

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME III

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The title of Wilhelm Dilthey's 1910 masterpiece, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (*Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*), may raise certain questions. The historical world is obviously not *created* by the human sciences, so what does it mean to say that it is *formed* in the human sciences?

The word "formation" has been chosen as the main translation of Dilthey's term *Aufbau* to suggest both a process and a resultant form. *Aufbau* has often been translated as "construction," but this is inappropriate because Dilthey contrasts *Aufbau* and *Konstruktion*. The natural sciences are constructive in that they appeal to basic elements on which everything in nature depends. But the constructs of the natural sciences abstract from many aspects of our lived experience. The human sciences, by contrast, analyze lived experience while never losing sight of its overall qualities. The cognitive task of the human sciences is to bring out the incipient sense that history already has for us in ordinary life. Cognition of history is possible because we are at root historical beings. The *formation* of the historical world in the human sciences is thus really an articulation of the general structures of historical life *in conjunction* with the human sciences.

### LIFE-KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC COGNITION

The task of the human sciences, according to Dilthey, is to gather the direct knowledge (*Wissen*) that already exists about the various aspects of historical life and to attempt to order this in terms of conceptual cognition (*Erkenntnis*) as much as possible. One of the tasks of the epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*) of the human sciences is to consider the limits within which it is possible to form a system of the human sciences and to what extent their procedures and methods can be distinguished from those of the natural sciences. But these epistemological and methodological problems are contextualized by Dilthey as part of much broader questions about the nature of human understanding. These are questions

about life in general that already crop up in our prescientific knowledge. They may be clarified to some extent by scientific cognition and its epistemology. However, they cannot be resolved until we attain a more integral theory of knowledge (*Theorie des Wissens*). This indicates that Dilthey's overall goal of a Critique of Historical Reason will require a progression from an immediate kind of knowledge of life to the conceptual cognition of the human sciences to a reflective knowledge that constitutes mature understanding.

The general structures that can be delineated within the manifold domains of such human sciences as sociology, cultural studies, economics, and religion derive their meaning from basic life-concerns that we all manifest in everyday existence. According to Dilthey, my lived experience of these life-concerns makes me see "people and things either as . . . expanding my existence and heightening my powers, or as restricting the scope of my existence. . . . From this subsoil of life, objective apprehension, evaluation, and the positing of purposes emerge as types of attitude with countless nuances that merge into each other" (153–54).

What is phenomenologically described by Dilthey as a general mental attitude (*Verhaltensweise*) can be understood in terms of some specific stance (*Stellungnahme*) (258) deriving from basic life-concerns (*Lebensbezüge*): references to life that concern specific individuals both in the sense of being about them and of mattering to them. It is the task of the human sciences to analyze the cognitive, evaluative, and purposive attitudes operative in reflection on the historical world without losing sight of their original togetherness in the concrete concerns of ordinary life. Dilthey's Critique of Historical Reason is thus much broader than this Kantian label would suggest. It must be rooted in the immediate knowledge of everyday life, which encompasses what is prized as well as cognized. The certainty of the knowledge that comes with lived experience constitutes a kind of elementary understanding, which is then analyzed in terms of the higher forms of understanding made possible by the human sciences. Elementary understanding knows the meaning things have in their normal, common context. Higher understanding focuses on more specialized contexts to transform what is already known into conceptual cognition, but it also makes it possible to systematize this cognition in terms of a universal framework.

Dilthey calls the context of elementary understanding "objective spirit." We are already historical because we grow up amidst the

ways in which the spirit of the past has been objectified and preserved in our present context. Objective spirit is the medium through which we participate in our socio-historical situation, understand our place in it, communicate with each other, and interact. Dilthey appropriated the concept of “objective spirit” from Hegel, but re-conceived the universal speculative character it assumed in Hegel’s idealism in terms of a more empirical and verifiable commonality (see 171–74). To think that Dilthey simply redefined objective spirit epistemologically is to underestimate his ontological leanings toward realism and to ignore his cognition-knowledge distinction. Objective spirit does not provide conceptual cognition; it merely embodies elementary knowledge as passed down to us by the reality of the past. Epistemic or critical conditions of consciousness only become relevant when the higher understanding of the human sciences transforms the real knowledge of ordinary life into the conceptual cognition of disciplinary discourse. This transition makes possible the move from commonality to universality. Many of the certainties inherited from a common ethnic or national past may prove to be provincial when compared to the customs of foreign nations. The narratives of universal historians such as Ranke and Schlosser helped to give a multinational scope to history, but for Dilthey universal history must also be coordinated with a radically pluralistic set of human sciences, each of which analyzes what happens in human history in terms of more specialized but general concerns, whether those be political, economic, legal, cultural, literary, or religious.

