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The Role of Intellectual History in Dilthey's »Kritik der historischen Vernunft«

The title of this paper can occasion some misunderstanding of what I am setting out to do. Let it be said at the outset, therefore, that I do not attempt to determine the role of intellectual history within the over-all framework of Dilthey's projected *Kritik*. Nor do I explore all of the functions and ramifications of intellectual history in *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883). Although some of these functions are discussed, it is far from all of them that can be taken up in the present limited context. In fact, my paper pursues four specific themes. First, I analyse Dilthey's use of a distinction between historiography (*Geschichtsschreibung*) and scientific history (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) in order to clarify what I see as being one of the crucial aims of his projected critique. Second, in the light of this distinction, which has been commonly overlooked by his interpreters, I attempt to clarify briefly his relationship to some central intellectual formations in the 19th century: historicism, positivism and the philosophy of history. Third, I outline his conception of intellectual history, also in the light of this distinction. Fourth, by focussing on Dilthey's practice as a historian in the second book of *Einleitung*, I attempt to identify two important functions which this book served in his project as a whole. In treating these four themes I hope to contribute to a more adequate understanding of what Dilthey was seeking to achieve through his critique of historical reason.¹

My point of departure is two quotations that serve to indicate the thrust of his thought on this issue as well as the reason why it is worthwhile to inquire into the role of intellectual history in Dilthey's *Kritik*. The first is from his notebook entitled *Zur Psychologie, in ihrem Verhältnis zur Geschichte* and was probably written during the late 1850's.

»Es wird das immer mein Traum bleiben, daß die Geschichte noch ebenso in der Kindheit ist, als die Naturwissenschaft zur Zeit, als sie noch Naturbe-

¹ In the lighth of the title of this symposium I have limited myself to the range of texts related to *Einleitung* and do not discuss therefore texts related to *Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1910).

schreibung war. Wie Bewegungsgesetze die ganze körperliche Natur beherrschen, so ist auch von freilich wesentlich verschiedenen Bewegungsgesetzen das geistige Leben beherrscht. (...) So wenig als Naturbeschreibung wird Geschichte, wie sie bis jetzt war, je aufhören; sie wird neben den künftigen Entwicklungen bestehen.« (XVIII, 206)

The second is from the treatise *Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat* and had a fairly prominent place in the original version of the text, forming as it did part of the introduction to the second instalment in *Philosophische Monatshefte* in 1875.

»Ich hege die Hoffnung, wenn die Geschichte der geistigen Bewegungen und des intellektuellen Fortschritts der Menschheit (...) sich aller ihrer natürlichen Hilfsmittel bemächtigt haben wird, dann wird kein anderer Teil der Historie sich mit ihr an wissenschaftlicher Strenge vergleichen können; dann wird die unverständige und nur aus Ignoranz in bezug auf die strengen hier in Frage kommenden Wissenschaften erklärbare Abneigung, ja Mißachtung vieler hochpolitischer Historiker gegenüber dem Studium der Geschichte der höchsten Äußerungen des menschlichen Geistes schwinden.«²

The second quotation clearly evinces that Dilthey attributed a very special significance to intellectual history. However, it also gives rise to a question as to what precisely he meant when he asserted that intellectual history represented the field in which it would prove possible to establish the most rigorous and scientific mode of historical inquiry. Thus, a discussion of the role of intellectual history in Dilthey's *Kritik* calls for an analysis of his understanding of history as a mode of scientific inquiry. The first quotation indicates that Dilthey, on that occasion at least, employed a distinction between two modes of historical inquiry: one focussed on description and the other on the discovery of laws or regularities. It also indicates that he did not conceive these modes of inquiry as competing alternatives in the sense that the one should supplant the other, thus making it superfluous. Rather, they were conceived as two co-existing and complementary modes of historical inquiry. Moreover, the second quotation indicates that at that point in time Dilthey felt the need to distance himself quite manifestly from the dominant form of academic history in Germany. He virtually ridiculed the views of contemporary political historians in order to convey the general significance of the approach to history which he was outlining. Since this is not the only instance in *Über das Studium* of such criticism of the established form of academic history, it suggests the need to clarify Dilthey's

² V, 41. The following is an earlier formulation of the same idea: »Wenn irgendwo strenge, objektive Geschichte möglich ist (das Ziel der Anstrengung aller echt historischen Köpfe), dann wird sie in der Geschichte der Wissenschaften sich realisieren.« (ca. 1866) XVIII, 10.

relationship to German historicism (*Historismus*) in any elucidation of his understanding of the nature and task of historical inquiry.

As a tradition of scholarship German historicism was both differentiated and complex. Yet, it is nonetheless possible to pinpoint a set of commonly held theoretical commitments that serve to justify the fact that one treats it nowadays as a particular intellectual formation. One of the most important of these was the commitment to a new type of historical method, a set of explicit and thematized rules for the pursuit of historical research. By emphasizing the special nature of this method, German historians sought to justify the claim that academic history was a distinct and autonomous discipline (*Fachwissenschaft*). This method also provided them with a means by which to further the professionalization of historical scholarship. German historians likewise shared a set of ideas concerning the nature of historical process which functioned as a general theoretical framework for their analysis and interpretation of historical events. However, it would be misleading to say that they shared an elaborated theory of the socio-historical world as such, since this set of ideas persisted mainly in the form of more or less tacit assumptions. There were very few attempts to ground these operative principles, J. G. DROYSEN's *Grundriß der Historik* (1868) being the outstanding example of an attempt to provide a theoretical legitimation of the historicist position.

As an intellectual formation, however, German historicism is not only identifiable on the basis of a shared set of positive commitments. Of almost equal importance seems to have been some shared negative commitments, that is, attempts to maintain a form of collective identity by clearly distinguishing German historicism from other available positions. Two such commitments are of special importance in the present context. On the one hand, German historicists sought to draw a clear line of demarcation between their own commitments and those of the German idealist philosophies of history, especially the Hegelian variant. They not only stressed that their approach to history should not be conceived as a new kind of philosophy of history. They also spelt out this difference of position by rejecting the use of systematic theory as such as well as the use of philosophical schemas of historical development. The need to employ an intuitive-interpretative (*Anschauung, Verstehen*) approach was emphasized in contradistinction, as well as the crucial role of the unique and individual (*Individualität*) in historical process. As from the 1860's, German historicists were also under pressure to distinguish themselves clearly from the emergent forms of Anglo-French positivism that were seeking to transpose the methods of natural science to the study of history and society.³

³ For two good recent attempts to describe the theoretical position of German historicism see J.

It is a well-known fact that Dilthey was very critical in his assessment of the merits of the German idealist philosophies of history and of the new positivist approaches to historical inquiry. However, one cannot infer from similar negative commitments to a similarity or identity of theoretical positions. An initial indication of his actual distance from German historicism can be gained by comparing the contents of DROYSEN's and Dilthey's reviews of the foremost exemplar of positivist history: THOMAS BUCKLE's *History of Civilisation in England* (1858–61). DROYSEN's review, arrestingly entitled *Erhebung der Geschichte zum Rang einer Wissenschaft* (1862), made it manifestly clear that the positivist ideal of science which structured Buckle's entire approach ought to be rejected on the grounds that it was completely inappropriate to history as a field of scientific inquiry. On this basis, he rejected the idea that historical inquiry should be directed towards explaining historical events through the discovery of general laws, and he emphasized instead that historians should focus their attention on understanding (*Verstehen*) historical events as being the outcome of free purposive action. Thus, DROYSEN's review was the first major attempt to make the distinction between an interpretative (*Verstehen*) and an explanatory (*Erklären*) approach a crucial issue in the ongoing debate about the nature, task and method of historical inquiry.⁴ Dilthey's review more moderately entitled *Geschichte und Wissenschaft* was published anonymously in the spring of 1862. Like DROYSEN's it was very critical, but his points of criticism make clear that he was arguing from a position which differed radically from that of DROYSEN. One of the crucial passages was the following where he both outlines and assesses BUCKLE's position:

»Er will die Geschichte in eine exakte Wissenschaft verwandeln, gleich der Naturgeschichte; er will in den geschichtlichen Begebenheiten die Gesetzmäßigkeit nachweisen und sich somit in den Stand setzen, dieselben vorherzusagen. Er spricht die Überzeugung aus, daß in dem Reiche der geschichtlichen wie in dem der natürlichen Begebenheiten überall das Gesetz der Notwendigkeit herrscht, das Verhältnis von Ursache und Wirkung; (...) Auf diesem

Rüsen: *Theorien im Historismus*, in J. Rüsen u. H. Süßmuth (ed.): *Theorien in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, (1980) and H. Schnädelbach: *Philosophie in Deutschland 1831–1933*, (1983), ch. 2.

