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Dilthey's Significance for Hermeneutics

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was deeply interested in hermeneutics, or the theory and methodology of interpretation ("interpretation" in the sense of coming to understand what people have expressed linguistically or in other ways), throughout most of his career. For example, his substantial work *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System in Relation to Earlier Protestant Hermeneutics* originally dates from 1860 and his seminal essay *The Rise of Hermeneutics* is from 1900.[1] This interest was intimately related to two other career-long interests of his: a broad interest in Schleiermacher, who among other things had been the most important recent theorist of hermeneutics (the first volume of Dilthey's *Life of Schleiermacher* appeared in 1870; Dilthey continued working towards a second volume during the rest of his life, and this material was published posthumously); and an interest in the methodology of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*], i.e. roughly what would today in the Anglophone world be called the social sciences and the humanities, in which interpretation plays a central role (the first volume of Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences* appeared in 1883, and was followed by work towards a second volume which was eventually published posthumously; in 1810 he published the closely related book, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, again producing materials towards a continuation which would only be published posthumously).

Making out Dilthey's significance for hermeneutics is not, though, an easy task. In particular, some of the most familiar and influential assessments of his significance in this area are as likely to lead us astray as to help us. For Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the real significance of Dilthey's hermeneutics lies not in its concern with history in the usual sense of the word, nor in its relevance for the methodology of the human sciences, but instead in Dilthey's demonstration that hermeneutics is rooted in "life," and especially his recognition of the intrinsically temporal structure of human experience, a structure that is both prior to and grounds our interest in history in the usual sense.[2] However, this assessment amounts to little more than selectively emphasizing certain features of Dilthey's position that could be interpreted as anticipations of Heidegger's own account of the nature of *Dasein* and downplaying all the rest. It is reasonable to protest that Dilthey's significance for hermeneutics was actually *very much* to do with history in the usual sense and with finding a methodology for the human sciences; that his views about "life" and the essentially temporal structure of experience contributed relatively little to this side of his project; that in particular his thesis of the rootedness of hermeneutics in "life," while perhaps helpful in reminding us that understanding, or interpretation, is already involved in everyday experience and that indeed everday experience could not occur without it, employs a concept of "life" that is too obscure to illuminate very much; and that the notion that

1 In this article Dilthey's works will be cited from two editions: W. Dilthey, *Selected Works*, ed. R.A. Makkreel and F. Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989–) [henceforth abbreviated as SW]; W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1914–) [henceforth abbreviated as GS]. Translations are borrowed from the former edition unless otherwise specified.

2 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 72-3, 428-9, 449-455.

the intrinsically temporal structure of human experience could go far towards explaining the nature of, or our interest in, history in the usual sense is an illusion. Somewhat similarly, Heidegger's student Gadamer attempted to accomplish a sort of assessment of Dilthey's significance for hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*. Gadamer essentially praised Dilthey for espousing a relativistic philosophy of "life" but criticized him for, simultaneously and inconsistently with it, also espousing a form of positivism (i.e. roughly, an assumption that meanings are objective facts and that they are therefore accessible by means of methods of inquiry similar to those employed in the natural sciences).[3] However, while some form of the tension that Gadamer identifies here is certainly present in Dilthey, Gadamer's theoretical preference for a version of relativism over positivism turns out to be highly dubious on closer inspection.[4] It may therefore well be that Dilthey's real achievement in this area lies not on his more relativist side but on his more positivist side. Finally, Gadamer's protégé Habermas essentially repeats Gadamer's assessment of Dilthey, disapproving of Dilthey's positivist side, but showing greater sympathy with his more relativistic recognition that interpretation is essentially rooted in interests and historically situated.[5] Habermas's assessment therefore basically inherits the dubiousness of Gadamer's. It may still well be that Dilthey's real importance for hermeneutics lies on his more positivist side than on his more relativist side.

I would therefore like in this article to set aside Heidegger's, Gadamer's, and Habermas's assessements of Dilthey's significance for hermeneutics and attempt to sketch a rather different assessment.[6] Its general upshot will be that Dilthey's main contributions lie not in certain areas where one might perhaps have expected or hoped to find them but instead in others: not in his interpretation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, nor in his own hermeneutic methodology, but instead in his broader history of the discipline, his definition of the discipline's range of application, and especially his implicit conception of the epistemic status of its subject matter, understanding, as potentially scientific, as well as his two closely related conceptions of the fundamental importance of understanding and hermeneutics for the human sciences and of the epistemic status of the human sciences as sciences.

I

Let me begin with the bad news. Given the considerable extent of Dilthey's concern with Schleiermacher's version of hermeneutics and with hermeneutics itself, one might have expected, or at least hoped, that he would have had very illuminating positions on both of these subjects. However, somewhat surprisingly and disappointingly, that does not quite turn out to be the case.

Consider first his interpretation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Dilthey does in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* and *The Rise of Hermeneutics* say many correct and even insightful things about Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. For example, he recognizes that it aims to provide a perfectly general methodology of interpretation (not, for example, one restricted just to the Bible or just to classi-

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3 See H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. tr. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2002), esp. pp. 234-42.

4 For a critique of Gadamer's own theoretical position that shows this, see M.N. Forster, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Critical Appraisal," *Mythos-Magazin*, July 2011.

5 J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, tr. J.J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 177-9. Habermas goes on to develop the latter side of Dilthey by setting aside Dilthey's own empathy-model of understanding and substituting for it a Gadamerian relativistic conception of understanding as consisting in "dialogue" between interpreted and interpreter (ibid., pp. 179-82), albeit while adding the further twist that it is possible to recuperate a sort of objectivity within such "dialogue" by incorporating into it a form of self-criticism on the part of the interpreter (ibid., pp. 181, 197-8).

6 One problem that confronts such an undertaking is that Dilthey's position in this area, as in others, is often frustratingly unclear, inconsistent, and changing (cf. O.F. Bollnow, "Wilhelm Dilthey als Begründer einer hermeneutischen Philosophie," in his *Zwischen Philosophie und Pädagogik* [Aachen: Norbert Friedrich Weitz Verlag, 1988], pp. 178-9). Rather than try to account for every statement in the texts, I shall therefore selectively emphasize what I take to be either the main thrust of his position or what is most valuable in it.

cal texts). He also recognizes that it seeks to do so on the basis of a theory of the very nature of understanding (not just a collection of rules for achieving it). He also recognizes that one of its central concern is to address the problems for interpretation that arise out of the phenomenon of an author's creative individuality (especially, conceptual originality). He also recognizes that another of its central concerns is with the problem of hermeneutical circularity (the problem of how, for example, one can, as one should, interpret the parts of a text in light of the whole text when, conversely, interpreting the whole text also requires interpreting its parts). He also recognizes that it develops a very plausible solution to that problem (namely, to continue with the example just mentioned, that one should read through the parts sequentially in order to get a provisional understanding of them and of the whole, then use this provisional understanding of the whole in order to refine the interpretation of the parts, thereby producing a better understanding of the whole, which can then be reapplied to further refine the interpretation of the parts still further, and so on ad indefinitum). And he also recognizes that it divides all interpretation into a linguistic and a psychological component, the former addressed mainly to what the author shares intellectually with his community but the latter to what is intellectually individual to him, and that it emphasizes the use of a "comparative" method on the former side and of a "divinatory" method on the latter side.

