

Between Nature and Spirit: Naturalism and Anti-Naturalism in Dilthey

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1. The Promise and Crisis of Naturalism

In the hundred years since his death, Wilhelm Dilthey's works have evoked contradictory receptions. Dilthey's epistemic project is to a large extent »naturalizing«, as his Neo-Kantian, phenomenological, and later hermeneutical critics have repeatedly noted. At the same time, it is »anti-naturalistic« according to his positivistic and scientific reception.

In this paper, I reexamine the mediated nexus of nature and spirit articulated in Dilthey's works, particularly the writings of the 1890's that are closer to a naturalistic and positivistic perspective without embracing it. I argue that Dilthey's project is more coherent than his naturalistic and anti-naturalistic critics have supposed. Such a reconsideration of Dilthey's project offers an evocative alternative strategy for responding to the opposition between naturalism and anti-naturalism that continues to inform contemporary philosophy.

Beginning with the naturalistic perspective presupposed by and established in the modern natural sciences, Dilthey immanently unfolds its scope, possibilities, and limits in relation to the psychological, historical, and ethical life of concrete embodied individuals. He does so without relying on essentialist religious or metaphysical conceptions of being, ideal validity, or an unchanging self. Dilthey not only accepted the validity of the modern natural sciences, he justified them by historically and anthropologically contextualizing them. Nature and history do not necessarily indicate the elimination of knowledge and truth; they are its contexts and conditions. Without these life-processes, and the emergence of the cognitive from the non-cognitive, there would be no science as a practice of knowing and enactment of truth.

In discussions of Dilthey's conception of science, Dilthey's attention to the natural sciences is frequently underemphasized, even though Dilthey wrote extensively about the historical development and life-comportment of the modern natural sciences.¹ In these writings, such as

¹ One example of this interest is Dilthey's attention to developments in the natural sciences in his review essays gathered in G.S. volumes XV-XVII. References to

his account of the constitutive role of Stoicism in the development of early modern natural philosophy, Dilthey helped pioneer the history of science as a philosophical undertaking.² Dilthey's this-worldly and historical justification of the sciences, and his corresponding transformation of the modern project of epistemology, critically traced the extent and limits of scientific knowledge in the nexus or context of life (*Lebenszusammenhang*).

The epistemology of the sciences not only calls for its social-historical contextualization; it also needs to be rethought in relation to its psychological, anthropological, and natural conditions. In this context, human knowledge is faced with the felt self-relational reflexivity (*Innewerden*) of the self, the singular individuation of natural and historical life in an individual life, and the inability of humans to fathom and comprehend the whole of life as an integrated metaphysical or universally valid system. The truth of the naturalistic worldview that orients natural scientific inquiry has no limits in the continuing practice of the natural sciences. However, the natural standpoint enters into aporia and crisis when it is illegitimately extended beyond its life-contexts and reified as a metaphysical world-system independent of experience.

Dilthey naturalistically contextualized epistemic claims that involve an appeal to what transcends experience and the categories of life enacted through experience. At the same time, Dilthey hermeneutically rejected the naïve empiricism and intuitionism that require an appeal to a non-interpreted immediate givenness. For Dilthey, there is no access to experience independent of the mediation of expression and understanding; the direct self-access and transparent self-evidence of an uninterpreted intuitionist »inner experience« or an unmediated empiricist »sensuous experience« prove to be illusory. In contrast to vulgar life-philosophy and growing irrationalist appeals to a pure stream of life without the mediation of words and concepts, which Dilthey would challenge with a scientific conception of life-philosophy for the sake of life that cannot live without knowledge, Dilthey noted how both concepts and intuitions are inappropriately separated from their life-contexts. Through the overextension and abuse of reason and intuition, lived-experiences are fixated

Wilhelm Dilthey's works are to: *Gesammelte Schriften*, 26 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914–2011 (cited as G.S.); English translations, when available, are from R.A. Makkreel and F. Rodi (eds.): *Wilhelm Dilthey, Selected Works*, 6 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985–2010 (cited as SW).

² Such as the essays gathered in G.S. II; on the intellectual historical context of Dilthey's account of the transition to modern science and modernity, see L. Frohman, *Neo-Stoicism and the Transition to Modernity in Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of History*. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56: 2, 1995, 263–287.

and dynamic life-perspectives become reified metaphysical world-pictures.

Dilthey's defense of naturalism is a limited and conditional one to the extent that he critically resituated naturalistic claims vis-à-vis the subject in the experience. Dilthey's epistemic subject is a situated, experiential, and embodied one within the life-nexus. Insofar as it involves more than being an impersonal product of natural and social forces, this experiential subject could well be described as involving a »weak transcendental« argument. Dilthey liberalizes the naturalistic thesis through the conditional yet still significant self. Due to Dilthey's moderate nominalism and experientialism, Dilthey minimalistically reinterpreted Kantian a priori transcendental categories as conditionally enacted and contextually embodied life-categories (*Lebenskategorien*). Dilthey consequently confronted naturalism, as the exteriority of worldly causal relations, with the reflexively felt and interpretively mediated character of the phenomenally given and the factual in the lived-experiences of an individual life that is experienced as being my own.