Although universal history must be correlated with the various modes of conceptual cognition made possible by the human sciences, it retains for Dilthey an intuitive core that makes it more appropriate to consider it as a mode of knowledge. Thus the movement from the immediate knowledge of life to universal disciplinary cognition can always be augmented by a reflective knowledge whereby individuals articulate what they cognize, value, and strive for.<sup>1</sup> There is a sense, then, in which knowledge can encompass conceptual cognition, but never in any final way. Such knowledge, whether it is based on surveying history or on philosophical reflection, can at best formulate a tentative world-view.

<sup>1</sup> In the First Study, Dilthey makes it clear that the foundation of the human sciences “must refer to all classes of knowledge: . . . to the *conceptual cognition of reality*, to the *positing of values*, and to the *determination of purposes* and the *establishment of rules*” (VII, 5 [this volume, 25]).

The human sciences include both the humanities and the social sciences, and each provides the opportunity to study human behavior, interaction, and cooperation up close. Some human sciences such as psychology and history are primarily descriptive; others such as economics and sociology are more systematic. In the *Formation*, the overall stream of history is diverted, as it were, into structural systems in which selected currents can be tracked to examine the ways in which they interact. Some of these structures are called cultural systems, especially if they serve shared purposes that have been fashioned by human choice. But some institutional structures such as nation-states and families, although also purposive, are not simply voluntary—these make up the external organization of society. These purposive systems or associations are already familiar from Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences* of 1883.<sup>2</sup>

#### HISTORY AND ITS PRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS

One of the advances of the *Formation* is to not subsume all these structures under the concept of a purposive system. A more neutral covering concept is used to capture all the ways the forces of life can converge. This is the idea of the “productive nexus or system” (*Wirkungszusammenhang*).<sup>3</sup> The efficacy of life and of the historical world is to be understood in terms of productivity before any causal or teleological analysis is applied. The carriers of history, whether they be individuals, cultures, institutions, or communities, can all be conceived as productive systems capable of producing value, meaning, and, in some cases, realizing purposes. Each is to be considered structurally as centered in itself.

According to Dilthey, “The fundamental form of a productive system arises in the individual who gathers together present, past, and possibilities of the future in a life-course” (177–78). Human individuals are productive systems in that their lived experience apprehends what is of interest in the present relative to past evaluations and future goals. This more explicit formulation makes

<sup>2</sup> See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences: Selected Works*, vol. 1 (SW 1), eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 99–136.

<sup>3</sup> In Rudolf A. Makkreel's *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), these were analyzed as “dynamic systems.” See esp. pp. 314–22.

references to the three aspects of lived experience—the cognitive, the evaluative, and the volitional—and Dilthey offers a detailed analysis of them, each with its distinctive purposive structures, in the three “Studies Toward the Foundation of the Human Sciences” that open this volume. These studies were to a certain extent inspired by Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, which Dilthey saw as advancing his own earlier efforts at structural description. However, instead of merely linking the subject to its perceived object by means of a general intentional relation, Dilthey shows that inherent in lived experience are all kinds of attitudes to things, not just cognitive, but felt and willed as well, that disclose concrete lifeconcerns. The productivity of the psychic nexus lies in the ways these three aspects of experience interact. For example, as feelings inform our evaluations, these can influence not only our volitional decisions but also our cognitive apprehension of the world. Often, the productivity of the individual is merely immanent, without a specific outcome as its product.

Although individuals as productive systems are centered in themselves, they are not self-sufficient. They are inherently related to other more inclusive productive systems that are also at work in history. These larger productive systems come about because of the need for communication, interaction, and cooperation among individuals. But they can also take on a life of their own and survive the individuals that formed them. In the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Dilthey was unwilling to consider these larger groupings as subjects or carriers of history. In the *Formation*, he qualifies his opposition to transpersonal subjects by allowing them to be considered logical subjects.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to recognize public modes of belonging together, but unacceptable to ground them “in subjects that are real in some sense, over and above the subjects of individual psychology” (304). The solution is to regard such productive systems as logical subjects that transcend individuals without positing them as superempirical real subjects. These more inclusive productive systems are not collective in the Hegelian sense.