However, Dilthey's interpretation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is also deeply unsatisfactory in many ways, and moreover tends to become increasingly so as he gets older – either downright misrepresenting Schleiermacher's position or else emphasizing its least viable side at points where it is ambiguously torn between two sides. Let me briefly specify some of the ways in which this is true:

(1) One of Schleiermacher's most important innovations in hermeneutics lay in founding the discipline on a new and superior philosophy of language, which in particular included versions of the Herderian principles that (a) thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language (Schleiermacher even went as far as to say: identical with language) and (b) meaning consists in word-usage (or, more specifically, "the unity of the word-sphere"). Dilthey at one point in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* insightfully praises Schleiermacher's project of founding hermeneutics on a new theory of language as "enormous progress."[7] Nonetheless, Dilthey tends to dismiss or overlook the two vitally important specific principles in question: Concerning (a), while he does indeed recognize Schleiermacher's commitment to a thought-language identity thesis, he quickly dismisses this as indefensible,[8] and therefore excludes it as much as possible from his reading of Schleiermacher's position. Concerning (b), he not only hastily dismisses any equation of meaning with word-usage as untenable,[9] but even at points seems to deny that Schleiermacher holds such a position at all, instead attributing to him a thoroughly psychologistic theory of meaning.[10] This early tendency in Dilthey to disregard Schleiermacher's founding of hermeneutics on versions of principles (a) and (b) is scarcely less marked later in *The Rise of Hermeneutics*.

(2) Relatedly, while Dilthey in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* quite properly emphasizes that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics pays at least as much attention to the linguistic as to the psychological side of interpretation, later in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* his characterization of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics focuses almost exclusively on the psychological side of interpretation, thereby severely misrepresenting it.[11]

(3) In *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* Dilthey quite properly recognizes that when Schleiermacher describes the predominant method on the psychological side of interpretation as one of

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7 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:178 = GS 14:739.

8 Ibid., SW 4:191, 211 = GS 14:750-1, 770.

9 Ibid., SW 4:201 = GS 14:760.

10 Ibid., SW 4:185-6 = GS 14:745-6. (But contrast SW 4:199-200 = GS 14:758-9.)

11 Heinz Kimmerle has rightly emphasized this one-sidedness in Dilthey's late account of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. However, Kimmerle does not do justice to the younger Dilthey, who had a much more evenhanded and accurate account of it.

"divination," he mainly means by this that it is a method of *guesswork* or *hypothesis*.[12] However, later in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* Dilthey instead characterizes Schleiermacher's "divination" as fundamentally a sort of psychological self-projection by the interpreter onto an author or his work, in the course of which the interpreter merely accentuates some of his own psychological traits and de-emphasizes others.[13] There are some small grains of truth in such a characterization of the method: Schleiermacher does (a) sometimes use metaphors along the lines of saying that the interpreter should "put himself ... in the position of the author"[14] or "put himself 'inside' the author,"[15] and (b) hold that the method of divination requires some measure of psychological common ground between the interpreter and the author.[16] Nonetheless, Dilthey's characterization is far more misleading than illuminating. For one thing, it disregards Schleiermacher's strong and crucially important insistence that interpreters need to resist pervasive temptations to falsely assimilate the concepts, beliefs, etc. expressed by texts (e.g. texts from the remote past) to their own. Schleiermacher writes, for example: "Misunderstanding is either a consequence of hastiness or of prejudice. The former is an isolated moment. The latter is a mistake which lies deeper. It is the onesided preference for what is close to the individual's circle of ideas and the rejection of what lies outside it. In this way one explains in or explains out what is not present in the author [*sic*]."[17] For another thing, Dilthey's characterization disregards the fact that Schleiermacher's metaphors of self-projection are counterbalanced by metaphors of self-*transformation* and even self-*effacement*: the interpreter should "transform himself, so to speak, into the author,"[18] he should "step out of [his] own frame of mind into that of the author."[19]

(4) Dilthey already in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* characterizes Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as fundamentally *ahistorical* – in particular, as concerned with the challenges to interpretation that are posed by creative individuality rather than with challenges to it that are posed by historical (or cultural) distance.[20] This is again highly misleading. As Dilthey himself later observes in *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, the development of the discipline since the Renaissance has largely resulted from a recognition that historical (and cultural) distance poses great problems for interpretation.[21] Moreover, the more immediate forerunners in the discipline whom Schleiermacher admired most (in particular, Ernesti, Herder, and Friedrich Schlegel) had all exemplified an emphatic form of that recognition. It would therefore be not only disappointing but also quite surprising if Schleiermacher were an exception to the rule. Here again, there is a *grain* of truth in what Dilthey says, in that Schleiermacher does believe that an author's psychological individuality poses problems for interpretation even where historical (or cultural) distance is not involved.[22] However, Schleiermacher also believes that historical (or cultural) distance is at least as important a source of such problems. This is especially clear in his essay *On the Different Methods of Translation* (1813), where he in effect argues that interpretation and translation typically need to cope with *two* problems: one arising from the discrepancy between the conceptual resources of our mo-

12 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:158 = GS 14:718; cf. SW 4:98, 231 = GS 14:659, 20:107.

13 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:248-9 = GS 5:329-30. Gadamer in *Truth and Method* basically follows Dilthey in (mis)reading Schleiermacher in this way.

14 F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: the Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. H. Kimmerle, tr. J. Duke and J. Forstmann (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), p. 113.

15 Ibid., p. 64.

16 Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, ed. A. Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 92-3.

17 Ibid., p. 23.

18 *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 150.

19 Ibid., p. 42.

20 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:134, 141, 218 = GS 14:693, 700, 778 (Dilthey does belatedly enter a qualification in a footnote on the last of these pages, though). Gadamer basically follows Dilthey in this (mis)reading of Schleiermacher (see e.g. *Truth and Method*, p. 240).

21 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:242 = GS 5:323-4.

22 See e.g. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, p. 20; *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, pp. 178-82.

dern language and those of the historically (or culturally) distant language that the author was using; and the other arising from the author's individual linguistic-conceptual deviations from his background language.

(5) Relatedly, Dilthey implies that Schleiermacher excludes the consideration of *historical context* from interpretation.[23] This is an extraordinary misunderstanding of Schleiermacher's position. For example, in *On the Different Methods of Translation* Schleiermacher says that "the art of understanding" is realized through "precise knowledge of the whole historical life of a nation."[24] Here again there is a *grain* of truth in Dilthey's reading (though only a tiny one), in that Schleiermacher does tend in the hermeneutics lectures to characterize the consideration of a work's historical context as a *pre*requisite for its interpretation rather than as *part* of its interpretation.[25] But for Schleiermacher this is a way of saying that considering historical context is *essential* to sound interpretation, a *conditio sine qua non* of anything that really deserves the name of interpretation taking place at all, not a way of saying that interpretation *can do without* it!

(6) Dilthey consistently interprets Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as ultimately resting on an *a priori metaphysical* thesis developed by Schleiermacher in his *Ethics* to the effect that all reason combines the *identical* with the *distinctive* (or the universal with the individual).[26] This interpretation is not *entirely* wrong. However, it amounts to focusing on only one side of a position in Schleiermacher that is ambiguous, and on the least plausible side at that. For another, and much more plausible, side of Schleiermacher's position, prominent in *On the Different Methods of Translation* for example, rather presents the combination of the identical with the distinctive in texts as something that only certain texts exhibit (not all), and that is known from experience.

(7) Finally, Dilthey in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* is quite properly skeptical of Schleiermacher's doctrine that the interpreter not only needs to investigate an author's psychology in a general way but that more specifically it is always the case that an author's "seminal decision [*Keimentschluß*]" lies at the source of any text, unfolding itself as the text in a necessary fashion, so that the interpreter always needs to identify this "seminal decision" and its necessary development in particular. (Dilthey points out plausibly that this doctrine has its source in Fichte's heady metaphysical theory that the self's original act of self-positing necessarily unfolds itself as the whole world of appearances,[27] and he rightly questions whether many texts really come into existence in this way – rather than, say, having *several* points of origin – and whether therefore they should really be interpreted accordingly.[28]) However, by contrast, Dilthey later in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* comes to emphasize and sympathize with this implausible doctrine of Schleiermacher's.[29]

The upshot of this whole unsatisfactory reading of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is that by the time Dilthey writes *The Rise of Hermeneutics* in 1900 he misleadingly attributes to Schleiermacher a simplistic and misguided methodology of interpretation, in which language and historical context play hardly any role, attention is instead mainly focused on the author's psychology, the interpreter's

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23 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:217-18 = GS 14:777-8. Kimmerle follows Dilthey in this (mis)reading of Schleiermacher (see *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, pp. 29-30.)

