

Leben erfaßt hier Leben

Dilthey as a Philosopher of (the) Life (Sciences)

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Ever since the publication of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883), the name of Dilthey has been strongly associated with the distinction, if not dichotomy, between the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and between their respective approach of their object: causal explanation (*Erklären*) versus hermeneutic understanding (*Verstehen*).

Given the attention Dilthey pays in his demarcative project to the opposition between the natural and human sciences, this impression is understandable. However, when we study Dilthey's writings more closely, the situation turns out to be more nuanced and more complicated. In the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, for example, Dilthey argues that causal explanations are not restricted to the natural sciences, but play an important role in the human sciences as well. Moreover, Dilthey does not always restrict himself to the aforementioned binary distinction between natural and human sciences. In an appendix of *The Rise of Hermeneutics* (1900), he distinguishes a third class of sciences in-between the natural sciences and human sciences. This class of biological sciences (*biologische Wissenschaften*) focuses on phenomena that are characterized by an internal teleology of life (*Lebenszweckmäßigkeit*), and are in need of a functional explanation.

Given the fact that "life" is one of the key concepts in Dilthey's philosophy – not without reason Dilthey is often considered to be one of the main representatives of the so-called philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) – the question arises of how Dilthey's concept of life relates to this third class of biological sciences. Although in Dilthey's later, post-1900 writings, such as *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910), life is primarily understood as a "psycho-historical" or "historico-spiritual" (*geistig-geschichtlichen*)¹ phenomenon, and as such object of the

¹ See GS 6: 125. The German word *Geist* can be translated both as "mind" and as "spirit" and in the case of Dilthey both meanings are often present. The two different English translations mentioned

human sciences, in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, and even stronger in his ontological works of the so-called middle period (1883–1900), in which he introduced the aforementioned tripartite division of the sciences, Dilthey often uses the word “life” in a biological sense, referring to the active interaction between the (human) organism and its environment.

In the following, I will analyze the role Dilthey ascribes to biology in his foundation of the human sciences and discuss how the elaboration of this “biological standpoint” in the writings of the middle period is connected with an important change in the meaning of Dilthey’s concept of life. In the first section I will give a short overview of the changing position of biology vis-à-vis the human sciences from the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* to *The Rise of Hermeneutics*.

In the second section, I will argue that Dilthey’s naturalistic revision of Kant’s subjectivist notion of purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) in the works of the middle period, was one of the main reasons for this change, resulting in a notion of an “immanent purposiveness of organic life.” This naturalization of the concept of purposiveness, which was a fundamental part of his “Progression beyond Kant” (*Fortgang über Kant*) (GS 8: 174), makes him a precursor of the so-called 4E movement in biology and the cognitive sciences, which is characterized by a “naturalization of phenomenology,” as we find it, for example, in Evan Thompson’s (2007) *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*.

In the third section, I will underpin my claim that already in Dilthey’s philosophy of life, just like in the contemporary “4E movement” (of which Thompson is one of the founders), cognition is comprehended as *embodied, embedded, enacted* and *extended*. Just as in the case of Thompson, Dilthey defends a nonreductionist naturalism in which the mind emerges from life. For both Dilthey and Thompson, the study of life and mind require a close cooperation between the natural sciences, the life sciences and the humanities, respectively resting on a third-person, a second-person and a first-person perspective. In conclusion I will argue that Dilthey’s philosophy of *life* and *mind* is not only interesting from a historical perspective, but contains many fruitful elements for the present discussion on human cognition, because the final focus in his work is a third realm of human life beyond biological life and the individual psyche: the historical world of meaningful cultural expressions.

here are taken from Makkreel (1992, 91, 214). In the rest of this chapter, the use of “mind” or “spirit” for *Geist* will depend on the context.

1 In-Between the Natural and the Human Sciences: The Life Sciences

In order to understand Dilthey's early view on biology, the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften: Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte, Erster Band*, 1883) provides an excellent starting point. In the first volume, Dilthey offers a survey of the human sciences and their relation to the other sciences, and prepares the foundation of the human sciences that have to take place in the never fully completed second volume of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*.²

In a first – provisional – definition of the term “human sciences” at the beginning of the first volume Dilthey states that this term refers to the class of sciences that have the sociohistorical reality (*geschichtlich-gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit*) as their subject (GS 1: 4 / SW I: 56). Examples of the human sciences Dilthey mentions within this context are, among others, history, politics, jurisprudence, political economy, theology, literature and the arts (GS 1: 3 / SW I: 55). This broad definition, that includes both the humanities and the social sciences, gives the impression that Dilthey takes the *object* of investigation as the criterion for the demarcation of the natural and the human sciences. This is also reflected in Dilthey's reference to Kant's distinction between the “realm of history” characterized by freedom, and the “realm of nature” characterized by objective necessity.

