# WILHELM DILTHEY, JOHN STUART MILL, AND THE LOGIC OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

ERIC S. NELSON

**Abstract.** Dilthey's early project aimed at a new critique of reason and theory of science that drew from and provided an alternative to contextualist historicism and scientistic positivism. While he sympathetically transformed the anti-theoretical emphasis on historical context and particularity of the historical school, he contested positivism's abstract ahistorical theorizing and its overextension of the naturalistic causal model. Dilthey's analysis of the immanent self-overcoming of positivism has obscured the importance of his sustained confrontation with Mill's philosophy, particularly his logic, for his own philosophical project. Dilthey critically appropriated elements from Comte and Mill, while unfolding an immanent critique of positivist aspirations and failures to develop an adequate theory and history of science. Mill's inductivism proved inappropriate to the logic of reciprocal understanding, his notion of experience too narrow and atomistic, his social and ethical philosophy inadequate to the rich complexity of the development and education of individuality and freedom, and his analysis of the moral sciences remained overly reductive to the naturalistic causal model. The theory of science instead needs to be reconstructed through the human sciences in relation to their history, normativity, and praxis. The sciences require the critical recognition of their structural conditions in the reflexively, biographically, and intersubjectively lived experiential life-nexus (the first-person participant perspective) and its reflective epistemic and human scientific investigation.

**Keywords:** Wilhelm Dilthey, John Stuart Mill, Epistemology, Human Sciences, Individual

## 1. INTRODUCTION: SITUATING DILTHEY AND MILL

The young Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911)[1] expressed in an 1859 note the need for a new critique of reason and new theory of science (JD, p. 80).[2] Dilthey's

Eric S. Nelson ✉
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
E-mail: hmericsn@ust.hk

[1] For overviews of Dilthey's life and thought, see Jos De Mul, *The Tragedy of Finitude: Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004; Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992; Eric S. Nelson, "Introduction: Wilhelm Dilthey in Context", in Eric S. Nelson, (ed.), *Interpreting Dilthey: Critical Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 1–18.

new critique would be developmental-structural rather than a priori or transcendental (in response to Kant) and phenomenological without conceptualist or logicist necessity and the one-sided reduction of nature to spirit (in response to Hegel). It would resituate the theory of science by turning to the crystallizations of the actual histories and practices of the sciences (JD, pp. 79–83). Dilthey's turn to actual history and praxis was formed in conversations with his mentor and friend Mortiz Lazarus, the theorist of the psychology of peoples (*Völkerpsychologie*), who helped introduce him to a wide range of new social scientific developments.[3] It was directly inspired by the historiographical practices of the German historical school. Dilthey proposed applying these to science itself to arrive at a more adequate conception of science than the then dominant idealist and positivist theories.[4]

Dilthey's early 1859 plan would transform into his project of a 'critique of historical reason' and its substantive expression in his 1883 *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (hereafter *Introduction*). Dilthey's strategy in this work drew on while also serving as an alternative to scientistic positivism, with its ahistorical dogmatic theory of science, and contextualist historicism, with its lack of sense of the role of theory. Dilthey contested the dominance of abstract theorizing based on a naturalistic causal model in the former, and the priority of an anti-theoretical attitude in the historical school that accentuated contextual positionality and concrete particularity.

In Dilthey's early lectures, drafts, and publications, he critically appropriated elements from the early positive philosophy of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and – to a greater extent in the details of his lectures and arguments – the empiricism of

[2] The young Dilthey wrote of a new phenomenology (Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Junge Dilthey : Ein Lebensbild in Briefen Und Tagebüchern 1852–1870* (cited as JD), 2nd edition, Stuttgart, Teubner and Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960, pp. 82, 120) and a phenomenology of spirit in which the contents of the movement of history proceed through individuals (Wilhelm Dilthey, GS 18: 5, in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (cited as GS plus volume and page numbers), 26 vols., Stuttgart, B. G. Teubner and Gottingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1914–2005). He criticizes an isolated philosophy of spirit as a ghost separated from the individual positive sciences (GS 1, p. 113).

[3] Their close yet tense relationship during Dilthey's first Berlin period is expressed in their correspondence in BW 1 (Wilhelm Dilthey, *Briefwechsel* (cited as BW), 4 vols., Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011–2022).

[4] On Dilthey's relation to positivism, see Eric Nelson, "Dilthey and Carnap: The Feeling of Life, the Scientific Worldview, and the Elimination of Metaphysics", in Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer, Jan Surman, (eds.), *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History, 1770–1930*, New York, Palgrave, 2017, pp. 321–346. Positivism has multiple connotations: in a narrow historical sense, it refers to (1) Comte's positive philosophy or (2) the reductive verificationist program of the Vienna Circle or elements thereof; (3) its larger sense, criticized in Dilthey's works, refers to a commitment to a reductive and unitary conception of science; (4) a later sense expressed in critical social theory and philosophical hermeneutics that encompasses any commitment to the priority of science. The fourth sense is at issue in the 1960s German dispute over positivism in the social sciences (Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1982) and includes Dilthey (Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Wilhelm Dilthey nach 150 Jahren: Zwischen Romantik und Positivismus", in Ernst W. Orth, (ed.), *Dilthey und Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Freiburg, Karl Alber, 1985).

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873).[5] His early university lectures on logic and psychology during the 1860s–1870s describe Mill's positions at length (GS 20; GS 21). An 1866 draft of a project, an early prototype of his argumentation in his 1875 "Study", had the heading "contra Lazarum et Lazaristas, Millium, etc."[6] Dilthey describes in his letters of this period his opposition to Lazarus' reduction of individual psychology to a collective social psychology, and the substantializing reification of collective entities such as 'nation' and 'people.' Dilthey opposed Mill's arguments for a truncating naturalistic psychology posited as the foundational moral science. Instead of Lazarus and Mill, Comte and Mill would be the primary antagonists of his 1883 *Introduction*. His early magnum opus was a polemical evaluation of existing philosophies of history and the human sciences. Comte had called for knowing science through its history by which he primarily meant its general developmental laws rather than its particular contents and contexts.