24 F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *On the Different Methods of Translation*, in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A.L. Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 7, cf. p. 13. See also *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 104: "Only historical interpretation can do justice to the rootedness of the New Testament authors in their place and time."

25 See e.g. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 104: the task of "gathering historical data ... should be done even before interpretation begins."

26 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:104-10, 134-7, 146, 157 = GS 14:663-9, 693-6, 706, 717. This interpretation also contributes in Dilthey to a broader reading of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as at bottom deeply anti-empirical in spirit (see e.g. ibid., SW 4:160 = GS 14:721).

27 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:100 ff. = GS 14:660 ff.

28 Ibid., SW 4:221 = GS 14:781.

29 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:246-7 = GS 5:327-8. Cf. *The Eighteenth Century and the Historical World*, SW 4:375-7 = GS 3:258-9.

access to that psychology is conceived as basically a sort of (modestly adjusted) psychological self-projection, and the more specific aim of psychological interpretation is mainly to recapture an author's "seminal decision" and its necessary unfolding:

> The possibility of a universally valid interpretation can be derived from the nature of understanding. In understanding, the individuality of the exegete and that of the author are not opposed to each other like two incomparable facts. Rather, both have been formed upon the substratum of a general human nature, and it is this which makes possible the commonality of people with each other for speech and understanding. Here the relatively formalistic terminology of Schleiermacher can be further elucidated psychologically. All individual differences are not in the last analysis determined by qualitative differences among persons, but rather through graduated differences in their psychic processes. Now inasmuch as the interpreter tentatively projects his own sense of life into another historical milieu, he is able within that perspective to momentarily strengthen and emphasize certain psychic processes and to minimize others, thus making possible within himself a re-creation of an alien form of life ... Grammatical interpretation proceeds through the text from connection to connection up to the highest relations that dominate the whole. Psychological interpretation starts by projecting into the creative inner process, and proceeds onward to the outer and inner form of the work, and beyond that to grasp the unity of an author's works in relation to his developmental and spiritual tendencies.[30]

II

Moreover, Dilthey's own hermeneutic methodology, insofar as he has one, basically takes over this whole model and its inadequacies. This can be seen from the drafts for a second volume of *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, for example, where he writes in one passage:

> Knowledge of psychic life is given to us immediately and directly only in [the] apprehension of our self ... There is [only the] inference from the bodily behavior [of others], which we then endow with our own psychic states. Therefore we know and understand only as much of psychic states as we find in ourselves. We divide and combine these inner processes in ourselves, we intensify and diminish them, and in this way acquire those processes which we attribute to the expressions of life that surround or precede us ... *Therefore, the entire material for our knowledge, our understanding of the states of sensible, thinking organisms, is merely the transformation of that which we apprehend in ourselves.*[31]

In fairness, Dilthey does qualify this crude position somewhat towards the end of his life in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. There he downplays the role of psychology in interpretation, mainly because he has now come to be impressed by the idea that meaning has a profoundly social character (depends on "objective spirit," à la Hegel),[32] and consequently thinks that the interpreter needs to understand people, including even himself, in the light of their expressions in the social domain rather than more immediately.[33] And in a section of the work titled "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life" he now distinguishes between elementary forms of understanding, forms of understanding that are socially mediated (through "objective spirit"), and "higher forms of understanding" which identify what is individual – allowing induction a role in the first, interpretation of the particular case in light of social norms in the second, and restricting psychological self-projection to the third.[34]

However, as the last part of this tripartite model shows, even in this late work he continues to assign an important role to psychological self-projection. For example, he writes that "we understand ourselves and others only if we project our experienced life into every sort of expression of our own and others' lives."[35] Moreover, the rest of his account remains radically underdeveloped. In particu-

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30 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:248-50 = GS 14:329-31.

31 *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, SW 1:375-6 = GS 19:205-6 (emphasis in the original). Cf. SW 1:388-91 = GS 19:223-6.

32 Concerning the Hegelian provenance of this concept in the later Dilthey, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 226-9; R.A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 307 ff.

33 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:106-8 = GS 7:84-7; cf. SW 3:168-73, 229-31 = GS 7:146-51, 208-10.

34 Ibid., SW 3:226-47 = GS 7:205-27.

35 Ibid., SW 3:109 = GS 7:87; cf. SW 3:234-7, 239, 335 = GS 7:213-16, 218, 315.

lar, even this final version of his hermeneutics still lacks any foundation in a philosophy of language in the manner of Schleiermacher (or in a broader counterpart to it that would attribute to the broader class of "expressions" that Dilthey now recognizes an essential role in constituting thought and meaning analogous to that attributed to language by Schleiermacher). And despite his aspiration in *Introduction to the Human Sciences* to develop a methodology for the "Historical School," which "considered spiritual life as historical through and through,"[36] and his observation in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* that the Renaissance's discovery of the problem of historical distance marked an essential step in the development of hermeneutics,[37] he still fails to incorporate any consideration of historical context into his hermeneutics.[38]

Nor can such shortcomings in Dilthey's hermeneutics be seen as merely the result of a persistent tendency of his to postpone developing it until after the rest of his position has been presented, as one commentator has suggested.[39] For Dilthey rather regards its further development as *impossible in principle*. Thus in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* he claims that the attempt to codify the rules of interpretation was something that only belonged to an early stage of the history of hermeneutics, a stage that has since been superseded by Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Boeckh.[40] And he adds that "There is something irrational in all understanding just as life itself is irrational; it cannot be represented in a logical formula ... These are the limits placed on the logical treatment of understanding by its very nature."[41]

Certainly, if one were to troll through, and select from, the whole bulk of Dilthey's often-contradictory statements on hermeneutics and its history from different periods of his work, one could cobble together a more satisfactory hermeneutic methodology than the one I have just attributed to him. And the same would be true if one were to abstract hermeneutic principles from his own, often scrupulous and skilled, interpretive practice (which in particular usually pays close attention both to linguistic-philological factors and to historical context). But the fact is that in his case such a satisfactory hermeneutic methodology remained at best only an unrealized possibility. If one wants a serious hermeneutic methodology one actually does much better to go back to Schleiermacher or Boeckh than to look to Dilthey.

In short, not only is Dilthey's grasp of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics inadequate but also, and largely in consequence, his own hermeneutic methodology is so as well.

III

So much for the bad news about Dilthey and hermeneutics. But there is also some very good news. So I would like now to turn to this for the remainder of the article. A first thing that deserves emphasis and praise here is the broader sweep of Dilthey's history of hermeneutics (i.e. his macroscopic history of hermeneutics in general rather than his microscopic history of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in particular). Dilthey was arguably the first person to attempt to give a reasonably comprehensive history of hermeneutics as a discipline. Moreover, many of his specific observations on this subject still repay consideration today. Let me therefore summarize a few of the most important points that he makes in his treatment of the history of the discipline:

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36 *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, SW 1:48 = GS 1:xvi.

37 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:242 = GS 5:323-4.

38 Though profoundly misguided, this is not *quite* as paradoxical as it may seem. To recognize the challenges posed to interpretation by historical distance and to want to bridge it does not *logically* preclude doing so by means which disregard historical context and instead, say, limit themselves to an intensive psychological engagement with the ancient texts involved.