Even if individuals are immersed in cultural systems and organizations of society, they will never be completely submerged by them. This is because each such productive system only engages some aspects of an individual. Dilthey is also convinced that the

<sup>4</sup> For an account of this shift, see Makkreel, *Dilthey, Philosopher of the Human Studies*, pp. 312–14.

individuals active in a cultural system will put their stamp on its mode of productivity so that more than the rationally agreed upon function of the system is achieved. Summing up these two points, Dilthey suggests there is a difficulty in conceptualizing the sciences of these cultural systems in terms of the function of purposes alone: “The individuals who cooperate in such a function belong to the cultural system only through those processes by which they contribute to the realization of the function. Nevertheless, they participate in these processes with their whole being, which means that a domain based purely on the system’s functional purpose can never be constructed” (208). Individuals give only part of themselves to these more inclusive systems, yet they can express their whole being through this part. No cultural system will embody merely the purposes it was meant to fulfill. That is why it makes sense to understand even purposive systems as productive systems. A productive nexus or system may be purposive without fulfilling a determinate purpose. It is to be conceived more generally as producing objectifications that express human values as well as purposes — leaving open the extent to which specific goals are achieved. The important thing is how human values and purposes are expressed in productive systems and how their meaning is to be understood.

In attempting to understand the historical world, the human sciences must do justice to both the facticity of particular events and the universal demands of conceptual thought. Their ultimate challenge is to be able to articulate the individuality of a historical phenomenon as a kind of concrete universal. To do so, we must also understand the historical world “as a productive nexus centered in itself, at the same time containing other productive systems within it. . . . All are to be understood as structurally linked into a whole in which the sense of the nexus of the socio-historical world arises from the significance of the individual parts” (160). Productive systems articulate the intermediate structures through which historical order can be discerned. They provide the synchronic systems whereby diachronic development can be established. Developmental order in history will not be found by observing particular events or speculating about overall historical purposes but by analyzing what has happened into intermediary productive systems. Thus Dilthey writes,

Whereas no law of development is to be found in the concrete course of events, its analysis into specific homogeneous pro-

ductive systems opens up the prospect of sequences of states that are determined from within and presuppose each other. It is as if one stratum always leads to a higher one that adds increased differentiation and comprehension. (190)

When productive systems become more comprehensive, their functions are at the same time more differentiated. Thus a people does not become a superindividual, for unlike an individual subject, it cannot be self-conscious. Dilthey allows that “individuals who pursue their own purposes . . . find at the same time a domain with its own ends in the nation. In this domain they act as a single subject. . . . Outer events, destinies, and acts are measured by the purpose that is central to the life of the nation at the time” (303). In that such convergence tends to be transitory, communal consolidation is rarely a threat. In a similar vein, Dilthey points out that “since no nation takes its own death into account, plans and purposes have a completely different role here than in the individual’s life” (303).

Dilthey repeatedly asserts that he is not proposing a philosophy of history that can establish an end for history. It is beyond our capacity to know whether there is a final purpose of history and, if so, whether it can be found in individuals or in some national community. His theory of history, as distinct from a philosophy of history, is content to find meaning in history. The philosophy of history of Kant and Hegel was in search of a universal history with one grand purpose. Dilthey’s theory of history embraces a universal history where the universality being claimed is more limited and generated on the basis of particular productive systems analyzed by the various human sciences. Thus there is no basis for claiming overall progress in history. Dilthey does find progress within limited domains such as in the sciences and in the international consolidation of information. But the Hegelian thesis that all history is about the realization of human freedom is unwarranted (see 366–67). Development is a legitimate category of history, but progress is not, because it cannot be applied globally.

#### THE CATEGORIES OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Development is one of the real categories of life operative in our lived experience. We should note that Dilthey distinguishes between formal and real categories. Formal categories arise from elementary operations of thought that are at work in all objective

apprehension, including simple perception. Such elementary logical operations include comparing, noting sameness, differentiating, separating, and relating. These operations are conceived by Dilthey as bringing out what is inherent in experience. They are like perception to the extent that they find what is given; they are like thought in that they explicate what is merely implicit in the given (144). Their logic is phenomenological in that they do not impose order but explicate it on the basis of what is known perceptually. They make possible the transition from perceptual knowledge, which is prediscursive, to conceptual cognition, which is discursive. Although the elementary operations of thought are still prediscursive, they provide the basis for the discursive thought involved in making judgments. The noting of sameness of prediscursive thought prepares the way for unifying concepts of discursive thought; similarly, differentiating and separating anticipate the discursive procedures of abstraction and analysis, and, finally, relating provides the basis for all kinds of synthetic procedures. Together these prediscursive and discursive logical operations articulate the formal categories of unity, plurality, identity, difference, degree, and relation that are shared by the natural and human sciences (see 218–19).

