

ELEUTHERIA

Published by the Institute of Speculative Philosophy

Volume VIII Number 1

SPRING 1996

Ottawa, Canada

Message from the President

Francis Peddle

This issue of *ELEUTHERIA* is devoted to my study of the phenomenological historicism of Johann Gustav Droysen, F. H. Bradley and Wilhelm Dilthey in the late nineteenth century. The intensification of historicist thinking during this period forms the backdrop to the nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche and to the predominance of time and historicity in existentialist thinkers such as Martin Heidegger. The concentration in these authors on the particulars of history as *indicia* of inner experience illustrates the tendency, in the history of the historicization of Western thought, towards the intensification of the principle of historical expressivism and its growing prevalence over transhistorical rationality and the traditional conceptualisms that were unencumbered by the flux of historical change.

Phenomenological historicism replaces the closed metaphysical circle of traditional philosophy with the "hermeneutical circle" which is no longer representative of a finished system of thought but indicative of an epistemological direction that is indefinitely open-ended, always imperfect and historically revisable. Dilthey formulated definitively for the twentieth century the question of how the historical consciousness can, on the one hand, assert the historically conditioned character and relative validity of all its objects and, on the other, seek a science of its objects which must include universal and non-relative criteria for their investigation.

Many writers in this period were acutely aware of the contradiction between the creative and the historical consciousness. Dilthey rightly saw this contradiction as "the silently born affliction most characteristic of philosophy today." In the contemporary philosopher creative activity is copresent with the historical consciousness, since philosophizing without this would embrace only a fragment of reality. At the same time, it is recognized that this creative activity is a part of the historical continuum, in which the philosopher consciously produces or creates something which is dependent. Historical dependency and an autonomous subjectivity are inextricable aspects of creativity.

* * *

There were a number of significant changes in the 1996 federal budget and related announcements with respect to donations to charities and income tax credits, and in the application of the federal goods and services tax, that affect the operation of non-profit organizations like the Institute of Speculative Philosophy. The government has proposed that the ceiling of 20 per cent of net income for receiptable donations to registered charitable organizations like the Institute, and charitable foundations, be increased to 50 per cent for the 1996 and subsequent taxation years. Furthermore, the limit on gifts by individuals in the year of death and the preceding year, including bequests or legacies, is being raised from 20 per cent to 100 per cent.

The Institute has never accepted direct grants from any level of government. However, in the absence of overall reform of our system of public

revenue generation, we are of the view that the longstanding tax subsidization of charitable giving is an appropriate way for the community to support non-profit organizations that have as their object, for instance, the advancement of education.

The government has also declared that charitable organizations will no longer be required to pay the federal goods and services tax (GST) on its purchases. In the past GST was payable by charities and refunded 50% on application.

For many charities, especially smaller ones, this was an onerous administrative and financial burden. It was yet another example, and there are many, of how one legislative provision is defeated and nullified by another.

* * *

On behalf of my colleagues in the Institute I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Peter McCormick, one of our founding members, on his recent nomination as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. The induction ceremony is to take place this Fall.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL HISTORICISM OF DROYSEN, BRADLEY AND DILTHEY

Francis Peddle

The often uncritical appropriation by historians in the nineteenth century of concepts and methods used in the natural sciences was countered in the latter half of the century by a form of historical and philosophical investigation which can be characterized as phenomenological historicism. Scientific history not only presupposes the diremption of subjectivity and objectivity but actively seeks the thorough excision from historical investigation of experiential referents grounded in the consciousness of the historian. In such a diremption the realm of the historian's encounter with the present or any aspect of it must not be imputed to the past nor must the objective and continuous movement of history be seen as a function of the historian's representation of its sequence and outcome. The interrelation of the objectivity of historical events and the procedure of historical inquiry is therefore resolved on the side of the "objective" realm of history as determined by a non-subjective correlation of facts and general laws.

Phenomenological historicism, on the other hand, approaches the interrelation of historical events and the *modus operandi* of historical inquiry primarily from the standpoint of the subjective consciousness of the historian. Its historicistic orientation derives from the active interpenetration of the historian's present in the past and the effectual persistence of the past in the present, while its phenomenological status comes from the elevation of consciousness to a primary referent in the consideration of history.

Unlike scientific history in the nineteenth century which strove for a clear demarcation between subjectivity and objectivity, present and past, particular and universal, phenomenological historicism groped for the forms in which these distinctions actively interrelated in concrete historical events. Although phenomenological history often located the ultimate sphere of reference for these interrelations in subjective consciousness instead of an independently objective historical process, as can be found for

instance in Ranke, there were a number of areas in which it shared the same thought-orientations as scientific history. Both were at one in their rejection of traditional metaphysics which was seen as incapable of adequately and nonabstractly assessing the significance and meaning of historical events. At least in principle, both sought an interrelation of theory and practice, although the outcome of such an interrelation meant something different for each school. For scientific historians, the universal and the particular are unified in the correlation of facts with laws, while the phenomenological historian sees this unity in the connection between the subjectivity of all historical agents and their products and the subjectivity of the historian seeking to understand these agents and products.

Past and present, though carefully separated in scientific history in order to purge its research of subjective partiality, are unified and coherent insofar as both participate in objectively universal, historical laws. For the phenomenological historian, however, the past has a presence in the present on the basis of a mutuality of subjective dispositions. The coherence of the past and the present is not therefore guaranteed by the objectivity of universal laws but by the subjectivity of the selfsame creation of historical products throughout history. The programs of scientific and phenomenological history sought the interrelation of universals and historical facts but from different directions. It was often the case, however, that the empirical side of both orientations to history occluded the formulation and discovery of the universal. The resulting fragmentation gave rise to trivial generalities, when they were brought forth at all, or to mystical statements purporting to describe the intuitive interactions between historians and historical agents. As phenomenological historicism grew more sophisticated in its techniques the coherence that persists in human subjectivity throughout history became less a matter of intuition and more a scientifically establishable structure for historical investigation.