The experiential hermeneutical perspective of an individual life cannot disregard or escape the natural causal relations with which it is entangled. This contingent self, as the individuation of meaning in the midst of its natural and social conditions, cannot be coherently and adequately reduced to, or reconstructed as, a discrete set of »natural« elements abstracted from the complex life-nexus. In the co-givenness of self and world, spirit and nature, to be a self is to have a world »there-for-me«. The world, as a relational nexus of significance, presupposes its being-there for someone. The individual is ineffable from the perspective of the natural standpoint. It is the individual person as a living ethical reality that is the other defining feature of modernity and the primary focus of the human sciences in Dilthey's historical analysis.

Despite the role of the ethical individual in the human sciences, naturalism is the primary methodological orientation for all modern science. Yet it is exposed to a dialectic that results in dogmatic metaphysical theses and explosive aporias that force its liberalization. The naturalistic standpoint is caught in perplexity and crisis in being extended to ethical life and challenged with issues of value, purpose, and meaning that it cannot appropriately address. It is the contexts and contents of life – as the mediation of nature and spirit – that motivate the methodological differentiation of the sciences and the articulation of reality in more complex and multifaceted ways.

2. Dilthey and Naturalistic Positivism

Dilthey's name is frequently invoked in Anglo-American contexts in conjunction with the idea – articulated by C.P. Snow in the mid-twentieth-century – that the natural sciences and humanities constitute two distinct cultures. Dilthey is understood as a radical dualist in this discussion and this remains the predominant way of construing his distinction between interpretive understanding in the human sciences and causal explanation in the natural sciences. However, within philosophical discourses, Dilthey has also been read as a proponent of the supremacy of one culture over the other.

One way of reading Dilthey identifies the basic tendency of his thinking as being in some sense ›naturalizing‹ and ›positivistic‹. Although this judgment might appear peculiar, Dilthey himself affirmed the family affinity between these two movements – along with materialism – as developmental variations of a common ›natural standpoint‹ or ›natural worldview‹. Dilthey not only noted their affinity with and resonance with one another but with his own critical empirical project that also begins with the fact of the modern natural sciences. Broadly construed, the naturalistic standpoint encompasses a guiding commitment to a non-supernatural and scientific conception of the world. Naturalism is transformed into natural scientific positivism, according to Dilthey, when the critical standpoint of the phenomenal character of the physical world is recognized.³ The positivist turn in the modern natural sciences entails that naturalism and materialism as doctrinal metaphysical systems are illusory.

Dilthey's later hermeneutical critics, Heidegger and Gadamer, have maintained the continuity between Dilthey and scientism.⁴ Heidegger claimed that Dilthey's differentiation of two varieties of sciences, natural and human, remains a positivistic distinction. It is derivative of the more original question of being (*Sein*) as such and as a unified whole in contrast with the ontic investigation of beings as entities (*Seiende*). Gadamer maintained that Dilthey was trapped between the scientific methodologically reductive conception of the world and the romantic experience of an affectively moved and felt vital individuality.⁵ Because of his affinity with

³ Cf. G.S. V, 403.

⁴ On Dilthey and positivism, see H. Sommerfeld, *Wilhelm Dilthey und der Positivismus: Eine Untersuchung zur ›Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften‹*. Berlin: Buchdruckerei von J. Herper, 1926; H.-H. Gander expands on the Heidegger-inspired analysis of Dilthey's positivism as the culmination of metaphysics in his: *Positivismus als Metaphysik: Voraussetzungen und Grundstrukturen von Diltheys Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*. Freiburg: Alber, 1988.

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. London: Continuum, 2004, 214.

positivism, Gadamer has stressed how Dilthey remained a student of Comte and Mill as well as of Goethe and Schleiermacher. This characterization of Dilthey makes little sense if ›naturalistic positivism‹ is defined in the limited sense of, in Benedetto Croce's words, ›the enemy of everything spiritual and historical‹.⁶ An expanded and historically fairer exposition of positivism, one that allows us to productively and critically clarify Heidegger and Gadamer's portrayal of Dilthey, is that it is naturalistic and positivistic in the sense that it encompasses: (1) the critique of metaphysical conceptions of reality for the sake of encountering and investigating reality in its empirical givenness and phenomenality and (2) the epistemic priority of the methods, models, and results of the modern natural sciences.

In another variation on this line of criticism, one adopted by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, it is argued that Dilthey did not overcome the last residues of naturalistic biology and universalistic anthropology by sufficiently historicizing and socializing human existence.⁷ This is intentional on Dilthey's part insofar as he opposed the one-sidedness of the historical school as much as he did a limited reductive naturalism. In an early response to Dilthey's criticism of the notion of a folk soul (*Volksseele*), or collective agency, Georg Simmel contended that there are no real individuals for the same reasons that Dilthey argued there are no collective entities. The collective and the individual are equally constituted products of natural conditions and social forces.⁸ Simmel proposed that this position, Dilthey is not directly named, was a positivism that inconsequentially stopped short in the face of the myth of the person.⁹

3. Dilthey and Anti-Naturalism

A second way of reading Dilthey has made his thought the target for proponents of the thorough naturalization of the human sciences and everyday life. Dilthey appears as a major antagonist of scientific naturalism from Otto Neurath's polemical assessment to Chrysostomos Mantzavi-

⁶ B. Croce: *History as the Story of Liberty*. London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1941, 129.

⁷ On Benjamin's reading of Dilthey's writings as an anthropologically based opponent of radical historicity, see B. Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 53.

⁸ Compare the discussion of these points in L. Udehn: *Methodological Individualism: Background, History and Meaning*, 2001, 68–74.

