R. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

⁷⁶ Compare his discussions of multiplicity as opposed to unity in the *Ideas*, GS 5: 175, 196, 213, 235/DP: 58, 77–78, 93, 114–115.

the consequences of a historicity that signifies the impossibility of knowledge as pure epistemology, metaphysics, or a systematic conceptual totality.⁷⁷

6. *Beyond Subjectivity: The Thereness of Self and World*

Dilthey's hermeneutics offers an impure phenomenology that describes and analyzes the nexus between experience, history, and language. His rethinking of epistemology shifts it toward the nexus or interconnectedness of individual life (interpretive psychology), history, and communication.⁷⁸ The certainty and transparency of epistemology, in its unconditional grounding of knowledge in the transparent and self-certain subject, is thrown into question by its worldly conditions and its fundamental lack of ground. Dilthey confronts the self-assuredness of the knowing subject with the dependence of the subject on its bodily, worldly, and historical conditions.⁷⁹ This dependence is not a foundational appeal to a clear and stable ground. Life in its immanent pre-representational significance discloses itself both as ground (e.g., conditions and contexts) and reveals itself as groundlessness. As ungroundable (*unbegründet*) and unfathomable (*unergründet*), life is that which "we knowers" cannot go behind or beyond to reach its governing or transcendent principle.

Dilthey retained the idea of epistemology as a clarification of conceptual knowledge and the sciences while fundamentally transforming it by: (1) connecting it with the research of the positive sciences and (2) denying the certainty and transparency of its representationalism and foundationalism. Dilthey employs the language of consciousness and self-consciousness while rethinking them in the context of the facticity, givenness, and phenomenality of the life to which they belong. Consciousness lacks self-transparency even in the transparency of its phenomenality (i.e., the givenness of phenomena or facts to consciousness). Interpretive psychology thus must take recourse to the idea of an "acquired psychic nexus." The epistemologist inherently presupposes and uses the acquired psychic nexus in his thinking, but he cannot control and master it.⁸⁰ It is a condition of the knowing subject and takes that subject to its limits in posing the constitutive and formative ungroundability and unfathomability of life.

The acquired psychic nexus presents the self as a dynamic medium of structures and processes, which involve both explicit conscious thought and an infinite variable field of prediscursive thought.⁸¹ In opposition to Kant's division

⁷⁷ GS 8: 38.

⁷⁸ GS 1: xviii/SW I: 51.

⁷⁹ GS 5: 225/DP: 105.

⁸⁰ GS 5: 149/DP: 32.

⁸¹ GS 5: 149/DP: 33; GS 7: 122.

of sensation and representation, “all discursive thinking can be expressed as a higher stage of these implicit intellectual operations.”⁸² Understanding involves both pre-representational “elementary” and more self-conscious “higher” processes and acts of understanding. There is an implicit structured order of significance in experience explicated and thematized in conscious thought.

Dilthey’s “acquired psychic nexus” brackets an unchanging self and undermines the priority of consciousness: (1) Our experience and consciousness of our being is inevitably both within a greater context of significance and piecemeal: attention and interest can only draw out elements rather than the totality of the whole⁸³; (2) the acquired psychic nexus is not directly transparent to itself such that understanding must indirectly proceed through the behavior, actions, and products of the individual⁸⁴; (3) because self-understanding is finite within an infinite and multiple context, and since knowledge of self and other is inescapably indirect as mediated through activities, events, and interpretation, humans know themselves through the mediation of language and history.⁸⁵ The individual life-nexus expresses and knows itself in communication and action. It is acquired and developed through individuation in a language and historical situation. The self consequently cannot be understood independently of its epoch and milieu, its body and envioning world.⁸⁶ We enter into active life without clarity concerning the core of the self, as life fathoms itself only gradually and to a limited degree in relation to forces that irresistibly impel it.⁸⁷

The certainty and transparency of the self is at best a creation of the poet, not a perception of actual life.⁸⁸ The co-givenness and thereness presented in the phenomenality of consciousness disclose themselves more as questions than as answers.⁸⁹ At variance with the claims of intuitionism, the self can be aware of what is given in experience without the given being thereby known. The given can remain in its givenness resistant, non-transparent, and impenetrable.⁹⁰ Thought appears complete and self-sufficient when it abandons feeling and will.

Representational thinking remains within the intentionality and phenomenality of consciousness and cannot reach the materiality of the world that is experienced in the resistance to will and feeling through the body.⁹¹ The tension

⁸² GS 5: 149/DP: 33.

⁸³ GS 5: 171/DP: 54.

⁸⁴ GS 5: 180/DP: 62.

⁸⁵ GS 5: 180/ DP: 62–63.