Dilthey makes it clear from the beginning, however, that the demarcation of the natural and the human sciences on the basis of their object presents serious problems. Dividing reality into a material substance (*Materie*) and a spiritual substance (*geistigen Substanz*) – a legacy of metaphysical tradition that, according to Dilthey, goes back at least as far as Thomas Aquinas – inevitably leads to insoluble problems. This especially becomes clear in the dualistic ontology of Descartes, which excludes a satisfactory explanation of the relation between body and mind (Dilthey, GS 1: 7–8 / SW I: 59–60). Furthermore, a separation of the natural and the human sciences on the basis of a sharp division between a material and a mental substance would ignore the fact that the object of the human sciences is the psychophysical unity of human nature (*psycho-*

² The *Introduction to the Human Sciences* was intended to be the first volume of a two-volume *Critique of Historical Reason* (*Kritik der historischen Vernunft*). The first volume contains two of the planned five books. See de Mul (2004) and H.-U. Lessing (1984) for a detailed reconstruction of Dilthey's *Critique of Historical Reason*.

physische Lebenseinheit der Menschennatur) (GS I: 6 / SW I: 58). It was partly on these grounds that Dilthey considered the term *Geisteswissenschaften* to be an imperfect term, and he only conforms to it because by then it had become generally accepted.³

However, Dilthey neither based the distinction between the natural sciences and human sciences on their methodological differences, as the neo-Kantian philosopher Windelband did, distinguishing between *nomothetic* and *ideographic* sciences (cf. de Mul 2004, 131–135, 189–196 and de Mul 2013). In contrast, in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey takes the *type of experience* as his criterion of demarcation of the two halves of the *globus intellectualis*. Starting from what we might call a proto-phenomenological perspective, his basic distinction is between *inner* and *outer experience*:

Whatever the metaphysical facts may be, man as a life-unit may be regarded from the *two points of view* that we have developed: seen from within he is a system of mental facts, but to the senses he is a physical whole. Inner and outer perception never occur in one and the same act, and consequently the reality of mental life is never given simultaneously with that of our body. On account of this, there are necessarily *two different and irreducible standpoints* for a scientific approach aimed at grasping the connection of the mental and the physical as expressed in the psychophysical life-unit. (GS I: 15 / SW I: 67; emphasis added)

Outer experience (*äussere Erfahrung*) is the process by which, by means of collaboration of the senses and discursive understanding, an image of reality outside ourselves, subject to natural laws, is created (GS I: 15–17 / SW I: 67–68). In the inner experience (*innere Erfahrung* or *Erlebnis*), on the other hand, we experience, “without the cooperation of the senses” (GS I: 9 / SW I: 61), an “independent world of mind” characterized by “a sovereignty of the will” and “a responsibility for actions.” Within this experience lies “every value and every purpose in life” (GS I: 17 / SW I: 68).

This formulation expresses succinctly the transcendental-ontological nature of Dilthey’s demarcation. Natural and human sciences are not primarily concerned with different parts of reality, but are based on different ways of experiencing the same reality. Dilthey sees these two experiential circles as “different manifestations of one ground” (GS I: 16 / SW I: 67–68). Expressed in Kantian terminology: outer and inner

³ In this sense the English “human sciences” is more adequate than the German *Geisteswissenschaften*. See de Mul (2004, 23, 132, 382, note 4) about the emergence of the term “*Geisteswissenschaften*” in German academia around the 1840s.

experience do share a common ground in the total number of objects of possible experience, but on this ground they constitute different domains of experience. In these domains of experience so formulated different facts of experience appear, facts of nature (*Tatsachen der Natur*) and facts of mind (*Tatsachen des Geistes*), respectively (GS I: 17 / SW I: 68).

Using contemporary terminology, we could say that Dilthey's basic demarcative criterion is the distinction between a *first-person* and a *third-person perspective*. However, this does not mean that human sciences would rest on a first-person perspective entirely. After all, an important part of socio-historical reality is only accessible from a third-person perspective. To give a few examples: the actions of other people, works of art and judicial systems are primarily given in outer experience (GS I: 24–26 / SW I: 75–77). What characterizes the human sciences is that they are based on a process that Dilthey, following Schleiermacher, designated as understanding (*Verstehen*), in which the objects of outer experience are linked to inner experience.⁴ “We only understand by transferring our inner experience to an external reality that is itself dead” (*eine an sich tote äußere Tatsächlichkeit*) (GS I: 138). The natural sciences, on the other hand, solely rest on outer experience. They try to explain inanimate nature with the help of testable hypotheses, which gives them an altogether different character:

This leads us to the source of the difference in our relations to society and to nature. Social states are intelligible to us from within; we can, up to a certain point, reproduce them in ourselves on the basis of the perception of our own states; our representations of the historical world are enlivened by love and hatred, by passionate joy, by the entire gamut of our emotions. Nature, however, is dead [and] alien to us. It is a mere exterior for us without any inner life. Society is our world. (GS I: 36 / SW I: 88)

In *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* (1892/1893), we find the following clarification of this opposition between nature and inner life, leading to his often-quoted remark about *erklären* and *verstehen*:

There exists a system of nature for the physical and natural sciences only through inferential conclusions that supplement the data of experience by means of combinations of hypotheses. In the human sciences by contrast, the continuum or nexus of psychic life is an original or basic given. Nature we explain, but psychic life we understand [*Die Natur erklären wir, das Seelenleben verstehen wir*]. (GS 5: 143–144 / SW II: 68)

⁴ See GS I: 9 / SW I: 61. Note that “understanding” here should not only be seen as a specific method of the human sciences but as an elementary characteristic of human life, on the basis of which a systematic understanding (interpretation) in the human sciences can be developed.