The first recognition of the need to steer clear of a naïve objectivism or a sceptical subjectivism using the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) can be found in Wilhelm von Humboldt. The form of *Verstehen* which Humboldt portrayed admits of an original pre-existing unity between subject and object which is tested and corrected through critical practice. The original congruity between subject and object as a pre-existent idea conveniently dispenses with historical discontinuity through the declaration of the possibility that any investigator can understand the active human element in history. This pre-given understanding only needs to be clarified by critical evaluation. Humboldt's *Ideenlehre* does not account for the historical and genetic development of the original congruity between subject and object. Critical historical inquiry is therefore subsequent to the condition which makes it possible. It is incapable of altering that condition without jeopardizing the very tenets of its historical investigation.

Humboldt's embryonic doctrine of *Verstehen* is therefore, in essence, a metaphysical interpretation of history in which there is an ideational predetermination that contextualizes the impartial and critical investigation of events. The congruity of subject and object, which is the fundamental aspect of *Verstehen*, is not dependent on history. In the phenomenological historicism of the later nineteenth century, the congruity of subject and object is still the crucial aspect and goal of *Verstehen*, but it became looked upon more and more as something that grows out of history and not pre-given to it.

Humboldt's historical *Ideenlehre* had a diverse influence. Its intuitive and critical method contained elements that could appeal to both the phenomenological and scientific approaches to history. Johann Gustav Droysen, who was a prominent critic of the Rankean school of scientific history, developed that aspect of Humboldt's idealistic historiography that concentrates on the imaginative and intuitive grasp of events which cannot be gleaned from the critical

method. Droysen emphasized historical understanding instead of causal explanation. He saw historical objectivity as something that grows out of the immediate, subjective grasp of events. He also preferred to see history as applicable in the fullest sense to the moral world rather than as simply an aspect of nature. Most importantly, he wanted to reconcile the dualisms created by scientific history and its methods. The task of *Historik* was then, for Droysen, not the determination of the laws of objective history but a systematic appraisal of the laws of historical investigation and knowledge.¹

Droysen shared with Humboldt the conviction that there is a commonality in human nature that makes possible the comprehension of historical material. This commonality or kinship of the nature of the historian with the utterances present in the matter of history is the basic presupposition of the essence of the historical method which Droysen sees as "*understanding* by means of *investigation*."² Although there is a strong Hegelian influence in Droysen's work, especially with regard to his conception of the ethical character of the state, he managed to dispense with the metaphysical referent of the world Spirit (*Geist*) in Hegel's philosophy of history as the source of reconciliation between subject and object and with Humboldt's original and ahistorical congruity of subject and object in the *Ideenlehre*. Instead, Droysen looked for the possibility of understanding historical material in the historical fact that human nature is at once both sensuous and spiritual. The inner spiritual processes are understandable through the apprehension of their externalization in the historical record by the senses of the historian. The historian is then able to project the perceived utterance or externalization back into an inner self which then brings forth, or recreates,

the same inner process that was necessary in order to create the perceived historical record.³

The congruity between the subjective consciousness of the historian and the objective historical records is not assumed by Droysen as something pre-given and to be re-affirmed critically in the assessment of the matter of history. Rather, it is a state of understanding that is achieved by the historian as a historical being in and through the revivification of the past in the mind of the present.⁴ Such a recreation of the past in the present is, according to Droysen, testimony to the eternal in historical events. This leads him to describe history as "humanity's knowledge of itself."⁵ Whereas Ranke took the critically investigative aspect of Humboldt's *Ideenlehre* and developed it into the canon of scientific history, Droysen modified the doctrine of intuitive understanding and the form of the connectedness of all events so as to make it the historically active and critical element in the estimation of the material and events of history. Understanding was therefore no longer something already present as the immediate congruity of subject and object but something that is achieved by historical investigation, ongoing re-creation, and constant reconciliation of inner experience and sensuous presentation.

Droysen's work is of pivotal importance in the development of phenomenological historicism as a reaction against scientific history and as a deeper historicization of the principle of individuality wherein the *I* as a totality unto itself is filled out by the *I* of the investigator through the particularities of historical expression and through the investigator's life experience. This concentration on the particulars of history as *indicia* of inner experience is a direct anticipation by Droysen of Dilthey's work on historical

¹ Droysen, *Outline of the Principles of History (Grundriss der Historik)*, tr. E.B. Andrews, original edition, 1893 (New York, Pertig, 1967), p. 118.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

understanding. It also demonstrates in the history of the historicization of Western thought the continual intensification of the principle of historical expressivism and a constant refinement of the methods used to evaluate its significance.

The process of understanding, Droysen insists, is as much synthetic as it is analytic and as much inductive as it is deductive.⁶ This means that the individual historical expression fills out the other's totality and conversely the totality fills out the individual expression. Droysen thus presents us with a vague anticipation of Dilthey's reciprocity of inner and outer and its concomitant notion of a constant interaction between the totality of an historical context and the particulars of historical expression contained within it. The historical is however, primarily for Droysen, not the realm of non-unifiable fragmentation but that within which there is to be found a reconciliation between the inner and the outer, the spiritual and the sensual, the materialistic and the idealistic. Such a reconciliation is only possible if the historical realm is understood as a moral world and not as a mechanistically determined chain of cause and effect relationships. Humanity's being is fundamentally moral but insofar as it is so it is even more fundamentally historical.

