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Editor

Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen

Introduction, pp. 1–13

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Chapter 1
Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen: Introduction

Uljana Feest

1.1 Methodological Preliminaries

The conceptual dichotomy of *Erklären* and *Verstehen* (explaining vs. understanding) has a revealing dual status. On the one hand, it has something of an antiquated air to it, as we loosely associate its origins with the work of Wilhelm Dilthey and other nineteenth-century German philosophers who are not widely read any more, at least not within contemporary Anglo-American history and philosophy of the human sciences. At the same time, however, remnants of the dichotomy still come up in various guises and in various areas of contemporary philosophy and philosophy of science. One example is the long-standing debate over the logical status of action explanations ("reasons vs. causes") in philosophy of mind (Davidson 1980), and associated issues of "teleological explanations" and the explanatory status of laws of nature in the philosophy of the human sciences (Dray 1957; Hempel 1965; von Wright 1971). Another is the question of whether the subject matter of the social sciences requires a special type of interpretative, hermeneutic, or perhaps even empathetic, "access" (Collingwood 1946; Winch 1964; Taylor [1971] 1985). More recently, there has been renewed interest in the question of how to explicate our capacity to interpret another person's actions (see the recent suggestion that the "theory–theory" vs. "simulation theory" distinction is similar to some aspects of the Erklären/Verstehen distinction) (Kögler and Stueber 2000). And within mainstream analytical philosophy of the social sciences, one of the central topics has long been the question of whether social facts/events can be reduced to the explanations of the actions of individuals (e.g., Kincaid 1997), raising questions about the units at which explanatory and/or interpretive efforts ought to be directed. ("individualism" vs. "holism"). This question can be traced back to early twentieth-century debates in economics and other emerging social sciences (Udehn 2001).

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While this list of topics is far from complete, it suggests that contemporary debates in the philosophies of mind, action, and science touch on a variety of aspects of the earlier dichotomy between explanation and understanding. Keeping this in mind is important for at least two reasons. First, it reminds us that from a philosophical perspective the Erklären/Verstehen distinction is richer and more multi-faceted than might appear at first sight, suggesting that perhaps some systematic insights might be gained from investigating the historical precursors and the contexts in which they originated. Second, it raises the question of whether the categories employed by the current philosophical literature may provide us with analytical tools that we can use when entering the thicket of nineteenth and early twentieth-century issues and debates. The essays in this volume are selected to juxtapose precisely these two questions, i.e., (1) what (if any) novel philosophical insights can be gained from analyses of the varied and diverse previous debates about aspects of the dichotomy between explanation and understanding, and (2) what (if any) historical insights can be gained by means of analytical tools taken from current philosophical discussions?

The second question, in particular, raises an important problem for conducting this sort of historical/philosophical enterprise: the worry that by using our contemporary philosophical categories, we are in danger of anachronistically reading issues into the historical debates that did not actually concern the historical actors. We might then assume that our current categories form some kind of teleological endpoint of a historical trajectory. However, if our interest in historical questions is motivated at least in part by a desire to learn something about current debates, then surely we need a language that makes past events and discussions comprehensible and relevant to our present concerns. These are legitimate worries. Ironically, it was precisely these types of questions that were behind some of the nineteenth-century writings in the philosophy of history, which found one articulation in terms of the dichotomy between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. The problem at issue is how to gain knowledge about a subject matter both intimately tied to our own sense of who we are and what we value, and at the same time remote from our current lives and practices. Or, as the issue was put as part of debates about *historicism*, how can we appreciate the extent to which previous categories may not have been informed by our own values and interests without thereby relativizing those very values and interests, and how can we get interpretive access to the past without assuming that our current categories are at least partially valid? (e.g., Wittkau 1992; see also Jacques Bos's contribution in this volume). In a similar vein, a philosopher who looks at aspects of historical debates about explanation and understanding may worry that she must refrain from any judgment of what is the *correct* way of thinking about this dichotomy, whereas a historian may worry that such philosophical prejudices might distort the historical narrative.