However, given the fact that as human beings, we experience our existence as a *psychophysical unity*, the opposition of the experience of nature on the one hand and psychic life on the other, and thus also of natural and human sciences, appears to be misleading. After all, in the context of his discussion of the implications of this unity for human experience, we read:

The psychophysical life-unit which is filled with *the immediate feeling of its undivided existence* [*unmittelbaren Gefühl unseres ungeteilten Daseins*] is analyzed into a system of empirically observable relations between facts of consciousness and observable relations of structure and the functions of the nervous system. For every psychic act shows itself to be connected with a change in our body only by means of the nervous system; and a change in our body, in turn, is accompanied by a change in our psychic state only through its effect on the nervous system.

This analysis of psychophysical life-units provides a clearer notion of their dependence on the overall context of nature within which they appear and act and from which they withdraw again. *It also clarifies how the study of sociohistorical reality depends on our knowledge of nature.* (GS 1: 16–17 / SW I: 68; emphasis added)

Given the subject of this chapter, this quote is interesting for more than one reason. In the first place, Dilthey correctly emphasizes in this passage the fact that in our life we immediately feel the unity of nature and psychic life.⁵ When I cut my finger while peeling a pear with a knife, I do not experience the resulting pain as a bodily *and* as a mental experience. From a first-person perspective, there is only *one* experience of pain, which is bodily and mental at the same time. After all, I feel the pain in my finger: in my lived experience the physical process and my awareness of it are one. Crucial here is that for me, as a human being, my body is no *tote äußere Tatsächlichkeit* at all, but an integral part of my lived experience.

Of course, it is possible to watch the cut in my finger and the blood coming out of the wound from a third-person perspective as well. The doctor who inspects and bandages my finger does not and cannot feel my pain. Maybe, my bleeding finger *reminds* her of the pain she once had when she cut her finger herself or, if she never had such an experience, she might at least be able to *imagine* how it would feel to cut your finger. However, in both cases she must have had some experience of pain in her own life in order to understand the pain of the other.

⁵ Obviously, there are many processes in our body of which we are not, or only vaguely or indirectly aware, such as digestion, blood pressure, etc.

In contrast, when we deal with inanimate nature our knowledge seems to rest entirely on the third-person perspective. After all, a stone has no inner life (at least as far as we know), and it seems to be absurd even to try to imagine “what it is like to be a stone.” In the case of an animal – for example a bat⁶ – it may be impossible to take “a first-bat perspective,” but it is at least not absurd to try to imagine such a perspective. And, as we will see, in an interaction with another species, we may even have another, second-person (or rather: second-species) perspective experience of the other.

Here, I want to emphasize another remarkable part of the quote. Dilthey explicitly states that the human sciences rest on our (third-person) knowledge of nature. And, referring to the theories of Comte and Herbert Spencer, he clarifies this statement as follows:

Mental facts comprise the uppermost limit of natural facts, and the latter the underlying conditions of human life. Because the realm of persons, including human society and history, is the highest phenomenon of the empirical world, knowledge of it must at countless points be based on the system of presuppositions which accounts for its development within the whole of nature. (GS 1: 17 / SW I: 69)

This already becomes clear when we think about the above example about cutting my finger. The understanding of this example presupposes not only that the reader has some basic knowledge of natural objects like pears, fingers and knives and about their specific properties (for example that a metal knife can easily make a cut in a fragile organ like the human skin), but the reader also must be able to understand my taking up the pear and the knife as part of a purposeful action. In other words: we have all kinds of presuppositions about the way nature acts upon us, and about the way we use nature in order to satisfy our needs and desires. Or, as Dilthey puts it:

Man, because of his position in the causal system of nature, is conditioned by it in a *twofold respect*.

The psychophysical life-unit . . . receives through its nervous system continuous stimuli from the general course of nature which it in turn affects. Where the psychophysical unit affects nature this is characteristically in the form of action guided by purposes. On the one hand, nature and its

⁶ I’m referring here, of course, to Thomas Nagel’s (1974) famous bat article:

It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one’s arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one’s mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one’s feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. (439)

constitution can govern this psychophysical unit in the shaping of purposes themselves; on the other hand, nature qua system of means for attaining these ends codetermines the psychophysical unit. Thus even in those cases where we exert our will, where we act on nature, we are dependent on the system of nature precisely because we are not blind forces but rather volitional creatures that reflectively establish their purposes. (GS I: 17 / SW I: 69)

Interestingly, Dilthey connects these two ways in which nature conditions human life with a distinction between biology and natural sciences that study inorganic nature:

The sciences of man, society, and history take the sciences of nature as their basis in two ways: first, insofar as psychophysical units themselves can be studied only with the help of *biology*; second, insofar as nature is the medium of their purposive activity, which is aimed mainly at the domination of nature. In the first respect, the *life sciences* provide the basis; in the second, it is chiefly those of *inorganic nature*. (GS I: 19 / SW I: 70–71; emphasis added)

Here, Dilthey explicitly distinguishes the life sciences (*Wissenschaften des Organismus*) from those natural sciences that have inorganic nature (*anorganischen Natur*) as their subject. In the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey does not further explain this distinction within the natural sciences, nor does he explicate the implicit tripartite division of the sciences – human sciences, life sciences and the sciences of inorganic nature – that results from it.