The differences between the natural and human sciences begin to come out more clearly relative to the real categories employed by them. Causality is a category appropriate for the natural sciences; but in history, Dilthey claims that the counterparts for the necessary relation of cause and effect are the relations of “agency and suffering, of action and reaction” (219). Whether causal explanations are altogether ruled out from the special systems analyzed by some of the human sciences is not clear. However, in any historical narrative, the priority must be given to the task of understanding the significance of the relevant events in the particular context. Because Dilthey insists that there is no metaphysical divide between nature and history, we should not exaggerate the differences between their respective sciences. After all, the spiritual content that is studied by the human sciences does not hover in a realm that is independent from nature. The events of history take place on a natural terrain with the consequence that the fertility of the soil can sometimes explain why it is that certain civilizations thrive and others languish.

But even if the natural and human sciences share some of the same real categories, they may take on different shapes. Thus Dilthey points out that the categorial part-whole relation as applied by the natural sciences to space, time, and organized beings is

transformed in the human sciences to become “a nexus in which the parts are interconnected” (219). The task of understanding one’s life, for instance, is one in which the parts of the whole are not merely spelled out in sequence, but in which a nexus is produced that can even incorporate relations to things outside. A natural organism is already able to ingest foreign contents, but a productive system is human and historical only to the extent that it can incorporate relations to the outside qua relations and center them in itself. Spirit in the minimal sense that Dilthey conceives it could perhaps be defined as the capacity to interiorize both content and form.

Interiorization may involve re-presentation (*Repräsentation*) in one of three senses: either (1) in the elementary sense of noting the form inherent in the content of the given or (2) in the psychological sense of having a representation (*Vorstellung*) of something or (3) in the more general semantical sense of being representative (*Vertretung*) (see 149). Earlier writings had focused more on the first two functions; the writings in this volume also aim to work out the third, namely, how a part can be understood to be representative or typical of a whole.

Of all the categories used by Dilthey to re-present and conceptualize history, those of time, value, meaning, purpose, and productive force prove to be the most important. Time is already referred to in the natural sciences, but in the human sciences it is lived—it is not merely an abstract frame of reference. Dilthey considers Kant’s efforts to conceive time as an ideal form to be inadequate for a Critique of Historical Reason. Time in the human sciences is a real category that is not just a formal condition of experience, but an experienced content as well. Rather than being merely the background for observing change and movement, time can be experienced as the nature of advancement as such. Dilthey writes,

Even the smallest part of the advance of time still involves the passing of time. The present never *is*; what we experience as present always contains the memory of what has just been present. Among other things, the continued efficacy of the past as a force in the present, namely, what the past means for it, imparts to what is remembered a distinct character of presence, whereby it becomes incorporated in the present. (216)

Time is experienced not just as given in the present, but as the continuum connecting it to the past and future. The relation between the past and present becomes the source for the category of

meaning; the relation between present and future points to the category of productive force.

The category of meaning (*Bedeutung*) is Dilthey's main historical category. Meaning is what understanding looks for, and we obtain it in history by fashioning a nexus out of the relation between past and present: "When we look back through memory, we see the nexus of the past parts of a life-course in terms of the category of meaning. When we live in the present, the positive or negative value of the realities that fill it are experienced through feeling. And when we face the future, the category of purpose arises through a projective attitude" (222). From the perspective of value, life appears as a multiplicity of juxtaposed values. From the perspective of purpose, everything in a life-course is subordinated to some future moment. "Only the category of meaning overcomes the mere juxtaposition or subordination of the parts of life to each other. As history is memory and as the category of meaning belongs to memory, this is the most distinctive category of historical thought" (223).

Whereas the category of meaning structures the temporal relations of history retrospectively to obtain a relatively stable mode of connectedness, the category of productive force (*Kraft*) relates the present to the future, but it does not necessarily do so in terms of a definite purpose. The productive force of life can also display itself "in dreams of future happiness, in the play of imagination with possibilities, in indecision, and in fear" (224). These inchoate modes of expanding ourselves in relation to the future can be said to be striving toward something without necessarily having fully defined it. They manifest the mere "*intention to actualize something* that was not already part of reality" (224).