Droysen maintains that history (*Geschichte*) emerges out of the doings of human beings (*Geschäften*). It is the criteria for establishing how such an emergence takes place that is crucial for historical inquiry.⁷ The activity of humanity is concretized in all forms of historical remains and preservations. The interpretation of these remains constitutes the distinctive features of the method of history. The principle task of criticism is therefore to determine the exact connection between the external historical material and the internal acts of will which

created it.⁸ Likewise, in historical interpretation the moral content of the past must be appraised in order to see its full reality. The exclusion of material or idealistic causes from the determination of historical realities will result in distortion. For Droysen, the very fact of historical life is an embodiment of these principles. In the abstract divisions of scientific history historical life is compartmentalized along the lines of a false alternative between the moral and the material. If history is approached not as an outwardly existent, immediately present reality, as it is in natural science, but as a mediated and primarily subjective knowledge that can still attain to some degree of objectivity through historical understanding and re-creation, then, and only then, can it be thought of as something which is ideally contained in the present and as an instrument whereby there can be achieved a consciousness of what we are and possess.

F. H. Bradley, in his *Presuppositions of Critical History*, emphasizes the phenomenological character of history by declaring that historical knowledge itself is essentially historicistic since it is determined by the present and the consciousness of the historian who is immersed in it.⁹ The fundamental referent and presupposition of critical historical inquiry is, according to Bradley, to be found in the historian's own

⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 5, 33, 72.

⁸ "The task of Criticism is to determine what relation the material still before us bears to the acts of will whereof it testifies. The forms of criticism are determined by the relation which the material to be investigated bears to those acts of will which give it shape." Ibid., p. 22.

⁹ "The history then (to proceed), which is for us, is a matter of inference, and in the last resort has existence as history, as a record of events, by means of an inference of our own. And this inference furthermore can never start from a background of nothing, but is essentially connected with, and in entire dependence on, the character of our general consciousness. And so the past varies with the present, and can never do otherwise, since it is always the present upon which it rests. This present is presupposed by it, and is its necessary preconception." F.H. Bradley, *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (Ontario, Dent, 1968), pp. 95-96.

experience of the world. It is therefore impossible to give an objective and impartial account of the past in the sense of an autonomous representation of it since the only way it can be approached is through the alembic of the present as it is experienced, encountered, and understood to be rationally explicable by the historian.

Bradley is intent, however, on not letting this phenomenological orientation collapse into a sceptical subjectivism. He avers that the critical aspect of history contains both an "objective" and a "subjective" element.¹⁰ Having maintained that historical knowledge is dependent on the historicity of the knower, Bradley must demonstrate, in order to avoid the destruction of this historical knowledge by its very historicity, that the inferences made by the historical investigator on the basis of presuppositions determined by present experience have an objective applicability to the past. Like Droysen, Bradley wanted to produce objective historical knowledge within an overall framework of relative historical subjectivity. The greater part of *The Presuppositions of Critical History* is taken up with the issue of historical testimony or evidence and the objective validity of judgments made concerning that evidence.

The treatment of history as a science in the nineteenth century opened its doors to a wide range of auxiliary disciplines and to a greater diversification of what was admissible as historical evidence. Bradley's phenomenological conception of historical testimony placed upon it a number of restrictions that the scientific historian would find anathema. Historical evidence, according to Bradley, must be *in* history or in other words within the human tradition. Secondly, it must be *to* history, that is, it must be directly applicable to the tradition of human history. Natural determinants of the human condition which are pre-existent to

recorded human history, or natural events which occur during human history, are not considered by Bradley to be a part of history as such. Natural events cannot be an aspect of historical testimony because ultimately its origin lies in an historical interest.¹¹ The evidence presented by history is created by a human interest which is a particular manifestation of the interiority of the human spirit.

As in Droysen's declaration that history in the full sense can only be applicable to the moral world, Bradley sees the fundamental determination of history and the evidence it presents in the individual spirit and its concrete manifestations in the historical world. His phenomenological historicism is therefore in the tradition of historical expressivism which sees the facts of history not as objective and autonomous instances of a law of events but as historical incarnations of the same spirituality ever creative in an infinite variety of temporal particularities. There still remains the problem of how one can be sure that inferences made about the past are in fact valid statements about the conditions for the creation of historical events, especially in the light of conflicting testimony as to how these events came about.

Bradley readily admits that there can be no history without prejudication. Scientific history in the strict sense of a separation of subjectivity and objectivity is therefore impossible. Historical facts are not to be regarded as autonomous entities capable of determination independent of all subjective reference, according to Bradley, nor are they to be seen as projections of inner feelings or states of the individual consciousness. Since all historical evidence rests on prejudications originating in the present consciousness of the historian, each historical fact must be a judgment. It is in *judgment* that Bradley seeks the connection between subjectivity and objectivity in his phenomenological appraisal of history.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

There is an obvious neo-Kantian, neo-Hegelian strain to this analysis. Bradley uses the conceptual machinery of German idealism to come to terms with some of the basic inner tensions in phenomenological historicism.

A judgment is subjective insofar as it is an act of thought while at the same time it can have objective validity insofar as it comprehends things as either true or false. The general consciousness of the historian, as the setting for historical judgment, still does not guarantee a bridging of the gulf between the present and the past. Bradley finally resorts to analogical reasoning in order to transcend the separation of past and present experience. Human nature is uniform throughout history, though experiences are dissimilar. Yet all these experiences participate in a totality which preserves the continuity of historical experience. This difference in diversity makes possible analogies between the present and the past which in turn are the basis for historical inferences.¹²

From the subjective continuum of all experience Bradley is able to move to the objective judgment of historical evidence *via* the instrument of analogical reasoning. The notion of the uniformity of human nature which figured prominently in early formulations of progressive philosophies of history, such as can be found in Fontenelle, appears in historicism, not as the naturalistic uniformity of positivism, but as the freely creative subjectivity of all human experience, participation in which the historian can find assurances of valid connections between the present and the past. The imaginative self-understanding of the historian and the critical appraisal of the present thus renders all of the past as potentially appropriable since the same conditions which make possible all experience obtain throughout history.