Dilthey proposed an alternative to Comte's theory (in book one) and history (in book two) of science to trace not only, as in Comte, the modern emancipation of science from metaphysics but, more radically, the modern emancipation of the individual sciences from metaphysics and the lingering metaphysical fog of its positivist remnant, the radically reductive program of the unity of science.[7] Dilthey began the *Introduction* with a radically immanent critique of positivism that demonstrated how it fell into epistemic circles and proved to be self-undermining, such that Comte – despite his already problematic early scientific aspirations – turned away from scientific justification to a renewed dogmatic speculative and metaphysical philosophy. While Dilthey's critical intentions against Comte's positivism are clear, his reception of Mill is much more complex as it is critical yet sympathetic and his early philosophy developed through a lengthy confrontation with Mill's 1843 work *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (hereafter *Logic*), and not only its sixth book concerning the moral sciences. Logic did not only concern formal or syllogistic logic for either Mill or Dilthey, but the methodology and system of scientific research (GS 16, p. 456; GS 20, p. 2).

[5] See JD, p. 185. On Mill's philosophy, see Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, London, Macmillan, 1970; John M. Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, London, Routledge, 2010. As Ryan examined, Mill described his philosophy as inductivist while emphasizing a Newtonian deductive model of science and a virtually rationalist commitment to system, causal necessity, and universal laws.

[6] Dilthey mentioned in an 1866 letter writing a little book "contra Lazarum et Lazaristas, Millium, etc." (BW 1, p. 350); "On the Study of the History of the Sciences of Humans, Society, and the State" (GS 5, pp. 31–73, hereafter "Study") appeared in 1875.

[7] Dilthey, GS 1, p. xv, 112. On Dilthey's conception of unity of science, see Nabeel Hamid, "Dilthey on the Unity of Science." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24. 4, pp. 635–656. Note that Dilthey is an opponent of abstract unity and identity being externally imposed on the sciences, which he associated particularly with Comte and Hegel (GS 1, pp. 100–101). Dilthey adopted in modified form the Aristotelian principle of the specificity of each individual empirical science, according to its objects in their mode of givenness, interpreted their unity as a structured or patterned interconnectedness that cannot negate their relative autonomy (GS 20, p. 15; GS 5, p. 264; GS 7, pp. 7–8).

Mill's expression "moral sciences," which had roots in the writings of David Hume, Adam Smith, and his father James Mill, was translated by Jacob Heinrich Wilhelm Schiel (1813–1889) as 'Geisteswissenschaften' (literally, 'spiritual sciences') in his first edition of Mill's *Logic* (Scheil 1849). Although this German expression and variations are found earlier than Scheil, typically in relation to Hegel's philosophy of spirit, its epistemic and methodological use in relation to individual empirical sciences was popularized by Dilthey. He considered it imperfect but more comprehensive and less misleading than more restrictive expressions such as moral-political, social, or cultural sciences. The latter signified for him partial groupings within the human sciences concerned with the external organization of society (which concern power and norms) or cultural systems (which center around expressions of meaning and value).

Mill's significance for the early Dilthey has been frequently noted yet has not been sufficiently clarified. This contribution offers a reconstruction of select interconnected elements in Dilthey's critical appropriation of Mill's philosophy in relation to the study of the human condition: experience, individuality, reflexivity, and science. Although Dilthey expressed much more sympathy towards Mill than Comte, and Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer could contend there is a strong positivistic dimension inherited from Mill in Dilthey's works,[8] Dilthey's analysis of Mill's philosophy immanently adopts his own standpoint as his critical point of departure.

Dilthey delineates how Mill's conception of experience and psychology proved to be too narrowly atomistic and associationist, his practical philosophy was inadequate to the rich development complexity and *Bildung* (formation and education in the widest sense) of relational individuality and liberty, and his analysis of the moral sciences proved overly reductive to the naturalistic causal paradigm. Although Mill advocated a strategy of adopting and extending natural scientific methodology to the moral sciences, in contrast to Comte's dream of a hierarchical reduction of all sciences, it remained insufficient to address the specificity of each empirical science. Each science needs to be interpreted through its own autonomous history and structure rather than through an assimilating adopted (*Anpassung*) method (GS 1, pp. 108–109). Mill's critical departures from Comte for the sake of experience, psychology, the moral sciences, and human liberty were promising, and made Mill the founding figure of the emancipation of the human sciences. Yet they remained insufficient due to his lingering positivist commitments (GS 1, pp. 105, 108).

An examination of Mill's positivist premises demonstrated the need for a transformation of the theory of science beyond positivism; namely, the recognition of the phenomenality (the there-for-me structure), self-reflexivity, and biographically and intersubjectively lived positionality of the life-nexus (*Lebenszusammenhang*;

[8] Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, 2nd edition, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1973; H.-G. Gadamer, "Wilhelm Dilthey nach 150 Jahren".

that is, the world experienced from the first-person participant stance) and its reflective inquiry in philosophy and the other human sciences.[9] Dilthey's confrontation reveals without doubt Mill's influence on his thought and its development. Although Dilthey's early philosophy is too eclectic and multifaceted to be reduced to one source, even to Kant's critical philosophy that served as one of his guiding models as evidenced by his modified philosophy of critique, several of its distinctive features involve his critical adaptive confrontation with Mill's logic, psychology, and theory of science.

## 2. HISTORICISM, POSITIVISM, AND THE TASK OF SCIENCE

Dilthey is frequently described as an adherent of the German historical school. This is an oversimplification, as Dilthey criticized pure contextualist historicism and perceived himself as critically adopting their historiography in a more comprehensive scientific context. Franz Brentano described Dilthey accordingly as simultaneously a representative of the historical school and its critic[10] and around a century later Gadamer identified Dilthey with historicism and positivism[11]. This is less paradoxical than it might appear.

First, there are historical links between the British and German empiricist movements and Dilthey's early modified Kantian or structural experientialism. Friedrich Trendelenburg, a teacher of Brentano and Dilthey, accentuated Aristotelian realism and empiricism (with a strong sense of the a priori), whereas Dilthey's early epistemology was in pivotal ways a reform of Kant critical philosophy in response to historicism and positivism. Thus, for instance, Comte's scientistic theory and history of science missed its essential self-reflective skeptical and critical moments (GS 1, pp. 133–134). Secondly, the early Dilthey expressed the need for both a theory of the individual empirical sciences rooted in their respective histories and objects (against positivism) as well as a theory of history rooted in more robust scientific aspirations for systematicity and universality (against pure historicism). The *Introduction* appears to be negotiating the claims of German historicism for concrete contextuality and particularity with positivism's call for one unitary and universally valid causal science (GS 1, p. xvii). Dilthey's strategy

[9] On Dilthey's notion of *Zusammenhang* (nexus, interconnectedness) and his structuralism, see Frithjof Rodi, *Das Strukturierte Ganze: Studien zum Werk von Wilhelm Dilthey*, Weilerswist, Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2003, and *Diltheys Philosophie des Lebenszusammenhangs: Strukturtheorie-Hermeneutik-Anthropologie*, Munich, Herder, 2018.