39 This suggestion is made by F. Rodi, "Drei Bemerkungen zu Diltheys Aufsatz 'Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik,'" *Revue internationale de philosophie*, no. 226 (2003/4), pp. 428-9.

40 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:238 = GS 7:217. It should be noted that this is a very dubious assertion, at least in relation to Schleiermacher and Boeckh, who are both extremely detailed and systematic in their formulation of rules of interpretation.

41 Ibid., SW 3:239 = GS 7:218.

(1) In *The Rise of Hermeneutics* he locates the origins of hermeneutics in ancient Greece. In particular, he observes that the central role of poetry in Greek education led to spirited interpretation and criticism of Homer and other poets during the Greek enlightenment of the 5th century; that the rise of the Sophists with their focus on rhetoric enabled hermeneutics to develop in a more refined way, eventually leading to Aristotle's contributions to the subject; that the interpretive and critical practice of Alexandrian philologists then led them to formulate even more sophisticated hermeneutical principles in the interest of achieving literal interpretation; that this was both opposed and provoked into greater refinement by an alternative, allegorical style of interpretation that came to be practiced at Pergamon; and that this conflict later re-emerged in the Christian era between, respectively, Antioch (in particular, Theodorus), which championed a literal style of interpretation, and Alexandria (in particular, Philo, Clement, and Origen), which now championed allegorical interpretation, a process that helped to spur still further development of hermeneutical self-consciousness and sophistication.[42]

(2) In the same work Dilthey identifies the Renaissance as marking a new phase in the development of hermeneutics because of its new awareness of the historicity of mental phenomena (i.e. their subjection to profound changes over time) and of the great difficulties that often arise for interpretation as a result:

> Interpretation and its codification entered a new stage with the Renaissance. Because one was separated by language, living conditions, and nationality from classical and Christian antiquity, interpretation became even more than in ancient Rome a matter of transposing oneself into an alien spiritual life through linguistic, factual, and historical studies.[43]

(3) Already in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, and then more cursorily again later in *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, Dilthey identifies the Reformation as the source of the next major step in the development of hermeneutics. Indeed, in the former work he goes as far as to say, "The science of hermeneutics actually begins with Protestantism, although the art of exegesis and reflection on it are, of course, much older."[44] According to Dilthey, Protestantism's defining principle that each Christian has the right and responsibility to interpret the Bible for himself gave a huge impetus to the search for reliable principles to guide the interpretation of this difficult text. The Lutheran Matthius Flacius Illyricus's famous work of biblical hermeneutics, the *Clavis* (1567), was thus the first in a long line of sophisticated modern Protestant works of biblical hermeneutics.[45] Moreover (as in the case of conflicts between different schools of interpretation in the ancient world), the conflict that then arose between Protestant and Catholic hermeneutic theorists increased the development of methodological self-reflection still further.[46]

(4) Finally, Dilthey both in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* and in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* identifies Schleiermacher as a sort of culmination in the development of the discipline. Dilthey in particular praises him for seeking a perfectly general theory and methodology of interpretation;[47] for aiming to ground it on an analysis of the nature of understanding itself (rather than merely providing a collection of rules for achieving understanding);[48] and for recognizing that the phenomenon of authors' *creative individuality* poses a vital challenge to interpretation which it needs to address.[49]

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42 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:239-42 = GS 5:321-3.

43 Ibid., SW 4:242 = GS 5:323-4. This was in effect the early beginning of what Dilthey in *Introduction to the Human Sciences* calls the "Historical School," i.e. the German school of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that included Winckelmann, Herder, the Romantics, Niebuhr, Jakob Grimm, Savigny, and Boeckh, and which "considered spiritual life as historical through and through" (SW 1:48 = GS 1:xvi).

44 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:33 = GS 14:597.

45 Ibid., SW 4:35 ff. = GS 14:599 ff.

46 Ibid., SW 4:34 ff. = GS 14:597 ff.

47 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:247 = GS 5:328.

48 Ibid., SW 4:246, 248-9 = GS 5:327, 329-30.

49 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:149 = GS 14:709; *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:246-7 = GS 5:327-8.

Dilthey's broad history of hermeneutics, including the four central theses just mentioned, constitutes an important contribution in connection with hermeneutics in its own right. Other writers have since treated some aspects of that history in more detail or extended it further forward in time (for example, J. Wach in *Das Verstehen: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert* [1926-33] and R.E. Palmer in *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* [1969]). But Dilthey laid the foundations for this subsequent work, and moreover remains in certain respects indispensable.

IV

Another positive contribution with which Dilthey should be credited lies in a certain broadening of the subject matter of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher had normally conceived interpretation and its methodology as exclusively concerned with *linguistic* forms of expression: written texts or discourse. In contrast, Dilthey, especially after 1900, increasingly came to emphasize that there are also other types of "manifestation [*Äußerung*]" or "expression [*Ausdruck*]" that convey meanings, hence require interpretation, and therefore ought to be covered by the methodology of interpretation.

Among the other types that he identified in this connection are instrumental music,[50] sculpture, and painting;[51] gestures and looks;[52] social customs and their products, including such things as the way in which trees are arranged in a park or chairs in a room;[53] a broader class of social practices and institutions that includes, in addition to all of the items just mentioned, also various sorts of social, political, economic, and legal institutions that convey meanings;[54] and finally (a class of cases which, unlike all the preceding ones, do not normally involve any *intention* to convey the meanings that they reveal, and which Dilthey therefore usually avoids calling "expressions," instead only classifying them under the broader category of "manifestations"), all actions.[55]

This extending of the range of meanings – and consequently of interpretation, and therefore also of hermeneutics as the theory and methodology of interpretation – to include much more than just language in the usual sense seems clearly correct, and also important. However, its novelty should not be exaggerated. For while such a move certainly makes progress over Schleiermacher, it had already been strongly anticipated by several *other* theorists of interpretation before Dilthey, including Herder,[56] Friedrich Schlegel,[57] Droysen,[58] and Hegel.[59] Dilthey seems to have been especially strongly influenced by Hegel here – his move to adopt his extended conception of meaning, interpretation, and hermeneutics largely occurred while he was working on his seminal book about the young Hegel, *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels* (1906).

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50 See esp. *Musical Understanding* (circa 1905) in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:241-5 = GS 7:220-4.

51 See esp. *The Eighteenth Century and the Historical World*, SW 4:375-7 = GS 3:258-9; also *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:96-7 = GS 7:75. (Interestingly, Dilthey by contrast denies that photographs express meanings – a denial that seems implausible for at least certain types of photographs.)

52 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:108, 229-30 = GS 7:86, 208-9.

53 Ibid., SW 3:229 = GS 7:208.

54 Ibid., SW 3:106-8, 168-73, 229-31 = GS 7:84-6, 146-51, 208-10. Dilthey in his late work calls all such social institutions and practices "objective spirit [*objektiver Geist*]." He borrows this term from Hegel, but in a flexible way, for example broadening its extension so as to include under it, not only what Hegel himself would have included, but also what Hegel would have contradistinguished as "absolute spirit" (i.e. art, religion, and philosophy).

55 Ibid., SW 3:227 = GS 7:206. For a more detailed discussion of Dilthey's theory of manifestations/expressions, see H.P. Rickman, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Pioneer of the Human Studies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979), ch. 7.

56 See M.N. Forster, "Gods, Animals, and Artists: Some Problem Cases in Herder's Philosophy of Language," in his *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

57 See M.N. Forster, "Friedrich Schlegel's Hermeneutics," in his *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

58 See e.g. J.G. Droysen, *Historik*, ed. P. Leyh (Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1977), 1:25-6, 187 ff.