⁴ Droysen's review was published in *Historische Zeitschrift* and later re-published as an appendix to his *Grundriß der Historik* (1868). The best detailed analysis of Droysen's critique of Buckle can be found in M. Riedel: *Zwischen Positivismus und Historismus*, in his book *Verstehen oder Erklären?* (1978). It is worth noting that two further attacks on Buckle appeared in the pages of *Historische Zeitschrift* within the decade following Droysen's review (R. Usinger: *Thomas Buckle*, HZ 19 (1868), 24–37 u. J. Bona Meyer: *Neue Versuche einer Philosophie der Geschichte*, HZ 25 (1871), 303–78), since it indicates the extent to which German historians felt the need to distance themselves from the emergent form of positivist history.

Grundgedanken ruht das ganze Werk; nur durch die Bezugnahme auf ihn erhalten die einzelnen, zum Teil ziemlich bunt zusammengefüigten Teile derselben Zusammenhang und Wert. Von der Stellung, die der Leser zu diesem Grundgedanken einnimmt, wird dessen Urteil über das Werk abhängen. Das unsrige sprechen wir kurz dahin aus, daß wir diesen Grundgedanken in abstracto zwar für richtig halten, daß sich derselbe aber für die Geschichtsschreibung bei der Eigentümlichkeit ihres Stoffes nur in geringem Maße fruchtbar machen läßt, und daß BUCKLE bei dem Versuche, umfassende Folgerungen daraus herzuleiten, völlig fehlgegangen ist.« (XVI, 101)

DROYSEN would never have stated – as Dilthey did – that he could accept BUCKLE's position in the abstract since the main purpose of his review was to demonstrate that BUCKLE's conception was wholly inadequate and misleading when employed in the study of history. Moreover, Dilthey's statement to this effect cannot be interpreted as a mere piece of rhetoric or as a tactical gambit on the part of a polemicist. He did object to any straightforward transposition of the ideals and methods of contemporary natural science to the study of history and society. Yet, he also acknowledged the need to establish a mode of historical inquiry that was specifically designed to explain historical events through the discovery of the generative laws of historical process. Thus, his criticism of BUCKLE's *History* was based on quite different grounds. First, he objected to BUCKLE's approach, not because it was an attempt to employ methods from the natural sciences in the study of history but, because this had been done in a dogmatic fashion without attending to the specific nature of the socio-historical world. Second, he could not accept BUCKLE's outright dismissal of traditional historiography as a pseudo-scientific mode of inquiry. Traditional narrative historiography (*Geschichtsschreibung/-erzählung*), he argued, served a purpose which was quite distinct from that of a scientific study of history and society. Thus, as far as Dilthey was concerned, traditional historiography could never be made superfluous by a science the main task of which was to explain historical process. Third, he also took issue with BUCKLE's contention that neither individuals nor particular individual circumstances were of any relevance in a science of history.⁵

The distinction between traditional (narrative) historiography and scientific (explanatory) history which Dilthey employed in the BUCKLE review can be said

5 It was mainly with reference to the emergent positivist challenge (Buckle, Mill) that Dilthey began to inquire into the nature and foundations of the human sciences in the mid-1860's (see XVIII, 1–2, 213–14 u. XIX, 1–2), and the draft entitled *Untersuchungen über das Studium des Menschen und der Geschichte* (c. 1866, XIX, 1–8) in which two modes of inquiry (*Weise der Forschung*) were distinguished, can be seen as Dilthey's attempt to develop the line of argument presented in his Buckle review in 1862.

to have served a dual purpose. By stressing the independent task and value of traditional historiography Dilthey was able to distance himself from the positivist onslaught on established forms of academic history. On the other hand, by stressing the need to establish a new scientific or explanatory mode of historical inquiry he also succeeded in distancing himself from the position prevailing among German historians at that time. Thus, in the early 60's Dilthey was seeking to defend a theoretical position which differed significantly from both that of German historicism and that of Anglo-French positivism.

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There is ample evidence to show that the commitment to the task of establishing a new and adequate form of scientific (explanatory) history was not a mere whim or a youthful dream of Dilthey's, but in fact to be seen as a long standing commitment of his. This commitment was clearly spelt out in his critical discussion of the state of German historical scholarship in the SCHLOSSER obituary, 1862. The task of explaining historical process was more or less seen as representing one of the ultimate challenges of the human sciences in *Grundriß der Logik und des Systems der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 1865. Much the same is true of the outline presented in his lectures on logic in Basel in 1867–68. In the programmatic yet unfinished treatise *Über das Studium*, 1875, Dilthey went further and sought to outline how one should approach the task of explaining the historical development of the predominantly practical human sciences. Moreover, when he set himself the task of providing a foundation for the study of society and history in *Einleitung* (1883), the type of historical inquiry that he had in mind was one directed towards explaining historical process. It is also worth noting that Dilthey in *Einleitung* singled out the incapacity to establish an explanatory method as one of the main failures of German historicism.⁶ Thus, in contrast to DROYSEN, Dilthey at no stage excluded explanation as a goal in his reflections upon the nature and method of historical inquiry. On the contrary, one of his central theoretical commitments was specifically to elucidate what an explanatory approach to the study of history would imply and to distinguish this from the approach of traditional historiography.

The distinction between historiography and scientific history can be seen to have structured Dilthey's reflections on the tasks and methods of the human sciences. In his lectures on logic in Berlin (1865–66) and Basel (1867–68) the

⁶ See (1862) XI, 150–55, 163–4; *Grundriß* (1865) § 52–54; *Basler Logik* (Berliner Nachlaß, C 97) (1867–68) § 24 (the title itself is very indicative of Dilthey's theoretical commitments: Die Durchführung und Umgestaltung der naturwissenschaftlichen Methoden für das Studium der geistigen Erscheinungen); (1875) V, 35–50; (1883) I, xvi.

problems of historiography were discussed under the general heading intuition alongside other methods such as deduction and induction, whereas those of scientific history were taken up towards the end of his lecture series in the context of discussing the possibility of explaining historical process and of determining the nature of historical progress. The same distinction played a central role in Dilthey's drafts of the final, uncompleted section of *Über das Studium* (ca. 1876). It is apparent that he had planned to conclude the first part with chapters on *Hermeneutik, Geschichtsschreibung und Dichtung*, whereas the second part was to have been devoted to an analysis of the manner in which the human sciences could be employed in the discovery of the causal nexus in historical process and thereby the laws of historical change. Moreover, as I will outline later, this distinction is of crucial significance in the systematic ordering of the human sciences which Dilthey presented to a wider public in *Einleitung* (1883).⁷

As far as I have been able to ascertain, it was in no sense a commonplace to distinguish between historiography (*Geschichtsschreibung*) and scientific history (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) in the German academic world at that time.⁸ Yet, it should be stressed that Dilthey was not the only one to employ such a distinction when reflecting upon the nature and task of historical inquiry. Several of his friends, MORITZ LAZARUS, WILHELM SCHERER und JÜRGEN BONA MEYER, availed themselves of a somewhat similar distinction in the 1860's.⁹ Moreover, within this friendship circle there existed a common commitment to establish a new science of history which differed radically from that of traditional academic historiography. At one stage an attempt was even made to make this commitment the basis of a collaborative venture. The commitment to an alternative mode of historical inquiry has to be seen as one of the main driving forces behind the attempt to establish a new, interdisciplinary journal in 1867 – a project in which Dilthey played a very prominent part indeed. What follows is the opening paragraphs of the programmatic outline of this new journal:

⁷ See *Grundriß* (1865) § 21 u. 52–4; *Basler Logik* (1867–68) § 21 u. 24; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 63–70, 105–11; (1883) I, 32–3, 90–95.