Productive force as a category of the human sciences is experienceable and not just hypothetical, like many forces in natural science. The force inherent in a productive system of history is conceived not as an abstract potential but as actualizing itself, working something out. When a productive system merely re-enforces itself, it can be said to exhibit an immanent purposiveness. Cultural systems arrived at for the sake of definite, as yet unactualized, purposes form a special subset of productive systems, but their historical realization also incorporates other factors that tend to modify these ends. Most productive systems—especially the lives of human individuals—do not even approximate a set of definite purposes. Because "individuals are only the points of intersection for cultural systems and social organizations with which

their existence is interwoven" (270), biography can never find closure by tracing the specific life-goals of individual subjects. Autobiography will prove to be more fruitful than biography for understanding history.

What attracts Dilthey to autobiography as a form of history is that it is "the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life" (221). Here life grasps life because the one understanding the life-course is also the one living it. The life-course becomes a productive nexus in which its own meaning is being produced. As long as a life is not yet completed, its meaning is still in process. The nexus or coherence of a life is yet to be acquired.<sup>5</sup> The process of acquiring meaning is not willed, but unfolds as a kind of "being-pulled-along by the state of affairs itself to ever more constituent parts of the nexus" (51). Here meaning is the explication (*Darstellung*) of the productive force of life itself. It is not yet the expression (*Ausdruck*) that re-presents what life has produced. We obtain the latter when a historian defines a life or a time that has fully elapsed.

#### EXPLICATION, EXPRESSION, AND DISCURSIVE RE-PRESENTATION

The move from prediscursive explication to discursive re-presentation can be seen as coming to full expression when Dilthey articulates the meaning of history in terms of past ages or epochs. An age or an epoch is perhaps the most complete form of a productive system or nexus. It is complete not only in that it constitutes a definite cut in the continuity of history but also in that it re-presents an affinity between many different forces and movements. An age is not necessarily homogenous and may not have a real center until something or someone is designated retrospectively by a historian as having that function. Thus Dilthey attempts to capture what is representative of the German Enlightenment by designating Lessing as typical of its efforts to reconcile reason and religion.

Epochs are best conceived as phases in the development of a cultural system such as a science or a particular art form such as music. The fact that the Baroque phase in music does not coincide

<sup>5</sup> In his descriptive psychology, Dilthey speaks of the acquired psychic nexus of an individual as a historical achievement.

with the Baroque in painting has to do with technical matters affecting their respective media. There is always a factual core to historical development that cannot be resolved into a rational dialectic. The only kernel of truth to be found in the dialectical approach to history is that there is often some negative development or deficiency that leads one age to break down and give rise to another. However, there is no general logic that can explain why one negative moment rather than another becomes a catalyst for change. We tend to delineate epochs in terms of the distinctive structures of their achievements, but we can understand them only as productive systems that were generated by human needs and life-concerns.

The concept of productive nexus finds its usefulness in being rooted in the dynamism of life while allowing for the kind of structural articulation demanded by the human sciences. Functionally, it becomes a system whose parts are reciprocally related. It is because of this that some parts can be analyzed as having representative significance. So far, the productive systems of history have been characterized as the intermediary structures of commonality or objectified spirit that allow Dilthey to reconcile the conflicting demands of the human sciences for both specificity and universality. We can also show the intermediary nature of these systems by tracing how they differentiate objective spirit relative to the task of hermeneutics.

#### FROM ELEMENTARY TO HIGHER UNDERSTANDING

It became increasingly clear to Dilthey that human understanding is inherently interpretive. This is as true for self-understanding as it is for the understanding of others. Both require the intermediary of expression. Thus Dilthey's hermeneutic triad of "lived experience, expression, and understanding" (153). Lived experience gives access to the human world, but its insights do not constitute understanding. To understand myself is to be able to see myself as others can see me. Understanding thus proceeds from the outside to the inside, from an overall context to a content.

Dilthey's most successful formulation of the task of hermeneutics is to be found in "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life" (226-47). There he distinguishes three kinds of life-manifestations that need to be understood: theoretical judgments, actions, and expressions of lived experience.

The first kind communicates cognitive contents independently of who utters them and is quite open to full understanding. Actions are not meant to communicate, but they nevertheless disclose something about the purposes of agents. Yet no matter how much personal deliberation went into an action, it can express only some aspects of that person and provide limited understanding. Expressions of lived experience are very different in that they disclose the personal more fully. However, they often do so in ways that are quite impersonal. They tend to reveal more to understanding than was intended, and instead of being true about what was first possessed in consciousness, may even disclose what was unconscious. As such, an expression of lived experience can be “truthful in itself” (228).