Bradley's *Presuppositions of Critical History* was only

a preface to a full scale examination of the validity of historical knowledge. He readily admits that insufficient justice has been done to the questions of probability and certainty. Droysen's *Grundriss der Historik*, while being of seminal importance in the development of phenomenological historicism, pales considerably in detail and depth when compared to his work on the history of Prussian policy. It is, however, in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey that there is to be found the most sustained and singleminded attempt at a phenomenological interpretation of history. Though Dilthey left no finished and systematic interpretation of history, indeed he declared that a completed appraisal of history is an impossibility, his various works on the nature of the human studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*), on the notion of understanding (*Verstehen*), on hermeneutics, on the types of world-views (*Weltanschauungen*) and their development, plus the many treatises and reviews on an astonishing array of topics and authors, together give an extensive indication of phenomenological historicism as he thought it should be conceived and executed.

Along with Bradley and Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey believed that humanity discovers what it is through history. The study of history is therefore as much a form of self-understanding and awareness as it is an understanding of the other. The phenomenological historicism which Dilthey exemplified also declared that the objective and generally valid could only be approached through the historically relative and subjective. Dilthey believed that the human studies could be as much a knowing system of thought as the natural sciences even though its fundamental referent, human consciousness, is itself an historical, and thus relative, sphere.

To prevent the collapse of this conception of historical consciousness into a radical subjectivism was a fundamental problem for Dilthey and for phenomenological historicism in general. The transcendence of the dichotomy between the mental and the physical, so prevalent

¹² Ibid., pp. 99-104.

amongst positivists, is a feature of Dilthey's work that is also found in Droysen and Bradley. The individual is, in Dilthey's view, the only real unit of history, and it manifests both corporeal and spiritual characteristics. The separation of these characteristics in the consideration of the real process of life can only result in the distortion of historical reality. Since individuality is the real unit of history, the life-blood of its content, then understanding it must be the primary goal of historical inquiry. The understanding of individuality must however extol interrelation and connection above abstract distinctions because the life of the individual in the fullest sense lies in the reciprocal dependency of whole and parts, of inner and outer. Dilthey's foremost contribution to the human studies and to the phenomenological interpretation of history is his consistent emphasis on the interrelatedness of all aspects of the treatment of the human individual in history. Systems of interaction and the structure of relations are fundamental to this conception of the nature of the historical world.

Dilthey is well situated within the tradition of post-Renaissance historical expressivism which understands the individual in history, not in relation to a cosmic order, but as a self-defining and self-creating source of historical existence. The revelation of how these self-defining individuals are capable of understanding other individuals even in the face of great historical and cultural distance was, for Dilthey, a basic goal of the human studies. The influence of classical German Idealism on the phenomenological historicists was extensive. Humboldt and Hegel play an important part in the writings of Droysen. Dilthey also made an intensive study of Hegel in his later years. A primary aim of his conception of the human studies is to reconcile the subjectivity of the mind-constructed (*geistige*) world with an objective knowledge of it by creating a Kantian style critique of historical reason. The basic problem of this critique is the attainment of a knowledge of mind-constructed historical reality upon the basis of the recognition that the structure of this reality is deter-

mined by our mental construction and representation of it. Dilthey's phenomenological historicism, as can be seen from these brief generalizations, encompasses an extremely diverse array of thought orientations.

An integral element of the historicization of Western thought has been the levelling off of the ancient and medieval systems of hierarchical order. Initially, in post-Renaissance thought this treatment of all aspects of history, time, and the cosmic order as equals took place on the ontological plane and suitable adjustments in the cognitive approach to reality followed thereafter. Hierarchical systems of thought, however, died a slow death and even in early nineteenth century positivism there was an all-inclusive hierarchy of the sciences based on the principle of increasing complexity. In the late nineteenth century hierarchical considerations of the sciences gave way to a treatment of them as having two distinct orientations.

In his 1894 inaugural address as rector of the university of Strassburg, Wilhelm Windelband, sought to clarify the distinction between those sciences of experience (*Erfahrungswissenschaften*) which have nature as their object and those which have the events of history, by describing the former as nomothetic and the latter as idiographic.¹³ Nature and history are in this view co-extensive since the same object can be studied nomothetically or idiographically. The nomothetic sciences have general laws as the formal character of their cognitive goals, while the idiographic sciences are oriented towards singular historical facts and events.¹⁴ The thought of the natural sciences is inclined towards abstraction, while that of the historical sciences is directed towards a graphic vividness

¹³ Wilhelm Windelband, *Präludien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, Vol. II (Tübingen, Mohr, 1924), "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft," p. 145.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

(*Anschaulichkeit*) of the particular.¹⁵ As has been common in German thought, Windelband found in historical and individual experience a realm of incomprehensibility, an inexpressible and undefined presence.¹⁶ The ineffability of the individual was no less the bane of phenomenological historicism than it was of historical thought in classical German Idealism.

Heinrich Rickert, the neo-Kantian successor of Windelband, also distinguished between the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*) and the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) in terms of the individualizing procedure of history and the generalizing procedure of the sciences which approach nature from the standpoint of its universal characteristics.¹⁷ Insofar as both groups of sciences are empirical and deal strictly with that which is perceptually accessible, then there is no basis for exempting the cultural sciences from the same methods of investigation used in the natural sciences. In Rickert's view there is only one empirical reality and one scientific method for investigating it. If, however, in the examination of empirical reality things and events having a particular meaning or significance for us stand out from mere natural reality, then it is legitimate to ask different questions of such phenomena than would be the case in natural science.¹⁸ Rickert's advance over Windelband's distinction between the nomothetic and the idiographic sciences lies in his

more sophisticated use of the concept of value and the complexes of meaning constituted by values as the fundamental ground for the classification of the sciences.¹⁹ An object's cultural importance does not depend on what it has in common with other objects, which is the *locus classicus* of its significance in natural science, but on what distinguishes it from other objects. Rickert therefore ties the cultural significance of an object to its historical particularity. This historical particularity, considered as a mere heterogeneity, is the unessential component of the historical sciences which must be transformed into "historically *significant individualities* affected with *meaning*," if one is seeking the essential basis of the formation of historical concepts.²⁰