⁹ Ibid.

nos's more recent book *Naturalistic Hermeneutics*. According to this argument, Dilthey cannot successfully prove that the human and natural sciences are discrete autonomous unities and that this thesis dangerously undermines the unity, coherence, and integrity of the sciences.¹⁰ Dilthey is read as placing inherent limits on the progress of positive scientific knowledge and rejecting a naturalistic conception of the world for one inhabited by biographical persons, felt and conceptual motivations, social groups, cultural patterns, political institutions, and other mythical folk-concepts. Dilthey's differentiation of the human sciences consequently places them outside the realm of legitimate scientific inquiry. The expanded notion of rationality and science promoted by Dilthey inevitably leads to irrationality and anti-science for these critics. This positivist criticism is echoed in Marxist materialism; Lenin and Lukács described Dilthey and Weber's justification of interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) in the human sciences as a higher obscurantism and non-clerical form of idealism.¹¹

There are earlier expressions of such suspicions concerning the meaning and implications of interpretive understanding, which is the elementary stumbling block for Dilthey's science oriented commentators. Theobald Ziegler in the late 19th-century warned of a »dictatorial Ignorabimus« (»we will not know«) that he proposed stemmed from Dilthey's interpretation of Augustine. Dilthey emphasized Augustine's articulation of an irrational subjective interiority and ineffable individuality that can only be comprehended through an intuitive felt understanding. Such a feeling-to-feeling transmission between persons cannot be reproduced and thus endangers the objectivity and rationality of science.

An interesting disagreement concerning Dilthey's import for the sciences is evident in the von Mises brothers. The economist of the Austrian school Ludwig von Mises accepted Dilthey's methodological individualism and the incalculable character of life in the 1920's in his confrontation with Neurath's conception of socialist calculation. The logical positivist Richard von Mises maintained, however, that *ignoramus et ignorabimus* – the »we do not know and will not know« that Emil Du Bois-Reymond introduced in a lecture on August 14, 1872 – is a direct consequence of

Dilthey's differentiation of explanation (*erklären*) and understanding (*verstehen*).¹²

Walter Pollack and Georg Misch argued against the claim that understanding the finitude and conditionality of cognitively established theoretical knowledge as entailing an obscurantist prohibition on further research and inquiry.¹³ If we turn to Dilthey's discussions of Du Bois-Reymond's thesis, Dilthey actively rejected the idea that there are intrinsic limits to scientific inquiry even as he argued that the sciences are differentiated and varied by their objects.¹⁴ The unity of science is not to be dogmatically limited; it is differentiated through the multiplicity of the empirical world. Dilthey would consequently agree with Haeckel's critical reply to Du Bois-Reymond's *Ignorabimus* and Virchow's *Restringamur – Impavidi progrediamur* (»advance fearlessly«), while disputing positivistic claims about the import and implications of the sciences within ordinary everyday life.

In an early *Literaturbrief* from 1876, Dilthey argues that Du Bois-Reymond's thesis is as unscientific as the dogmatic scientific materialism that it attempts to oppose.¹⁵ The current configuration of the scope and limits of the sciences can and will be redrawn. Crises and alternative hypotheses and theories reconfigure the scope and limits of scientific knowledge. However, being disposed towards Hume's argumentation concerning what theory and scientific theory can achieve, and prefiguring Rudolf Carnap's distinction between science and ethics, Dilthey concluded that there are no internal limits to science in its own domain yet, even if every question could be scientifically resolved into natural laws, the riddles and tasks of practical life would remain.

Jürgen Moltmann rightly argues that Dilthey did not advocate obscurantism in response to science and reason. Dilthey identified a scientific obscurantism in those who overlooked history, deluded that they alone possess truth independently of others.¹⁶ Their ahistorical lack of vision resembles the priestly princes of metaphysics who refuse to acknowledge the constitutive role of the affective, the subjective, and the individual that are the conditions of both life and knowledge. No desires and senti-

¹⁰ O. Neurath, *Soziologie im Physikalismus* (1931) in: M. Stoltzner, ed., *Wiener Kreis. Texte zur wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung*. Hamburg: Meiner, 2006, 285; C. Mantzavinos, *Naturalistic Hermeneutics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

¹¹ On Dilthey and Marxist materialism, see K. Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 184; T. Rockmore, *Irrationalism: Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason*, 1992, 212.

¹² R. von Mises, *Positivism: A Study in Human Understanding*. New York: Dover Publications, 1968, 209.

¹³ W. Pollack, *Über die philosophischen Grundlagen der wissenschaftlichen Forschung. Als Beitrag zu einer Methodenpolitik*. Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1907: 119; G. Misch, *Vom Lebens- und Gedankenkreis Wilhelm Diltheys*. Frankfurt a. Main: G. Schulte-Bulmke, 1947, 49.

¹⁴ Pollack 1907, 119.

¹⁵ G.S. XVII, 5.

¹⁶ J. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, 60.

ments run through the veins of their knowing subjects and so such subjects are constitutively incapable not only of living but of knowing. The thesis that reason is grounded in sentiment and historical life is of course another argument with precedents in Hume's philosophy of common life.