⁸ A recent survey of the teaching of historical method and theory (*Historik*) at German universities appears to confirm this tentative generalisation – see H. W. Blanke, D. Fleischer, J. Rüsen, *Historik als akademische Praxis. Eine Dokumentation der geschichtstheoretischen Vorlesungen an deutschsprachigen Universitäten von 1750 bis 1900*, Dilthey-Jahrbuch 1 (1983), 182–255.

⁹ See M. Lazarus, *Über die Ideen in der Geschichte*, Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft 3 (1865), 385–486; W. Scherer: *Rez. von E. Petsche: Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung unserer Zeit*, (1866) – reprinted in W. Scherer: *Kleine Schriften* I, (1893), 169–75; J. Bona Meyer: *Neue Versuche einer Philosophie der Geschichte*, Historische Zeitschrift 25 (1871), 303–78.

»Wir beabsichtigen, für die Pflege der Geisteswissenschaften in ihrem Zusammenhang eine Zeitschrift zu gründen. Es scheint dem Aufschwung dieser wichtigen Studien besonders hinderlich, wie sie an Geschichte, Philosophie, Philologie, Jurisprudenz, Staatswissenschaften, Theologie vertheilt sind, die Grenzsperren der Facultäten, die scharfe Sonderung der Fachzeitschriften isolieren die Arbeitenden in einem willkürlich herausgehobenen Kreis und hindern dadurch nur zu oft die fruchtbare Gemeinschaft mit anderen Forschungen.

Denn der große fruchtbare Zusammenhang der Geisteswissenschaften, wie er nicht in irgend einer philosophischen Gruppierung, sondern in dem methodischen Ineinandergreifen der Forschungen selber liegt, tritt heute immer klarer hervor. Sie ergänzen sich, führen sich gegenseitig weiter, dem gemeinsamen Ziele entgegen: die Bedingungen, die elementaren Kräfte, den gesetzlichen Zusammenhang zu erforschen, wie sie den einzelnen Gruppen und schließlich dem Ganzen der intellektuellen, moralischen, socialen, politischen Erscheinungen zu Grunde liegen. Auf dem Grunde dieser Bedingungen, Kräfte und Gesetze vollzieht sich der Fortschritt der menschlichen Cultur. An ihr Studium erscheint die stätige und methodische Förderung dieses Fortschritts gebunden.«¹⁰

One reason for focussing attention on this editorial outline is that it shows that Dilthey and his friends were fully aware of the fact that the type of scientific inquiry which they were seeking to further by means of the new journal represented a clear-cut break with the socially established disciplinary divisions within German *Wissenschaft* at that time. Moreover, because it represented a significant break, the available terminology could not be readily used to indicate the specific nature of this alternative mode of historical inquiry. It seems probable, for instance, that a distinction between *Geschichtsschreibung* and *Geschichtswissenschaft* did not immediately appear obvious or even meaningful to German historians, since they tended to regard their own historical studies as contributions to the established form of *Geschichtswissenschaft*. There can be little doubt, I believe, that Dilthey was aware of the problems that arose from the fact that his own usage of the latter term differed from common usage. This may explain why he failed to employ a univocal or consistent terminology in his reflections on this issue.

¹⁰ This revised version of the editorial outline was included in a letter from B. Erdmannsdörffer to W. Scherer 15. 6. 1867 (Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR, Nachlaß Scherer no. 151). From this letter it transpires that Dilthey originally had drafted the outline. See also W. Dilthey to W. Scherer, 12. 5. 1867 u. 20. 5. 1867 in C. Misch (ed.): *Der junge Dilthey*, (1960), 238–42 as well as (1867) V, 27.

This problem of language does not concern Dilthey's use of the term ›history‹ (*Geschichte*), although at times it can be difficult to determine whether he was referring to *res gestae* or to *historia rerum gestarum*. Nor does it arise in regard to the term that he used to refer to the established forms of historiography – he generally employed the term *Geschichtsschreibung* in this context. The main terminological problem arises when one begins to scrutinize the terms he employed in regard to that mode of historical inquiry which, to his mind, significantly differed from the narrative mode prevailing in traditional historiography. In his review of BUCKLE, 1862, he had described this alternative mode of inquiry as the province of a science of society (*Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*). In the SCHLOSSER obituary, published the same year, he described this very same field of inquiry as that constituting the province of a philosophical grasp of history (*philosophisches Erfassen der Geschichte*) or, simply, of a philosophy of history (*Philosophie der Geschichte*). The latter term was also the one employed in *Grundriß* (1865), when he named the discipline charged with the task of explaining historical process. Moreover, the term ›science of history‹ (*Wissenschaft der Geschichte*) was likewise used by Dilthey in the 60's in contexts where the specific emphasis was on an explanatory mode of historical inquiry.¹¹ During the 1870's he virtually ceased to employ the term ›philosophy of history‹ when outlining his own approach to the task of historical explanation. He did so, because he did not wish to appear to be endorsing either the general assumptions or the methodological procedures of the existing forms of philosophy of history. He began instead to employ the phrase ›historical research with philosophical intent‹ (*historische Forschung in philosophischer Absicht*) when describing his commitment to a mode of historical inquiry that would focus upon causal relationships and thus explanation. This phrase re-occurs at least twice in *Einleitung* (1883), but in this context he more generally opted for the terms ›scientific history‹ (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) or even ›general science of history‹ (*allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*) when naming what he saw as an alternative mode of historical inquiry.¹² Moreover, Dilthey not only employed different terms when seeking to articulate his reflections on the nature, task and method of historical inquiry. At

¹¹ (1862) XI, 150, 154; (1862) XVI, 106; *Grundriß* (1865) § 52–54; (ca. 1866) XVIII, 7–8.