However, in the addenda to his essay “The Rise of Hermeneutics” that he wrote around 1900, Dilthey returns to the question of the foundation of the human sciences and the problem of the demarcation of the different classes of sciences, and this time he makes this tripartite division of the sciences explicit:

Self-evidently ... the same elementary logical operations appear in the human and the natural sciences: induction, analysis, construction, and comparison. But what concerns us now is what special form they assume within the experiential domain of the human sciences. Induction, whose data are sensory processes, proceeds here as everywhere on the basis of a knowledge of a connection. In the physical-chemical sciences this basis is the mathematical knowledge of quantitative relations; in the biological sciences it is the [nexus] of purposiveness [*Lebenszweckmäßigkeit*]; in the human sciences it is the structure of psychic life. (GS 5: 334–335 / SW IV: 254)

Although the explicit tripartite demarcation of the sciences is new, Dilthey’s attribution of purposiveness to the biological sciences does not come as a surprise. In Chapter 13 of the *Introduction to the Human*

Sciences – entitled “The Sciences of the External Organization of Society” and starting with a section on the psychological foundation of these sciences – Dilthey also pays ample attention to purposiveness, and in that context he also refers to biology. However, in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* he attributes the “purposive nexus” (*Zweckzusammenhang*) preeminently to the lived experiences of the human individual and the resulting human culture. He argues that the human sciences have a privileged access to life, because functional phenomena like purpose, function and structure (*Zweck, Funktion und Struktur*) are inherent to our lived experiences and our social world. In contrast, when we ascribe purposiveness to organisms, in Dilthey’s view this actually is no more than a projection of lived experience to an external object. In biology, the aforementioned functional terms can only be used heuristically:

It is remarkable that the relation of purpose, function, and structure, which in the realm of organic beings guides research only heuristically – as a hypothetical model, so to speak – is here [the social world] a historically demonstrable reality, accessible to social experience. And thus it would turn things upside down if the concept of a living organism, which is obscure and hypothetical as it is found in organic nature, were used as a guide to those relations arising in society, which are experienced and clear! (GS I: 71 / SW I: 121)

It is for that reason that in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey considers the psychophysical individual the basic element “from which society and history are formed” and anthropology and psychology, which study these life units, “the most fundamental group of the human sciences” (GS I: 28 / SW I: 80).

However, in-between the publication of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* in 1883 and the writing of the addenda to *The Rise of Hermeneutics* in 1900, the relationship between psychology seems to reverse completely. Whereas Dilthey in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* rejects Comte’s idea that “the constancy of an external biological organization establishes the constancy of a certain basic psychic structure” because it is based on a “crude naturalistic metaphysics” (GS I: 107 / SW I: 156), in *Life and Cognition* (circa 1892–1893), part of a draft for the second volume of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, he claims the opposite:

A biological perspective is necessary in order to be convincing about the structure of life. Earlier I endeavored to show the validity of the psychological foundation [of the human sciences] over against a one-sided intellectualism. The approach has also gained more and more adherents. But

ever since I recognized that the structure of life provides the basis for psychology, I have had to broaden and deepen the psychological standpoint by a biological one. (GS 19: 345 / SW II: 71)

In order to explain this remarkable reversal, which seems to replace anthropology and psychology with the life sciences as the most fundamental group within the human sciences, we have to situate it against the background of Dilthey's overcoming of the subjectivist and static character of Kant's transcendental philosophy.

2 Beyond Kant's Subjectivist Notion of the Purposiveness of Life

As the title *Critique of Historical Reason*, which Dilthey originally had in mind for his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* suggests, the influence of Kant's transcendental philosophy on Dilthey is difficult to overestimate. Already in his inaugural address in Basel in 1867, he expresses his intention "to follow Kant's critical path and to lay, in close cooperation with researchers in other domains, the foundation for an experiential science of the human spirit" (GS 5: 27). Dilthey considered Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* "to a large extent unassailable" (GS 5: 12). However, as Kant restricts himself in his *Critique* to a foundation of the natural sciences, Dilthey intends to *supplement* the *Critique of Pure Reason* with a foundation of the human sciences.

Dilthey's use of the notion of teleology (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* clearly shows his indebtedness to Kant's analysis of this concept in the *Critique of Judgment*. Natural sciences, as defined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, can only explain nature in a mechanistic way. Concepts like "purposiveness" are neither categories nor constitutive principles of objective knowledge. Purpose, as Kant expressively puts it, is a "stranger in natural science" (*Fremdling in der Naturwissenschaft*) (Kant 1987, 217 / KU, B307). In nature, however, we come across countless phenomena that are not amenable to a causal explanation, life being the most obvious example. With regard to these Kant considers a teleological perspective inevitable.

The reason why a mechanistic explanation is insufficient is that, in contrast to inanimate nature, we can consider a living creature as nothing other than a purpose of nature, that is to say, as a phenomenon that "is both cause and effect of itself" (Kant 1987, 249f. / B286). This is the case for three reasons. First, the parts of a living organism are only possible with respect to the whole; second, there is a question of reciprocal causality

with regard to the relation between part and whole; and third, this reciprocal causality can only be understood as a purpose-means relation.