⁸⁶ GS 5: 180, 214, 225/DP: 62–63, 95, 105.

⁸⁷ GS 5: 205/DP: 86.

⁸⁸ GS 1: 62/ SW I: 112.

⁸⁹ GS 5: 103–104.

⁹⁰ GS 8: 40.

⁹¹ GS 5: 102–103.

of the lived body and its environing world allows for the differentiation of self and world in their cogiveness and difference.⁹² Thought, striving to transcend its basis in life and the world through claims to universal validity, is a function of life.⁹³ Thought occurs within life and so cannot step outside of life by finding an external standard.⁹⁴ Self-consciousness is already a consciousness of the world and others. Human life occurs and acts in relation to an environment or milieu, an epoch or age.⁹⁵ The world and self are cogiven in the “there” (*da*),⁹⁶ and in the tension of a mutual dependence and differentiation that cannot be sublimated.⁹⁷

Thereness is the basis of and limit to a theoretical knowledge of the world and the self.⁹⁸ The modes of human life are articulated from out of their worldly comportment, their “being-there-within life” (*Darinnensein im Leben*).⁹⁹ The thereness of life reveals itself through resistance to the body, and through the disturbance and interruption indicating the limits and finitude of human thought, will, and feeling. The force, resistance, and violence of what is given to the self in life reveal externality and materiality, and the dependence of the self on its world.¹⁰⁰ The self is constituted by exteriority, being outside itself in the thereness of its world, and a facticity that it cannot master. Facticity is nontransparent and ungraspable insofar as it cannot be resolved back into intentions, cognitions, volitions, or affects.¹⁰¹ Reality is not given in intuition or representation but through *how* it gives itself through its causal-interpreted effects.¹⁰² In contrast with the anxious logic of identity and unity threatened by all distance and difference, the violence and trauma of separation and distance, the alterity of the world and others, the conflict and dispute of the mutually dependent and intertwined, is constitutive and productive of life itself.

Identity, systematic totality, and unity are undermined in life itself, which addresses us in the responsiveness of the feeling of life that cannot escape the conditions of violence and trauma while attempting to secure harmony, happiness, and tranquility. Such conditions should be responded to and not repressed. Dilthey’s writings resonate with Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morality*. Violence and trauma must be recognized and worked-through, and not sublimated and

⁹² GS 5: 105–108.

⁹³ GS 19: 318–320/SW I: 474–476.

⁹⁴ GS 19: 347.

⁹⁵ GS 5: 200–201/DP: 82.

⁹⁶ GS 19: 70, 86, 152–153, 178.

⁹⁷ GS 5: 124.

⁹⁸ GS 8: 16, 18, 39, 54.

⁹⁹ GS 8: 99.

¹⁰⁰ GS 5: 117, 131.

¹⁰¹ GS 5: 105.

¹⁰² GS 5: 114, 128.

repressed, if the individual is to cultivate the responsiveness of/to life and not deny life through the positing of a reified transcendent beyond.¹⁰³

Rather than reifying the forces of life according to metaphysical essences and transcendental conditions, or mystifying life's ruptures as an irrational mystery, life is to be interpreted immanently from out of itself. Its temporality is that of the hermeneutical circle, which oscillates and moves in-between singular and whole, event and structure, difference and identity. Life is intelligible and understood through our practical, interpretive, and theoretical activities, and yet remains opaque and unfathomable.¹⁰⁴ Life is a ground that cannot be escaped and yet an abyssal groundlessness that overflows being gathered in thought and language. The circle of knowledge and life retains the character of tension and conflict that is irresolvable into a final coherent moment.

7. Conclusion

Dilthey's impure phenomenological description of resistance does not simply or derivatively presuppose the world, since resistance is disclosive and formative of self and world. This description is transformed in his later account of the intrinsically agonistic character of life. The conflict of life (*Streit*) and worldviews (*Widerstreit*) is indicated in a preliminary way in his earlier work, even as the "*wider*," the interruption of experience that presents itself within it, suggests a change of emphasis.

Although Dilthey has been identified with the romantic commitment to the priority of the self, subjectivity, and individuality, he noted how "the self is never without this other or the world in whose resistance it finds itself [...]"¹⁰⁵ The self cannot be without a world and others irreducible to itself. Self and other are not indifferently cogiven but occur in the irreducible tension of reference and withdrawal, of significance and the interruption of significance, in adaptation and resistance, in identity and the responsive conflict of difference. Dilthey is, accordingly, a thinker of the *Auseinandersetzung* and *Widerstreit* of life as a conflict irreducible to the subject or the assertion of the will.