¹² There is at least one instance in the 70's or 80's in which Dilthey still employed the term ›Philosophie der Geschichte‹ when referring to his own work, namely (ca. 1880) XVIII, 184. For his use of the phrase ›historische Forschung in philosophischer Absicht‹ see (1875) V, 35–6; (ca. 1875–6) XVIII, 42–3, 50–3, 221; (ca. 1880) XVIII, 172–3; (1883) I, 92, 112. For his use of the term ›Geschichtswissenschaft‹ see (1883) I, 32–3, 94–5, 112; (1880's) XIX, 293–94. See also his use of the term ›philosophische Geschichtsbetrachtung‹ in *Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters* (1887) when outlining what he considered to be a more scientific and explanatory approach to the study of history (VI, 107–9).

times he even combined terms which he otherwise had attempted to distinguish clearly. An example of this is his use of the term ›philosophical historiography‹ (*philosophische Geschichtsschreibung*) in a context where the focus quite definitely is on reaching causal explanation.¹³ However, the main point worth stressing is that although these changes in the use of terms do generate problems of interpretation, they are not to be taken as indicating essential changes in Dilthey's theoretical commitments.¹⁴

At times Dilthey understood the distinction between historiography and scientific history as being more or less identical with that between descriptive and explanatory modes of analysis. The difference between description and explanation was no doubt one of the crucial features of his differentiation between modes of historical inquiry, yet it far from exhausts the issue at hand. As regards historiography, Dilthey continuously stressed that it fulfilled a specific human need and would therefore never become superfluous or obsolete as the positivists believed. Historiography was seen as a mode of inquiry and presentation which satisfied man's need for an immediate understanding of bygone human life. Another recurrent theme in his reflections on historiography concerned its affinity to art. Thus, he frequently compared the imagination of historians with that of artists (e. g. the dramatist's) when seeking to identify the mental processes operating in the production of historiography. If historians were to make the past – so to speak – come alive again, they had to employ their imaginative capacities. He stressed moreover the importance of mental processes such as empathy (*Miterleben*), re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*), re-enactment (*Nachbilden*) and self-abandonment (*Hingebung*) in historiography. However, the key term which he employed when seeking to clarify the nature of historiography was ›intuition‹ (*Anschauung*). As he saw it, historiography aimed to achieve an intuitive grasp of the individual and unique (*das Besondere, Einmalige, Singulare*), and a historian intuitively grasped the general or universal in the unique and individual by using his imagination in much the same way as artists did. As a mode of historical inquiry, Dilthey emphasized, traditional historiography was not mediated by abstract-theoretical knowledge of the phenomena which it studied.¹⁵ In this context, it is worthwhile noting that to focus attention on the role of intuition in historiography and on its affinity to art was in no sense

¹³ (1894), V, 191–92.

¹⁴ There seem to be two main reasons why Dilthey's distinction between historiography and scientific history has been overlooked. First, his use of many different terms has made it difficult to grasp that he actually was employing one central distinction and, second, the systematic significance of this distinction has first become fully apparent after the publication of vol. XVIII u. XIX of the *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1977 and 1982.

¹⁵ *Basler Logik* (1867–68) § 21; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 64–70, 105–9; I, 40, 90–1.

unusual in a German setting at that time. Similar ideas had been an integral part of ongoing theoretical reflection about history since W. VON HUMBOLDT's academy lecture *Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers* (1821).¹⁶

It is clear that Dilthey found it difficult to locate historiography in that systematic ordering of the human sciences which he outlined in *Einleitung*. At times he seems to have been in some doubt as to whether traditional historiography could claim to be a *Wissenschaft* in any strict sense of that term, since he used formulations which at least imply that it was not a science. However, he opted in the final analysis for the position that historiography had to be seen as an indispensable element in the study of the human world, and he located it in an intermediary position between, on the one hand, a mere collecting and sorting of socio-historical source material and, on the other, a systematic-comparative analysis of this material.¹⁷ Even though Dilthey greatly admired many of the achievements of traditional historiography, he also maintained a distinctly critical attitude in his comments upon its approach and method. He pointed out, for instance, that it was very selective and one-sided in its approach to the past. When studying a specific epoch historians tended to focus their attention almost exclusively upon the unique and extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary and common (*das Alltägliche, Gemeinsame*). It therefore had to be acknowledged, he argued, that a process of abstraction operated in traditional historiography even if most historians seemed to be unaware of this fact. He also pointed out that whereas historians were usually critical and scrupulous in their efforts to establish discrete historical facts, their method tended to be lax and careless in other important respects, the most outstanding failure being the liberty with which they tended to organize series of historical facts and to account for them. It was manifestly clear, in his view, that the methodological conscience of traditional historians greatly needed to be improved.¹⁸

The conception of scientific history which he sought to propagate through *Einleitung* differed from traditional historiography in several respects. The main task of scientific history was to reach historical explanation through the pursuit of causal analyses. Dilthey had already made this point in *Über das Studium* (1875), asserting that it was only through understanding the causal nexus in the concurrence and succession of historical events that historians could achieve an

¹⁶ See, for instance, W. Hardtwig: *Die Verwissenschaftlichung der Historie und die Ästhetik der Darstellung* in: R. Koselleck, H. Lutz & J. Rüsen (ed.): *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung*, (1982), 147–91.

¹⁷ For Dilthey's doubts as to whether or not to call historiography a science see (1862) XVI, 100; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 66–7, 105–6. For his final position see (1883) I, 40–1.

¹⁸ (1875) V, 47–8; (1883) I, 28, 90–1.

¹⁹ (1875) V, 47–8.

adequate grasp of historical process.¹⁹ Thus, the pursuit of an explanatory mode of inquiry did not in itself distinguish the natural from the human sciences. Dilthey, however, did point out that the types of causality in question made the difference between these sciences clear. The human sciences were primarily concerned with the dynamics and consequences of human action, and their interest was therefore focussed on a type of causality that radically differed from that in the processes of nature. Thus, the key problem for these sciences consisted in understanding how human motives and goals of action constituted a specific type of causality. It is clear that Dilthey assumed that it would prove possible to discover patterns and regularities (laws) in the dynamics of human action, and that such regularities or laws would pertain not only to the actions of individuals but, on a trans-individual level, would also be found to operate in human interaction (*Wechselwirkung*). He therefore rejected the view that the dynamics of historical process could be exhaustively analysed and explained on the level of psychology, and he saw it as a task of scientific history to explore the nature of the trans-individual dynamics of historical process (*Bewegungs-, Totalkräfte der Geschichte*). As a philosopher of science, however, he was also interested in determining the intrinsic limitations of explanatory modes of analysis. Science, he asserted, could never exhaustively explain an individual totality (*individuelles Ganzes*), this being the case in the natural as well as the human sciences. Thus, scientific history could never hope to achieve anything more than a partial explanation of historical process. It was on this background that he justified his assertion that traditional historiography would always have an important role to play in the ongoing studies of the human world.²⁰

In contrast to what Dilthey saw as the predominantly intuitive approach of traditional historiography, scientific history had to approach the study of past events by systematically employing analytical as well as comparative procedures. Instead of attempting to handle a complex historical totality at once, scientific history would deliberately seek to break down such a totality into distinct parts and processes and then subject these to an exact and thorough comparative analysis. Only when the distinct parts and processes had been scrutinized in this way, should the attempt be made to grasp the internal nexus in a complex historical totality as a whole. Dilthey also emphasized that the mode of inquiry pursued in scientific history had to be mediated by the theories developed in the systematic human sciences. The systematic human sciences would provide historians with the relevant concepts and theories concerning

20 (1875) V, 63–4; (1870's (?)): »Die Art der Kausalität ist die des Willens = Motivation. Daher die Durchsichtigkeit. – Diese Kausalität hat ihre spezifischen Gesetze.« XVIII, 224; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 67–9, 105–6, 110–11; (1883) I, 6–7, 88–9, 114; (1888) VI, 65–7.

the type of phenomena under investigation, and they would in turn employ these concepts and theories in their historical research. Dilthey envisaged that historians working in this manner would need to avail themselves of the whole range of systematic human sciences from anthropology (psychology) and ethnology to the sciences concerned with cultural systems and the external organization of society. Moreover, it was only by systematically employing such concepts and theories, Dilthey emphasized, that historians could ever hope to achieve an account of historical process that could lay claim to being a scientific form of explanation.²¹