As an organized purposive entity, a living organism looks like a work of art, though without an artist or designer. In other words, a living organism is a self-organizing creature (*selbstorganisierendes Wesen*) characterized by a formative force (*bildende Kraft*) (Kant 1987, 253 / KU, B292–293). According to Kant, it is exactly this interplay of forces and forms that evokes the impression of purposiveness in us.

However, for Kant, the teleological view of nature, although inevitable, does not produce objective knowledge of nature, but, just as in the use of transcendental ideas by theoretical reason, it functions as a heuristic principle: “We do not actually *observe* purposes in nature as intentional ones, but merely add this concept in our *thought*” (Kant 1987, 282 / KU, B336). In a formulation that is very close to Dilthey’s aforementioned reflections on the relationship between psychology and biology in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Kant states:

The concept of a thing as in itself a natural purpose is not a constitutive concept either of understanding or of reason. But it can still be a regulative concept for reflective judgment, allowing us to use a remote analogy with our own causality in terms of purposes generally, to guide our investigation of organized objects and to meditate regarding their supreme basis. (Kant 1987, 255 / KU, B293)

Although mechanistic and teleological explanations are mutually exclusive principles of judgment (*Prinzipien der Beurteilung*), in Kant’s view it must be recognized that an exclusively mechanistic judgment of nature is just as illusionary (*phantastisch*) as an exclusively teleological judgment is fanatical (*schwärmerisch*) (Kant 1987, 296 / KU, B356). His conclusion is that an investigation into nature must follow both methods, without confusing them or putting the one in place of the other. However far our causal knowledge of nature might extend, we cannot avoid ordering all causal relationships under a teleological principle. According to Kant, it is absurd to hope that one day a Newton will appear “who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced” (Kant 1987, 282–283 / KU, B338).

Whereas Dilthey in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* subscribes to Kant’s idea that the notion of purposiveness is no more than a regulative concept for reflective judgment, and for that reason cannot ascribe any foundational role to biology, his “biological turn” in the writings of the middle period indicate a change in his appreciation of Kant’s analysis of the concept of purposiveness. This change is connected with Dilthey’s

growing critique of Kant's transcendental subjectivism. For example, in one of the drafts for the second volume of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, entitled "The Reality of the Temporal Flow: Critique of Kant's Theory of Time as the Form of the Inner Sense," Dilthey criticizes Kant for conceiving time as a pure form of intuition. Although he fully agrees with Kant that all experience is a priori characterized by temporality, he rejects Kant's reduction of time to a pure intellectual form: "Kant's first thesis about the flow of time as an a priori form is correctly demonstrated by him. . . . Kant's second thesis is false. Time is not a pure form of intuition . . ." (GS 19: 216 / SW I: 384).

Dilthey gradually realizes that instead of being a formal, empty form, *time is a real manifestation of life as a psychophysical whole* (cf. de Mul 2004, 146ff.; Makkreel 1992, 387). In *Life and Cognition*, criticizing the formal character of the Kantian categories, Dilthey expresses it as follows: "But the real categories are completely different from these. They are not founded in reason at all, but in the nexus of life itself. . . . The mark of real categories is that their content is unfathomable for thought. They are the nexus of life. This is certain and explicit for reflexive awareness, but unfathomable for the intellect" (GS 19: 361 / SW II: 87).

Moreover, the realization that time is a real category also leads Dilthey to the insight that the a priori forms of sensibility and understanding are not static, but develop in time. Already in an early draft for the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey remarks:

Kant's a priori is fixed and dead; but the real conditions of consciousness and its presuppositions, as I grasp them, constitute a living historical process, a development; they have a history, and the course of this history involves their adaptation to the ever more exact, inductively known manifold of sense-contents. The life of history also encompasses the apparently fixed and dead conditions under which we think. They can never be abrogated, because we think by means of them, but they are the product of development. (GS 19: 44 / SW I: 500–501)⁷

For Dilthey, a priori structures are neither arbitrary axiomatic impositions, nor unchangeable laws of thought, but historically and culturally variable structures which rest on a foundation of various psychophysical and social conditions (GS 19: xxv). An important implication of the "historization of the a priori" is that Kant's strict distinction and separation of transcendental analysis and empirical research is no longer tenable:

⁷ See also the lapidary formulation of this point in the foreword to the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (GS I: xviii / SW I: 51).

“philosophical foundation becomes linked to the nexus of the positive sciences” (GS 19: 52). Because the real a priori structures of (human) life are subject to evolution (*Evolution*), unfolding (*Entfaltung*) and development (*Entwicklung*) (GS 22: 12; cf. Damböck 2012), their transcendental reconstruction and analysis can only take place in close cooperation with the empirical sciences, such as biology, psychology and history.

The overcoming of the subjectivist and static character of the a priori, which not only characterizes Kant’s transcendental philosophy, but also still – at least partly – marks Dilthey’s own early works, took Dilthey considerable time and did not proceed in the same pace all along the line. However, in the works of the 1890s, Dilthey’s critique of Kant’s subjectivism also found its way in his reflections on the purposiveness of life. In the writings of the middle period reciprocal causality, purpose-means relationship between part and whole and the self-organization were no longer considered to be sheer regulative ideas, projections of the purposiveness experiences in psychic life onto “external objects,” but are now considered by Dilthey to be defining characteristics of organic life and as such the foundation of the higher forms of purposiveness.