[10] Franz Brentano, *Ueber die Zukunft der Philosophie*, Wien, Holder, p. 3 / On the Future of Philosophy (trans. by Susan Krantz Gabriel), in Ion Tănăsescu, Alexandru Bejinariu, Susan Krantz Gabriel, Constantin Stoenescu (eds.), *Brentano and the Positive Philosophy of Comte and Mill*. With Translations of Original Writings on Philosophy as Science by Franz Brentano, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022, p. 526.

[11] H.-G. Gadamer, "Wilhelm Dilthey nach 150 Jahren".

is not merely a juxtaposition of the two, as the critique of historical reason is an alternative to the failures and limits of both discourses.

Ranke and the historical school emphasized understanding the past as it really was, as distinct from the present, and each epoch and culture from its own perspective through its expressions and remnants.[12] In addition to the self-worth of every epoch (GS 11, p. xvii), Dilthey stressed understanding each individual from its own perspective as a world onto itself. Whereas German historicism is following in Herder's footsteps, Dilthey's sources also include the ethical individualism of Kant, Humboldt, and Schleiermacher (GS 11, p. 131). This is not only an aesthetic or romantic individuality, since the ethical-political individual is at stake in everyday affairs and the human sciences.

First, the reflexive first-person participant stance is practical and epistemic. It is expressed in practical life in the individual's participation within systems such as the state, law, and ethics in which they act (GS 18, pp. 35–37), as action has a self-relational significance and value for the one who acts that is associated with will and freedom (GS 18, pp. 179–180). In his early epistemic writings, it is visible in the principles of phenomenality (the "there-for-me" of phenomena as real for consciousness), the reflexivity in self-other and self-thing relations, and in explicit forms of critical self-reflection. Dilthey's principle of phenomenality has been interpreted as a variation of the positivist phenomenalism linked with Comte and Mill, despite his efforts to distinguish the two. It is a more epistemically modest and reflexively robust version of Mill's thesis in the opening pages of his *Logic* that:

> Whatever is known to us by consciousness, is known beyond possibility of question. What one sees or feels, whether bodily or mentally, one cannot but be sure that one sees or feels. No science is required for the purpose of establishing such truths; no rules of art can render our knowledge of them more certain than it is in itself. There is no logic for this portion of our knowledge" (CW 7, p. 7)[13].

In Dilthey's epistemology, which at times appears closer to Hume's skepticism than to Mill's phenomenalist certainty, this truth has its own scope and limits in relation to the formed conditional self who experiences itself as a reflexive and interconnected effective nexus. What is phenomenally and experientially "real" (*wirklich*) is that which has "effect" (*Wirkung*) (GS 19, p. 17). Dilthey's various uses of effectivity indicate a formed complex that is physical and causal as well as constituted through relations of understanding, meaning, and freedom. Consciousness must be situated in its nexus though critique and history, as the contemporary

[12] Leopold von Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1954, p. 7.

[13] In John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (cited as CW plus volume and page numbers), 33 vols, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1963–1991.

subject is formed through: (1) the asymmetrical structural differentiation of the self-world nexus and (2) the historical transformations of the self and its self-interpretations.

Second, Dilthey's interest in the individual is also expressed in his concern for individual freedom within the everyday life-nexus and the human sciences as well as liberal individual rights in a constitutional order. In addition to the nature of science, freedom is a primary issue in Dilthey's praise and criticisms of Mill. Dilthey might appear more positivistic than Mill in his rejection of Mill's exclusion of ethics and politics from the sciences as arts of practices (CW 8, pp. 943–944). For Mill, the normative language of approbation, ought, should, and purpose has its role here even as it is excluded from proper science (CW 8, p. 949). There are rational first principles for science and other first principles for art (CW 8, p. 951). Mill's dualistic bifurcation between arts of life and the science of reality, along with his attempted compatibilist account of freedom and causality (CW 8, pp. 836–843) that Dilthey rejected, allows him to preserve a realm of practical deliberation and freedom (liberty) and normative rationality (utility) in a universe of strict causal determination. Mill thereby eliminates self-interpretive freedom from scientific inquiry as a purely causal and theoretical order. Dilthey by contrast perceives a continuity between life and science, placing the relative distinction between practice and theory elsewhere given his more expansive and pluralistic conception of the interconnectedness of science.

The first-person participant stance of agents serves as a presupposition of the effective interactive life-nexus, including practices of scientific inquiry and the art of everyday political affairs, and consequently its systematic study within the human sciences. For instance, the sciences of the external organization of society (ethics, law, and politics) presuppose and investigate individual reflexive agency and motivations, normative rules and values, structured systems of inequality, power, and obedience, as well as physical causal relations.[14] Thus, in a very early review of Trendelenburg's philosophy of law, law cannot be studied only as a system of power, nor can it be studied only normatively, without reference to natural and social forces (GS 16, pp. 392–393). As Dilthey later stated, the reciprocal or mutual (i.e., intersubjective) relations expressed in law and ethical life cannot be adequately explained solely through social coercion or force (GS 1, p. 423).

Dilthey identified Comte and Mill as the primary representatives of positivism (in the third sense mentioned in note four) while distinguishing between its stronger version in Comte's directly reductive, unified hierarchical system of science and a more complex version in Mill's mediated application of a unifying

[14] Dilthey's analysis of rules, norms, and understanding is more complexly mediated by material and power relations than Neo-Wittgensteinian games and rules-models of social science such as Winch (Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2008).

idea of method across distinctive sciences. Mill broke with Comte, according to Dilthey, while perpetuating his errors in refined form (GS 1, p. 105). In Mill's two essays on Comte, published in the 1865 work *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, the first essay sympathetically portrays Comte's vision in the *Course on Positive Philosophy* of the systematic unity of science, revealing their shared tendencies. Mill's second essay scathingly analyses Comte's *System of Positive Polity* for its dogmatic systematizing, the anti-scientific character of his "religion of science," and bureaucratic-managerial political ideal.

## 3. THE SELF-OVERCOMING OF POSITIVISM

Dilthey criticized Comte and Mill for their commitments to a reductive and misleading account of science that would undermine the relative autonomy of the individual empirical sciences and their practical everyday significance. He sided with Mill against Comte on a range of issues such as the importance of experience, inductive forms of inference, individual psychology, and individual liberty. Mill better expressed, albeit in a conditional way, the autonomy of the human sciences and the key roles of psychology and individuality, which Comte neglected in favor of a reductive naturalistic causal ideal culminating in the primacy of society. Whereas Comte is an encyclopedist of the sciences, imposing order from the outside, Mill directly studies and outlines their logic and methods (GS 20, pp. 237, 239). Comte's unitary vision of science and the philosophy of history thus remains overly metaphysical and inadequate to the individual empirical sciences. Mill points beyond it but is compromised by the underlying limiting conception of science that he shared with Comte (GS 23, pp. 148, 151).