Several contributions to this volume address these questions, either explicitly or implicitly. Beginning with worries more likely to be formulated by historians, we can in particular identify methodological questions that concern the use of *sources*. This concern has two aspects. First, can we do justice to the history of a philosophical category – or any category, for that matter – only by looking at historical sources that explicitly addresses this category (for example, in our case, nineteenth or early

twentieth-century literature about the distinction between explanation and understanding)? Second, can we do justice to a particular writer's notion of that category by taking at face value what he writes about his own motivation for adopting it? In response to both types of questions, there is by now a consensus amongst many historians of science and of philosophy that (a) intellectual history – like other kinds of history – has to be careful not to uncritically adopt actors' categories, and (b) more generally, even the actors' own thinking about a particular issue has to be contextualized vis-à-vis their other intellectual commitments and interests, as well as the complex conditions that make the totality of their commitments possible. Such conditions include cognitive as well as practical, institutional, and cultural factors. The articles in this volume respond to these challenges in several ways. For example, one author (Christopher Pincock) seeks to read some of the nineteenth-century philosophical writings about *Erklären* and *Verstehen* as standing for a more fundamental problem, which he terms the problem of the "unity of experience". In turn, other authors contextualize aspects of the Erklären/Verstehen dichotomy in relation to debates about educational reforms in nineteenth-century Germany (Denise Phillips), controversies about the relationship between science and religion in the wake of the rise of Darwinism (Bernhard Kleeberg), aspects of the material culture of the Austrio-Hungarian empire (Katherine Arens), and a growing appreciation – throughout the nineteenth century – of the notion of *individuality*, both with respect to persons and with respect to historical events (Jacques Bos).

The philosophical concern with the question of whether an appreciation of the contingent nature of intellectual history forces us to regard our current philosophical positions as unfounded or arbitrary is confronted especially clearly by Christopher Pincock, who tries to strike a middle ground between writing a history of arguments for whatever positions we currently hold and writing a history that makes our current positions entirely contingent on their historical developments. He concludes with a plea for a type of intellectual history that aims at identifying important philosophical problems and keeping a wide range of solutions – both past and present – on the table. In a similar vein, Warren Schmaus's comparative analysis of French and German debates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highlights the fact that there is no reason to suppose that a shared set of problems would automatically lead to similar philosophical solutions, thereby also expanding the range of philosophical options available to us. Thomas Uebel's narrative, in turn, shows that even if we restrict our attention to an analysis of developments that took place *within* one (e.g., the logical empiricist) tradition, we may find that the dynamics of the emerging story provide us with a much more fine-grained picture than standard textbook accounts might suggest.

The dichotomy between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* is located somewhere between science and philosophy, in that it expresses philosophical thoughts about the epistemological or methodological foundations of the human sciences. Moreover, it emerged at a time when the line between philosophy and the sciences was less clear-cut and more contested than it is today. Hence, it seems especially clear that if we aim at an analysis of the historical and systematic status of this dichotomy, a combination of approaches from the history of science, the philosophy of science, and the history of the philosophy of science is called for. It is for this reason that the current volume presents a range of articles by authors from different disciplines,

where this interdisciplinarity plays out both in terms of the *academic training* of the contributors (bringing together philosophers, historians, sociologists, and literary scholars), and in terms of their *subject matters* (social science, psychology, history, theology, philosophy, literature, and intellectual culture). The volume therefore attempts not only to offer different disciplinary perspectives on the history of the *Erklären/Verstehen* dichotomy, but also to overcome a narrow focus on disciplinary histories. In this vein, several contributions offer insights into the writings of well-known figures (such as Wilhelm Dilthey or Max Weber) by relating these writings in novel ways to other academic and/or scientific developments. For example, Michael Heidelberger argues that Max Weber's conception of an understanding sociology (which is often characterized as coming out of an engagement with the work of Heinrich Rickert) was in fact stimulated by the philosopher/psychologist and theorist of probability Johannes von Kries, while Daniel Ŝuber argues that Wilhelm Dilthey's work had a much bigger impact on twentieth-century sociology than is commonly assumed, and Safia Azzouni describes the ways in which Dilthey's theory of poetics helped shape early twentieth-century popular science writings.