When understanding is conceived in the most general terms, it can be said to be “about connectedness” (276) and this is best judged relative to objectifications of experience. Whereas lived experience provides immediate access to reality and self, understanding is usually mediated and indirect. We understand more about ourselves through the ways we relate to others and express ourselves than through introspection. Our self-understanding is always more than personal, because most of what is expressed uses the communal signs of the language we grew up with, and more generally, all the discursive practices of objective spirit. This means that in normal or elementary understanding, expressions have a public transparency. National languages are thus productive systems that serve as intermediaries between lived experience and understanding. In elementary understanding, the relation between an expression and what is expressed is not inferential but directly representative. People participating in the same productive nexus of objective spirit normally attach the same meanings to expressions. This elementary function of objective spirit is representative in a public discursive sense rather than in a private mental sense. For the elementary understanding of expressions, it is not necessary that we share the same psychic representations (*Vorstellungen*). They need merely be part of a productive nexus that is expressive in a discursively representative sense (*Vertretung*).

Objective spirit is the productive nexus of commonality from which all elementary understanding starts. Higher understanding is only needed when this self-evident context of commonality breaks down and pits particulars against each other. Then we must analyze the medium of commonality into more specific contexts. Once the normal relation between an expression and its

meaning is rendered questionable, it becomes necessary to develop an understanding based on finding the appropriate context of that expression.

Here the relation between an expression and what is expressed goes over into that between the multiple manifestations of another person and the inner nexus that underlies them. This leads us to also take into account changing circumstances. What we have here is an inductive inference from particular manifestations of life to the overall nexus of life. It presupposes a knowledge of psychic life and its relation to milieu and circumstances. (232)

We thus advance from objective spirit as the background productive nexus of meaning to more situational and restricted productive systems, such as the psychic nexus of the speaker, his or her social circumstances, work situation, etc. Whereas elementary understanding proceeds directly from particular to particular within an accepted common medium, higher understanding identifies more localized contexts and moves inductively from particulars toward generalizations. Higher understanding must attempt to account for the anomaly that an author's expression seems not to be used in any typical sense. We then consider whether something about the author's historical situation, state of mind, or professional position produced a shift in meaning. But, Dilthey cautions,

Not all higher forms of understanding rest on the fundamental relationship between a product and productivity. We already saw that such an assumption is not correct for elementary forms of understanding; but a very important portion of the higher forms is also based on the relation between expression and what is expressed. In many cases, the understanding of human creations is directed merely at the nexus in which the successively apprehended parts of a work form a whole. (232)

Sometimes higher understanding aims at an overall understanding of a work, a sense of how everything fits together as a whole. This requires a shift from simply following the action of a play as it unfolds to a more reflective response once the performance has been completed. Among other things, this could involve an effort to grasp how the tensions between the characters are worked out, how everything from the setting to the words uttered by the actors

creates an overall effect. This totality of the work is not simply derived from the background productive nexus of objective spirit, nor contextualized in relation to more specific productive systems, whether psychic, social, or cultural, but becomes itself a productive nexus. The higher understanding of the overall work makes possible the transition from common meaning to universal significance. That is, to be able to understand the greatness of a play like *Macbeth* requires a sense of its overall coherence. Only such efforts at higher understanding can explain its universal appeal. Elementary understanding can grasp common or typical meanings, and higher understanding can aim at more systematic relations that can give a sense both of what is of universal import in human products and of what individualizes them.

The important breakthrough for Dilthey is that human products do not normally need to be related back to the psyches of their producers. Although the possibility of relating a work of art back to its creator is not ruled out, it is far from being the primary source of its understanding. Indeed, a great work of art can take on a life of its own and can become itself a productive nexus generating an ever deeper meaning over time.