The conflict of life, of interpretations and worldviews, signifies the impossibility of an indifferent relativism in which everything is equal in its independence. The forces of life and human responsiveness make the disinterested

¹⁰³ Compare my "Priestly Power and Damaged Life in Nietzsche and Adorno," A. Sommer (ed.), *Nietzsche: Philosoph der Kultur(en)? / Philosopher of Culture?* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 349–356.

¹⁰⁴ GS 19: 307, 329/SW I: 464, 489; R. Carnap, perhaps influenced by Dilthey on this point, likewise wrote of the "die nie ganz durchschaubare Verflechtung des Lebens" in *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1998, p. xvi.

¹⁰⁵ GS 8: 18.

equality of relativism impossible. The responsive differentiation of *Widerstreit* is life itself. It is life that resists complete grasping or explanation, whether as a total unified science, a unified picture of the world (an ultimate worldview or metaphysical system), or a perspective detached from all contexts and perceiving life from outside of itself without the aporias of immanence (the so-called view from no-where).¹⁰⁶ For both thought and a historical form of thought, resistance and excess are irreducible, and remainder and rest incomprehensible to identity.¹⁰⁷ An epoch is not defined as a homogeneous unity but as an agonistic and differentiated field of forces.¹⁰⁸

The recognition of the intrinsic conflict and difference constituting an epoch is visible in Dilthey's concept of generation.¹⁰⁹ Dilthey characterized a generation by its receptivity and dependency that forms a relative homogeneity distinct from other generations. This homogeneity does not consist in a fixed essence but in a generation forming and sharing in an intersection of possibilities unavailable to other generations.¹¹⁰ "Generation" is a determination of the social-historical self, through which the self is understood through the possibilities of its facticity and historicity. Each generation is a multiplicity without one exclusive unified worldview. An age is typified by an individual who reveals the age's contradictory and conflicting impulses. Unlike Hegel's one person who embodies an age, there is no one definitive identity in the determination of an epoch but a field of tensions and a *Widerstreit* of worldviews immanent to life itself. There is a dominant yet no single unified tendency of an age, and possibilities of the creative and new—which challenge the dominant worldview—cannot be excluded.¹¹¹

Unfathomability and ungroundability are aspects of self-interpretive life. They are constitutive of life as enacted in life—in the "already was" of a past that resists being presented and mastered, and the future's unexpected, unpredictable, and surprising occurrence that potentially shifts a generation and epoch. Life in its temporality presents itself as that which withdraws, as an alterity irreducible to conceptual knowledge, or as resistance and mystery. Conceptual knowledge endeavors to ground and explain the world, developing concepts and laws, representations, and propositions. Yet these produce tensions and aporias requiring thought to revise itself or begin anew. Such discontinuities are not alien to human existence, externally imposed on it by reflection and historical consciousness, but are due to the fractured plural immanence of its facticity and finitude.

¹⁰⁶ GS 8: 98.

¹⁰⁷ GS 8: 152.

¹⁰⁸ GS 8: 158–59.

¹⁰⁹ GS 7: 177–178; M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1985, p. 385.

¹¹⁰ GS 5: 37.

¹¹¹ GS 7: 178.

Facticity indicates the ungroundable “ground” of knowledge that itself cannot be grounded. Knowledge cannot penetrate the facticity that indicates the infinite complexity, multiplicity, and singularity within the nexus of life.¹¹² Facticity involves an incomparability or incommensurability that is indicated through interpretive mediation while remaining irresolvable in mediation. There is no ultimate *Aufhebung*, but knowledge does not stop at a border across which stands the irrational. Humans cultivate themselves to some extent or another in an emerging recognition of their finite conditions and limits, developing practical insight and conceptual knowledge from life’s facticity. The growth of human understanding and cognition is not only toward abstraction but toward recognizing life’s greater complexity and deeper singularity.

Increasing complexity and singularity can be revealed through strategies of epistemic self-reflection and human scientific inquiry, which call for responsiveness to the complexity and singularity of social-historical life, and receptive attentiveness to the alterity appearing within experience. The singular is not a brute singular fact; it is overdetermined as an intercrossing and complex multiplicity. Experiences of resistance, reversal, and withdrawal—revealed in impure phenomenological interpretation—are primary ways that the overly detailed and unfathomable textures and densities of life are disclosed. Dilthey’s interpretive pluralism profoundly differs from the interpretive monism and anti-scientism of later hermeneutics. His method incorporates the languages of reasons and causes, interpretation and explanation. It is an impure methodological hybrid through which the interpreter circles the singular without enclosing or mediating it, as it is a fragment and trace signifying without being intuitively or conceptually fixed. What is not fully presentable and representable constantly risks skepticism if we remain within a foundational logic, yet it is not the last word that it is thought to be.¹¹³

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¹¹² GS 1: 322; GS 13: 53.

¹¹³ GS 7: 161.

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