Finally, the volume takes a *comparative* perspective, insofar as a number of contributions compare and contrast the issues discussed, and concepts used, in debates that took place in Germany, Austria, France, Britain, and the USA. In taking this perspective, the volume seeks to highlight commonalities and divergences in the approaches adopted by writers in different countries and national traditions. The contributions of Warren Schmaus and Philipp Müller, for example, bring out the specifics of the French debates, with Schmaus focusing more on differences between French and German debates, and Müller revealing some unexpected commonalities between the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey and Hippolyte Taine. In a similar vein, David Leary traces similarities and dissimilarities between William James and Wilhelm Dilthey with respect to their notions of understanding and explanation, while Roger Smith provides a detailed analysis of the issues that dominated British debates about the relationship between different areas of learning.

1.2 Overview of the Papers

In the German context, the distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* is usually seen as closely linked to the aim of securing an epistemological basis for the distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* (the natural and the human sciences). Denise Phillips (University of Tennessee at Knoxville) contextualizes the latter dichotomy by relating it to debates that started in the 1830s, regarding the notion of *Bildung*, i.e., the question of what constitutes the notion of knowledge and education that was essential to the self-fashioning of the educated middle class in the nineteenth century. Central to these debates, Phillips argues, were the questions of what kinds of personality traits were crucial to being a good scientist, and what kind of training was required to assist the development of such traits. She thereby brings out the close relationship between notions of *Bildung* (the German term "Bildung" has a double meaning of "education" and "molding") and philosophical writings about

scientific methodology. Using as a case study a specific debate in Dresden, Phillips points out that what was at stake were two models of knowledge, one that emphasized the study of *texts*, and one that emphasized the study of *nature*. While the former was traditionally more highly valued and deeply rooted in the German tradition of a humanist secondary education, Phillips points to the complex set of circumstances in which the study of nature not only began to become part of the university curriculum (raising the question of whether high school students were adequately prepared), but also began to be organized in local associations for the study of nature, whose members increasingly protested their marginalization by traditional educational culture.

Phillips's contribution provides an important context for understanding the emerging distinction between *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. It makes clear that the underlying notions of both the natural *and* the human sciences were in a state of flux, and underwent some changes in the course of the nineteenth century. For example, while we find one of Phillips's protagonists referring to the natural sciences as based in *sense experience* and the human sciences as allowing for a *text-based* understanding of the past, Wilhelm Dilthey would later distinguish between the two in terms of a science based in *hypotheses* (natural sciences) vs. one based in *lived experience* (human sciences) (see Feest 2007). This points to an important shift that took place, namely that parts of the human sciences themselves "went empirical". In his contribution, Bernhard Kleeberg (Universität Konstanz) analyzes a particular aspect of this shift, namely the question of how German protestant theologians in the nineteenth century responded to the fact that the new science of evolution was producing an empirically based alternative narrative of the history of the earth and the place of human beings on it. As a consequence, theologians felt themselves in danger of losing their interpretive authority concerning issues of ethics and meaning. As Kleeberg points out, we can make out an overall development, in the course of which theology became *one humanity among others*, even though many theologians still wanted to resist this conclusion, emphasizing the distinct status of religious experience as the basis of theology. The central thesis of Kleeberg's paper is that in the course of this development, the very notions of *meaning* and *interpretation* underwent some changes as theologians developed a sophisticated hermeneutic methodology, which, in many cases, sought to show that science and religion could coexist peacefully. As Kleeberg shows, theologians adopted different strategies in their attempts to reconcile science and religion. Some turned to neo-vitalism in support of the idea that both material and nonmaterial factors contribute to evolution, while others took the position that while science provided *explanations* of events and phenomena in natural history, it still had to rely on theology to provide an *understanding* of the symbolism of nature or to interpret the moral narrative inherent in the biblical account of creation.