Furthermore, scientific history was not conceived as the province of a specific academic discipline alongside other existing disciplines. Rather, it was accorded a special position in Dilthey's attempt to systematically order the human sciences, being conceived as an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary field of inquiry. This position was made clear by Dilthey, for instance, when he identified what he saw as the most important forerunners of modern scientific history: VICO, TURGOT, CONDORCET und HERDER. Their work had been characterized by an attempt to combine insights and theories from a range of academic disciplines in their efforts to grasp historical process as such.²² Thus, Dilthey's conception of scientific history has also to be seen as an attempt to outline a type of scientific inquiry which could function as a counterforce in regard to the mounting disciplinary specialization and differentiation of the human sciences. In no sense can he be said to have been an opponent of the ongoing differentiation and specialization of contemporary science as such. Rather, he viewed these changes as necessary elements in the ongoing development of the natural as well as the human sciences. At the same time, however, he feared that this tendency would result in an ever increasing fragmentation of human knowledge, and because of the far-reaching socio-political significance which he attributed to *Wissenschaft* in general, he looked upon such fragmentation as posing a serious threat to contemporary civilization. As he saw it, the mounting fragmentation of knowledge would undermine the possibility of maintaining and furthering a healthy and orderly form of social, cultural and political progress. He therefore took upon himself the task of attempting to meet the challenge presented by fragmentation, and the conception of scientific history out-

21 (1883) I, 93-4, 110-12. Dilthey was fully aware of the fact that his commitment to the idea of historical research mediated by systematic theory represented a clear-cut break with the historicist position. In *Einleitung* he made this clear by recurrently pointing out that it was crucial to avoid the pitfalls of what he called 'the historical as well as the abstract school' - see (1883) I, 27, 48-9, 80-1.

22 (1883) I, 112.

lined in *Einleitung*, as a new interdisciplinary and integrative form of inquiry within the human sciences, has also to be understood against this background.²³

The ultimate aim of scientific history seems to have been twofold. First, this transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary form of historical inquiry was to pursue a theoretical goal. It should strive to establish a general theory of historical process (*allgemeine Theorie des geschichtlichen Verlaufs*), which would lay bare the regularities and laws behind historical change. Second, it should also seek to grasp human history as a concrete process, striving to produce the best possible scientific explanation of a historical totality (*Gesamtzusammenhang*), thus preparing the way for the writing of an explanatory history of mankind (*Universalgeschichte*).²⁴ The foregoing outline of Dilthey's conception of scientific history has been an attempt to clarify the meaning of what I take to be one of the most important programmatic statements in *Einleitung* – a statement put forward in the chapter entitled *Bestimmung der Aufgabe der Geschichtswissenschaft im Zusammenhang der Geisteswissenschaften*:

»Die Erkenntnis des Ganzen der geschichtlich-gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit, welcher wir uns als dem allgemeinsten und letzten Problem der Geisteswissenschaften entgegengetrieben fanden, verwirklicht sich sukzessive in einem auf erkenntnistheoretischer Selbstbesinnung beruhenden Zusammenhang von Wahrheiten, in welchem auf die Theorie des Menschen die Einzeltheorien der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit sich aufbauen, diese aber in einer wahren fortschreitenden Geschichtswissenschaft angewandt werden, um immer mehreres von der tatsächlichen, in der Wechselwirkung der Individuen verbundenen geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit zu erklären. In diesem Zusammenhang von Wahrheiten wird die Beziehung zwischen Tatsache, Gesetz und Regel vermittle der Selbstbesinnung erkannt. In ihm ergibt sich auch, wie weit wir noch von jeder absehbaren Möglichkeit einer allgemeinen Theorie des geschichtlichen Verlaufs entfernt sind, in welchem bescheidenen Sinn überhaupt von einer solchen die Rede sein kann. Universalgeschichte, sofern sie nicht etwas Übermenschliches ist, würde den Abschluß dieses Ganzen der Geisteswissenschaften bilden.«²⁵

23 (1883) I, 3–4, 93–5; (1886) XI, 237–8 and the formulation: »Der Kausalzusammenhang respektiert die Grenzpfähle zwischen den Einzelwissenschaften nicht; soll er erfaßt werden, so muß neben die an sich so notwendige Arbeitsteilung eine neue Arbeitsvereinigung treten.« (XI, 245); (1887) V, 10.

24 (1883) I, 91–5. Also the first draft of the second volume of *Einleitung* has an explanatory form of universal history as its ultimate aim – see (1880's) XIX, 291–5.

25 (1883) I, 95. I quote this programmatic statement at length because, to my knowledge, little or no attempt has been made to analyse and clarify its meaning.

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I shall now briefly discuss Dilthey's relationship to historicism, Anglo-French positivism and the German idealist philosophies of history. If the preceding analysis is correct, then available interpretations of Dilthey's relationship to German historicism need to be qualified. Specifically, if Dilthey's conception of scientific history, distinguished from historiography, is granted as a central theme in his reflections on the nature of historical inquiry, then it is incorrect to interpret *Einleitung* as an attempt to provide German historicism with an epistemological foundation and theoretical legitimation. Nor is it accurate to summarize his achievement as, for example, »eine große zusammenfassende Selbstdarstellung des Historismus«. ²⁶ I do not wish to take issue with the accepted view that Dilthey sought to incorporate and develop central insights and theorems from the historicist tradition in his own outline of the nature, method and scope of the sciences of man. I do contend, however, that his conception of scientific history, and his prolonged effort to distinguish this mode of historical inquiry from that of historiography, represented his commitment to transcend what he understood as the limitations of that tradition. In this important respect it is inaccurate to cast Dilthey in the role of legitimating the historicist position.

Dilthey's relationship to the different forms of philosophy of history can also be clarified in the light of his conception of scientific history. Whereas his devastating critique of the available philosophies of history is well-known, little attention has been given to the question of why he thought it worthwhile to devote so much time and space to such a critique. The fact that he did so is all the more interesting since it is the only instance in which he considered it necessary to present a very detailed critical assessment of other available positions in the first book of *Einleitung*. It is important to note the exact point at which Dilthey subjected the established forms of philosophy of history to a critical analysis. It occurred when he confronted what he saw as being the most general and ultimate problem of the human sciences: is it possible for these sciences to produce a knowledge of the socio-historical world as a whole? He also specified in some detail what this type of knowledge would embrace. It would be characterized by insights into the nexus between (i) the concrete causal interrelationships in actual historical process, (ii) the general laws or patterns operative in this pro-

²⁶ H. Schnädelbach: *Geschichtsphilosophie nach Hegel*. Die Probleme des Historismus, (1974), 115. Schnädelbach has maintained this view in his new book *Philosophie in Deutschland 1831–1933*, (1983). J. Rüsen sees Dilthey's *Einleitung* as a central text für »eine philosophische Begründung und Rechtfertigung des Historismus« in his article on German historicism (see note no. 3). On this point both Schnädelbach and Rüsen essentially follow H.-G. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) which treats Dilthey's thinking as a central and integral part of the historicist tradition.

cess, and (iii) the systems of norms and values in human life. Having outlined this challenging task, he then pointed to the fact that there existed sciences which laid claim to produce this kind of knowledge, namely the classical German philosophies of history and the new Anglo-French positivist sociology. It was because Dilthey wanted to challenge this claim that he thought it necessary to present a detailed and devastating critique of the existing forms of philosophy of history.