The unity and validity of these historical concepts, and of the cultural sciences in general, can only be premised, according to Rickert, on the unity and objectivity we attribute to values that are acknowledged as *valid*.²¹ As long as there is a crisis of values, the scientific basis of cultural and historical studies will be undermined. Furthermore, since the historical and cultural sciences are "superordinate" to the natural sciences, a pervasive uncertainty of values will lead to a general crisis of culture.²² Rickert

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁷ Heinrich Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (Tübingen, 1899) translated as *Science and History: A Critique of Positivist Epistemology* by George Reisman (New York, Nostrand Co., 1962), p. 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14. Since it is only in the cultural domain that such phenomena could come before us, Rickert believes it is more appropriate to call the disciplines antithetic to the natural sciences cultural sciences rather than sciences which deal with the manifestations of the human spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*).

¹⁹ "At all events, in the distinction between nature as devoid of value and culture as affected with value we already have the *essential* principle of division for the classification of the sciences, and we could show that the relevance which the distinction between meaningless and meaningful objects (i.e., between those that are not understandable and those that are understandable) has for the logical structure of the methods of the various sciences cannot be demonstrated until the methodological significance of the relevance of objects to values has first become clear." *Ibid.*, p. 21. *Vide* p. 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²² "It should rather be said that the point of view of the historical sciences that deal with cultural phenomena is altogether *superordinate* to that of the natural sciences,

considered the assumption of a third realm beyond the empirical reality of the world of sense and the nonsensorial, valid values as indispensable, but as was prevalent amongst phenomenological historicists, he could only conceptualize the suprahistorical by way of the historical and thus in the end always made the validity of transhistorical complexes of meaning and value dependent upon the vicissitudes of cultural and historical change. Even though the validity of values may be held to be perfectly objective relative to a certain historical period its universal and transhistorical validity is subverted by the relativity of subordinate realms of values and this in turn creates an uncertainty for all values situated in history.

Rickert and Windelband represent the school that sees the difference between the natural sciences and the humanistic disciplines in terms of the distinctive attitudes and approaches of the cognitive subject. It is the method of understanding empirical reality that determines the form of science and not its particular content. They thought that the cultural studies could be raised to the level of science by the objectivity of this method. Dilthey, however, refused to accept the criteria the neo-Kantians used for distinguishing between the sciences. The historical world of the human studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*) cannot be reduced to a particularizing approach because it encompasses the individual and the universal in their interrelation.²³ The human-historical

because it is by far the most comprehensive. Not only are the natural sciences an historical product of civilized man, but also "nature" itself, in the logical or formal sense, is nothing but a theoretical value of *cultural* life, a valid, i.e., objectively valuable, *conception* of reality on the part of the human intellect. And it is precisely the natural sciences that must always *presuppose* the absolute *validity* of the value attaching to this conception, as well as that of the complex of meaning constituted by it." *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²³ Hajo Holborn, "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Critique of Historical Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1950, p. 106.

world involves both a time-bound, transitory element and a desire for transcendental stability, in Dilthey's view. It contains limitations as well as the constant human reach beyond these limits and it reveals as its content a never-ending struggle between the determinism of natural forces and the independence of human volition.²⁴

The subject matter of history is, in Dilthey's representation, a complex interaction of tendencies that in various ways shuttle between the individual and the general, between the particular and the overarching context. The methodological separation of these tendencies by the neo-Kantians results in the distortion of historical reality, according to Dilthey. A single method for *Verstehen*, and for grounding the human studies, was as anathema to Dilthey as metaphysical monism. Pluralism was for him as much the desired approach in methodological considerations as it was in the formation of historical concepts and in the assessment of the conditions for *Verstehen*. This pluralism is of an extreme complexity since it encompasses not only the evidence of the senses as given in the historical record, or the appearance of mind in outer reality, but also the inner reality of the individual. The distinction between the human studies and the physical sciences rests to a great extent upon our ability to experience and relive (*nacherleben*) this inner reality.²⁵

A discipline only belongs to the human studies when its subject matter is approached through the connection between experience (*Erleben*), expression (*Ausdruck*), and understanding

²⁴ See, Michael Ermarth, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 116, where there is an account of the main real-dialectical oppositions which Dilthey saw to be persistent in historical life.

²⁵ H.P. Rickman, ed. and tr. *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 247.

(*Verstehen*).²⁶ This triumvirate of referents is the hallmark of Dilthey's investigations into the construction of the human-historical world (*Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 1910). It also marks a change of focus in his thought. Originally, Dilthey looked for the foundation of the human studies in a strict analysis of the subjective acts of experience. In his later thought there is a shift to the intersubjective and historically mediated aspect of experience.²⁷ It was recognized by him that the inner experience of one's own states can never reveal our individuality unless there is a comparison through differentiation and identity with the other. The *Grundwissenschaft* of the human studies cannot therefore be primarily psychological but must be historicocultural for it is only in history that the essential features of human individuality are revealed.

It would, however, be incorrect to see Dilthey's aborted attempt at a psychological *Grundwissenschaft* for the human studies as a radical shift in his thought. In the *Ideas about a Descriptive and Analytical Psychology* (*Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie*) he lays down as a crucial distinction between the sciences and the human studies the fact that the objects of the former are presented to consciousness as coming from outside in the form of isolated phenomena while those of the human studies are given as coming from within as a living continuum (*Zusammenhang*).²⁸ The primary distinction Dilthey makes between his own descriptive and analytical psychology and that of the explanatory and constructive variety is one of postulating a nexus which is originally and continuously given throughout all the developed modes of human psychic life or of, on the other hand, deriving

psychological data from "a limited number of analytically found elements."²⁹ Psychology must therefore begin with the totality of evolved psychic life and then proceed with an analysis of components which are united in reality. Constructive psychology derives evolved psychic life from these abstract elements as the original givens of its inquiry. In Dilthey's view this is a misguided procedure since the given nexus of life itself must be the starting point of all psychological articulation.