Misch maintained that Dilthey adopted the same phenomenalist epistemic basis as the positivist advocates of the natural sciences, whilst reinterpreting its significance and implications. There can be in Dilthey no »we will not know« that limits processes of further intellectual development.¹⁷ There is instead only a reasonable recognition that we do not know in an absolute or royal way. This pluralist claim cuts against both reductionistic naturalism and anti-naturalism. Insofar as anti-naturalism assumes a royal route to truth through intuition, dialectic, or phenomenology, it commits the same error as its opponents.¹⁸

There are a number of readings suggestive of an alternative conception of nature and spirit in Dilthey's writings. Ermarth describes Dilthey as an idealist inculcated »with a considerable dose of naturalism«. But more adequately, as Dilthey did not idealistically deny the natural and social exteriority of the world, others stress Dilthey's intermediate and mediating role in these disputes.¹⁹ Dilthey articulated what could well be depicted as an expansive and liberal in contrast with a cramped and illiberal naturalism; one that could encompass value, validity, and the ideal as the content of consciousness in accordance with a scientific – and person-oriented principle of phenomenality (*Satz der Phänomenalität*) in which nature and the world are not only neutral, impersonal, and indifferent but »there-for-me«:

»The supreme principle of philosophy is the principle of phenomenality: according to this principle everything that exists for me is subject to the condition that it is a fact of my consciousness. All outer things, too, are only given as a connection of facts or processes of the consciousness. Objects, things, only exist for, and in, consciousness.«²⁰

¹⁷ Misch 1947, 49.

¹⁸ As Austin Harrington argued, one cannot directly assimilate Dilthey to either naturalism or the anti-naturalism of Husserl and Neo-Kantianism, see: *Dilthey, Empathy and Verstehen: a Contemporary Reappraisal*. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 4.3 (2001): 311–329. Compare, however, the arguments for such a common anti-naturalism in John E. Jalbert: *Husserl's Position between Dilthey and the Windelband-Rickert School of Neo-Kantianism*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 26: 2, 1988, 279–296.

¹⁹ B.B., *Literaturbericht*, Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft, 4–5, 1895, 126.

²⁰ G.S. V, 90; SW I, 245–246.

4. Nature and Spirit

In a late short retrospective piece, his *Draft for a Preface* (1911) for his epistemological and psychological writings, Dilthey noted that the dominant positivist model of the natural sciences had »truncated the spiritual-cultural world« by transforming it into a mere folk-illusion.²¹ This illusion – from the perspective of mere natural material relations – is, however, not a groundless illusory projection but functionally real. The most reductive naturalist and materialist inevitably presuppose the practices of the human world and the enactment, expression, and understanding of human life. It is this practical life-context that allows the human scientist to recognize the individual self in its sociality and its productive creative relations with the whole of its life.

Dilthey sceptically revealed the aporias of constitutive idealism and its problematic intellectualist and representationalist assumptions about mind and reality, arguing that life is given through its phenomenality and yet is not merely a phenomenal appearance constituted by an empirical much less an ideal consciousness. Whereas only nature comes from nature, life in its relational tensions and living actuality is »there-for-me«. Life is given as a complexly mediated productive nexus that can form awareness, meaning, and value for itself. This relationally emergent life is in need of words and the cultivation of its relational capacities for expression and articulation. As such, life is not immediately or intuitively given to itself. It is reflexively aware (*Innewerden*), which is »the most simple form in which psychic life can appear«. ²² The simple and elemental is already reflexively relational and mediated. That is to say, it must be understood and interpreted through its expressions, objectifications, and practices. There is no knowledge of a world independent of perception and lived-experience, which provide the context and actuality for the consciousness of idealism and the material nature of naturalism.

The naturalizing approach to reality based on a materialistic understanding of the natural sciences continues to be the prevailing tendency of our time despite the anti-naturalistic calls to re-enchant the world and the theological turn in some forms of recent philosophy. The anti-naturalistic distrust of the sciences is also scrutinized by Dilthey in the same preface. Dilthey maintained that it is not modern science and its successes that are the problem but the triumph of a narrow conception of scientific method over science itself.

²¹ SW II, 2.

²² G.S. XIX, 66; SW I, 254.

Despite positivism's limitations and dogmatic overextension, and thus also of the naturalistic worldview when it becomes a problematic metaphysical doctrine about the totality of the world, Dilthey articulated the basic empirical dynamic of knowledge while rejecting positivism's speculative opponents, »who tore thought away from sense-perception«. ²³ According to Dilthey, both positivism and Kantian inspired critical empiricism are correct to stress both experience and its limits, since the natural and historical empirical conditions and contexts of life cannot be transcended even as further articulation and evaluation pushes individuals beyond the factuality of their real conditions.

In contrast to the one-sided reduction of life to biological and physiological instincts, drives, and the senses that are its natural basis or to the activity of a non-sensuous spirit or constitutive consciousness, Dilthey proposed a suggestive alternative strategy to both: to »understand life on its own terms«, immanently interpreting it from out of itself – without eliminating its fullness for the sake of one of its elements – and bring it through its felt reflexivity (*Innewerden*), methodological interpretation and inquiry, and self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) to reflective cognition and validity about itself. ²⁴ To this extent, science (*Wissenschaft*) is not excluded or demeaned, as Dilthey's scientific critics maintain, as it plays a central role – along with art and ethics – in the formation (*Bildung*) and self-reflectiveness of modern individuals in relation to the contingency of natural forces and social conditions. ²⁵

Dilthey remarked almost twenty years earlier in *Life and Cognition* (1892–1893) that »thought, which sets out to ultimately comprehend the universe, is bound to the transient existence of organic life. Thought is extremely fragile; it appears only at isolated points in organic life and as such only at intervals as a temporary function. Everywhere it appears as a part of life and in its service.« ²⁶ In this significant text, Dilthey is clearly pursuing a naturalistic strategy insofar as he analyzes how all things emerge from contingent natural conditions and circumstances and the common bodily sensuous schema of animal and human life. As evident in the previous quote, thought strives to universalize itself and the person to individuate herself in the context of these conditions. This universalizing from out of the facticity and finitude of one's situation and milieu is possible because of the pre-conceptual felt self-reflexivity (*Innewerden*) and

²³ SW II, 2.