His critique focussed in the main on the methods as well as the assumptions of the existing forms of philosophy of history. The methods employed were rejected on the grounds that they did not accord with the established procedures and norms of empirical research. Dilthey also criticized the general tendency to underestimate the complexity of historical process, based on the operative assumption that it was possible to discover a relatively simple set of explanatory principles. He queried moreover the assumption that this most complex field of inquiry was the province of a single scientific discipline. What has to be stressed, however, is the fact that Dilthey at no stage queried the relevance or legitimacy of the questions that had been posed by the existing forms of philosophy of history. His critique was almost exclusively directed at the means that had been employed in the variety of attempts to answer these questions. Among the range of questions that Dilthey deemed fully legitimate was the question of the meaning of history as well as the matter of deriving norms of actions from the study of history.²⁷ He asserted with some confidence that it would prove possible at some point in the future to reach empirically grounded answers to these questions if scholars patiently employed the methods of empirical research and self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*):

»(...) aus einer unermeßlichen Mannigfaltigkeit einzelner Werte baut sich der Sinn der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit auf, wie aus derselben Mannigfaltigkeit von Wechselwirkungen sein Kausalzusammenhang. Der Sinn der Geschichte ist also ein außerordentlich Zusammengesetztes. So hätte auch hier wieder dieselbe Aufgabe sich ergeben, Selbstbesinnung, welche im Gemütsleben den Ursprung von Wert und Regel und ihre Beziehung zu Sein und Wirklichkeit erforscht, und allmähliche, langsame Analysis, welche diese Seite des verwickelten geschichtlichen Ganzen zerlegt. Denn was dem Menschen wertvoll sei und welche Regeln das Tun der Gesellschaft leiten sollen, das kann nur mit Hilfe der geschichtlichen Forschung mit irgendeiner Aussicht auf allgemeingültige Fassung untersucht werden.«²⁸

²⁷ See (1883) I, 86–115.

²⁸ (1883) I, 97–8. Dilthey saw his commitment to the idea of deriving values and norms of action from a scientific study of historical process as representing another essential point of difference between his position and that of the historicists—see (1887) VI, 189–90 & (1888) VI, 61–9.

Thus, to my mind, there are good reasons for interpreting Dilthey's conception of scientific history as an attempted *Verwissenschaftlichung der Philosophie der Geschichte* insofar as it was an attempt to find new ways to answer the range of questions that had been posed by German idealist as well as Anglo-French positivist philosophies of history. He transcended these positions by seeking to specify the mode of inquiry that had to be pursued if this range of questions was to be treated in accordance with the procedures and norms of contemporary empirical science. Thus, Dilthey believed that by employing the historico-critical method, by introducing the systematic use of analytical and comparative procedures, by deliberately pursuing historical research that was mediated by systematic theory and by stressing the interdisciplinary nature of this field of inquiry, it would eventually prove possible to discover the complex causal nexus in historical process, to establish some form of general theory of historical change and to derive norms of human action from the study of history. According to my interpretation, one of the over-all aims of Dilthey's *Kritik der historischen Vernunft* was specifically to provide an epistemological foundation and theoretical legitimation of this conception of the goals and methods of scientific history.²⁹ Moreover, it was not only in *Einleitung* that Dilthey advocated this conception of scientific history. The same conception was put forward at least until the mid-90's, as his contribution to UEBERWEG's *Grundriß* (1897) makes clear:

»Die Analysis der gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit vollzieht sich durch die Sonderung der in ihr enthaltenen Zweckzusammenhänge (Cultursysteme und äußere Organisation), sonach in den Einzelwissenschaften. Diese behandeln die einzelnen Erfahrungsgebiete, analytisch, vergleichend, unter Benutzung der Zusammenhänge, in denen sie stehen. (...) Auf die Verwerthung des in den Einzelwissenschaften für die Zweckzusammenhänge Erkannten gründen sich Geschichtswissenschaft und Principien der Leitung der Gesellschaft. Eine abgesonderte Philosophie der Geschichte ist unmöglich.«³⁰

Moreover, it is in the light of this commitment of his that one has to understand his plan to conclude the second volume of *Einleitung* with a chapter on *Universalgeschichte und Pädagogie* – see (1880's) XIX, 291–5. See also the section which has been entitled: *Die Entstehung der Werte im Lebenszusammenhang*, (1880's) XIX, 283–5.

²⁹ When Dilthey in *Einleitung* defined *Kritik der historischen Vernunft* as »das Vermögen des Menschen, sich selber und die von ihm geschaffene Gesellschaft und Geschichte zu erkennen« (I, 116), it seems to follow that his *Kritik* is to be interpreted as an attempt to provide a foundation specifically for that conception of scientific history which he had just been outlining.

³⁰ Friedrich Ueberwegs *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Part III, vol. 2, (ed. by M. Heinze), (1897), 279. The formulation itself can be taken as further evidence for interpreting Dilthey's

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Having presented Dilthey's conception of scientific history I can now attempt to outline the reasons why he held the view that intellectual history was the field in which this mode of inquiry could be applied with the greatest rigour. There were several different reasons why Dilthey attributed a special position to intellectual history. One reason concerned the extent of the relevant source material available in this particular field of inquiry. The history of intellectual movements in modern Europe, he contended, was one of the very few fields of research in which the extent of the existing source material could be considered satisfactory from a scientific point of view – the crucial intervening event in this regard being the invention of the printing press. It was also a field in which the existent *Nachlässe* would frequently allow the possibility of getting behind the printed texts in order to trace the actual genesis and formation of ideas. The extent of the available source material was also considered crucial in that it held the promise of making a more exact and rigorous mode of inquiry possible through the introduction of statistical methods of analysis. By means of this type of analysis it would prove possible, Dilthey believed, to discover the extent and intensity of a particular intellectual movement as well as its specific preferences and internal conflicts. A further reason stemmed from his methodological reflections on the nature of the relevant source material. In intellectual history, Dilthey asserted, historians did not have to confront the very intricate problem of reliability (*Glaubwürdigkeit*) of the source material to the same extent as in other fields of historical research. The relevant texts, he contended, lacked pretence (*Verstellung*), tending to represent authentic articulations of the ideas of their authors.³¹

conception of scientific history as an attempted »Verwissenschaftlichung der Philosophie der Geschichte«. However, it should be noted that Dilthey when first outlining his position for Ueberweg's *Grundriß* had concluded with the statement: »Philosophie der Geschichte ist unmöglich.« Paul Yorck objected to this conclusion on the grounds that Dilthey had himself earlier demonstrated in what sense a philosophy of history was possible, and that it was this which gave Dilthey a special position vis-à-vis other theoretical positions among German historians. Paul Yorck also reminded him of the distinction between historiography and history as science on that occasion (see P. Yorck to W. Dilthey 22. 8. 1896 in *S. v. d. Schulenburg* (ed.): *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm Dilthey und dem Grafen Paul Yorck v. Wartenburg 1877–1897*, (1923), 222–3 u. VIII, 264–6). Thus, both Paul Yorck's objection and Dilthey's own re-wording of the conclusion support such an interpretation of Dilthey's conception of scientific history. Yet, the entire episode also indicates that Dilthey in the mid-90's was becoming somewhat ambivalent to this theoretical commitment of his.

31 (1875) V, 39–41; (1883) I, 24–5, 115.