Here we find a remarkable similarity between Dilthey’s “naturalistic turn” and recent phenomenological approaches in biology and the life sciences. In Evan Thompson’s (2007) *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, we find a similar attempt to connect empirical research in the life sciences and the cognitive sciences with phenomenology.⁸ Just as Dilthey, Thompson naturalizes Kant’s analysis of purposiveness:

Kant’s statement, “the organization of nature has nothing analogous to any causality known to us” (Kant 1987, 254), no longer seems compelling, thanks to our growing understanding of circular causality, nonlinear dynamics, and self-organizing systems. Many scientists now believe there are necessary principles of biological self-organization. The advance of science seems to have rolled back the limits of reason as Kant saw them, so that there is no longer any compelling reason to regard self-organization as simply a regulative principle of our judgments about nature rather than also a constitutive principle of nature itself (Juarrero-Roque 1985). (Thompson 2007, 139)

Dilthey emphasizes the constitutive character of the self-organization of life, too. In the *Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* (1894), Dilthey points at the fact both the biological and the psychological purposiveness are immanent: “It must be emphasized once again that just

⁸ On the different meanings of the phrase “naturalization of phenomenology” see Zahavi (2009).

as we reject the idea of a purpose underlying the nexus of subjective immanent purposiveness, so we must reject it for objective immanent purposiveness” (GS 5: 214–216 / SW II: 185–187).

Finally, although both Dilthey and Thompson naturalize phenomenology, they strongly reject *reductionist* naturalism.⁹ Although there is a strong continuation between organic and psychic purposiveness, the latter cannot be reduced to the former, but rather emerges from it and constitutes a higher form of articulation: “Without doubt, the higher phenomena of consciousness stem from lower ones. The lower ones constitute their foundation. However, they are not simply an assemble of connections, which could be completely derived from the elementary ones” (GS 22: 12). In this sense the human sciences, including phenomenological descriptions of first-person perspective experience, have a *relative independence* vis-à-vis the natural sciences, as Dilthey already argued in *The Introduction to the Human Sciences* (GS 1: 17 / SW I: 68–69).

However, the cooperation of phenomenology and the natural sciences may help us to gain a better understanding of the nature of both life and mind (Thompson 2007, 14). Says Thompson: “Phenomenology provides a way of observing and describing natural phenomena that brings out or makes manifest their properly phenomenological features – selfhood, purposiveness, normativity, subjectivity, intentionality, temporality, and so on – which otherwise would remain invisible to science. Put another way, phenomenology offers a way of *seeing the inner life of biological systems*” (Thompson 2007, 358).

3 The Embodied, Embedded, Enactive and Extended Character of Lived Experience

Evan Thompson – coauthor of the groundbreaking book *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Varela, Thompson and Ross 1991) – is one of the (co)founders of the embodied cognition paradigm. Although phenomenology, especially the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, is an important source of inspiration for Thompson, Dilthey is not discussed, either in *The Embodied Mind* or in *Mind in Life*. Given the rather one-sided emphasis in the secondary literature on Dilthey’s foundation of the human sciences and the almost total neglect of his reflections on the biological dimension of human life¹⁰ and the fact

⁹ Cf. Damböck (2012) and Jung (2014, 110).

¹⁰ An important exception is Jung (2014, 105f).

that most of these reflections have only recently been available in English translations,¹¹ it is hardly surprising that Thompson does not even mention Dilthey's name. However, looking at Dilthey's work through the lens of the embodied cognition approach, does not only shed a new light on the importance of his thoughts, but may also contribute some valuable new elements to the embodied cognition approach. Although this tradition is not homogeneous – there are differences in emphasis, method and sources of inspiration (see Menary 2010) – it has become fashionable within this tradition to characterize human cognition in terms of the 4Es: embodied, embedded, enactive and extended. These four catchwords are surprisingly suitable to characterize the core of Dilthey's work, not only of the middle period but also of his later – post 1900 – work, in which he returns to the foundation of the human sciences.

Embodiment

As we have seen in the discussion of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Dilthey emphasizes the fact that the human being (like all animals) is characterized by its psychophysical unity. With this emphasis Dilthey opposes the one-sided intellectualism, not only of the rationalist tradition, but of the empirical tradition as well. In Dilthey's often quoted words:

No real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought. A historical as well a psychological approach to whole human beings led me to explain even knowledge and its concepts (such as the external world, time, substance, and cause) in terms of the manifold powers of a being that wills, feels, and thinks. (GS 1: xviii / SW I: 50)

If there is one thing shared by all representatives of the embodied cognition movement, it is their criticism of this kind of intellectualism that can be found in cognitivism, the dominant approach within cognitive science, which equates cognition with the manipulation of mental representations. In *The Origin of Our Belief in the Reality of the External World and Its Justification* (1890), Dilthey explicitly rejects the idea that we know the external world through a mental “projection” (GS 5: 106 / SW II: 24). Instead, knowledge of the external world presupposes that we are bodily present in the world, and it is only within the nexus of life that our self emerges:

¹¹ The translation of *Leben und Erkennen* [*Life and Cognition*], the most important “biological” texts of Dilthey, only appeared in 2010, in SW II; that is, three years after Thompson's *Mind in Life*.