²⁴ SW II, 2.

²⁵ Compare E.S. Nelson: *Disturbing Truth: Art, Finitude, and the Human Sciences in Dilthey*. *theory@buffalo: Interdisciplinary Journal of the Humanities*, 11, 2007, 121–142.

²⁶ SW II, 345.

the intensified self-reflectiveness (*Selbstbesinnung*) in which life turns back on itself and through which life becomes aware of itself, articulating itself as a life. ²⁷

The individuation and cultivation of a self occurs through an immanent intercrossing movement, encompassing the natural-biological as well as the social-historical, toward the possibility of the ideal and potentially even the religious. It is here that the ethical, the individual other worthy of respect, becomes visible within the context of the world and society. Dilthey described this process of the becoming of knowledge as »a real natural epistemology«. It requires an expansive conception of naturalness, without doctrinal naturalism's confinement of the phenomena, in contrast with its reductive and eliminative forms.

5. Becoming a Self

Dilthey did not conclude his argumentation with the assertion of naturalness in this expanded sense. Dilthey critically traced the boundaries of natural scientific methods in the face of the felt reflexivity of the subject (*Innewerden*), the singular nexus of the individual's life (*Individuation*), and the inability of humans to know and comprehend life as a comprehensive universally valid systematic whole. Beginning with naturalism as a general point of departure in his writings of the 1890's, Dilthey immanently demonstrated its possibilities and limits in the context of the psychological, historical, and ethical life of individuals while declining to appeal to essentialist, religious, or metaphysical conceptions of a substantialized self.

Dilthey's wider project extends beyond the theory of knowledge as it is shaped by the concern for recognizing and valuing an ethical individual self within the context of the natural and social-historical determinants that appear to undermine the identity of such a self. Dilthey does not so much posit a self as an atom of analysis outside the social, as Simmel charges. Simmel dismantled this individuality, which for Dilthey is not merely a theoretical thesis but a practical vocation, as an undigested remnant resisting full social mediation. There is, however, no unmediated individual in Dilthey. He revealed instead how the self is expressed and cultivated only within and through the immanent structures and conditions of social-historical life. The individual self can establish itself and other

²⁷ See E.S. Nelson: *Self-Reflection, Interpretation, and Historical Life in Dilthey*, in: H.-U. Lessing, R.A. Makkreel und R. Pozzo (eds.), *Recent Contributions to Dilthey's Philosophy of the Human Sciences*. Stuttgart: Frommann-holzboog, 2011, 105–134.

selves as a universal value only in and through this nexus, as an intersectional point of crisscrossing forces that extend beyond it.

It is Dilthey's practical ethical orientation that ultimately constitutes the genuine turning point from the natural to the human world. This transition from nature to spirit also has its epistemic conditions. While Dilthey naturalistically critiques claims appealing to a non-interpreted immediate givenness and the direct self-access and self-evidence of an unmediated »inner experience« or an unmediated sensuous perception, which lead to problematic transcendent claims about reality as a systematic totality, Dilthey critically – if minimalistically due to his reinterpretation of transcendental categories as conditional embodied life-categories – confronts naturalism with the reflexively and interpretively processed and mediated character of the given and the factual. Since facticity and givenness must be there-for-me (that is, there for a self) and since lived-experiences are complex relational wholes involving purposiveness, Dilthey concludes that they cannot be coherently and adequately reduced to or reconstructed as discrete »natural« elements abstracted from the complex life-nexus. Although naturalism is generally the primary orientation of all modern science and is the most basic of worldviews in his *Weltanschauungslehre*, it is the contents of life and the objects themselves that call us to methodological pluralism and articulate reality in more multifaceted and nuanced ways.

6. Between Nature and Spirit: The Mediating Role of Psychology

Dilthey reinterprets epistemology as having a social, psychological, and biological dimension that cannot be eliminated without distorting the activities, processes, and tasks of cognitive knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) in the context of articulating and justifying ordinary and human scientific communicative understanding. Dilthey challenges metaphysical and scientific formalisms that interpret knowledge to consist of worldless validity and value claims. The sense of actuality is not a product of intellectual positing; it is shaped by the interaction of cognition with feeling, instincts, and volitions that develop as a complex whole in a person through experiences of resistance, limitation, and restraint.

The Origin of Our Belief in the Reality of the External World and Its Justification (1890) shows how reality is neither a representationally constructed phenomenal object nor an immediately given in intuition or inner experience. Reality as »there for me« is exhibited as immediate in empirical consciousness through felt reflexive awareness (*Innewerden*). This apparent immediacy is mediated through biological drives, environmental

adaptations, and practical interests formed through the play and work of impulse and resistance. Our sense of reality presupposes the elemental interaction and mediation of self and world prior to their differentiation; reality is irreducible to a worldless subject or an unperceived and non-given object, to pure consciousness or materiality, much less to their metaphysically reified manifestation as idealism and materialism.