Dilthey's justification for a more expansive conception of the sciences and the relative autonomy of each science in their mutual structural interconnection – rather than positing an abstract unity or identity – is their actual history and praxis.[15] This justification proceeds through two positivist theses and their internal incoherence and inadequacy in the opening pages of his *Introduction*. First, Dilthey commences with the positivist thesis, drawn from Comte and Mill, of the liberation of modern science from theology and metaphysics (GS 1, p. xv). This signifies in positivism the autonomy of science with which they associate its systemic theoretical unity. Yet, this positivist assumption imposes another external abstract schema and hypothesis onto the sciences that contradicts the histories and practices of the individual sciences concerned with their own objects and modes of experientially mediated givenness. Each science has its own presuppositions that are tested and modified through their use, and the history of science is one of the questioning and

[15] Dilthey's opposition to abstract unity or identity was applied to Hegel (GS 20, pp. 7, 9), who reduced nature to spirit, as well as to the positivist reduction of spirit to nature (GS 1, pp. 100–105, 113; GS 5, p. 3).

clarification of presuppositions. This testing and transformation of presuppositions and categories included those that Kant separated as a priori (GS 19, p. 44). Dilthey's anti-positivist conclusion is that the individual empirical sciences should be liberated from the lingering metaphysical ideas of presuppositionless science, and the unity and conformity of all science. This assessment pertains to Comte's reductive encyclopedic system and Mill's more nuanced fusion of, on the one hand, fallibilistic and inductive practices of observation and inference with, on the other, the positivist vision of a completely lawful and determinate deductive system of causal explanation.

The second positivist thesis is based no doubt on an interpretation of Mill. He agrees with Mill against Hegelian philosophy of history and historicist historiography that history and other moral sciences have yet to adequately recognize the key structural importance of epistemology, logic, and theory as well as psychology and anthropology. Mill fails, however, to sufficiently appreciate how such recognition can only be achieved through an immanent interpretation of the sciences. Dilthey's anti-positivist conclusion entails that an appropriate theory of science falls within the human sciences and can only emerge through critical epistemic self-reflection on the histories, practices, and structures of science. This signifies the emancipation of the individual sciences in modern historical consciousness that contextually relativizes them so as to disclose their self-reflexive and normatively formed aspirations, meanings, and values. The intersubjectively reproduced normative dimension of the life-nexus, as experienced in the binding rules and purposes of a form of life, is more than relative nominalist conventions and less than timeless truths. The issue of normativity will be analyzed further below.

Dilthey shared with positivism and Neo-Kantianism the assumption that contemporary epistemology should commence with the 'fact of science.' However, unlike these two other positions, Dilthey recognized (1) the asymmetrical differentiation and individuality of each empirical science (so to speak, the 'fact of the sciences') according to how its objects are experientially given, and (2) the historical, reflexive, and normative structure of scientific theory and praxis.

## 4. LOGIC, METHOD, AND INDIVIDUALITY

Dilthey's 1883 refutation of positivism obscures the fact that he was concurrently one of the few systematic nineteenth-century German readers of Mill's works, particularly but not only his *Logic*, as well as his adaptive critic. First, in his 1874 review of Theodor Gomperz's 12-volume German edition, Dilthey claimed to have long been familiar with Mill's works in the original.[16] Second, Mill's *Logic* is clearly a vital source and foil for Dilthey's formulation of

[16] GS 16, p. 457. Despite Dilthey's familiarity with Hume and Mill in the 1860s and 1870s, he claimed in an 1895 letter to Yorck not to have read them as carefully as he did (BW 2, p. 568).

his own logic and psychology as revealed in extended direct and indirect discussions in his lecture courses during the 1860s and 1870s (such as GS 20; GS 21).

What was Mill's general significance for Dilthey? Let us consider a few examples. In 1865, for example, he declared that Mill's "great reform" of the human sciences was undermined by his inadequate natural-scientific explanatory ideal (GS 18, pp. 2–3). In the mid-1860s, he charged Mill and "his student" the historian Henry Buckle of positing individuals as particular cases for generalizing propositions, thus underestimating the individual's role (GS 20, pp. 98–99). The atomistic or methodological individualism proposed in Mill's *Logic* was inadequate to explain both actual social interactions and formative individuality, each of which should be understood as an interconnected effective nexus. Notwithstanding the aporia between the causal determinism of Mill's theoretical philosophy and the freedom expressed in his practical philosophy, Dilthey praised, in an 1874 sketch of Mill, *On Liberty* as advancing a German Humboldtian program of political freedom by envisioning the free development of individuality in its myriad forms (GS 15, p. 248). In the same sketch, he doubted the effectiveness of Mill's improvements of Comte's system (GS 15, p. 250).

Elsewhere, Dilthey is more generous while remaining critical of Mill's Comtean debts. In 1874–1875, Mill's "Logic of the Moral Sciences" is described as his most important work, and his greatest departure from Comte in his *Logic* (GS 5, p. 42; GS 15, p. 248). In the same period, Mill is considered the first to clearly recognize the priority of anthropological-psychological research in the human sciences (GS 18, p. 217). In 1880, he remarked that only Mill, Buckle, and their school had so far attempted a genuine justification of the human sciences (GS 19, p. 2). During the 1880s, he increasingly moved away from drawing on Mill due to Sigwart's critique (GS 19, pp. 392–393) and the further development of his own project. In his lectures on the history of philosophy at the turn of the century, Dilthey still claimed that Mill was the first to develop a logic of the human sciences based on their own lawfulness in confrontation with Comte (GS 23, p. 151). Dilthey also noted Philodemus' Epicurean logic as anticipating Mill's logic (GS 23, p. 47). This presumably accentuates his empiricist inductivism instead of his Comtean deductivism. The tensions between these two moments noted by Dilthey continue to inform interpretations of Mill's thought with various authors claiming the priority of one or the other or their equality.[17]

In positivism, all science from mechanics to psychology and sociology aims at deductive systems of causal explanation. Mill presented a more complex and ambiguous picture in his *Logic*, as inductive inferences, as developed in his inductive canons, supply the premises and offer means to verify and falsify deductive conclusions. To be brief, inductive inference provides a fallibilistic logic of discovery and

[17] Ryan discussed inductivist and deductivist readings of Mill in the initial chapters of *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*.

verification while the deductive system is an internal logic of justification. Against the perceived flaws of employing the more experimental chemical and more rationalistic geometrical methods in the moral sciences, respectively exemplified by Macaulay and Bentham, Mill's strategy was to generalize, extend, and adopt the deductive causal model of mechanics to the moral and social sciences (CW 8, p. 834).