#### DILTHEY'S *FORMATION* AND ITS PRODUCTIVE HISTORY

This is the only volume in our *Selected Works* (hereafter *SW*) edition that reproduces a volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (hereafter *GS*). This is a testament to the importance of *GS* VII, edited by Bernard Groethuysen, one of Dilthey's closest disciples in his last years. The first part of the volume consists of three "Studies Toward the Foundation of the Human Sciences," which Dilthey read to the Prussian Academy of the Sciences in Berlin from 1904 to 1909. Only the first of these studies was published during Dilthey's lifetime in the Proceedings of the Prussian Academy. The second part of the volume is the *Formation* essay, which was published in 1910 as a treatise by the Prussian Academy. The extensive materials that make up the "Plan for the Continuation of the *Formation*" were never published by Dilthey himself and, like the Second and Third Studies, did not appear in print until Groethuysen published them in 1927, sixteen years after Dilthey's death.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For details, especially concerning where the handwritten remains were found, see *GS* VII, 348–80.

That same year, Heidegger published his *Being and Time*, in which both the importance and limits of Dilthey's contributions to the understanding of history and historicity are noted. When Heidegger speaks of the need to address the presuppositions of a "possible 'Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences'," he could only be alluding to Dilthey's 1910 Academy essay.<sup>7</sup> The full *Formation* volume, as we have it here, goes some way in also addressing these presuppositions (see below, e.g. 213–25; 297–98; 310–11).

In his preface to the German *Formation* volume, Groethuysen distinguished between two sets of problems or perspectives governing the materials that he had assembled. For the sake of simplicity, he characterized these perspectives as those of psychology and hermeneutics. The first two studies and some parts of the appendix are seen as contributions to psychology, whereas everything else is considered to be part of the hermeneutical approach. This distinction set the stage for the question whether the hermeneutical approach was able to overcome the psychological approach. As editor, Groethuysen remains neutral and does not try to answer the question, but unfortunately, it would remain central in Dilthey scholarship for many decades. The view that Dilthey was finally able to leave the psychological approach behind led many interpreters such as Ludwig Landgrebe and Otto Bollnow to refer almost exclusively to this volume in their own writings.<sup>8</sup>

In this concluding section, we will attempt to transform the continuing psychology-hermeneutics debate about the *Formation* into a more productive posthistory. When it comes to evaluating the importance of the psychological and the hermeneutical approaches in the late Dilthey, it should be said that he indeed did distance himself from certain early explanative psychological tendencies. But his structural psychology, which he called "descriptive and analytical," was never renounced. Indeed, structural psychological and hermeneutical insights often re-enforce each other in Dilthey's writings. And if the appeal to a pregiven context is assumed to be

<sup>7</sup> This allusion gets lost in the two translations of *Being and Time*, but it can be clearly discerned on page 376 of Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> See Ludwig Landgrebe, "Wilhelm Diltheys Theorie der Geisteswissenschaften (Analyse ihrer Grundbegriffe)," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, IX, ed. Edmund Husserl (Halle a.d.S.: Max Niemeyer, 1928), pp. 237–367, and Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Dilthey: Eine Einführung in seine Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955).

the original position of hermeneutics, then Dilthey's structural psychology of the 1890s is at least protohermeneutical. There is always already a structural nexus of consciousness within which lived experiences and mental functions locate their meaning. Hermeneutics places this nexus of the self in a medium of commonality with others so that access to the self's experience is by way of incorporating representative meanings. The understanding of others serves the further specification of one's own experiences and thus makes it possible to define one's own individuality.

Dilthey's structural psychology and his hermeneutics are both about the articulation of meaning. In the former, the meaning of an experience is articulated by placing it within general structures of consciousness. In the latter, the meaning of things is articulated by regarding them as part of some larger context. Because Dilthey relied on an inner-outer distinction to fully explicate the meaning being articulated, whether psychologically or hermeneutically, one might assume that he merely developed a psychological mode of hermeneutics. But there is in Dilthey's use of the inner-outer distinction a productive ambiguity that works against this assumption. Psychologically, one might think that the inner is primordial and that the outer manifestation merely confirms it. We have shown, however, that the expressions appealed to in this volume are representative in a public discursive sense. Expressions need not merely manifest what was first represented psychologically. Rather, they are conceived as semantically transparent for any given community so that their meaning involves simply "reading off inner relations from outer forms" (62). This is not just an operation that starts from without to probe within, reversing the direction of the process of psychological manifestation. Discursively or semantically, the relation between an expression and the meaning expressed is that of an "inner unity" (61), which means that they are inseparable. Accordingly, "inner" comes to mean that to which we have direct access without needing to resort to inference. Even what we have access to as inner experience requires this inner unity of meaning provided by language.