59 See concerning this M.N. Forster, "Hegel and Hermeneutics" and "Hegel and Some (Near-)Contemporaries: Narrow or Broad Expressivism?" both in his *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond.*

There is also a further interesting aspect of Dilthey's position here that deserves discussion, though. Among those of his predecessors who had already recognized the capacity of certain non-linguistic arts such as instrumental music, painting, and sculpture to express meanings, and their need therefore to be interpreted, some had held that this capacity was only possible through a sort of parasitism on the artist's language (e.g. Herder and Schlegel), whereas others had held that non-linguistic art could in certain cases express meanings that transcended the expressive resources of the artist's language (e.g. Hegel).[60] In *The Rise of Hermeneutics* from 1900 Dilthey still seems to be attracted to the former position (which he there especially associates with Preller).[61] However, in works after 1900 he comes to opt for the latter position instead.[62] His decision during that period to begin exploring a class of "expressions" which are only in part linguistic is symptomatic of this in a way. But it can be seen even more clearly in a short piece titled *Musical Understanding* which he wrote around 1905.[63] In this piece he insists that instrumental music expresses deep aspects of the soul's experience and has a meaning. But he also distinguishes between, on the one hand, meanings in instrumental music which merely reflect a pre-articulation or pre-articulability of the same meanings in language and, on the other hand, meanings in instrumental music which are not clearly expressible in language but are more properly musical. More specifically, he claims that there are aspects of "life" itself which *only* receive clear expression in music, not linguistically. It seems clear that his move to this later position was again strongly influenced by his preoccupation with Hegel while writing *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels* (1906). However, his discussion of instrumental music also shows that he was by no means slavishly following Hegel, since for Hegel it was not instrumental music but instead architecture and sculpture that exhibited the sort of expressive independence from language in question. Dilthey's position concerning music specifically seems rather to have been influenced by Schopenhauer's famous discussion of it in *The World as Will and Representation*, according to which it has the power to directly express the nature of the will and thus the metaphysical ground of everything in a way that transcends language.

Whether Hegel and Dilthey are right in claiming the independence of certain forms of expression of meaning from language or whether instead Herder and Schlegel are right in claiming that there is always an implicit dependence on language seems to me a very difficult question, and I do not want to try to settle it here.[64] But the following are two points which at least *tend* to support the Hegel-Dilthey position: First, if one conceives language in the usual sense as restricted to speaking and writing, i.e. to uttered sounds and visible marks on paper or a similar substance, then it seems extremely unlikely that these two physical media of expression, among the many others that are either imaginable or actual, could have the sort of monopoly on the power to express meanings in an independent way that the Herder-Schlegel position asserts. Would that not be a sort of miracle? Second, Dilthey in *Musical Understanding* emphasizes that music is an evolving cultural artifact constituted by a rich body of *rules* which make possible its expressive power. This suggests a way in which instrumental music (or other non-linguistic symbolic media) might sometimes be able to express meanings independently of spoken or written language, namely in virtue of possessing a similar sort of *rule-governedness* to that which makes meaning possible in the case of such language. For example, the ancient Greeks' various musical modes seem to have been very tightly bound by explicit or implicit rules to certain specific sorts of occasions and moods.[65]

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60 For details, see ibid.

61 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:237 = GS 5:319: "There is also an art of interpretation whose objects are statues or paintings, ... and Preller tried to work it out. Yet Preller himself had already pointed out that such interpretation of mute works is everywhere dependent on literature for its elucidation. That is indeed the immeasurable significance of literature for our understanding of spiritual life and of history, for only in language does human inner life find its complete, exhaustive, and objectively understandable expression."

62 Habermas overlooks this change of position when he discusses Dilthey in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

63 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:241-5 = GS 7:220-4.

64 For an attempt to settle it, see Forster, "Hegel and Some (Near-)Contemporaries: Narrow or Broad Expressivism?"

65 This point also suggests, though, that to the extent that instrumental music (or another seemingly non-linguistic

V

I now turn to what are probably Dilthey's most important contributions in connection with hermeneutics. They lie in his answers to three questions that all turn out to be closely related in his view: (1) Can interpretation in principle be a science or instead only something else, say an art? (2) What is the central and proper method of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*], i.e. such disciplines as history, political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, jurisprudence, psychology, classical scholarship, literary studies, and art history? (3) Are these disciplines such as to be properly speaking sciences?

The main lines of Dilthey's approach to these three questions had already been developed before him by Droysen in his lectures on *Historik*, or the methodology of the discipline of history.[66] (The lectures were first delivered in 1857; an outline of them, *Grundriß der Historik*, was published in 1858, followed by several further editions, the last in 1882; two editions of the lectures themselves were eventually published in the twentieth century, including an edition of the first cycle from 1857.) Droysen in particular insisted on the following principles: The appropriate method of a science depends on and varies with the science's object.[67] Accordingly, history is a science but it is one whose central method lies not in causal explanation [*erklären*] like the natural sciences, nor even in the criticism of sources, but instead in *understanding* [*verstehen*], or *interpreting* [*interpretieren*].[68] The methodological discipline that is of central importance to history is therefore hermeneutics.[69]

Dilthey's answers to questions (1)-(3) follow and expand on these principles of Droysen's. Let me say something about Dilthey's answers to each of the three questions in turn, beginning in this section with (1), then turning in the next sections to (2) and (3).

Dilthey's answer to question (1) is implicit rather than explicit, implied by his explicit answers to questions (2) and (3). More specifically, it is implied by his explicit answers to questions (2) and (3) that the central and proper method of the human sciences is understanding, or interpretation, and that it is in virtue of their employment of this method that they are indeed sciences. Nonetheless, I would like to consider Dilthey's answer to question (1) first here, since this is a fundamental question within hermeneutics (rather than merely a question concerning the relevance of interpretation and hermeneutics for other disciplines).

Friedrich Schlegel, in his *Philosophy of Philology* (1797), and then Schleiermacher, in his hermeneutics lectures, had already posed the question whether interpretation is a science [*Wissenschaft*] or instead an art.[70] Schlegel had not given a consistent answer to the question, but Schleiermacher had done so, opting for characterizing interpretation as an art, on the grounds that it centrally uses the method of "divination," or hypothesis. Now when Dilthey identifies interpretation as the distinctive

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symbolic medium) has the power to express meanings in an independent way, it should perhaps really *itself* be classified as a language in the usual sense (thereby eliminating, or at least reducing, the distance between the Hegel-Dilthey position and the Herder-Schlegel position). For example, the fact that deaf sign language is highly rule-governed in a manner similar to written language and discourse leads us, despite the unusualness of the physical medium that it involves, to classify it as language in the usual sense.

66 Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 212 ff.; and especially F.C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 7. It is a small but revealing symptom of the strength of Droysen's influence on Dilthey that much of Dilthey's most distinctive vocabulary was in fact first brought into currency by Droysen – e.g. *Geisteswissenschaften* (Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*, p. 36 points out that Droysen seems to have been the first person to use this term, already doing so in 1843); *Äußerung* and *Ausdruck* (see e.g. the 1857 edition of the lectures on *Historik*, in Droysen, *Historik*, 1:26, 315-16, 323, 329, 332-3, 398); and *Erlebnis* (see e.g. ibid., pp. 249, 261).

67 See e.g. ibid., p. 4.

68 See e.g. ibid., pp. 22, 29, 57, 159 ff., 283, 398. A typical statement of this position: "We do not explain [*erklären*]. Interpretation [*Interpretation*] is not explanation of the later in terms of the earlier, of what has become as a necessary result of the historical conditions, but is the construal [*Deutung*] of what is given" (p. 163).