The early Dilthey responded in partial agreement in ways that informed his subsequent philosophy. There are several diverging affinities that indicate the impact of Dilthey's confrontation with Mill's *Logic*. Mill's notion of adopting a method across distinctive individual sciences made him a pioneer of the reform and autonomy of the human sciences, albeit insufficiently radical to address their specific objects in their givenness, their disciple-specific methods, and theoretical goals. Mill's thematization of questions of transition constituted a break-through. Mill was pioneering in systematizing a comprehensive theory of science that failed to adequately incorporate the history and praxis of the individual sciences. Mill's *Logic* relied on models from physics and political economy, as applied mathematical sciences, and revealed an inadequate sense of history, as the way in which specific phenomena are given, and the specificity of the history of the individual empirical human sciences (BW 1, p. 333).

As announced in the opening pages of the *Introduction* (GS 1, pp. xv–xvii), Dilthey concluded with Mill, and against German historicism in this respect, that history and the human sciences require an epistemological reflection on their constitution, logic, and methodology as well as the systematic integration of psychology and anthropology (GS 18, pp. 1–4, 63, 78). However, the latter two sciences were not foundationalist or causal in Mill's sense. Mill posited psychology (the science of the individual) and ethology (the science of the formation of character and culture) as foundational deductive sciences of the moral sciences (CW 8, pp. 840–841). Dilthey conceived psychology as a descriptive and analytical human science that focuses on the individual as a psychological-physical nexus. Anthropology, which he favored over Milll's ethology, studies the formation and relational types of groups and peoples. He rejected defining them as either foundational or causal-deductive sciences. Dilthey still gave these two sciences – as descriptive and structural sciences with analogous roles to Mill's inductive inference rather than his deductive foundationalism – primary functions in contributing to and verifying the claims of the other human sciences.

Dilthey's interpretation of psychology led to polemical critiques by advocates of naturalistic experimental psychology[18] as well as cultural sciences of value and individuation without psychology[19]. Dilthey's distance to the German discourses of his time was due to his affinities and confrontations with Mill's *Logic*. Dilthey's

[18] Hermann Ebbinghaus, "Über erklärende und beschreibende Psychologie", *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 1896, 9, pp. 161–205.

[19] Heinrich Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft Und Naturwissenchaft*, 7th ed., Tübingen, Mohr, 1926.

portrayal of explanatory psychology and his distinctive classification of psychology, criticized by Ebbinghaus and Rickert, appear closer to Mill's psychology and the British moral sciences tradition without their naturalism and causal determinism. For example, Mill and Dilthey closely link the question of individuality with psychology, whereas Ebbinghaus and Rickert do not. Psychology is purely a natural science for the latter; it is not considered a naturalistic moral science as in Mill much less a structural human science pace Dilthey.

## 5. THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL CONSENSUS

In accord with their respective estimations of psychology as the science of individual mind, which was eliminated as a theological remnant in Comte's system (GS 19, p. 29), Mill and Dilthey considered individuals to be the basic elements and objects of the moral or human sciences. What are individuals? Neither philosopher asserts an underlying essential or substantial self. Mill's individual consists of atomistic elements and laws of association. Dilthey's analysis likewise begins with the Humean skeptical empiricist account of a bundle of drives and feeling of liveliness (GS 10, pp. 48–50) and leads to the individual, with its personal feeling of life and reconfigured drives, as a formative and acquired interconnected nexus (GS 18, pp. 49–52, 55). Their accounts of social consensus follow the same logic. Social consensus denotes for Comte the complete cohesion of parts such that it is not meaningful to separate individuals or individual social systems. Mill's atomistic approach to the composition of society can be considered a classic exemplar of methodological individualism, whereas individuality in Dilthey is constituted through intersecting natural forces, intersubjective relations, and sedimented social systems. The heterogeneous plurality of asymmetrical differentiated forces and systems cannot be collapsed into one complete social system without fundamentally substantializing and misinterpreting social patterns. The function of individuality in Mill and Dilthey differed: it signified the atomistic individual for Mill, whose laws equally characterized all social laws, and the socially embedded and intersubjectively formed individual for Dilthey, where relations and sedimented systems were not reducible to ether the monadic individual (as in Mill) or society (as in Comte) that Dilthey deemed misleading fictional abstractions lacking their promised explanatory value.

Comte's physiological and sociological elimination of individual psychology and his formulation of social consensus, which would inspire anti-individualistic sociological theorizing from Durkheim to Luhmann, posed a problem for Mill and Dilthey: how can social categories and systems be generated from individuals? In 1876, Dilthey addressed the relationship between individual and society and diverse social spheres in terms of social consensus, a concept derived from Comte and Mill (GS 1, p. 111; GS 18, p. 225). Dilthey noted that he preferred to speak of differentiation and family affinity or relationship (*Verwandschaft*) (GS 1, p. 112).

There are three key issues at stake in Dilthey's response. First, Dilthey's conception of an interactive interconnected nexus between individuals expressed an alternative to the sociological reification of society as a deterministic totality in Comte as well as the methodological individualism of Mill in which individuals are detached from their embedded participation within a historical context and assessed according to a theory of the human mind and human nature from the paradoxical standpoint of the disinterested spectator that can externally observe everything except itself as a participant.

Second, Comte and Mill emphasized the conformity and uniformity of logical and theoretical propositions across all science. Dilthey argued, on the contrary, that scientific research, and not only in the human sciences, presupposes and uses various forms of language expressing relations of meanings, rules, purposes, and values (GS 1, p. 97). Examining the human sciences shows that they encompass three heterogeneous varieties of propositions that are not directly interchangeable: (1) factual, (2) theoretical, and (3) normative (GS 1, p. 89). More radically, structurally reinterpreting Kant's critical philosophy, the categories and languages of metaphysics and natural science reflect the conditions of human experience. In his emerging analysis of the immanent structural categories of life, which have a quasi-transcendental function for Apel and Habermas,[20] the notion of cause presupposes individual experiences of effectiveness, substance experiences of self-identity, and lawfulness rule-following. These categories are not merely genetic sources, as they structure science as an intrinsically historical and normative enterprise. Key elements of scientific inquiry (evidence, demonstration, objectivity, validity, verification) belong to historically embodied normative structures without which there would be no science. Accordingly, the positivistic idea of science is inadequate to the theory, history, and praxis of the sciences and the formation of an appropriate culture of science.