Our body is first of all the region of our movable limbs. . . . The region of the body sets itself apart from an environment within which motor-impulses only produce movement indirectly. Such external movements lack the accompaniment of inner sensations within the muscles and joints and on sensitive surfaces. . . . Tactile impressions in particular allow us to experience an actuality that is beyond our skin and hence external: something alien, located entirely outside of the area of our own lived bodily existence. (GS 5: 106–107 / SW II: 25)

Embeddedness

The last quote already indicates that in Dilthey's view, we cannot study the human being independent of its interaction with its physical environment. Moreover, psychic life finds its origins in this interaction. As Dilthey expresses it in *Life and Cognition*:

The interaction between the self, which is enveloped, as it were, by a body, and objects finds its expression in the structure of all inner life. We experience this in ourselves, and we find it again in other living creatures. It is based on the fact that a living creature, in the midst of the stimuli that impinge on it from its milieu, seeks to satisfy its system of drives and feelings in reaction to these objects, either by adapting them to its needs or by adapting itself to what is unchangeable. We find this structure exemplified in every living creature. (GS 19: 345 / SW I: 468)

It is clear that for Dilthey, human life does not so much oppose animal life, but is an integral part of it. This observation enables me to return to an earlier remark on the distinction Dilthey makes about our alleged inability to understand nature, because it is completely alien to us. This might be true for inanimate nature, but in the case of living nature, in particular “the animal world,” we are at least able to understand it at a functional level. We share some of our basic drives – such as hunger and thirst and our sexual drive – with animals and although it is not possible to imagine “what it is like to be a bat” from a first-person perspective, interaction with animals discloses a “second-animal” perspective. When we play with our dog, for example, and join in the to and fro of throwing and retrieving a ball, there is definitely some form of mutual understanding. Likewise, our intercourse with other persons – from working or playing music together to making love – not only rests on third-person perspective observations and attempts to reexperience (*nacherleben*) their lived experiences from a first-person perspective, but also (and fortunately!) heavily depends on our ability to interact with them within a common context from a second-person perspective

(GS 7: 205–220 / SW III: 226–241).¹² Within this perspective in-between the “facts of [inanimate] nature” and the “facts of mind” the “facts of living nature” (*Tatsachen der lebendigen Natur*) appear.

Enactment

What the last quote also makes clear, is that the “objective immanent purposiveness” of our bodily interaction with the environment expresses itself in the “subjective immanent purposiveness” of psychic life. Thus, on the basic level of self-preservation and propagation, cognition is closely related to action, not only in the sense that it is a function of action, but also in the sense that it is enacted, has its foundation in action.

In the writings of the middle period, one even often gets the impression that all cognition for that reason is solely functional. For example, when we read in the *System of Ethics* (1890):

In the structural nexus of psychic life, thinking is interposed, as it were, between impression and reaction [*Eindruck und Reaktion*]; it must be transformed into action. The play of children depends on this, as does the whole of culture. For the animate creature, thought and cognition stand within a teleologically structured nexus that extends from perception of the external world to a mutual adaptation between the world and itself. Thus, the philosophical comprehension of the world also has its goal in action. (GS 10: 13)¹³

It is important to note that Dilthey speaks of a *mutual* adaption of the organic self and the surrounding world. The animate *creature* is as much a product of the environment as this environment is produced by this creature. And, in a similar manner, the human being is as much a product of culture as culture is produced by humankind.

It appears as if all cognition, including abstract philosophical thinking, is entirely pragmatic. In *Life and Cognition*, for example, Dilthey explains how the formal categories with which scientists and philosophers attempt to understand the world, such as substance, causality and essence, are not original categories, but abstractions from our enacted lived experience of respectively selfhood, acting and personal character and style.

However, if we consider the later works of Dilthey, we see that this pragmatic dimension of life does not have the last word. Psychic life finds a

¹² Cf. de Mul (2013). Recently, in the cognitive sciences, there is also a growing interest in the crucial role the second-person perspective plays in all kinds of cognition. See, for example, Schilbach et al. (2013).

¹³ Translation by R. A. Makkreel, to be published in SW VI (in press).

further articulation in what Dilthey, in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, called “the highest phenomenon of the empirical world” (GS 1: 17 / SW I: 69): the historical world of meaningful cultural expressions, which has its own independent reality and which requires its own form of hermeneutic explanation beyond the causal and functional explanation of its underlying physical and biological conditions: higher forms of understanding (*höheren Formen des Verstehen*), exegesis (*Auslegung*) and interpretation (*Interpretation*).

Extendedness

The recent embodied cognition research shows a special interest in the topic of extended cognition, focusing on the outsourcing of aspects of cognition to the environment or external objects (see, for example, Clark 2008). We can think of the way an animal finds its way through the forest or a person her way to the city with the help of signs of recognition. In the case of human beings, especially the use of external symbols, from pre-historical cave paintings to writing, plays an crucial role in cognitive processes, and nowadays the human mind even is assisted by machines to process such symbols (computers) (cf. de Mul 2010, 225ff.).