69 See e.g. ibid., pp. 159-216, where Droysen develops just such a hermeneutics in four parts, flexibly modeled on Boeckh's four-part hermeneutics (which had in its turn been flexibly modeled on Schleiermacher's hermeneutics).

70 Pace Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, p. 7, who implies that the idea of a "science vs. art" opposition only arose later, with positivism.

method of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] and insists that in virtue of using this method they are genuine sciences [*Wissenschaften*], this implies a different answer to the Schlegel-Schleiermacher question: interpretation (at least in challenging cases and when properly practiced) is a *science*.

For Dilthey, this assessment implies that interpretation meets certain distinctive and demanding standards deriving from the paradigmatic status of the natural sciences, and that it therefore deserves an exceptionally high level of respect. For the exact meaning of the "science vs. art" question had undergone a subtle shift between Schlegel-Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Roughly speaking, whereas for Schlegel and Schleiermacher "science" had been a disjunctive concept meaning "either like the natural sciences or like Kant-Fichte-Schelling-style systematic philosophy," for Dilthey, who emphatically rejects such systematic philosophy and instead writes in the wake of, and in considerable sympathy with, nineteenth-century positivism, it has ceased to be a disjunctive concept and now just means "like the natural sciences." And whereas for Schlegel and Schleiermacher "art" had been at least as strongly valorized as "science" (it was, after all, one of the distinguishing features of German Romanticism, especially Schlegel's version of it, to rank art as the highest area of culture), for Dilthey it is slightly less so.[71]

What warrants Dilthey's assessment that interpretation can be scientific, then? There are, I think, a number of important considerations that together support it. First, Dilthey takes it for granted (as did virtually everyone at this period) that interpretation is a matter of discovering facts which are no less objective than those discovered by the natural sciences – namely, the original meanings of texts, discourse, and other forms of "expression."[72] Gadamer has of course identified this assumption as the fundamental error of what he pejoratively calls "Romantic hermeneutics." However, as I have argued elsewhere, it is probably Gadamer himself who is in error here, not Dilthey and the tradition to which he belongs.[73] This, then, constitutes one important, albeit implicit, reason in Dilthey for classifying interpretation as a science.

Second, in sharp contrast to many Enlightenment thinkers who had believed that human mental life is very much the same at all times and places, Dilthey believes that it varies in profound ways between different historical periods (and cultures),[74] and that it even does so to a significant extent between individuals who belong to a single time and place. The former insight (concerning history and culture) was in his view the fundamental insight of what in *Introduction to the Human Sciences* he calls the "Historical School" (a school which it is his main purpose in that work to support by providing it with a sound methodological foundation). Moreover, as we have seen from his history of hermeneutics, for him the successive emergence of these two insights constituted two of the most important steps in the development of the discipline: the former insight (concerning historical and cultural variation) entering the discipline with the Renaissance, the latter insight (concerning individual variation) with Schleiermacher. This whole phenomenon of mental variation between historical periods and cultures and even between individuals with a single period and culture – producing, as it often does, deep mental gulfs between an interpreter and the historical period or culture of the author he wishes to interpret, as well as between both and the author in his individuality – makes interpretation a far more *difficult* task than many Enlightenment thinkers had assumed it to be, indeed often a vertiginously difficult task. This entails that in order to have any real hope of success in many cases, interpretation needs to develop and follow *rigorous methods*. This whole line of thought in fact already lay behind Schleiermacher's famous statement in his hermeneutics lectures that contrary to a

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71 This shift in the meaning of the "science or art" question constitutes a grain of truth in Beiser's position that the question was new (see the preceding note).

72 I say "no less objective than" rather than simply "objective like" because Dilthey basically accepts Kant's Copernican revolution concerning all objects of knowledge.

73 See Forster, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Critical Appraisal."

74 Dilthey, like Hegel before him and Gadamer after him, is much more focused on *historical* variation than on *cultural* variation, though in each case they do also acknowledge the latter. (This is a striking and rather dubious imbalance in the philosophical tradition in question.)

common assumption that "understanding occurs as a matter of course," instead "misunderstanding occurs as a matter of course, and so understanding must be willed and sought at every point."[75] Now, to complete the point: interpretation is for these reasons often an extremely *difficult* task and needs to employ *rigorous methods* in order to achieve success – *just like natural science*!

Third, Dilthey does not normally disagree with Schleiermacher that the methods of interpretation are sharply different from those of the natural sciences. On the contrary, he normally supports such a position by arguing that whereas interpretation aims at a sort of re-experiencing of a particular psychological state in its holistic and individual character, natural science aims at knowing objects in their discreteness and their qualitative identity to each other, and attempts to derive explanatory causal laws from that knowledge. However, Dilthey does disagree with Schleiermacher in rejecting Schleiermacher's view that such a difference in methods constitutes a good reason for denying that both sorts of activities are *scientific*. Dilthey's position is instead that the umbrella of science is broad enough to include a *diversity* of methods under it. This, then, is a further important part of his case for saying that interpretation (at least in challenging cases and when properly practiced) has a scientific character.

Fourth, while the previous point is already powerful as it stands, it becomes even more so if one takes to heart a further point which Dilthey himself occasionally, though only rarely, hints at: that the natural (and formal) sciences themselves exhibit a considerable diversity of methods. As Frithjof Rodi has noted,[76] although Dilthey usually operates with a rather crude twofold distinction between, on the one hand, the human sciences with their method of interpretation, and on the other hand, the natural sciences with their method of causal explanation, in the addenda to *The Rise of Hermeneutics* he instead develops a threefold distinction between the human sciences, the physical-chemical sciences, and the biological sciences, characterizing the physical-chemical sciences as concerned with "the mathematic knowledge of quantitative relations" (i.e. covering or causal laws), but the biological sciences with "life-purposiveness [*Lebenszweckmäßigkeit*]."[77] Subsequent work in biology and in the philosophy of biology has tended to bear out Dilthey's intuition here that it is implausible to assimilate biology's central methods to those of physics or chemistry.[78] There is also another, and even more glaring, example of the same sort of situation, namely the formal sciences – logic and mathematics. Like many other philosophers, Dilthey tends to set these to one side by in effect stipulatively defining "natural science" in a way that excludes them. However, they surely are at least *sciences*, and just as surely they do not employ the method of empirical generalization to causal or covering laws that characterizes physics and chemistry. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suspect in the end the picture that all of the non-human-sciences employ some such single method is little more than a naïve caricature or a utopian fantasy, that they instead exhibit a rather rich variety of methods. Recognizing this situation significantly strengthens Dilthey's basic intuition that the failure of interpretation to conform to the methods of natural sciences such as physics and chemistry is perfectly consistent with interpretation nonetheless being scientific.

Fifth, moreover Dilthey *does* in fact identify a considerable amount of overlap in methods between interpretation and the natural sciences. Actually, Schleiermacher had already done so before him to a certain extent, in particular identifying a "comparative" method as predominant on the linguistic side of interpretation, by which he meant an inductive method of the sort that he thought was also used by the natural sciences (Schleiermacher's broader position was just that a method of "divination," or hypothesis, was equally essential to interpretation as well, and that unlike "comparison," this was *not* shared by the natural sciences). Accordingly but more ambitiously, Dilthey in the addenda to *The Rise of Hermeneutics* allows that several methods are common to interpretation and the natural sciences, again saliently including induction, but also including what he calls analysis, const-

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75 *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, pp. 109-10; cf. *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, pp. 21-2.

76 Rodi, "Drei Bemerkungen," pp. 433-4.

77 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:254 = GS 5:335. Translation modified.