Like Kleeberg and Phillips, Safia Azzouni (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science) also addresses the issue of how notions of *Erklären*, *Verstehen*, and related ideas played out in the cultural and educational context of turn-of-the-century Germany. More specifically, she describes the way in which the literary genre of *science popularization* constituted an important new model for the presentation and distribution of knowledge. This model, she argues, borrowed significant elements from both the natural and the human sciences, in that it attempted to convey scientific

explanations by means of literary techniques, thereby re-creating in the reader a lived experience of the scientific facts in question. As a point of departure, Azzouni takes Wilhem Dilthey's work, *Poetik*, of 1887, arguing that the ideas expressed there were a major influence on Dilthey's one-time student, the high-school teacher and popular science writer Kurd Laßwitz. While Dilthey had in other places emphasized the gulf between explanation and understanding as constituting an important epistemological difference between the natural and the human sciences, his *Poetik* posited the notion of lived experience both as an important *explanatory concept* (i.e., one that explains the poet's creative potential) and as something that enables us to *understand* that which the poet conveys to us. As Azzouni shows, Laßwitz took this to mean that the poet is ideally suited to evoke in his audience the lived experience necessary for an understanding of scientific ideas. She then provides an illustration of how he applied this idea in his own popular science writings, seeming thereby to bridge the gap between the human and natural sciences.

As laid out in the contribution by Philipp Müller (Humboldt Universität), the French philosopher Hippolyte Taine, like Dilthey and Laßwitz, thought that artistic expression was an important vehicle of psychological insights. Müller reminds us that Dilthey used Taine, along with Buckle and Mill, as a prime example of the kind of positivistic philosophy of history that he rejected. However, Müller argues that in fact Taine's idea of founding history in psychology was closer to Dilthey's conception of the human sciences than is commonly assumed. While Taine did appeal to the role of psychological laws in the explanations of historical events, he in fact viewed the structure of the human mind as resulting from the interplay between mental and historical forces, and, furthermore reflected on the cultural and historical context of the science of psychology itself. Müller places Taine's philosophy of history in its historical context, showing how Taine's views about the necessity to naturalize the human mind have to be read as criticisms of spiritualists' writings, such as Victor Cousin's "méthode psychologique", and that his own outlook on psychology was the result of close intellectual contacts with contemporary novelists and literary critics who emphasized the historical situatedness of human thought. Taine then sought to investigate this situatedness by means of historical studies of artistic products.

The comparison between Taine and Dilthey with respect to the status of psychological laws raises the more general question of the relationship between French and German approaches to the issues we might summarize under the heading of *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. This task is taken on by Warren Schmaus (Illinois Institute of Technology). Schmaus argues that while reflecting on differences in the subject matters of the natural and human sciences, French philosophers did not conclude that any significant methodological distinctions should be drawn. In this, he suggests, they differed both from Dilthey, who derived the distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* from the different ways in which we gain epistemic access to mind and nature, and from Windelband and Rickert, who derived the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic method from the different scientific goals of gaining knowledge about laws of nature vs. individual events. Beginning with an account of Dilthey's early thoughts on descriptive psychology and his notion of lived experience, Schmaus shows that there were some parallels in the work of various French philosophers.

such as the idea that we have direct, unmediated experience of our inner lives. He argues, however, that few in France thought that this implied a distinct foundation for the human sciences. Similarly, while some French scholars distinguished between the nomothetic and idiographic in ways similar to Windelband, they did not argue that this entailed a *methodological* distinction, since they believed that all scientific knowledge was inductive and hypothetical. Schmaus's paper concludes with a comparison between (the later) Dilthey's method of hermeneutical interpretation and Durkheim's notion of an interpretive social science, pointing to the fact that while Durkheim disagreed with some of Dilthey's most fundamental assumptions (i.e., the idea of grounding the social sciences in psychology), Durkheim nonetheless formulated his social science as an interpretive endeavor.