Although Dilthey doesn't uses the phrase “extended cognition,” from early on he was fascinated by the role external objects play in human cognition. Already in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, he repeatedly points at the fact that the human world for a large part consists of material objects (artifacts like houses, paintings, books, etc.), and that these are crucial to understand mental and spiritual phenomena. After all, without these expressions we do not have access to the lived experience of historical actors, painters, etc. In his post-1900 writings, collected in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (GS 7 / SW III), he comes back to this role of expressions in his profound analysis of the structural nexus of lived experience, expression and understanding (*Erlebnis, Ausdruck, Verstehen*).¹⁴ However, this time, inspired by his bio-anthropological writings from the middle period, Dilthey arrives at a much deeper understanding of the cognitive dimension of this triad.

According to Matthias Jung (2003/2004), the structural nexus of lived experience, expression and understanding results from the transposition of his biological model of mutual adaptation between organism and

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of the triad lived experience, expression and understanding, see de Mul (2004, 225–263).

environment to the cultural sphere (Jung 2009, 125–181). Just as the organism and the environment mutually shape each other, human beings and their surrounding culture produce each other as well. Moreover, with the expression of lived experience into an external symbolic system, the already meaningful interaction with the physical environment emerges as a secondary, cultural semantization. As such, the structural nexus of lived experience, expression and understanding constitutes the basic structure of human – that is, culturally mediated – cognition.

As *articulations* of lived experience, expressions are no longer conceived of as a simple copy, as they can contain more meaning than the lived experience. In this sense, expression is *creative*: “In lived experience we grasp the self neither in the form of its full course nor in the depths of what it encompasses. For the scope of conscious life rises like a small island from inaccessible depths. But an expression can tap these very depths. It is creative” (GS 7: 220 / SW III: 241).

Implicit relations, which often remain unconscious in lived experience, are articulated in expressions: “An expression of lived experience can contain more of the nexus of psychic life than any introspection can catch sight of. It draws from depths not illuminated by consciousness” (GS 7: 206 / SW III: 227). Whereas first-person introspection gives us a certain access to our thoughts, volitions and feelings, and second-perspective action a pragmatic grasp of the life of other living beings, it is only via the third-person hermeneutic understanding, exegesis and interpretation of the articulated expressions that we disclose an entirely new independent realm of spiritual meaning for hermeneutic understanding, to which Dilthey refers with the Hegelian word “objective Spirit” (*objectiver Geist*). It encompasses the totality of human expressions in history that together constitute the “human-socio-historical reality” (GS 7: 81 / SW III: 103), which “represents the highest evolutionary stage on earth,” and which is the subject of the human sciences.¹⁵

The *inner* dimension of this world of articulated expressions is no longer understood as psychic but as spiritual: “The understanding of this spirit is not psychological cognition. It is a regression to a spiritual formation that has its own structure and lawfulness” (GS 7: 196 / SW III: 217–218). And, precisely for that reason, it transcends elementary understanding, and is in need of higher forms of understanding, exegesis and interpretation.

¹⁵ “A discipline belongs to the human sciences only if its object becomes accessible to us through the attitude that is founded upon the nexus of life, expression, and understanding” (GS 7: 87 / SW III: 109).

The task of comprehending this “life of the Spirit” (GS 7: 196 / SW III: 217) is infinite, because as long as human history lasts, “all understanding will always remain partial and can never be completed” (GS 5: 330 / SW IV: 249), but at the same time this form of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) is the most rewarding task conceivable, as only in this realm is life really able to grasp itself most deeply: “Here life grasps life” (*Leben erfaßt hier Leben*) (GS 7: 136 / SW III: 157).

4 Conclusion

A popular thesis in the early secondary literature on Dilthey is that between 1895 and 1900 Dilthey underwent a fundamental turn from a psychological to a hermeneutic foundation of the human sciences.¹⁶ This thesis has turned out to be untenable, as hermeneutics already played an important role in Dilthey’s work long before 1900, he also continued to refer to his earlier psychological texts in his post-1900 writings, even quoting large parts verbatim. Although I’ve tried to show in this chapter that in the middle period (1883–1900), Dilthey directs his attention to the biological dimension of human life, and even used the word “biological turn,” this turn should not be understood as a rejection of the psychological or hermeneutical dimension of his foundation of the human sciences. As the analysis of the publications of the middle period made clear, the evolutionary perspective inspires Dilthey to understand the biological, psychological and spiritual dimensions as three levels of human life, and that in order to grasp human life these levels should be studied in a close cooperation of the life sciences and the human sciences. In this sense Dilthey’s “naturalized phenomenology” can be regarded to be a forerunner of present approaches in the embodied cognition tradition. Moreover, within this context, the study of Dilthey’s work is not only interesting from the perspective of the history of philosophy or the history of science. As Dilthey’s post-1900 work focuses on the hermeneutic interpretation of “the life of the Spirit,” a level of human life that does not get much attention in the embodied cognition tradition, it also remains an important source of inspiration toward a “*Fortgang über Thompson*” in order to also include this precious level of human life in the embodied cognition tradition.

¹⁶ It was already put forward by Spranger as early as 1912 and was repeated by Groethuysen in his foreword to GS 7 / SW III.

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