78 For a helpful discussion of the issues involved, see A. Rosenberg, "How is Biological Explanation Possible?" (online).

ruction, and (in a somewhat different sense of the word from Schleiermacher)[79] comparison.[80] In short, according to Dilthey, though a sharing of methods between interpretation and the natural sciences is not *essential* for classifying interpretation along with the natural sciences as a science, there *is* in fact a considerable sharing of methods between them.

Sixth, and intriguingly, Dilthey sometimes also recognizes (in partial agreement with and partial contradiction of Schleiermacher) that interpretation and natural science share the method of *hypothesis* – thereby strengthening the line of argument just discussed even more. Dilthey mainly associates the method of hypothesis with the natural sciences. Indeed, in his later works he does so *exclusively*.[81] However, in earlier works, he instead sees this as a method that the natural sciences share with interpretation. For in these earlier works, like Schleiermacher before him, he sees that it does play an important role in interpretation. For example, he writes in *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System* (1860): "All interpretation starts with a very flexible hypothesis, which embodies a range of possibilities that will be narrowed down as the interpretation proceeds."[82] Similarly, in some notes from 1867-8 he writes concerning "the procedure of the hermeneut": "he operates with hypotheses."[83] As I have argued elsewhere, Schleiermacher and the early Dilthey are quite right to think that hypothesis plays a central role in interpretation.[84] This early strand of Dilthey's position also implies an important correction of Schleiermacher, though. For Dilthey is again quite right to hold that hypothesis is a central method of the natural sciences, and Schleiermacher had been quite wrong to deny this (the intervening work of William Whewell concerning the important role of hypothesis in the natural sciences had probably helped to make this clear to Dilthey). In sum, Dilthey's early position concerning hypothesis constitutes an important enrichment of his more general principle that interpretation and the natural sciences share certain methods in common, and thereby contributes to his case for saying that interpretation may properly be considered scientific.

These, then, are six important reasons that can be found in Dilthey for his implicit classification of interpretation (at least in its more challenging and adeptly practiced forms) as a science. Collectively, they amount to a very compelling case for so classifying it.

VI

Let us turn now to the two closely connected questions that still remain to be considered: (2) What is the central and proper method of the human sciences, i.e. such disciplines as history, political

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79 Like Schleiermacher before him, Dilthey often writes about "comparison." But he seems to mean something slightly different by this word than Schleiermacher had meant by it – roughly, a process of comparing and contrasting a class of cases which are only to some extent qualitatively similar to each other rather than more or less qualitatively identical. Dilthey's closest counterpart to *Schleiermacher's* "comparative" method is what Dilthey himself rather calls "induction." This shift in the meaning of the word "comparison" seems to go back to Droysen (see e.g. Droysen, *Historik*, 1:171).

80 *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:254 = GS 5:334-5: "Self-evidently ..., the same elementary logical operations appear in the human and the natural sciences: induction, analysis, construction, and comparison ... Induction, whose data are sensory processes, proceeds here as everywhere on the basis of a knowledge of connection ... In the human sciences [this basis] is the structure of psychic life ... This nexus is individual and accordingly subjective. This determines the task and form of induction. The logical operations receive their further definition through the nature of linguistic expression. The theory of this kind of induction is specified in the more narrow domain of language through linguistics: grammar." Cf. *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:239-40 = GS 7:218-20.

81 See e.g. *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology*, SW 2:119-21 = GS 5:143-6; *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:352 = GS 7:332; and note also the omission of hypothesis from the account of the methods of interpretation in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* and its addenda.

82 *Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical System*, SW 4:98 = GS 14:659; cf. SW 4:158 = GS 14:718 on the role that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics ascribes to "guessing at an author's individual manner of combination."

83 SW 4:231 = GS 20:107. Cf. Dilthey's later concession in the addenda to *The Rise of Hermeneutics* that interpretation is not purely descriptive but shades over into explanation: "There are no fixed boundaries between interpretation and explanation, only differences in degree" (SW 4:255 = GS 5:336).

84 See M.N. Forster, "Hypothesis in Natural Science and Interpretation," in *Naturalistische Hermeneutik*, ed. L.C. Madonna (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2012)

science, economics, anthropology, sociology, jurisprudence, psychology, classical scholarship, literary studies, and art history? (3) Are these disciplines such as to be properly speaking sciences?

Dilthey's answer to question (2) is essentially that the central and proper method of the human sciences lies in description rather than explanation, and in particular involves accurate *understanding*, or *interpretation*. Dilthey already adumbrates this position in *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883).[85] He subsequently elaborates on it more fully in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910) and its addenda, where, for example, he says that the human sciences "will have a predominantly descriptive and analytical character,"[86] and that "the method pervading the human sciences is that of understanding and interpretation. All the functions and truths of the human sciences are gathered in understanding. At every point it is understanding that opens up a world."[87] This conception of the character of the human sciences naturally makes hermeneutics their central methodological discipline. Accordingly, after having initially, in *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883) and *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytical Psychology* (1894) assigned that role to a descriptive psychology, in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* (1900) and *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910) he assigns it to hermeneutics.[88]

Dilthey's argument for this conception of the central and proper method of the human sciences has two sides, one negative and the other positive. (The general shape of the argument, and indeed many of its details too, can already be found in Herder –[89] for Dilthey one of the founders of the "Historical School" whose methodology he himself aspired to supply.)

The *negative* side of the argument consists of skeptically questioning pretensions to make these disciplines *explanatory*. Dilthey saw such pretensions as coming in two main forms. The first was the position argued for by positivists such as Comte, Mill, and Buckle (whom Dilthey already criticized in an early review article from 1862) that the ultimate aim of these disciplines is to arrive at explanations of human phenomena in terms of efficient causes and general laws. Dilthey usually allows that causality and laws govern human just as much as non-human nature.[90] He also usually allows that we may sometimes actually discover causes and laws governing human affairs, for example laws concerning rates of suicide and crime.[91] Indeed, he usually insists that a causal component is essential to the

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85 See *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, SW 1:157-9, 168-9 = GS 1:108-9, 119-20.

86 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:182 = GS 7:160.

87 Ibid., SW 3:226 = GS 7:205. Cf. SW 3:108-9, 139-41, 170 = GS 7:86-7, 117-19, 148. Cf. also *The Rise of Hermeneutics*: "Action everywhere presupposes the understanding of other persons ... The entire science of philology and of history is based on the presupposition that such reunderstanding of what is singular can be raised to objectivity ... And when the systematic human sciences go on to derive more general lawful relations and more inclusive connections from this objective apprehension of what is singular, the processes of understanding and interpretation still remain basic" (SW 4:235 = GS 5:317).

88 Cf. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*, pp. 272-3 for a similar account of the history of Dilthey's development on this particular issue. However, in modest revision of Makkree's account, it is worth noting that the later position is already anticipated in *[On Comparative Psychology] Contributions to the Study of Individuality* (1895-6), where Dilthey states that the human sciences have a method "that is peculiar to them that is based both on the projection of one's own self into something external and on a consequent transformation of this self in the process of understanding. This is the hermeneutical method in alliance with the critical method. The hermeneutical-critical method is crucial for the philologist and the historian, and no human science can exist without it" (SW 2:231 = GS 5:262). It should also be noted that neither Dilthey's earlier preference for psychology over hermeneutics nor his later turn away from psychology towards hermeneutics was entirely consistent (see on this Bollnow, "Wilhelm Dilthey als Begründer einer hermeneutischen Philosophie," pp. 183-5; Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, pp. 337-9, 346). Finally, it is also worth remarking that because Dilthey had a deeply psychologized conception of hermeneutics itself, the decision between descriptive psychology and hermeneutics as the fundamental discipline of the human sciences for him almost amounted to choosing between two sides of a distinction without a difference (as the passage just quoted may serve to illustrate).