In his contribution, "Instead of Erklären and Verstehen: William James on Human Understanding", David Leary (University of Richmond) also offers a comparative perspective, by analyzing some aspects of William James's philosophy of psychology. He argues that while James in fact shared with Wilhelm Dilthey some views about the nature of psychology, James never became involved in anything like the Erklären/Verstehen debate. As Leary explains, James seems not to have found such a distinction useful. For James, the question of whether we take an explanatory or a descriptive stance was ultimately a matter of preference vis-á-vis an open-ended, changing world. Leary contextualizes this analysis of James by providing an overview of James's views on human understanding, highlighting some significant biographical factors that may have contributed to James's views, such as his extensive reading of Goethe and Shakespeare and his association with the metaphysical club around Chauncey Wright. As Leary shows, James's views about explanation comes out particularly clearly in his response to the philosopher-psychologist Ladd, who had argued (in a review of James's book *Principles of Psychology*) that James's approach was not able to provide truly scientific explanations. James's reply suggests that he did think that psychology aimed at providing explanations (by which he meant ultimate descriptions of how things fit in), but that he thought of the actually existing explanatory statements as a provisional body of propositions. Leary concludes with a brief discussion of why Dilthey and James might have been content with such differing conceptions of the nature of science.

The contribution by Katherine Arens (University of Texas at Austin) draws attention to the fact that the notion of *understanding* cannot be reserved for those who posited it as a distinguishing methodology of the *human sciences*, to be contrasted with the *explanatory* methodology of the *natural sciences*. Positivism, especially in its turn-of-the-century instantiation, explicitly rejected the notion of natural science as providing explanations that appealed to hypothetical constructs. For positivists, such as Ernst Mach, the task of philosophy of science was to provide an analysis of the ways in which our *understanding of both the natural and social world is based in our phenomenal experience*. Arens argues that Mach's way of thinking was in fact representative of a particular cognitive style that she attributes to features of the Austrio-Hungarian empire (such as its school system). This style, which emphasized historical situatedness as foundational to knowledge, was not, according to Arens, easily reconciled with the Erklären/Verstehen dichotomy, at least in the sense in

which these notions were employed in the context of German philosophy. Arens examines the work of three otherwise quite diverse theorists (Ernst Mach, Karl Menger, and Alois Riegl), and argues that they shared in common the idea that scientific knowledge is firmly grounded in specific phenomenal experiences, which in turn are tied to specific material practices. Arens refers to this way of thinking about scientific understanding as "materialist phenomenological" and argues that its emergence has to be placed in the context of Viennese culture and history, in which all three thinkers developed their views.

In two complementary papers about British philosophy and the human science in the nineteenth century, both Roger Smith and Christopher Pincock argue that nothing like the Erklären/Verstehen dichotomy existed in the English language context. In his paper, "British thought on the relations between the natural sciences and the humanities, c. 1870–1910", Roger Smith (Russian Academy of Sciences) presents a detailed and comprehensive overview of the development and disciplinary formation of what we might today refer to as the human sciences, arguing that (a) the primary concern of English-language writers in the philosophy of scientific knowledge was *naturalism*, and (b) both proponents and critics of naturalism shared a commit to having their scholarly work provide a *moral foundation* for society. These concerns are traced back to Mill's 1843 *Logic of the Moral Sciences*, whose naturalistic outlook, however, was not widely shared until the 1860s. Smith then provides an overview of the development of different humanities disciplines (social theory, philosophy, history, psychology) in the decades following the 1870s, providing both intellectual and institutional contexts for each, and pointing to factors that may have been responsible for the different forms the debates took in Britain, as compared to debates in Germany at the same time. As Smith remarks, it is probably no coincidence that in the 1950s and 1960s, British critics of a positivist philosophy of the social sciences turned to the older German debates for inspiration. There was no prior British tradition to embrace.

