

Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, eds. *Wilhelm Dilthey. Selected Works vol. III: The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

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## Preview

[Book Review] Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, eds. *Wilhelm Dilthey. Selected Works vol. III: The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

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This volume provides Dilthey's most mature and best formulation of his critique of historical reason. It consists of four parts: (1) Studies Toward the Foundation of the Human Sciences; (2) The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences; (3) Plan for the Continuation of the Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences; and finally (4) an appendix with supplements and additions.

Part One contains three "Studies Toward the Foundation of the Human Sciences," in which Dilthey delineates the basic structures of consciousness relevant to historical understanding. These studies examine preliminary descriptive concepts that orient the understanding of human experience. Prominent among these concepts is that of lived experience which presents itself as a temporal nexus of consciousness. Within this temporal nexus, Dilthey distinguishes two kinds of experiential regularities: (1) uniformities that determine the succession of psychic processes; and

(2) structures that connect aspects of one state of consciousness or temporally separated states into larger wholes. The first kind of regularity is about external causal relations. It is the second kind of regularity involving inner experienceable relations that is Dilthey's main concern.

These studies were to a certain extent inspired by Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, which Dilthey saw as advancing his own earlier efforts at structural description. However, instead of primarily linking the subject to its perceived object by means of a general intentional relation, Dilthey shows that inherent in lived experience are all kinds of attitudes toward things, not just cognitive, but felt and willed relations that disclose concrete life-concerns. The productivity of the psychic nexus lies in the ways these three aspects of experience interact. For example, as feelings inform our evaluations, these can influence not only our volitional decisions but also our cognitive apprehension of the world.

The first study is primarily about structural nexus in a psychological sense. The second study is entitled "The Structural Nexus of Knowledge" and consists of two parts: one on "objective apprehension," the other on "objective having." Objective apprehension is cognitive and conceptual but does not exhaust our knowledge of the world; we also know the world by means of feeling and willing as two modes of objective having. As Dilthey writes: "Lived experience is first of all the structural unity of attitudes and contents. My perceptual attitude with its relation to an object is just as much a lived experience as my feeling about something or my willing something. Lived experience is always certain of itself" (46–47).

This certainty of Dilthey's theory of knowledge (*Theorie des Wissens*) is explicated as a reflexive awareness that precedes the reflective self-consciousness of traditional epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*). Reflexive awareness is the being-there-for-me of all contents of my consciousness. This indexicality of lived experience must be abstracted from when pursuing the natural sciences, but it remains relevant to the human sciences as they cognize the social and historical world. The reflexivity of lived experience provides an initial intelligibility for the human sciences, but this does not yet constitute understanding.

The third study entitled "The Delimitations of the Human Sciences" focuses on the importance of the category of meaning. Dilthey writes that meaning

...provides the relation that determines and articulates the apprehension of the course of our life. But it is also the point of view according to which we grasp and explicate simultaneous and successive life-courses in history, making prominent what is significant ... Generally, it is the category distinctive of life and the historical world. It inhabits life as the distinctive relation that holds between its parts, and this relation inhabits life and makes it possible to explicate and narrate it wherever it extends (95).

Although lived experience is intelligible from within, the understanding of the meaning of life is always with reference to some external context.

In Part Two, Dilthey's 1910 masterpiece, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* explicates the initial context that makes understanding possible as the objective spirit or the sphere of human objectification that surrounds us as we grow up. Hegel's idea of objective spirit is reconceived in a more empirical form to designate the medium of commonality in which historical beings are immersed. Any universal claims about history need to be framed within the specific disciplinary systems analyzed by the various human sciences. Instead of predetermining these systems as either causal or teleological, Dilthey describes them experientially as productive systems (*Wirkungszusammenhänge*).

In the introduction to this volume, the editors argue that the initial commonality of objective spirit is local and at the level of immediate knowledge (*Wissen*). It is only the epistemic conceptualization introduced at the level of the human sciences that can produce anything like universal cognition (*Erkenntnis*). But since this epistemic analysis of the human sciences simultaneously refines and fragments our sense of history into distinct productive systems, Dilthey aims at a further, more integral level of understanding, which the editors call "reflective knowledge."

Part Three, or Dilthey's "Plan for the Continuation of the Formation," contains extensive discussions of the categories most important for this more comprehensive reflective knowledge of historical life. These categories of life include not only meaning as discussed earlier, but also value, purpose, time, development and force. The contributions of autobiography to historical understanding, and of biography to scientific history are also considered. By characterizing understanding as a "rediscovery of the I in the Thou," Dilthey aims at ever higher levels of connectedness. Ultimately, autobiography and biography must give way to more encompassing modes of historical understanding. As Dilthey puts it:

The connectedness of the world of human spirit dawns in the subject and yet there is a progression of spirit that connects the particular logical processes whereby the overall meaning of this world is determined. On the one hand, this world of spirit is the creation of the apprehending subject; on the other hand, there is a progression of spirit directed at an objective knowledge of this. Thus we confront the problem of how the formation of the world of spirit in the subject makes possible the knowledge of spiritual reality. I have already called this the task of a critique of historical reason (213).