Also the nature of the process itself gave intellectual history an advantage in relation to other fields of historical inquiry. Dilthey argued that ideas and concepts could, theoretically speaking, be transferred (*übertragen*) from one person to another without any decisive loss, and therefore the possibility of continuous development within the history of scientific thought existed. Since a continuous development did not as a matter of fact always occur, one of the crucial problems in intellectual history therefore consisted in analysing the ways in which socio-cultural conditions respectively promoted and retarded the transfer and development of scientific theories. Moreover, this insight structured Dilthey's prolonged attempt to outline a general framework for the study of the causes determining the concurrence as well as the succession of scientific theories. Using the framework that had been initially developed in his essay on NOVALIS (1865), he distinguished between two sets of conditions determining the transferability and development of scientific theories at any given time: the available intellectual culture and existing socio-political ways of life. He considered these conditions decisive insofar as they set determinate limits (*Grenzen*) for the ways in which scientific theories could be developed in a specific historical setting. It is also worth noting that by introducing the concept of »a generation« as the central unit of analysis he sought to establish a way of discerning patterns in the intellectual work that was going forward at a given time in a sociological fashion. Even though he exhibited a keen interest in the matter of how outstanding individuals had internalized and developed a common intellectual heritage in their own individualized ways, his entire approach was structured in such a way that it tended to stress the paramount importance of the general socio-cultural conditions as well as the available ways of thinking in a given period.³²

But this was not the only sense in which Dilthey attempted to get beyond the study of individuals in his approach to intellectual history. Even though he conceived historical process as being the product of the interactions of socially pre-formed individuals and thus, ontologically speaking, rejected the employment of holistic concepts such as *Volks- und Weltgeist* or *Gesamtwillen*, he nonetheless believed that it would prove possible to discover patterns or laws on a specifically trans-individual level in the historical development of the sciences. As a field of inquiry intellectual history had an advantage in this regard because, as Dilthey argued, a continuous ongoing development was more evident and manifest in the history of scientific thought than in any other sphere of human activity. His overarching aim, it appears, was to outline a general theory disclosing the trans-individual patterns or laws in the historical evolution of the

32 (ca. 1866), XVIII, 10-1; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 225-6; (1875) V, 36-9; (1883) I, 114-5, 128.

human sciences, and in this endeavour he appears mainly to have been inspired by DARWIN's attempt to disclose the regularities in the evolution of the species. Thus, Dilthey conceived scientific progress as being the result of a series of successful adaptations (*funktionelle Anpassung*) of available presuppositions, ideas and concepts – adaptations by which the sciences achieved an increasingly more adequate grasp of reality. This constituted the core of his attempt to discover what he called the *Gesetz der Sache* in the historical evolution of scientific knowledge.³³

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This conception of intellectual history should by no means be interpreted as being a merely programmatic outline on Dilthey's part. As a historian he also sought to put these ideas into practice by using them as guidelines in his own research. When one turns from the programmatic conception of scientific history in the first book of *Einleitung*, to the question of what this conception would involve concretely in regard to research practice, Dilthey's own historical writings yield several exemplifications. The second book of *Einleitung* is a good, if not the best, case in point. Thus, the second book represents not merely a critique of metaphysics, but also an attempt to treat intellectual history in a manner that was designed to apply in practice his conception of scientific history outlined in the first book. As a critique, the second book of *Einleitung* sought to provide a complex critical analysis of metaphysics in order to prepare the ground for working out an adequate foundation of the human sciences. As an instance of what he termed 'an explanatory history of metaphysics' (*erklärende Geschichte der Metaphysik*),³⁴ the analysis sought to live up to the canons of scientific history as outlined in Dilthey's programmatic statements.

Throughout the analysis in the second book of *Einleitung*, Dilthey sought to respect the established norms of an empirico-critical mode of historical research. He therefore frequently emphasized the tentative nature of the analysis presented due to the existing state of research, for instance, when he attempted to explain the historical emergence of modern man and modern science. He also stressed the limits imposed on historical inquiry due to the lack of adequate source material, for instance, when he discussed the possibility of understanding the earliest forms of religion. His approach was analytical in the sense that he attempted to treat, not a complex historical totality, but only one particular sphere of human activity: that of intellectuals pursuing scientific-philosophical

³³ (ca. 1866) XVIII, 10–1; (1875) V, 44–7, 62–3; (ca. 1876) XVIII, 62–3, 110–1; (ca. 1880 (?)) XIX, 44–8, 51–2; (1883) I, 41–2, 58–60, 128.

³⁴ (1883) I, 235.

research at specific points in time. Moreover, the analysis presented has to be seen as the result of historical research that was mediated by the use of systematic theory. Dilthey employed his own psychological and cognitional theory in this regard, and it is only against this background that one can understand his conception of metaphysical systems of thought as being the result of attempts to project and intellectualize an underlying ›metaphysical feeling‹ (*metaphysische Stimmung/Grundgefühl*) in the inner life of man.³⁵ The analysis was also mediated by systematic theory in another respect. In treating the history of European science he employed his own concept of scientific activity as a developing cultural system in order to attend to the crucial role played by the institutional setting of scientific research. The second book of *Einleitung* was the outcome of a very deliberate effort to pursue a comparative form of historical analysis. This commitment manifested itself in the attempts to compare the metaphysical ways of thought in what Dilthey termed its first and second stage, that is in Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages. It was rigorously pursued in the analysis of the Middle Ages where comparisons of the developments in the Islamic world with those in Western Europe were constantly drawn in order to determine the decisive similarities as well as the essential differences at this point in the historical evolution of scientific thinking. He also used this comparative perspective in his attempts to explain the actual changes which had taken place. Thus, he explained, for instance, the improved understanding of the classical heritage during the Renaissance by pointing to the similarities in the specifically urban forms of culture in Antiquity and in 15th and 16th century Europe.

Dilthey did not succeed in presenting a satisfactory explanatory history of metaphysics according to the standards which he himself had laid down. Yet, throughout the second book of *Einleitung* he did present a series of what can be termed ›explanatory sketches‹ of the forms and changes in the history of scientific-philosophical thinking. In this context, he more or less consistently employed that general framework for explaining the concurrence and succession of scientific theories that he had worked out at an earlier stage. As mentioned already, the developmental possibilities as well as the determinate limits of scientific research were to be explained as resulting from the intersection of two sets of conditions: the existing intellectual culture and the more general socio-political way of life. For obvious reasons his interest was mainly focussed on the ongoing debate in the intellectual culture itself, but he also frequently sought to indicate the way in which the socio-political conditions had influenced the works of intellectuals at a given point in time.

35 (1883) I, 364–5, 372–3, 406–7.

One instance of this is his ›explanatory sketch‹ of the limitations of the classical Greek type of natural science. He challenged the thesis that the dominant position of metaphysics provided a satisfactory explanation of the limitations and failures of Greek natural science because such an explanation only raised the further problem of explaining why metaphysics had gained such a hegemonic influence at that time. He therefore treated the position of metaphysics and the Greek type of natural sciences as correlative historical facts, and from this viewpoint sought to discover their common causes. In this context, he focussed on two sets of socio-political conditions. On the one hand, the class division in Greek society had tended to divorce manual from intellectual labour and had thereby furthered the emergence of a disdain for manual work among Greek intellectuals. On the other hand, the absence of a developed form of industrial production had tended to preclude the discovery of adequate instruments. However, Dilthey did not see these socio-political conditions as being the decisive explanatory factors. The contemplative disposition of the Greek mind, he argued, had greater significance as an explanatory factor. This disposition was in turn explained as resulting from the inherent character of the Greek form of natural religion which had the effect of making people shy away from any thorough attempt to dissect the world of the living. To this was added a further, tentative, explanatory factor, namely that Greek intellectuals had not in fact had the possibility of developing a capacity for thinking in a highly abstract manner since this presupposed extended training within a specialized field of research. Thus, three different kinds of factors were employed by Dilthey in his attempt to explain why Aristotelian natural science had been very successful indeed within the fields of descriptive and comparative analysis, yet had entirely failed to develop reasonably adequate mechanical and physical concepts.³⁶

When Dilthey set himself the task of writing an explanatory history of scientific-philosophical thought, he wanted to do more than present a series of ›explanatory sketches‹ accounting for the particular changes in the modes of scientific thought. His conception of scientific history also implied a commitment to pursue historical research with the aim of establishing some form of general theory. In writing the second book of *Einleitung* he remained faithful to

36 (1983) I, 208–11. For more complex ›explanatory sketches‹ in which the socio-political conditions play a more significant role see, for example, Dilthey's attempts to explain the limitations of the classical Greek type of human science (I, 215–35) and the emergence of the specifically modern type of science (I, 351–60). In the latter of these sketches it is interesting to note the importance attributed by Dilthey to the bourgeoisie in bridging the gap between manual and intellectual labour.