Dilthey's philosophical and psychological writings from the 1890's, are representative of a highly productive and controversial period in the development of his thought. Dilthey's endeavors to give both naturalistic and humanistic strategies their due regard and reconceive epistemology through the methods and data of the sciences, particularly history and psychology, led to the negative reaction of both positivists and idealists. No aspect of his thought was more provocative than his advocacy of a descriptive and analytic psychology as a »human science« (*Geisteswissenschaft*), which was opposed by those who considered psychology an exclusively naturalistic experimental science, including pioneering experimental psychologists such as Ebbinghaus and Wundt who pursued reductionist programs that uprooted individuals from their environing world and social existence. Dilthey's critics also included Neo-Kantian philosophers. Windelband and Rickert in particular protected the distinctiveness of the »cultural sciences«, as sciences of individual persons and ideal values, from naturalism by abandoning psychology to the universalizing hypothetical-causal explanations of the natural sciences.

These early debates continue to haunt later reflections on the possibility of a humanistic or interpretive psychology. Dilthey's contributions to these philosophical and psychological disputes over the actuality of the self and its experiences of the world are worth reconsidering for their historical significance, and – given the increasing albeit still too limited appreciation for the social, historical, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of psychological inquiry – because we are perhaps in a better position today to recognize the continuing relevance of Dilthey's contextualizing epistemology and individual-oriented interpretive psychology.²⁸

The *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* (1894), Dilthey's most controversial work, raised the ire of both positivistic psychology (Ebbinghaus and Wundt) and philosophers committed to a transcendental realm of validity and value claims (Rickert and early Husserl). Dilthey articulates – through a complex and nuanced reading of the psychological literature of his times – the possibility of a descriptive and analytic (that is, an interpretive) psychology. Dilthey does not argue for an opposition

²⁸ I discuss the impure and plural character of Dilthey's psychology further in E.S. Nelson: *Impure Phenomenology: Dilthey, Epistemology, and Interpretive Psychology*. *Studia Phaenomenologica* 10, 2010, 19–44.

of methods – understanding and explanation – and a duality of sciences – natural and human – as simplistic depictions of Dilthey's thinking incorrectly claim. Dilthey does not advocate abandoning or bracketing the causal nexus of reality; he reminds his readers that mechanical and efficient causal explanation in the natural sciences construct an abstract causal nexus linked by hypotheses and separated from the dense bonds and thick relations of the effective nexus (*Wirkungszusammenhang*) of life.

In kinship with Max Weber's later conception of interpretive understanding, relations of meaning and causal relations are mutually entangled. Neither one dissolves the efficient causal and conditional nature of scientifically explainable reality. Nowhere is the connectedness of meaning and causality more significant than in the human sciences themselves. As a consequence, Dilthey did not reduce human scientific inquiry to pure interpretive understanding. Dilthey utilized both efficient causal explanation and interpretive understanding in his psychology as well as other human scientific strategies such as functional and structural explanation of social and cultural systems.

Dilthey did not discard causality; he critiqued the misuses and abuses of causality in the reductive empirical experimental psychology and scientism of his time for the sake of genuine scientific inquiry. It is interesting to note that Misch identified Hume as an important source for Dilthey's historical project. As with Hume's moderate and life-nexus oriented scepticism, which can be employed simultaneously against dogmatic metaphysics and radical varieties of scepticism, Dilthey sceptically interrogated the possibility of fathoming causal connections to achieve certainty or metaphysical truth, whether this is materialist or idealist, while articulating the social reproduction and transformation of meaning and knowledge within the contexts of the daily communicative practices of ordinary life.²⁹ As opposed to justifying the sciences through a questionable appeal to the transcendent or transcendental, Dilthey demonstrated the validity of the sciences by sceptically abandoning exaggerated knowledge claims and through the anthropological and historical contextualization of the sciences.³⁰

²⁹ On Dilthey's moderate empirically oriented skepticism, see E.S. Nelson: *Empiricism, Facticity, and the Immanence of Life in Dilthey*. PLJ: Warwick Journal of Philosophy 18, 2007, 108–128.

³⁰ This reading runs contrary to F.C. Beiser's account in *The German Historicist Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 2012, 433; Dilthey is not concerned with answering the radical sceptic by appealing to a dubious fiction that purportedly transcends the natural and historical world, as the separation of epistemology from the conditions of life abandons the most fundamental questions of knowledge. Beiser accordingly misses the historical complexity of Dilthey's position in dismissing

Given the mediation involved in concrete individual life, psychology cannot be appropriately understood as a subjective self-intuition and introspection. This approach denies the facticity of life and mind, as mediated phenomena demanding interpretation, and undermines psychology's scientific – i.e., intersubjective and universalizing – task. Nor can psychology be adequate to its task of illuminating individual human life if it is the collecting of discrete data – abstracted from and dissolving the life-nexus of individual and social life – that are then externally reconstructed and organized through causal hypotheses.

Objectifying third-person methods are useful in every science but should be contextualized in a human-oriented psychology that recognizes the conditional, negotiated, and fragile unity and identity of the individual person and the person's interpretive, mediated, and self-reflexive life. Because of the multifaceted mediation of the »acquired psychic nexus«, which as structured contrasts with an atomistic bundle of elements and as acquired differs from the vision of an innate intrinsic self, psychology cannot be merely descriptive but must also be analytic, comparative, and structural. Structural psychology reveals the temporal enactment of the categories of life in lived-experience and provides additional support for his reinterpretation of epistemology and the human sciences in contrast with movements that exclude empirical psychology from these roles.