The notion of the totality of the individual and the fundamental interrelatedness of subjective experience are crucial concepts which Dilthey retained in his later thought. Psychological development is only possible on the basis of the connectedness of structural nexus, purposiveness, the value of life, creative processes and psychic articulation.³⁰ Also, in the *Ideas about a Descriptive and Analytical Psychology* it can be seen that Dilthey even in this period was loath to treat of psychology in isolation from history.³¹ Psychology cannot be conducted properly unless it is in

²⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁷ Ermarth, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

²⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, trs. Richard M. Zaner and Kenneth L. Heiges (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1977), p. 27.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 35, 41.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

³¹ "Man does not apprehend what he is by musing over himself, nor by doing psychological experiments, but rather by history. This analysis of the products of human spirit - destined to open for us a glance at the genesis of the psychic nexus of its forms and its action - must, in addition to the analysis of historical products, observe and collect everything which it can seize of the *historical processes* wherein such a nexus becomes constituted. It is precisely on the combination of these two methods that every historical study of the genesis, forms and actions of the psychic nexus in man depends." Ibid., p. 63. There is a rough analogy between Dilthey's interrelation of structure and development in psychology with Auguste Comte's connection between social statics and social dynamics. For Comte statics are the abstract laws of structural analysis, while dynamics are the laws of historical development. In Dilthey's psychology there is a structural nexus of psychic life but this nexus is also teleological and this makes it developmental since the value-system embedded in this purposiveness causes psychic life to have a determinant tendency.

conjunction with both an analysis of historical products and an investigation into the historical processes whereby the original psychic nexus of life is constituted. It is in this insight that we can see a connection between Dilthey's attempt to found a *Grundwissenschaft* for the human studies on the basis of psychological experience and the later post-1900 shift to a more rigorous treatment of historical and intersubjective experience.

A basic feature of understanding is the projection of what we have actually experienced into our own expression and that of others. The meaning of an historical event is therefore a complex of our own experience, the injection of that experience into its outward expression, and an understanding of the experience and expression of others in the cognition of structural similarities between these experiences which makes possible the projection of one experience to another. Dilthey is therefore not interested in experience *per se* but in the intelligible structure that lies within it. *Verstehen* cannot therefore be the intuitive grasp of some inward essence, or simply an undefinable empathy with the past, but must be the elucidation of structural relations as they are manifested in systems of interaction (*Wirkungszusammenhänge*) and multiple coherences. So, although *Verstehen* is intimately involved in the historical process, it also has an ahistorical focus on the intelligible structures and generalities which permeate the historical field.³² The totality of understanding reveals not only the subjective aspect of experience but also the objectifications of life. It is the externalization of human subjectivity in the manifold of structural systems which pervade history that is a foundational referent for the human studies. These objectifications are the subject matter and point of departure for understanding in the sociohistorical studies and always contain the relation of inner to outer - a

relation which Dilthey looked upon as a fundamental category of life, along with such others as temporality and value.³³

The relation of the objectifications of life through understanding to experience whereby both self-understanding and the interpretation of the experience of others takes place is a crucial step in the intimate appropriation of what was previously held to be external and alien.³⁴ The severance of the relation between the inner and the outer in natural science dehumanizes what is held to be factual. In the human studies this connection is re-established. It is then understood that every fact is human-made and thus historical. The re-establishment of the connection between the inner and the outer makes possible the understanding of the common features of the objectifications of life. Natural science must seek its laws in an already given, objective realm because it is unaware of the historicity of facts. The only way that the remoteness of the facts of natural science can be diluted is through the recognition of this historicity. It is only in this historicity that the original connection between life and science can be brought to light. There is an obvious connection here between Vico and Dilthey since both believed that it was on the basis of a common and creative human nature that we can come to know and understand the overwhelming diversity of the historical world.³⁵

³² Theodore Plantinga, *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 130.

³³ H.P. Rickman, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Pioneer of the Human Studies* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1979), "Dilthey's main categories of life are inner-outer, means-ends (or purpose), value, part-whole, power, meaning and temporality." p. 133. It is important to note that Dilthey would consider this list as neither definitive nor finished due to the ongoing revelations of the historical understanding.

³⁴ Rickman, ed. and tr., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings*, p. 192.

³⁵ H.P. Rickman, "Vico and Dilthey's Methodology of the Human Studies," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 452.

In the drafts for a *Critique of Historical Reason* there can be found Dilthey's well known definition of understanding as "a rediscovery of the I in the Thou."³⁶ The "Thou" here refers not only to the individual subject in a community but also to systems of culture and the totality of mind and universal history. The degree of understanding is therefore a function of the level of complex involvement in what is other to consciousness but which can be appropriated by it. The common theme of the identity of the I and the other that is retained throughout the various levels of complexity involved in understanding makes possible the effective connection or working together (*Zusammenwirken*) of the different results in the human studies.

The determination of meaning in the historical realm involves a threefold process.³⁷ One must, first of all, try to get into the mind of the historical agent by grasping the meaning of a sign or historical expression. Secondly, the understanding of the meaning of historical actions can be effected by a re-experiencing of the feelings and experiences of others. Finally, understanding involves the interpretation of historical expressions and events on the basis of the larger context which is determined by the ways in which the historical events affected the historian, by its consequences in time, and by a consideration of the entire life of the historical agent by the historian. Every expression is imbued with meaning insofar as it is a signified part of life and points to life as a whole.³⁸ The

notion of meaning can only arise within the process of understanding which in turn can only take place insofar as there is a relationship between something outward and something inward of which it is the expression. For Dilthey there can be no separation of life and history since life approached as "a temporal and causal construction objectified in time" is nothing other than history.³⁹ The determination of meaning within the context of historical understanding involves both an attempt at an identification of the intelligible structure present in the experiences of historical agents and historians and a differentiation of these experiences in terms of the historian's ability to situate the material of the historical field within a larger context. This differentiation on the basis of an identity of experience makes possible the notions of understanding better (*besserverstehen*) and immanent critique.