Instead of reading Dilthey's *Formation* volume as the overcoming of the middle psychological works of the 1890s, it is more useful to see it as a return to the earlier efforts of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*. As such, its project of a Critique of Historical Reason, which is here revived and expanded, makes room for multiple modes of higher understanding. The task of a critique of the human sciences is to transform the elementary mode of un-

derstanding that comes from being immersed in objective spirit as the medium of commonality into higher modes of understanding provided by the various productive systems that can be analyzed in history. Here the psychic nexus is only one of many reference points.

It is also worth noting that the idea of a productive nexus or system, which is so central to the *Formation*, was first introduced in Dilthey's psychological writings immediately following the publication of the *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology*.<sup>9</sup> The mode of structural articulation from within, which Dilthey had developed in his psychology, is made applicable to the social and cultural systems in which individuals participate. But the fact that productive systems are also structurally centered in themselves does not require us to isolate them from each other. Instead, they can be shown to intersect structurally.

The most important contribution, however, that productive systems make to the understanding of history is their capacity to relate the categories of meaning and productive force. The category of meaning is in service of the structural articulation of how things in history are related. Structural systems do for history what laws do for nature; they account for order. The category of productive force, by contrast, develops Aristotle's categories of agency and suffering, action and reaction, in an effort to capture the dynamism of history. Productive force is to history what causality is to nature. What is distinctive of Dilthey's productive systems is that they are conceived in terms of both structure and force. The structural search for meaning points to similarities in things. Force can be channeled into structures, but it also has the capacity to move beyond them and produce difference. The challenge for historical understanding is to hold these tendencies in balance.

Dilthey distinguishes two kinds of forces that can work together to generate instability and discontinuity in the structural continuum of the status quo. One force derives its impetus from a negative tension, the other is a more positive striving for something new. Acknowledging their role in history, Dilthey asserts that "in the productive nexus of the great world events, the relationships of pressure, tension, the feeling of the insufficiency of the existing state of affairs—that is, feelings of aversion with a negative prognosis—form the background for action sustained by feelings of positive value toward goals to strive for and purposes to be set"

<sup>9</sup> See Dilthey, *SW* 2.

(187). No matter how successful any epoch in the development of a society or a cultural system may be, there always comes a point when some felt lack produces the need for change.

It could be objected that to posit a feeling of insufficiency as accounting for historical change is too anthropomorphic. This may be a fair criticism. Despite his efforts to reduce the role of psychology in the overall system of the human sciences and to do justice to transpersonal forces operative in history, Dilthey persisted in the belief that the role of individuals could not be eliminated if history is to be assigned meaning. Without human beings and human sciences, there cannot be a formation of the historical world. It may seem that we have accentuated the problem of anthropomorphism for Dilthey by translating *Geisteswissenschaften* as “human sciences” rather than more literally as “spiritual sciences.” But Dilthey was not particularly happy with the term *Geisteswissenschaften*, and one of the alternatives he used was “sciences of man, society, and state.” We can, however, save Dilthey from anthropocentrism by reiterating that in the *Formation*, individuals are no longer considered to be the sole carriers of history but merely the co-carriers.

Even when history “transpires in individuals” (304), its significance lies in the way these individuals experience commonality. For as Dilthey writes: “Individuals qua individuals remain separate from each other. They do not allow us to grasp the most profound essence of history, which is to objectify the spirit of community” (278). The historical role of individuals is to “re-present something more encompassing by gathering it within themselves, endowing it, as it were, with a singular, bounded visibility” (274). But not everything in life can be made visible—Dilthey also acknowledges the importance of a religious sense of being related to the invisible. There are some striking passages to be found in this volume about “the heightened way in which great religious individuals experience life” (285). They transcend the everyday experience of commonality, even the ideal of community, by pursuing a more thorough search for communion. Describing how religious people seek to overcome isolation, Dilthey writes: “They transport themselves toward the invisible and into the fundamental nature of life itself, uniting with other souls through love and understanding” (285).

True religiosity allows “no evasion, no yielding to the superficiality of being caught up in life, nor to the everyday forgetfulness of past and future” (285). Religious consciousness, then, need

not be an escape from this life into otherworldliness, but can itself contribute to historical understanding. The invisible, characterized as “something pressing in on life from outside, yet coming from its own depths” (285), seems to challenge our usual ability to distinguish the inner and the outer. Accordingly, the scope of understanding may need to be broadened beyond the three modes of representation already discussed to also encompass what cannot be interiorized or brought into visible focus. Although historical understanding for Dilthey is centered in individuals, we obtain hints that it is susceptible to a decentering that leaves room for invisible forces.

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E.R.