In "Accounting for the Unity of Experience in Dilthey, Rickert, Bradley and Ward", Christopher Pincock (Purdue University) approaches the difference between German and English work by asking what was the *common philosophical problem* to which the German-language Erklären/Verstehen dichotomy proposed to provide an answer, as distinct from answers we find in the English-language context. According to Pincock, the problem may briefly be summarized as that of showing *how experience relates to scientific knowledge*. He refers to this as the "problem of the unity of experience" and shows that it can be demonstrated especially clearly in John Stuart Mill's phenomenalist philosophy of science. Pincock presents a reading of two German authors (Dilthey, Rickert) and two British authors (Bradley, Ward), according to which they each attempted to tackle the problem of experience in different ways. Dilthey and Rickert, Pincock argues, disagreed fundamentally in several respects, but each end up with a conception of the unity of experience that has as a consequence the distinction between different types of sciences (human vs. natural sciences) and both invoke a notion of understanding as supporting the distinction. In contrast, Pincock argues, Bradley and Ward (while also disagreeing widely) each proposed solutions that did not invoke a distinction between understanding and explaining.

By focusing his attention on the unity of experience rather than Erklären/Verstehen divide, Pincock is also able to draw attention to interesting *similarities* between Dilthey's and Ward's conceptions of psychology.

As already mentioned, one approach in Germany that attempted to delineate the human sciences from the natural sciences came from proponents of the Southwest school of Neo-Kantians, in particular Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert. According to this school, the relevant epistemological distinction was not one between explanation and understanding, but rather between the explanations of individual events and the search for general laws (Windelband used the well-known terminology of "idiographic" vs. "nomothetic" sciences for this contrast). In the view of Jacques Bos (University of Amsterdam) the big category underlying many discussions of the human and natural sciences during the nineteenth century was that of individuality. Bos argues that the notion of historical events as *unique* was central to the nineteenth-century notion of *historicism*. While the term "historicism" has different connotations, Bos uses it to refer to a movement that rejected Hegelian and Romantic ideas about the *telos* of historical developments, instead turning to discussions of empirical methods in the investigation of past events. Bos contends that the depiction of historical events as unique was linked to an insistence on the uniqueness of individual human beings and their central role in shaping historical events. To substantiate his claims, Bos analyzes the work of three important nineteenth-century historicists – Wilhelm von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke, and Johann Gustav Droysen. He argues that each rejected both Hegelian and positivist philosophies of history, because they implied a disavowal of the idea of individuality. Nonetheless, Bos emphasizes, while agreeing on the importance of individuality, each also championed his own understanding of the concept.

Given the notion of individuality, the question arises whether, and in what way, *individual agency* can be appealed to when accounting for particular historical or social phenomena, i.e., at what level of analysis should explanatory and/or interpretive efforts be pitched? This question, commonly known as the individualism/holism debate, was famously addressed in the so-called "Methodenstreit" between the Austrian school of economics (in particular, Carl Menger) and the German school of national economy (in particular, Gustav Schmoller). In her contribution, Filomena de Sousa (Technical University of Lisbon) addresses this debate, arguing that it neither began nor ended with Menger and Schmoller. De Sousa traces the origins of this debate back to the nineteenth-century historical school of German economics, which (following the literature in economics) she terms "historicist". In contrast to the type of historicism presented in Jacques Bos's contribution – where the term is used to describe a particular historiographical approach – de Sousa's focus is on a type of economic theory that viewed economic phenomena as bound to particular historical time periods. De Sousa argues that this historical approach to economic theory, which often made appeal to concepts such as "Volksgeist", was inherently *holistic* in its orientation, an approach at odds with the methodological *individualism* of the Austrian school. The debate touches importantly on the question of the relationship between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, since the notion that individual preferences can explain individual economic behavior and, ultimately, the economy

as a whole, presupposes that it is possible to access the preferences that individuals in fact have. In other words, it presupposes that there is some sense in which economists can "understand" what goes on in the minds of individual agents. De Sousa argues, however, that there was no consensus amongst members of the Austrian school on this issue. She suggests that the methodological disagreement between the individualist theoretical approach of the Austrians and the more holistic empirical approach of the Germans also must be seen against the background of conflicting political ideologies, i.e., that of the social reformism of the German national economists vs. the political and economic liberalism of the Austrians.