On account of the distance between the historian and the historical agent, the former is able to evaluate both the events and expressions produced by the latter within the wider context of the fulfilment of aims and the actual degree of attainment of intended purposes. The future outcome of historical events is not something that can be known by the historical agent. The historian therefore has a definite perspectival advantage over the historical material that is being investigated. There may be a re-experiencing of the experience of the author of historical events and expressions, there may be an understanding of the inner coherence of a work without explicit reference to authorial experience, and there may be a contextualization of both forms of understanding within a larger historical context.⁴⁰ It is this continual

³⁶ Rickman, ed. and tr., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings*, p. 208.

³⁷ Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 119. See also, H.P. Rickman, ed., *Meaning in History, W. Dilthey's Thoughts on History and Society* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1961), Editor's Introduction, p. 50, and H.A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), pp. 232-233.

³⁸ Rickman, ed. and tr., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings*, pp. 235-238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁴⁰ Understanding of the inner coherence of a work without reference to authorial experience may be described as the "philological" level of interpretation,

contextualization that forced Dilthey to conclude that history could never be fixed, finished, or absolute. It is also on the basis of such contextualization that an immanent critique can take place. This form of interpretive attitude involves both the internal or immanent re-experiencing and re-thinking of authorial experience and thought and a transcendence of this experience and thought through the critical re-appraisal of this position from a wider historical perspective.⁴¹

Through the interpretation of the objectifications of life as manifested in history one can come to understand in part the universal conditions for subjective experience. Understanding particular objectifications can lead back to a more general understanding of the subjective processes which made possible these objectifications. There is thus a constant movement from a consideration of the whole to that of the parts and vice versa since a universal-historical survey of the whole presupposes an understanding of the parts and segments of the historical course of events can only be understood in relation to the whole.⁴² This illumination of the whole by the parts and the parts by the whole is Dilthey's well known concept of the "hermeneutical circle."

The interrelation between the individual and the general not only constitutes the human-historical world but is also the central dynamic of its interpretation. In phenomenological historicism the circle is no longer representative of a finished system of thought but indicative of an epistemological direction that is indefinitely

while the elucidation of the relation of a work to its wider context would be the "historical" level. Structural coherence and interrelatedness is of course an object of investigation on both levels. *Vide*, Ermarth, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁴² Rickman, ed. and tr., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings*, p. 196.

open-ended and always imperfect. This is an historicization of the traditional metaphysical circle since the opposing terms and categories contained within it are never harmonized and reciprocally closed off but rather the circle itself is symbolic of a constant historical and interpretive movement between the related terms. The result is an everwidening horizon of understanding. The developed historical consciousness is, for Dilthey, one that is always in the process of formation. Such a consciousness sees beyond the conditions of its own historicity, but at the same time is aware of the relativity of all historical phenomena.⁴³

The relative is not, for Dilthey, the realm of the unintelligible but expresses the incomplete and partial.⁴⁴ The objectifications of life cannot have absolute validity because they are historically relative. The absence of such absoluteness does not, however, entail the negation of a relative validity since these objectifications are authentic manifestations of subjective experience. Like Vico, Dilthey was not so much interested in confronting the issue of conflicting testimony as he was in revealing the basis of that testimony in the creative spirit of humanity. All historical evidence therefore has a place in historiographical interpretation even if it contains contradictions, inconsistencies and incoherencies. The issue of historical truth thus becomes secondary. The historical consciousness of the finitude and relativity of all historical phenomena is for Dilthey a great step forward in the liberation of humanity since it makes possible the transcendence of an attachment to historical positions that claim universal validity but which

⁴³ Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ Gerard Masur, in "Wilhelm Dilthey and the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1952, fails to qualify what is meant when he calls Dilthey a relativist, *vide*, p. 106.

are, from the standpoint of the historical consciousness, historically conditioned and only relatively valid. The position of the historical consciousness brings us to the central dilemma of Dilthey's phenomenological historicism and the *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*. How can the historical consciousness, on the one hand, assert the historically conditioned character and relative validity of all its objects and on the other seek a science of its objects which must include universal and non-relative criteria for their investigation?

The unique individual in history is, in Dilthey's view, the basic reference for all historical investigation. Hence, the importance he attributed to historical biography. The historical productions of the unique individual, for the most part, have only a relative validity because of the historically conditioned nature of their creation. The historical methodology that results from the historical consciousness is therefore directed towards identifying those factors of the human condition that are in history. This methodology dilutes the absoluteness of any absolute in history since it approaches such an absolute not from the internal standpoint of its cohesiveness but from the external conditions of history which are looked upon then as the primary determinates in its development. It is still possible of course to espouse an historicistic methodology while at the same time admitting of the existence of moral values, ideational constructs, or human freedom without making a specific reference to their functional dependence on history.⁴⁵

The historicization of moral values and freedom can result in the negation of their autonomy and validity. Dilthey, however, saw in the relative historicity of systems of thought and valuation an expression of the creative freedom of subjective

human experience. The historicity of the human studies thus puts us in the dilemma of having on the one hand to acknowledge the historically determined character of the human situation and, on the other, to recognize that it is only in this historical milieu that freedom is both possible and understandable. This is but another aspect of the basic contradiction of the historical consciousness. The science whose objects have a relative validity is the counterpart of a freedom that can only be free insofar as it embodies a relative historical creation. Likewise, the historical consciousness relatively finitizes all its objects through the methodology of investigating historical determinates but destroys the foundation for such an investigation by raising the methodology to a *Weltanschauung* which must in the end deny even the validity of the absoluteness that is a necessary feature of its own method. The elevation of the methodology to a *Weltanschauung* might be taken as deliberately avoidable but if it is maintained that humanity is constituted by its history then the methodology must necessarily become a *Weltanschauung* since the admission of limits to it is denied by its own directedness towards the historical.