Dilthey did not abandon this psychological program even as it became more deeply hermeneutical in his later works. *Contributions to the Study of Individuality* (1895–96) further articulates the comparative-morphological strategy of elucidating individuality in its relational contexts. Through the hermeneutical oscillation between singular and whole, both are further elucidated. Dilthey rejected the Neo-Kantian paradigm of the ideographic character of the cultural sciences developed in Windelband. Dilthey rightly illustrated how (1) natural sciences such as astronomy encompass an ideographic dimension and (2) the human sciences presuppose and propose generalizing and systematizing claims that allow the effective life-nexus to be interpreted through the typical and the singular. It is in this natural-historical context that the actual and not merely ideal individual can be recognized and respected. The world overflows the individual according to Dilthey:

»The infinite richness of life unfolds itself in individual existence because of its relations to its milieu, other humans and things. But

Dilthey's critique of abstract intellectualistic theories of knowledge and the positive epistemic role for science and life of the critique of historical reason.

every particular individual is also a crossing point of contexts which move through and beyond its particular life.«³¹

Nonetheless, the conditional and situated yet still meaningful and purposive individual person is the basic point of departure and task for the human sciences and of Dilthey's hermeneutical justification of methodological individualism against the collectivist tendencies dominant in German philosophy and social theory.

Dilthey's methodological individualism differs from other varieties because it grasps the individual as a contextual historical reality rather than as a Hobbesian fiction and allows for the use of social concepts. Social realities such as the state, society, and community are given in experience and need to be interpreted in order to understand social life. Their experiential givenness does not justify positing them as independent much less metaphysical realities. Dilthey's critique of reified notions such as the spirit of the people (*Volksgeist*) and community (*Gemeinschaft*) for the sake of the relational yet still distinctive individual, which was reformulated by Plessner against its poisonous fascistic forms in *The Limits of Community*, proved to be prescient.

7. Naturally Interpreting Persons?

Dilthey's philosophy of the human sciences appears anti-naturalistic from the perspective of an impoverishing and reified monistic naturalism. Dilthey's naturalism is such that the appropriate recognition of each object and class of objects calls for recognition. It is methodologically pluralistic rather than ontologically monistic and is opposed to the minimalistic desert-producing logicistic naturalism of philosophers such as Quine. From a Quinean eliminative viewpoint, Dilthey would appear no doubt even more dogmatically empirical in his defense of the unrestricted and unprejudiced empirical inquiry (*»unbefangene Empirie«*) against empiricism and more laxly lenient and baroque than Carnap's – from Quine's perspective – overly tolerant logical positivism.

Dilthey's critique of metaphysics places transcendent objects into suspicion as being beyond the limits of cognitive knowledge. This critique does not extend to phenomenal objects given in experience, all of which (natural and human) are mediated. The mediation of each object does not entail a reduction to isolated elements that suppresses their sense and significance. It requires that they be described, analyzed, and investigated in their own way as wholes. Although all sciences are expressions of life,

³¹ G.S. VII, 134–135.

which cannot escape life's conditions, the human sciences are immanently constituted in intersubjective relations by practical and ultimately ethical and social-political interests in a way that distinguishes them from the natural sciences that rest more securely in the objectified world.

Dilthey's expansive naturalism prefigures the philosophical anthropology of Misch and Plessner. This more contextualized, nuanced, and tolerant form of naturalism proceeds from the natural-biological and anthropological conditions of human life through their social-historical configurations to their unique intersection and crossing in the life, self-reflection, and individuation of a conditional yet meaningful and purposive nexus that can be designated an individual person.

Heidegger construed, problematically in my estimation, Dilthey's project as a flawed anti-naturalist personalism and consequently a failed phenomenology which gave the natural point of view and the sciences too much purchase.³² Dilthey's works are an ambiguous source for the new phenomenology, as Husserl noted in his defensive and polemical justification of the primacy of an absolute science rising against all natural, anthropological-psychological, and social-historical conditions and contexts. Given their common sources in the descriptive and analytic empiricist philosophy of Trendelenburg, who was a determining influence on Dilthey and Brentano, Dilthey could appreciate the description of the emergence of higher forms of understanding, meaning, and validity described in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and its tendency toward a realist worldly referentiality. Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger learned from Dilthey's personalist psychology or his depiction of an immanent self-interpreting affective, worldly, and historical life.³³

Dilthey's thought is incompatible with the transcendental-ontological turn in philosophy that occurred in Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology. Dilthey is not an anti-naturalistic thinker, did not advocate a bracketing of the natural and the objective for the sake of a pure phenomenological starting point that is independent of the social-historical life-nexus, and would not attempt to replace metaphysics – placed in doubt by cultural-historical and epistemic-reflective critique and revealed to be more affective and individual than cognitive and universal – with a new fundamental transcendental-ontological philosophy.

Philosophy should become a less pretentious and more modest critical reflectiveness (*Besinnung*) that cannot abandon its close relations with the natural and human sciences or with cultural life. The multiplicity of

³² M. Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, GA 20, 161.