The finest summary of Dilthey's views on hermeneutics can be found in "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life." Here, Dilthey differentiates understanding relative to three kinds of manifestations of life. The declared task of the essay is to consider how the understanding of others contributes to historical understanding. It starts by establishing that the givens of history are always manifestations of life (*Lebensäußerungen*), but not necessarily expressive of the lived experience (*Erlebnisausdrücke*) of others. Dilthey writes: "By manifestations of life I mean not only these expressions that intend something or are meant to mean something but also those that without any such intent to express spirit nevertheless make it understandable. Understanding will differ in kind and scope in relation to different classes of manifestations of life" (226).

The first class consists of concepts, judgments and other thought-formations. If anything is expressed in these theoretical manifestations, it is not anything more than logical meaning. "Here understanding is directed at the mere logical content, which remains identical in every context, and is more complete than in relation to any other manifestation of life" (226-27). These life-manifestations are expressions insofar as they are intended to communicate meaning contents, but they are not expressive of the otherness of those who have put them forward.

Actions constitute the second class of life-manifestations. They are not intended to communicate, but the way they relate to purposes does communicate something about others nevertheless. Actions will express only part of the inner life of the actor. The significance of actions tends to be one-sided because they respond to particular situations.

Dilthey introduces the third class of life-manifestations as follows:

It is quite different with the expression of lived experience. A special relation exists between it, the life from which it stems, and the understanding that it brings about. 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. But at the same time, it is characteristic of the expression of lived experience that its relation to the spiritual or human content expressed in it can only be made available to understanding within limits (227).

Expressions of lived experience draw on the full scope of psychic life and therefore offer a greater challenge to understanding and more room for misunderstanding. They are much more difficult to interpret than the other two kinds of life-manifestations because they are not reigned in by the theoretical and practical interests of ordinary life. They tend to reflect the interestedness of life in less constrained ways and in doing so can manifest in reality another dimension in which self and others can participate.

Dilthey also distinguishes between elementary and higher understanding. The former orients itself by objective spirit and settles for the initial meanings that we grow up with and that require no “conscious inference” or at most an “inference by analogy” (228, 230). A manifestation of life can “express something about human spirit” (231) because it finds its place in the already “articulated order” (230) of objective spirit.

This way of conceiving the expression of meaning allows Dilthey to reconsider the nature of understanding and interpretation. Although he speaks of understanding as a process that proceeds from something externally presented to something inner, this is not normally to be interpreted as going back to the psychological state of the author. Instead, the primary sense of “inner” in the realm of meaning is the intrinsic connectedness of the parts that make up the overall expression. The relation of expression to what is expressed is an inner structural connection due to the expression’s inherent place in the articulated order of objective spirit.

Higher understanding becomes necessary when the common or familiar meaning of an expression does not seem adequate. Higher understanding is not concerned merely with meaning, but raises the issue of truth. This happens when we confront ambiguities and inconsistencies in a text, or when we suspect the possibility of deception. Then we must compare the expression in question to similar expressions either in the same text or other texts or if necessary in relation to other contexts. These contexts can either be more or less inclusive than objective spirit.

Objective spirit represents the commonalities that we inherit from our tradition, but they are not yet truly universal. For Dilthey the human sciences are necessary to direct higher understanding to the appropriate universal disciplinary contexts, whether they be social or political, economic or cultural, secular or religious. These cases of higher understanding establish a larger context of reference and move from simple inference by analogy to what Dilthey calls inductive inference.

However, higher understanding can also focus on more specific contexts related to the work or its author. The consideration of such contexts should come only at the conclusion of the interpretive process and represents a shift from exploring the relation “of expression to what is expressed” toward the relation “of what has been produced to productivity” (233). Here the concern is with the individuality of an author and his or her work. The highest form of understanding is not the reconstruction of the individuality of the author, but involves a process of re-experiencing. Whereas understanding “is an operation running inverse to the course of production,” re-experiencing requires that we “go forward with the line of the events themselves” (235).

Re-experiencing develops understanding by completing the hermeneutical circle. Whereas understanding goes “back” to the overall context, re-experiencing goes “forward” by following out the parts that give focus to the whole. A re-experiencing is not an actual re-construction but produces a “better understanding” that refines the original.

The essay also includes a suggestive section on musical understanding, in which the expressiveness of music is shown to not involve a translation of some personal experience into tones. Instead, the composer’s experience is tonal from the start. “There is no duality of lived experience and music, no double world, no carryover from the one to the other. Genius is simply living in the tonal sphere as if it alone existed” (242).

The appendix contains unpublished drafts about the tasks of the human sciences. Special attention is devoted to the systematic human sciences and how they can contribute to universal history. Understanding is here defined as the process “in

which we recognize something inner from signs that are outwardly given” (329). Only rarely is the inner to be conceived psychologically, and if at all, only as a last resort.

In sum, this work is important for putting into context the many concerns of Dilthey’s philosophy. It allows us to see to what extent early psychological interests are overcome and to what extent they are refined. Lived experience remains a source of intelligibility but it cannot provide understanding. The commonality of objective spirit establishes the framework for elementary understanding. The human sciences then delimit the more specific productive systems that allow us to arrive at universally valid regularities about aspects of historical life. They move us to the higher understanding made possible by conceptual cognition. However, the fullest understanding of historical life requires the more integral perspective of reflective knowledge.