In a late work entitled *The Essence of Philosophy (Das Wesen der Philosophie, 1907)* Dilthey tried to come to grips with the contradiction between the tendency towards universal validity in the metaphysical systems and the recognition by the historical consciousness of the relativity and transience of all human creation. Consciousness is, for Dilthey, always a totality of feeling, volition, and thought. *Weltanschauungen* are not simply the products of thought but emerge from the totality of our mental structure and physical being. Their formation, as Dilthey says, is "determined by the will to stabilize the conception of the world, the evaluation of life and the guidance of the will..."⁴⁶ Dilthey's isolation of naturalism, the idealism of freedom, and objec-

⁴⁵ Vide, for example, H.P. Rickman, ed., *Meaning in History*, Editor's Introduction, pp. 52-58.

⁴⁶ Rickman, ed. and tr., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings*, p. 141.

tive idealism as the main types of *Weltanschauungen*, like his isolation of temporality, inner-outer, value and so on, as the main categories of life is not to be taken as a fixed and unrevivable typology of the human-historical world. Dilthey always left open the possibilities for categorical and interpretive and adjustment. When a *Weltanschauung* goes beyond the simple urge to penetrate the whole of the world and life and becomes a conceptual system of thought grounded in principles and having universal validity, then it is metaphysics proper.⁴⁷

There is a fundamental tendency in philosophy toward universality, but this desire for totality is in constant struggle not only with the unattainable demands for a universally valid knowledge but also with the recognition by the historical consciousness that all creations which result from the metaphysical desire for totality must in the end be looked upon as transient and relatively *vallbid*. It is therefore impossible for philosophy to understand the world by means of a metaphysical system that is held to be universally *vallbid*.⁴⁸ The urge towards the creation of a metaphysical system must also, in the contemporary world, be tempered by the awareness, born of the historical consciousness, that all creativity is within the context of the historical continuum and is dependent upon it.⁴⁹ Dilthey's concepts of

creativity and freedom do not therefore rest upon the negation of the finite or some form of liberation but upon the formation within, and the active contribution to, a pre-existent historical reality that is shaped solely by this continuous effervescence of human subjectivity. The treatment by the metaphysical systems of their own standpoint as universally valid negates this creative process since it is only in the constant formation of relative validities that the process is sustained. The historical consciousness is therefore the end result of all metaphysical labour and it is aware that this labour must be indefinitely repeated in the historical process.

It was recognized by Dilthey that there is an inherent contradiction in the conclusion that all the absolutes of history are relative. He attempted to resolve this contradiction by pointing out that the consequence of a historical study of *Weltanschauungen* is not their simple relativity of value but the "sovereignty of the mind" in each one of them.⁵⁰ In all the dispositions of subjectivity there exists but one reality of the world for us. The task of *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* is to give a systematic account of the relation of the human mind to what Dilthey refers to as "the riddle of the world and of life". Philosophy therefore recognizes the relativity of historical creation but its goal is to contextualize all relativities within the overriding connection of the human mind to the world.

If Dilthey's historicism was radical, then it would be impossible for him to admit of this universal appraisal of historical relativity. It is the rigidification of the universal value of human creativity in the metaphysical systems that Dilthey was on his guard against since he saw in this a

⁴⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Essence of Philosophy*, trs. S.A. Emery and W.T. Emery (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), pp. 62, 75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ "Herein lies the eternal contradiction between the creative and the historical consciousness. The former naturally tries to forget the past and to ignore the better in the future. But the latter lives in the synthesis of all times, and it perceives in all individual creation the accompanying relativity and transience. This contradiction is the silently born affliction most characteristic of philosophy today. For in the contemporary philosopher his own creative activity is copresent with the historical consciousness, since at present his philosophy

without this would embrace only a fragment of reality. He must recognize his creative activity as a part of the historical continuum, in which he consciously produces something dependent." *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

betrayal of the basic creative urge to transcend an attachment to the determinate, the finite, and that which is unalterably fixed. Universal validity is a self-delusion of metaphysical thought not only on account of the revelations of the historical consciousness but also because the creativity which made possible the formulation of this universal validity cannot co-exist with it.

Dilthey does not offer a conceptually rigorous philosophy of history that takes into account the attempt in some of the metaphysical systems to de-absolutize previous metaphysical systems in roughly the same manner as he relativizes them within the context of the historical consciousness. The precise relationship between the position of a philosophy that recognizes the breakdown of system and the historical drama of each system attempting to deal with history from the standpoint of an all-inclusive system of reference was not one that Dilthey confronted

in a detailed conceptual manner. The question then of whether the *Weltanschauung* of the historical consciousness is a part of the historical process itself, or a transcendence of it, or both, is left unanswered.

There is an inclination in Dilthey's work toward the absolutization of the historical consciousness but at the same time he looked upon the sovereignty of the mind and creative subjectivity as a transhistorical absolute that persists through the historical not as a fixed essence or a bloodless abstraction but as something which is a pervasive presence in all the historical and concrete objectifications of life. It is the retention of the transhistorical absoluteness of the human mind in relation to its objectifications that distinguishes Dilthey's phenomenological historicism from the radical historicism that became the legacy of the nineteenth century.

ELEUTHERIA ISSN 0843-8064. Published semi-annually in the Spring and Fall by the **INSTITUTE OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY**: P.O. Box 913, Station B, Ottawa, CANADA K1P 5P9 Tel: (613) 594-5881. Fax: (613) 594-3952. Charitable Reg. No. 07799841-20. Available to all members. Subscription rates and the availability of back issues and of volumes in the **INSTITUTE'S MONOGRAPH SERIES** will be supplied upon request.