89 See Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*, pp. 37-9.

90 See e.g. "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:262 = GS 16:101.

91 See e.g. "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:265-7 = GS 16:103-5.

writing of history,[92] and takes it for granted that parts of the human sciences are concerned with the discovery of general laws.[93] However, he is usually deeply pessimistic about the prospects of advancing far in this direction.[94] This pessimism dominates both of his most detailed and systematic treatments of the subject: *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883)[95] and *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910).[96] The following are some of his main reasons for such pessimism: (1) the epistemic inaccessibility of many of the most important causal factors involved in the causal determination of past history, especially the psychological factors;[97] (2) the impossibility of exact *measurement* of such psychological factors (unlike physical ones), which precludes arriving at exact laws governing them;[98] (3) the holistic and individualistic nature of such psychological states and processes (in contrast to the discrete and homogeneous character of physical ones), which again prevents us from discovering general laws governing them;[99] (4) the impossibility of conducting experiments to test causal hypotheses concerning history (in contrast to non-human nature, where that *is* possible);[100] and (5) the important influence that the cognitively elusive decisions of single individuals often have on the course of history (e.g. Alexander the Great and Napoleon).[101] So much for the first sort of pretension to make the human sciences explanatory.[102] The second sort of pretension to do so consists in the various grand religious and metaphysical theories of an overall meaning in history that have been offered by such Christian theologians as Augustine and such philosophers of history as Hegel (whom Dilthey sees as seamlessly continuous with his theological predecessors in this area). Dilthey essentially considers such theories too fanciful to be taken seriously.[103] Now this whole normal inability of the human sciences to provide *explanations* of human phenomena in a way leaves the accurate *description* of such phenomena, including the accurate interpretation of them, as their main method *by default*.

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92 See e.g. "On Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1862)," SW 4: 273 = GS 11:72.

93 See e.g. *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:235, 252 = GS 5:317, 333. Note, though, that "usually" in each of the above statements is doing some real work, for there are also some passages in which Dilthey takes a contrary position. In particular, there are passages where he denies that the category of causality applies in the human sciences at all (e.g. *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, SW 1:234 = GS 1:401; *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:219, 223-4 = GS 7:197, 202).

94 Here again "usually" is doing some real work, for there are a few passages where on the contrary he looks forward in a Comtean spirit to an explanatory science of society (e.g. "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:269 = GS 16:106).

95 *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, esp. SW 1:88-9 = GS 1:37.

96 *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, esp. SW 3:180-2 = GS 7:158-60.

97 See e.g. "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:264 = GS 16:102. Dilthey's way of putting this problem often implies that it derives from a general problem of knowing other minds. However, his main point would remain plausible even without any such assumption of that general problem.

98 See e.g. *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:180-1 = GS 7:159-60.

99 See e.g. ibid., SW 3:181 = GS 7:159-60.

100 See e.g. "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:267-8 = GS 16:105. For instance, it is not possible to test alternative hypotheses about the causes of the English Civil War by going back and running the seventeenth century through again without the alleged causal factors in question.

101 See e.g. ibid., SW 4:265-7 = GS 16:103-5 (Dilthey points out that people living in modern democratic societies tend to underestimate this influence).

102 Habermas has complained that while Dilthey may have been right to elevate interpretation over the discovery of laws in the discipline of *history*, he should have acknowledged the central role of laws in the "systematic" human sciences, e.g. political science, economics, and sociology (*Knowledge and Human Interests*, pp. 185-6). However, (a) as we just saw, Dilthey does in fact allow that such laws should be sought there and even that they may occasionally be found, merely being pessimistic about the *extent* to which this is likely to be happen; and (b) that pessimism, and his grounds for it, seem no less justified today than they did in his day (at least if one really means *laws*, as opposed, say, to mere statistical regularities that apply only to certain times and places).

103 See esp. *The Eighteenth Century and the Historical World*, SW 4:331-3 = GS 3:215-17; "Friedrich Christoph Schlosser and the Problem of Universal History (1862)," SW 4:313 = GS 11:154; *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, SW 1:145-7 = GS 1:96-8.

Dilthey also has several *positive* arguments for conceiving the central and proper method of the human sciences as description and interpretation, though. First, in his early review of Buckle he argues that human beings have intellectual yearnings not only for explanation but also for *narration* – they want to know not only why things happened but also *what* has happened. Indeed, he claims that the desire for narration is prior to and more fundamental than that for explanation.[104] Consequently, even if the human sciences cannot in general provide explanations, the descriptive-interpretative function that they *can* serve is one of at least equal importance. Second, Dilthey argues that an interpretive narration of the past, other cultures, or other individuals takes us beyond the narrow confines of our own experiences to share the dramatically different experiences of other people, thereby enriching our lives and increasing our happiness.[105] Third, if the question were to be raised whether such an interpretative narration is a *challenging* enough task to constitute the central method of the human sciences, Dilthey would say that the insight that emerged in the Renaissance and reached a peak in the German "Historical School" that human mental life varies deeply from period to period, culture to culture, and even individual to individual shows that it *is*.

In short, for all of these reasons, both negative and positive, the central and proper method of the human sciences, according to Dilthey, is the descriptive-interpretative one, thus rendering hermeneutics their central methodological discipline.

This seems to me a powerful case. It is also a case that could be developed more fully than Dilthey develops it, though. This is perhaps especially true on its positive side, where one can imagine several further good reasons being added. For example, these might include the potential that we may learn things from other periods, cultures, and individuals; the greater ethical sensitivity that we can achieve by coming to understand them; and the greater self-understanding that we can attain when we are able both to compare our own outlook with others and also to see how it developed out of the past other outlooks that eventually generated it. In fact, Herder in his original version of the argument had already supplied several such additional positive arguments, including the ones just mentioned.

VII

Finally, let us more briefly consider question (3), the question of whether the human sciences can properly claim the title of sciences. Dilthey of course holds that they can. Since, as we have just seen, he identifies their central and proper method as one of interpretation, my previous account of his reasons for holding that interpretation (at least in difficult cases and when properly performed) is a genuinely scientific accomplishment has already in effect supplied his reasons for holding that the human sciences are likewise genuine sciences.

To recapitulate his reasons, now in direct application to the human sciences: their main subject matter when they employ that central method, namely meaning, is no less objective than the subject matters that are dealt with by the natural sciences; due to the phenomenon of deep historical, cultural, and even individual mental differences, in investigating that subject matter they face a very *difficult task* requiring very *rigorous methods*, just as the natural sciences do; the status of being a genuine science is compatible with a variety of methods, so that differences in this respect between the human sciences and the natural sciences do not automatically entail that the former cannot be sciences, a point which becomes especially compelling when one realizes that there are also sharp differences of method among the natural sciences themselves; moreover, it in fact turns out that there is a lot of overlap between the methods of the human sciences and those of the natural sciences, especially in that both employ the methods of induction and hypothesis.

This is surely again a very sophisticated and cogent case.

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104 "History and Science (1862), On H.T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*," SW 4:261-2 = GS 16:100.

105 See e.g. *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, SW 3:236-7 = GS 7:216; *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, SW 4:235, 247 = GS 5:317, 328.

VIII

In conclusion, Dilthey was indeed significant for hermeneutics. But he was so in certain ways rather than others, and the distribution of his achievements and failures is somewhat surprising. Where one might well have expected his contributions to be especially impressive, namely in his account of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and in his own hermeneutic methodology, he disappoints. However, in his broader history of hermeneutics, his extension of hermeneutics beyond language to include other sorts of expression as well, his conception that interpretation (at least in challenging cases and when properly practiced) is scientific, his identification of the central method of the human sciences as consisting in interpretation, and his account of why given that central method the human sciences deserve to be classified as genuine sciences – in all of these areas he makes contributions of considerable importance.