Max Weber, whose historical sociology places him in a critical position both with respect to the German and the Austrian schools, is commonly credited with having developed a unique notion of *Verstehen* as a necessary precondition for *explanations* in the human sciences. According to Weber, explanations of particular historical or social events require some presupposition to the effect that these events are the results of a means-end rationality on the parts of social agents. Our understanding of such an idealized means-end rationality then serves as a norm ("ideal type"), drawing our attention to the necessity of providing explanations where this norm appears to be violated. While Weber's methodological framework is commonly regarded as having been significantly influenced by Heinrich Rickert's analysis of *values*, the contributions of Michael Heidelberger (Universität Tübingen) and Daniel Ŝuber (Universität Konstanz) call this assumption into question, though in rather different ways. In his contribution, Michael Heidelberger examines the impact on Max Weber of Johannes von Kries's work on the relationship between statistical laws and the attribution of an adequate cause. Heidelberger argues that once we appreciate the central status of von Kries's work in Weber's thinking, we have to recognize that Weber's notion of an "understanding sociology" in fact bears a surprisingly close resemblance to notions of causal explanation that we ordinarily associate with the natural sciences. Contrary to Heidelberger, the contribution by Daniel Ŝuber argues that the impact of Dilthey on the proponents of classical sociology (Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Karl Mannheim) has been much neglected in favor of emphasizing the neo-Kantian elements in sociology. Ŝuber contends that the simplified accounts found in many disciplinary histories of sociology are due to the lack of an adequate understanding of the philosophical positions being debated at the turn of the century. Ŝuber's own methodology is informed by Mannheim's theory of structure, which aims at displaying the logical structure of prior systematizations in a given field of research. He argues that such an analysis reveals that Dilthey's ontology was a holistic one (as opposed to Rickert's dualistic ontology) and that subsequent work in sociology can be shown to bear some marks of Dilthey's holism.

The Erklären/Verstehen dichotomy regained some currency within English-language debates by the 1940s and 1950s, following the publication in 1942 of Carl Gustav Hempel's "The Function of General Laws in History". In his contribution, "Opposition to Verstehen in Orthodox Logical Empiricism", Thomas Uebel (University of Manchester) situates Hempel's work within the broader historical trajectory of logical empiricists' changing views about the unity of science. Uebel argues that it is necessary to distinguish between not only different stages of logical empiricism,

but also different aspects of what was considered problematic about *understanding*. As Uebel shows, the early logical empiricists' rejection of *Verstehen* should be seen as (a) a special case of the rejection of intuition as a validational method, and (b) an expression of their logical behaviorism and verificationism. With the relaxation of the latter dogmas by the mid-1930s, logical empiricists began to wonder whether an understanding of mental states could be appealed to in explanations and what status should be accorded to understanding in the context of *validating* such explanations. After recounting the relevant arguments, Uebel turns to a 1952 paper by Hempel, in which Hempel (importantly drawing on Max Weber's ideal-type method) analyzed at length the relationship between explanation and understanding in both the natural and the human sciences. This analysis, Uebel suggests, leads more or less directly into current discussions in the philosophy of the social sciences.

1.3 Concluding Remarks and Acknowledgements

The articles in this volume are based on papers that were presented at the conference *Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen – an Interdisciplinary Workshop*, which took place at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin in June, 2006. The aim of the conference was to bring together scholars from various fields to reflect about both the histories and the current status of the dichotomy between explanation and understanding. Like the workshop, this volume tries to address not only the question of how to make sense of a particular set of philosophical concepts (*Erklären* and *Verstehen*) by paying attention to the contexts of their emergence, but also how to use these concepts as analytical tools with the aim of gaining some insights into a particular complex of intellectual, social, cultural, scientific and institutional changes that took place around the emerging human sciences from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Clearly, a collected volume such as this one cannot hope to be comprehensive and I am painfully aware of some gaps. For example, a fuller historical treatment of the dichotomy between explanation and understanding would also examine aspects of the histories of psychiatry and psychotherapy, such as Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic method or Karl Jaspers's understanding psychology. Moreover, while this volume provides some analyses that compare aspects of the German debate with those of other national traditions (Austria, France, Britain, the United States), it also leaves out national contexts, such as Russia or Italy, that would have provided material for further analytical reflection.