Third, the analyses of Comte and Mill's appealed to the ideal of an externally applied deductive model of social consensus, which invoked for Dilthey more programmatic ideas than demonstrated propositions. He interpreted social consensus as sedimented networks of immanent historically and reflexively formed systems that presuppose individuals and function as if they were independent of them. Only individuals, as reflexive self-interpretive participants in their life-nexus, form purposes and values. Social systems presupposed a meaningfulness and purposiveness borrowed from individuals, even as they are no longer reducible to the individuals who arise and depart as they reproduce themselves. The early Dilthey made this point in the language of stabilization and sedimentation expressed through *beharren*, *verharren*, and their variations. The mature Dilthey deployed the Hegelian categories of objectivization and objective spirit, which he liberalized and pluralized given his reservations about the metaphysical abstractions of Hegel's mature philosophy (GS 1, p. 104), to express these consolidating processes of systematic social reproduction.

[20] Karl-Otto Apel, *Die Erklärung-Verstehen-Kontroverse in Tranzendentalpragmatischer Sicht*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979; Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse.*

Dilthey's argumentation targeted the shared positivism of Comte and Mill, as in these three examples, while also concurring with Mill's criticisms of Comte and pushing them further (GS 1, p. 108). Each philosopher was concerned, as evident in Mill's second essay, with Comte's heavy-handed use of social consensus to justify the sociological prioritization and reification of society vis-à-vis individuals, the loss of individual rights and an education promoting the active forces and self-development of the individual mind, and his hierarchical, managerial-bureaucratic collectivism in which society was to be centralized and directed through positivist elites and a church-like social organization.[21]

## 6. WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUAL? DILTHEY WITH AND AGAINST MILL

Comte notoriously contended that individual rights are to be eliminated along with natural law and that individual freedom of thought and communication is neither necessary in society nor the sciences. Mill and Dilthey articulated the ethical-political importance of individuals, and their rights and freedoms, within modern social-political life as well as their elemental function in human scientific inquiry. Neither thought that the concept of the individual required an appeal to classical natural law theory or a substantial metaphysical or theological subject. Each begins, on the contrary, with the natural and historical conditions of being a self.

Biology itself offered a preliminary distinction, for the early Dilthey as much as for Mill, insofar as the conditions of the individuated organism (its spatial-temporal location, perceptual perspective, motility, etc.) are not identical with those of its group or species. In Mill's account, biology explains the self-interested character of individuals, and the development of the species requires no radical discontinuity between nature and spirit and their respective sciences. In Dilthey's early thought, there is a transition within natural history in which a distinctive human history arises (JD, p. 80). Dilthey described later the physiological conditions of the organism in movement and resistance that were transformed into a sense of freedom (GS 10, p. 56). The individual is both a natural and historical product and a free participant who adaptively, reflexively, and increasingly purposively modifies its environment and world from within.

Within a normatively oriented form of life, individuality has a worth and incomparable uniqueness that remains incomprehensible to abstract theories of nature and society (GS 19, p. 6). Theories of biological and human nature, abstracted from historical and normative relational contexts, provide conditions for social-historical inquiry, but are inadequate to explain the emergent varieties and structures of historical-normative forms of life (GS 18, p. 198). That is, the human world (spirit) is a synthesis that transforms its anthropological-psychological elements.

[21] Compare Mill, CW 10, pp. 351–352; Dilthey, GS 1, pp. 106, 112; GS 10, p. 15.

Mill likewise rejected the derivation of human history from human nature, recognizing the importance of historically emergent properties and evolving forms of social consensus, and attempted to link these with developmental historical laws (CW 8, pp. 913–917). Nonetheless, Mill's discourse is doubly problematic because of his truncated conception of the individual, which is contradicted for Dilthey by his normative claims in his practical philosophy, and his positivist goal of natural-like determinate historical laws while offering only empirical generalizations about historical and social tendencies. The positivists never produced the promised explanatory science of history and society that would be as exact as mechanics and astronomy. As indicated in Dilthey's discussions of the *ignoramus et ignorabimus* (we do not know and will not know) controversy over the limits of science, this is not due to any ostensibly intrinsic limits of scientific inquiry. It is due rather to the content or subject matter itself. Each science must be understood through its own varieties of givenness and its autonomous forms of inquiry.

What then of the individual? Dilthey repeatedly referred to Humboldt's remark that individuality is the greatest mystery, Goethe's reformulation in a letter to Lavater of the Scholastic idea that the individual is ineffable, and the utterly unique thisness (*haecceitas*). But there can be no science of a singular haecceitas qua singular haecceitas unmediated by experience and conceptualization. The individual of psychological and social science is experientially given and recognized as a psychological-physiological nexus and as a participant within a social-historical environmental nexus. Despite Dilthey's appreciation for Mill's defense of the individual against Comte's prioritization of society, and his admiration of *On Liberty*[22], their accounts are incompatible in several ways.

First, in Dilthey's reflections on psychology and society, he concurs with Mill's rejection of Comte's exclusion of psychology and shares his views that psychology cannot rely directly on introspection and intuition as self-evident sources (GS 6, pp. 318–319). It uses indirect procedures and methods and requires 'middle elements' to link theoretical and inductive-empirical claims (GS 21, p. 24). Despite several family resemblances, Dilthey rejected Mill's psychology as atomistic and associationist, and unable to access and analyze psychological structures and reciprocal social relations.

Second, Mill's conception of the individual is limited by its reliance on the model of British political economy with its focus on pleasure and pain, self-interest and general interest, and utility. The young Dilthey contrasted in an 1860 essay on Lord Macaulay, English democracy, based solely on the principle of property, with "ours" that emanates from the worth of the individual and humanity (GS 16, p. 9). His subsequent remarks dropped the word democracy while continuing his earlier Humboldtian critique: British political economy prioritizes property rather than active free self-formation, and a reduced isolated individual rather than the

[22] Compare BW 1, p. 727; GS 15, p. 248; and Yorck's comment in BW 1, p. 810.

effective interactive nexus of living together (GS 10, p. 24). Dilthey developed this critique of Mill's utilitarianism and his variety of individualism at length in his *System of Ethics*.[23] Individuals pursue concretely embedded goods, values, and meanings rather than the abstract reified forms of pleasure and happiness expressed in Mill. Third, insofar as Mill adopted a Humboldtian account of the greatest diversity of forms of individuality and self-culture in *On Liberty*, it was inconsistent with the causal explanatory determinism of his *Logic*.