³³ Compare Heidegger, GA 20, 161; E. von Aster, *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart*. Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1935, 149, 155.

ways of life and worldviews is in this context irrevocable.³⁴ The intertextuality of human life and the value of individual personality are articulated through interdisciplinary human scientific research. As Ernst von Aster noted, metaphysics is abandoned in Dilthey for philosophical anthropology and universal history.³⁵

As Aster and Misch argue, a philosophical reflection that informs and is informed by the human sciences and modestly remains within the immanence of nature and life is incompatible with the rehabilitation of the metaphysical, theological, and transcendent in the phenomenology of the 1920's.³⁶ Misch describes how the anti-metaphysical critical philosophies of Kant and Dilthey direct us back to empirical life and its problems, while the new »life-philosophical« ontology departs from that life to return to the metaphysical.³⁷ Dilthey's advocacy of the antimetaphysical legacy of the Enlightenment and critical-positivist prioritization of experience and the experiential sciences are sources of resistance to the new powers of authoritarianism and re-enchantment.³⁸

8. Feeling and Nature in Dilthey's Aesthetics

Dilthey's aesthetics provides a distinct yet related example of Dilthey's resistance to enchantment and his critical appreciation of naturalism and modernity, one which can only be briefly sketched here. Dilthey's approach to art has been portrayed as a continuation of Romanticism that – due to the emphasis on feeling, imagination, and the free responsiveness of the subject – is incompatible with the realism and naturalism of the second half of the 19th-century. But in his aesthetic writings, particularly *The Three Epochs of Modern Aesthetics and Its Present Task* (1892), Dilthey emerged as a more sympathetic and complex aesthetic theorist who criticized the limitations while articulating the significance and possibilities of literary realism and naturalism – e.g. modern artistic articulations of the naturalistic feeling of life – against their Neo-Romantic detractors and the emergence of symbolist spiritualism and its visionary enthusiasm.

³⁴ On Dilthey's plural approach to worldviews, and Heidegger's ontologically monistic criticism of Dilthey's »ontic pluralism«, see E.S. Nelson: *The World Picture and its Conflict in Dilthey and Heidegger*. *Humana Mentis: Journal of Philosophical Studies* 18, 2011, 19–38.

³⁵ E. v. Aster 1935, 51–52, 103.

³⁶ E. v. Aster 1935, 103–104.

³⁷ G. Misch, *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung der Diltheyschen Richtung mit Heidegger und Husserl*. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967, 281–282.

³⁸ Misch 1967, 281–282.

The power of realism for Dilthey lies in how it critically reveals the discrepancy between outer appearance and internal reality, even as its weakness is its inability to reflectively generalize and interpretively focus on what is essential to evoking and heightening the »feeling of life« (*Lebensgefühl*). Rather than rejecting naturalism and directly defending Romantic aesthetics, naturalism is understood as achieving its truth when it not only copies and reproduces but elucidates, intensifies, and transforms the life that it portrays. Dilthey reinterprets realism through the tension of reality and feeling, resistance and will, and the objectivities of social life and lived-experience of the individual.

The naturalism of social novels – such as those of Dickens, Balzac, and Zola – is the emergence of a new style and sensibility appropriate for the modern technological conditions of life that has not yet achieved a »new inner form« for the work of art in relation to the subjectivity of the artist and audience. Dilthey consequently reinterprets both romanticism and realism as revealing two sides of the tensions of reality and feeling, resistance and will, and the objectivities of social life in the context of individual lived-experience (*Erlebnis*).

Life-philosophically and hermeneutically interpreted, the artistic tendencies of realism and naturalism prove to be one-sided and incomplete steps in contrast to the more expansive and liberal unfolding of naturalism in writers such as Goethe. Dilthey not only emphasized the naturalistic dimensions of Goethe and Schleiermacher but relied on these to formulate his objections to narrow naturalism. Nonetheless, despite his criticisms, literary naturalism and realism are more aesthetically promising for the »present task of aesthetics« than the abandonment of the tension between reality and feeling in a literature that one-sidedly and unreflectively embraces organic vitality, intuitive vision, and irrational feeling.

Dilthey's critical evaluation of radical subjectivism in aesthetics is an example of his wider »hermeneutical empiricist« strategy of critiquing and contextualizing idealist epistemology by situating knowledge in the social-historical, psychological, and natural conditions of life. To this extent, Dilthey is at best an ambiguous heir to Romanticism and much more of a critic of its late-19th century pathologies.

9. Dilthey's Legacy

Dilthey's hermeneutical legacy only partly resonates in thinkers such as Heidegger and Scheler, who did not further articulate the emergence and differentiation of the human immanently from within the natural. Heidegger and Scheler rehabilitate in their own ways – and in distinction from Dilthey's historical anthropological approach to human life – the

dignity of the ontological and the transcendent over against animal and organic life.

Heidegger excluded the discourses of the natural and human sciences as ontic from the tasks of a fundamental ontology. Heidegger did not recognize or allow for the basic role that Dilthey gave the particular sciences in interdisciplinary reflection and philosophy itself. Scheler adopted the mystical core of »life-philosophy« and the personalism of interpretive psychology in order to rehabilitate the metaphysical and theological character of values. Scheler not only rejected »biologism« but the mediated anthropologies of Dilthey and pragmatism as overly naturalizing, advocating instead an anti-naturalistic philosophical anthropology that maintained a radical difference in essence between animals and the metaphysical religious animal.³⁹

The inheritance of transcendental philosophy in both its Neo-Kantian and phenomenological forms appears as an unbridgeable abyss between nature and spirit, the animal and the human. It was not in Heidegger or Scheler's phenomenology but, as discussed in other contributions to this volume, in Plessner's bio-hermeneutical anthropology that the mediated character of nature and spirit continues to be analyzed. Echoing Dilthey's articulation of the self in the midst of the forces and conditions of natural and historical life, Plessner corrected the partiality of both naturalism and an anti-naturalistic personalism by forcefully elucidating their inner coherence in the emergence of a relational self. The naturally eccentric and artificial constructive animal called human occurs in the midst of life.

³⁹ E. v. Aster 1935, 103–104.