This collection of papers should therefore be viewed as opening up a field of analysis and discussion, rather than as providing any definitive answers. Nonetheless, I think it is possible to highlight some findings and questions. Most prominently, it appears that the distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, as underwriting two separate methodological approaches for the natural and the human sciences, had a distinctly German flavor to it. That is to say, while the question of differences and commonalities between the emerging human sciences and other scientific endeavors was also debated in other places, the dividing line between explanation

and understanding was apparently not drawn anywhere else as sharply as in the work of (for example) Wilhelm Dilthey. At the same time, however, even within the German (and German language) context, there were other ways of demarcating the natural and the human sciences (a particularly prominent example being the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic methods, coming out of Rickert and Windelband's school of Neo-Kantianism). Moreover, as several contributions to this volume remind us, the continuous branching off of the human sciences into separate disciplines with their own methodological concerns helped to give rise to more general worries about the disintegration of knowledge. These worries, in turn, spurred some to initiate the *Unity of Science* movement, which would turn out to be especially influential for the development of philosophy of science in North America. We may therefore ask (as Warrren Schmaus does at the end of his contribution) what set of circumstances led to the specifically "German" model of thinking about *Verstehen* (and its critiques!) as a distinguishing feature of the human sciences, given the many similarities between German and other (e.g., French) approaches to the study of human minds and societies. While there is surely no *one* right answer to this question, the analyses provided in this volume contribute several pieces of the puzzle, by pointing to educational, religious and political factors at work in mid nineteenth and early twentieth-century Germany. Elaborating further on these analyses, both in comparison with other countries and with respect to the complex interrelations between these and other factors, strikes me as opening up promising topics for future research.

In the same vein, however, we may also remark on the fact that there was certainly no consensus on the significance of the distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* within Germany, let alone across the other national and cultural contexts. Moreover, as Roger Smith emphasizes in his contribution, it is not clear that there was no *one* set of shared questions and concerns associated with this conceptual dichotomy. This observation, too, is brought out clearly in a number of articles in this volume, raising the question of why, in spite of this vagueness, the dichotomy between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* has had such tenacity in twentieth-century philosophical discourse. This question has two aspects, one historical and one philosophical, both of which go beyond the scope of what is being presented in this volume, and both of which are well worth investigating further. The historical question is how the dichotomy came to travel from the contexts of its origin to be represented in various fields of contemporary philosophy of mind, action, and science. Important events, in this respect were surely the renewed debates about the philosophy of history in the 1940s and 1950s (this is touched upon in Thomas Uebel's contribution to this volumes) as well as Georg Henrik von Wright's philosophy of action explanation (see Kusch 2003, for a recent reappraisal), but more research into this question is definitely called for. Apart from such specific questions, however, I would like to suggest that it is precisely the heterogeneity of questions and concerns bundled together under the rubric of the *Erklären/Verstehen* dichotomy that accounts for some of its continuing popularity. This then brings to the fore the philosophical question of what is the current relevance of the distinction. In response to this question, too, I would like to suggest that it is the heterogeneity of usages and

philosophical topics behind the conceptual pair of *Erklären* and *Verstehen* that makes it hard to dismiss it *tout court*. Careful and historically informed analysis of the different ways in which notions of *explanation* and *understanding* figure in current philosophical debates remains central for systematic philosophical work. Conversely, if used with the requisite historical sensibility these notions can provide analytical tools for intellectual history.

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