Dilthey's notion of relationality signifies that form cannot be separated from contents, nor social form from individual relations (GS 1, pp. 420–421). The human sciences thus require a comprehensive analysis of expressions and objectivizations that refer to lived experiences, comportments, and their structures. To analyze expressions, it is necessary to consider both the first-person perspective, which includes affects, intentions, norms, purposes, and values, and their social-historical mediation and objectivization. The interpersonal participant stance is immanent and reflexive, and it is also structural-historical, and not based on a priori truths. The human sciences require the recognition and analysis of historically mediated individuals in view of their own self-interpreting perspectives. Mill's middle elements and laws are reinterpreted as the sedimented objective structures though which relational individuals interact. Dilthey proposes a structural-functional analysis that emphasizes the significance of reciprocal dependence and free participation within an effective nexus. Individuals are structural unities given within social relations (GS 1, pp. 111, 422).

This strategy of structural differentiation avoids reducing interactive individuals to a collective entity, as in right and left Hegelianism and the psychology of peoples, or society, as observable in Comte (GS 18, p. 198). Collective terms name abstract objects that cannot fully explain or exhaust the individuals who compose them (GS 1, p. 82). Further, models of abstract identity or unity are contrasted with models that structurally differentiate the interconnectedness of state, society, and individual existence (GS 1, pp. 82–83). Dilthey's moderate or critical skepticism (which contests metaphysics and abstract theory) and immanent relational individualism set his thought in opposition to positing deep structures or entities behind life (GS 10, p. 46). This critique challenges organicist social philosophies, right and left Hegelianism (in contrast to liberal appropriations of Hegel), and subsequent sociological and social theories that eliminated an adequate sense of individuality and normativity from Comte and Durkheim to Luhmann.

Dilthey's relational individualist alternative informed his critique of various social theories, such as mechanistic, organicist, and sociological theories (GS 1, pp. 84–86). Subsequent German-language philosophy and social theory viewed Dilthey's theory with suspicion.[24] Relational individualism is an intermediate or

[23] GS 10; see Benjamin Crowe, "Dilthey's Ethical Theory", in Eric S. Nelson (ed.), *Interpreting Dilthey: Critical Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 159–177.

[24] For instance, amongst others, Simmel, Lukács, post-1929 Heidegger, Gadamer, and Luhmann.

more conditional holistic position that recognizes the effective mediation of intersubjective interactions between individuals and how it cannot be reduced to either bare atomistic individuals (which cannot adequately explain ethical and social phenomena) or to collective entities or systems (which cannot adequately explain the individual).

## 7. EMPIRIA, EXPERIENCE, AND SCIENCE

Mill (at least in his empiricist inductivist moment) and Dilthey were each concerned with the priority of experience. There are two distinct forms of experientialism at play here. In Dilthey's terminology, one is "external" and constrained in the mode of the disinterested spectator (the third-person perspective) and the dogmas of empiricism; the other is "internal" and expansive in the mode of the agent or participant (the first-person perspective) (GS 18, p. 186). The former expresses a restrictive empiricism, inadequate to experience in its multiplicity and richness, and the latter embraces an unrestricted empiria (GS 1, p. 81; GS 19, p. 17). One imposes an abstract unity upon science; the other trails and theorizes the specificity of each science and the distinct ways in which phenomena are experientially given.

In each philosophy, the perceptual self and its form of identity or unity are at issue given their denials of an underlying metaphysical self or identity. In Mill's account, experiences are bundles of atomistic sensations united through association, and it is unclear how there can be an adequate sense of self-identity as understood in what Husserl and Habermas later designated the lifeworld.[25] In Dilthey's interpretation, experiences are understood through a descriptive analysis of the interconnectedness of the self-world nexus and the asymmetrically differentiated reflexive self in which they occur. Dilthey rejected the psychology of impressions and associations, arguing that it cannot lead back to the complex reflexive and narratively understood life-courses of individuals, including their first-person sense of self in the 'thereness-for-me' of their world. Dilthey's notion of interconnectedness, a differentiating or structural holism without an abstract reductive identity or unity, entails that individual and social systems are relational intersections within shifting structural wholes.

Mill ambitiously asserted in his *Logic* that the method of the natural sciences can be applied to the moral sciences, despite all the obstacles that he failed to resolve, as his psychology and sociology fell far short of mechanics. This extension does not only face an issue of complexity that could be resolved through greater progress and precision. This is a category mistake, as there is a difference in category or kind. The human life-nexus and their sciences occur within the natural world and are differentiated from it.

[25] Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 vols., Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1981.

There is a reflexive transformation of what is called nature to what is inadequately called "spirit" that encompasses – as their very elements – subjective self-relations and intersubjective relations. This has two consequences. First, spirit as historical life encompasses all human experiences and phenomena without excluding their natural and material conditions much less reducing the latter to consciousness. Second, Dilthey's reflexive or hermeneutical break entails that the method of natural science, and its ideological form in positivism, cannot adequately address the ordinary empiria of human life.

The life-nexus and human sciences assume an immanent perspective in which individuals experience themselves as both conditioned by the world (the truth of naturalism and positivism) and active participants in the world (the truth of idealism). Dilthey's analysis considers the individual as a formative acquired psychological nexus, as well as reflexive (self-related) and self-reflective (adoptable and reformable). Therefore, individuals are ethical realities with autonomy and worth. Mill's practical philosophy supports this thesis, despite contradicting it in his theoretical philosophy. Similarly, a more complete understanding of self-cultivation (*Bildung*) is necessary, including its introspective, autobiographical, and contemplative senses. This should also encompass a sense of freedom and adaptive change through technology and reform, which for Mill are compatible with natural causal determinism, and for Dilthey call for a more complex analysis that presupposes a self-reflexive and normative shift within the natural world to historical social-cultural forms of life.

Mill and Dilthey both perceive how natural science is related to the technological control of nature and moral science related to guiding and potentially reforming society. Despite the convergence of art and science at such points, Mill maintained a separation between theory and practice. Less dualistically, Dilthey traced how the sciences are born from and inevitably shaped by their historical situation while normatively aspiring to objectivity and universal validity. All sciences are in this sense informed by practical interests, as useful for the art of individual and political life, whether technical (as with the natural sciences) or social-political (as with the human sciences). The human sciences are motivated by their own practical interests situated in the life-nexus, even as their epistemic normative structure should separate them the partisan conflicts of the day as Dilthey argued against the directly politically-motivated historians.

The human sciences are interconnected with everyday ethics, politics, as well as the scope and limits of progress and reform in Mill and Dilthey. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, inspired in part by Dilthey and Pierce whose thought plays key roles in this work, Habermas delineated three types of epistemically constitutive interests: technical-instrumental interest (as expressed in science and technology), interpretive intersubjective interest (lifeworld and tradition), and critical emancipatory interest (freedom, equality, and solidarity).[26] It should be observed in

[26] Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*.

Dilthey's delineation of epistemic interests, these three moments are closely intertwined, as each is an element of existing social networks as well as potential scientific and social-political reform and progress.

## 8. INDIVIDUAL OR RELATIONAL LIBERALISM?

To continue to use Habermas' language, Dilthey prioritizes the second intersubjective interest as orienting the first and third interests. The latter two presuppose while suppressing the second when science or critique are reified in purposes or systems independent of the interpersonal perspectives of the living. The so-called hermeneutical interest of self-understanding and understanding others through interpretation already requires critical ethical and political reflection on oneself and one's society. This in turn leads to the development of higher expressions of intersubjective interests and dynamics such as – in Dilthey's *System of Ethics* – freedom, equality, and solidarity. The young Dilthey had maintained that understanding is the basis of ethics and love is the highest expression of understanding (GS 18, p. 101). Dilthey's concept of humanity – inspired by Humboldt and Schleiermacher – emphasizes the historical embeddedness and diversity of individuals, in contrast to the abstract ethical principles that he associated with Kant and Mill or the social totality he attributed to Hegel and Comte (GS 10, p. 124).

Mill himself criticized Comte's ideas of unity, totality, and society in his second essay for the sake of individuality and freedom. It is in the liberal ethical-political arena that the young Dilthey found Mill to be most sympathetic. This is evident in his 1873 and 1874 correspondence with – his soon to be wife – Katharina Püttmann (BW 1, pp. 662, 727). Mill and Dilthey both share in this light overlapping yet distinctive varieties of liberalism. This includes 'negative liberty' from excessive coercion by the state and society, but also participatory freedom and individual self-development (GS 15, p. 248). Questions of individual freedom and its historical mediation serve as a starting point for Dilthey as much as for Mill. They intersected in their appreciation of liberal political thinkers such as Humboldt and Alexis de Tocqueville. Dilthey commended Mill's *On Liberty* for its alignment with the Humboldtian idea of freedom and self-cultivation (*Selbstbildung*), which serves as a primary model for modern political philosophy, and which aims at the unrestricted development of the diversity of forms of individuality (GS 15, pp. 248–249; GS 23, p. 148).

Mill had argued that ethics should be based on the abstract principle of utility, while politics should be based on the principle of individual freedom. Dilthey proposed an alternative approach that favored formative and relational individuality and freedom. He stressed the significance of describing and analyzing lived experiences and their structural connections, as well as taking into view psychological context and emergence. Dilthey discussed the reflexive break of self-

reflexivity and being-there-for-me, or the first-person stance. He argued that the human sciences require emergent hermeneutical self-reflexivity and self-interpretation, as well as ethical life as a formed content- and context-related purposiveness. Thus, despite several resemblances, their respective philosophies of the human sciences led to divergent interpretations of ethics and politics.

Two versions of liberalism are operative in Mill and Dilthey. Each has distinctive conception of science, its affiliation with society, and political freedom. Mill is undoubtedly a more radically progressive liberal reformer, while Dilthey's relational individualism is historically and normatively situated. Dilthey contests both atomistic individualism and strong holism, which condenses a complex communicative network into an abstract collective unity and identity. Dilthey understood himself in alignment with the Prussian reformist tradition of Humboldt and Schleiermacher, and as an inheritor of the German Enlightenment. In history, for example, the early Dilthey maintains, in an historically mediated form, a Kantian orientation towards reform and progress rather than construing it as a developmental necessity (JD, pp. 188–190). Dilthey was, no doubt, a cautious and moderate liberal and reformer, who can appears conservative to later generations. Nonetheless, Dilthey's relational approach is arguably more promising than other options to the significance of both self-interpretive individual life and sociality as intersecting networks of intersubjective and sedimented forms of interaction.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Dilthey can be considered a sympathetic albeit critical interlocutor of Mill's philosophy in the German context. Both authors share a commitment to individual freedom, self-development, and the importance of human sciences. However, Dilthey diverges from Mill on the specific requirements of these commitments, placing greater emphasis on embodied relational freedom and individuality, and how the human sciences rely on and utilize the interpretive stance.

This contribution has offered a historical and conceptual reconstruction of the importance of Mill's philosophy for Dilthey's thought through appropriation and critical confrontation. It has shown how Dilthey's argumentation indicates that relational individualism may be a more effective model for understanding forms of life and positioning the strategies of the human sciences in contrast with one-sided, reductive forms of atomistic individualism and collective holism or substantialism (GS 10, p. 25). Both insufficiently recognize the reflexivity, relationality, and intersubjectivity of the first-person participant perspective. It is not most fully realized in self-centered egoism, according to Dilthey's *System of Ethics*, but co-enacting and sharing life with others in reciprocity, mutuality, and solidarity (GS 10, pp. 68–69, 78, 81). Dilthey opposes the interpersonal and intersubjective

ethics of reciprocal understanding to the individualistic formal ethics of an abstract principle (such as duty or utility) as well as the identity of a social totality.

On the one hand, in contrast to Mill, individual psychology and categories such as self-interest cannot explain social forms, as individuals are motivated within concrete bodily and communicative encounters and relations. On the other hand, in contrast to Comte and Lazarus, society is co-enacted through interactions between individuals and groups motivated by a plurality of diverse and conflicting forces and drives (GS 10, pp. 88–89, 111–112). Moreover, individuals and communities experience themselves as real and as reflexive participants in their world (in the sense of the phenomenality of the there-for-me or there-for-us).

This crucial dimension of social life is missed when individuals are deemed epiphenomenal to their own expressions and sedimented or objectivated products such as the systems of economy, culture, society, and the state. Dilthey's critical strategies continue to be pertinent to the extent that contemporary social and cultural studies continue to presuppose either the abstraction of self-interested atomic individuals or totalizing ideas of power, society, system, and tradition to explain away and colonize individually and intersubjectively lived historically and normatively mediated forms of life.[27]

[27] Dilthey's approach intersects in several ways with Habermas' analysis of social systems and their colonization of the lifeworld (Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*).