this commitment as the following programmatic statement from the introduction to that book makes clear:

»(Der) Zweckzusammenhang der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit (wird) nicht durch einen Gesamtwillen geleitet (...), sondern er vollzieht sich in der freien Tätigkeit der einzelnen Individuen. – Die allgemeine Theorie dieses Systems ist Erkenntnistheorie und Logik. Sie hat das Verhältnis der Elemente in diesem vernünftigen Zusammenhang des im Menschengeschlecht sich vollziehenden Erkenntnisprozesses zueinander, sofern es einer allgemeinen Fassung fähig ist, zu ihrem Gegenstande. Somit sucht sie in dem über das Individuum hinausreichenden Zusammenhang dieses Erkenntnisvorgangs Notwendigkeit, Gleichförmigkeit und Gesetz. Ihr Material ist die Geschichte der menschlichen Erkenntnis als Tatsache, und ihren Schlußpunkt bildet das zusammengesetzte Bildungsgesetz in dieser Geschichte der Erkenntnis. – Denn obgleich die Geschichte der Wissenschaft teilweise durch sehr mächtige, zum Teil höchst eigenwillige Individuen gemacht wird, obgleich die verschiedenen Anlagen der Nationen auf diese Geschichte einwirken, das Milieu der Gesellschaft, in welchem dieser Erkenntnisvorgang sich vollzieht, überall ihn mitbestimmt: dennoch zeigt die Geschichte des wissenschaftlichen Geistes eine über solchen Pragmatismus hinausreichende folgerichtige Einheit.«³⁷

In the present context, I shall make no attempt to discuss the implications of this statement for Dilthey's understanding of cognitional theory and logic. Yet, it does give rise to two questions of relevance for understanding how he used his conception of scientific history: (i) what did he mean by the term ›law‹ (*Gesetz*) when applied to historical process?, and (ii) how did he attempt to explain the trans-individual process that was conceived as operative in the history of scientific-philosophical thought?

It is difficult to give a clear and univocal answer to the first of these questions since there are two seemingly opposed tendencies in Dilthey's thinking on this issue. He emphasized on the one hand that the kind of causality operative in the socio-historical world was radically different from that found in the processes of nature insofar as it specifically pertained to human motives and goals of action. Also the importance attributed by Dilthey to human freedom further underscores the difference between ›historical‹ and ›natural‹ causality.³⁸ On the other hand, he felt convinced that historical process was governed by some form of necessity, at least in the sphere of philosophical-scientific thought. Since he made several statements to this effect in *Einleitung*, asserting for instance that the metaphysical mode of thought constituted a necessary stage in the development

³⁷ (1883) I, 128.

³⁸ (1875) V, 63–4; (ca. 1880) XVIII, 178–81; (1883) I, 6–7, 136–7; (1880's) XIX, 291–5.

of European science, there does not seem to be any good reason to doubt that this was a sincerely held belief of his. Moreover, it appears to be due to this element of necessity that he felt justified in employing the term ›law‹ when analysing the nature of historical process.³⁹ At different points in the second book of *Einleitung* Dilthey sought to specify the content of what he took to be the formative law (*Bildungsgesetz*) inherent in scientific progress. These attempts once again make apparant that he tended to stress the necessary and inevitable character of historical process. The following quotation can illustrate this:

»Die Mittel zu den bisherigen intellektuellen Fortschritten lagen, wie die Entwicklung seit THALES zeigt, in der Erweiterung der Erfahrung und der Anpassung von Erklärungen an deren Tatbestand. Das Verfahren des Denkens, welches die Geschichte der Wissenschaften hierbei gewahren läßt, ist ein Einsetzen von Voraussetzungen (Substitution), alsdann eine versuchsweise Benutzung derselben; unvollkommene Erklärungen gehen beständig in großer Zahl zugrunde, wie wir denn diese Grausamkeit des Zweckzusammenhangs gegenüber der mühsamen Arbeit der Individuen beständig um uns ausgeübt sehen und selber von ihr bedroht sind; lebensfähige dagegen passen sich den Anforderungen an Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit schrittweise an und bilden sich so fort.«⁴⁰

Dilthey's attempt to discover the law of scientific progress resulted in the disclosure of two main patterns. The first was very general and can be described as an inherent self-correcting process of learning in scientific research. He understood scientific progress as being generated by two interrelated activities: the extension of experience and the adaptation of explanations in the light of an ever accumulating experience. In this way the more viable scientific explanations were more or less inevitably developed, and thus survived, whereas those that were not viable in the light of experience were discarded and thus perished. The second pattern concerned the emergence of distinct scientific disciplines. Dilthey understood the ongoing differentiation and specialization of scientific research as being a more or less inevitable element in scientific progress. Only in this way had it become possible to study what was specific in the different fields of reality and then to subject these fields to a scientific mode of causal analysis. Thus, as he saw it, it was through an ongoing differentiation of research that the sciences had slowly gained autonomy, breaking away from the hegemonic influence of the metaphysical mode of thinking and thereby also ceasing to attempt to answer the specifically religious questions of mankind.⁴¹

39 See (1883) I, 63, 126–8. See also the formulation: »... das Erkennen [muß] dem in ihm liegenden Gesetz gemäß seinen Gegenstand der Notwendigkeit unterwerfen.« (1883) I, 137.

40 (1883) I, 181f. Compare (1880(?)) XIX, 44–8, 51–2.

41 For another of Dilthey's more significant attempts to formulate a law of scientific progress in

In the present context, Dilthey's attempt to discover the law of scientific progress is also a relevant issue insofar as it sheds light on the manner in which he sought to explain the existence of a trans-individual dimension of historical process. On one level, he accepted what he called »the pragmatist conception of history«: the view that historical process was being generated by people – individually as well as collectively – pursuing their specific interests according to their own lights. Such an understanding of historical process accorded well with his idea that the dynamics of history were to be found in human motives and goals of action. On another level, however, Dilthey could not accept that the pragmatist view, when maintained consistently, implied that historical process was nothing more than a product of a mere »play of personal forces« (*Spiel der persönlichen Kräfte*). He rejected this corollary because he did not want to discard the idea that history was an inherently progressive development and thereby the idea of the unity of the history of mankind. He therefore had to face the problem of trying to make the pragmatist view compatible with a directional conception of human history, without at the same time introducing some trans-individual form of teleology into historical process. The solution to this problem as presented in *Einleitung* was as follows:

»(...) in Wirklichkeit wird eben *vermittels dieser Wechselwirkung der einzelnen Individuen*, ihrer Leidenschaften, ihrer Eitelkeiten, ihrer Interessen *der notwendige Zweckzusammenhang der Geschichte der Menschheit verwirklicht*. Der pragmatistische Historiker und HEGEL verstehen einander nicht, da sie nie von der festen Erde zu luftigen Höhen miteinander reden. Einen Teil der Wahrheit besitzt doch jeder von beiden. Denn alles, was in dieser geschichtlich-gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit vom Menschen bewirkt wird, geschieht *vermittels der Sprungfeder des Willens*: in diesem aber wirkt der Zweck als Motiv. Es ist seine Beschaffenheit, es ist das Allgemeingültige und über das Einzelleben Hinausgreifende in ihm, gleichviel, in welcher Formel man es fasse, auf welchem der Zweckzusammenhang beruht, der durch die Willen hindurchgreift. In diesem Zweckzusammenhang vollbringt das gewöhnliche Treiben der Menschen, das nur mit sich selber beschäftigt ist, doch, was es muß. Und selbst von den Handlungen ihrer Helden läßt die Geschichte dasjenige erfolglos versinken, was sich diesem Zweckzusammenhang nicht einordnet.«⁴²

Einleitung see (1883) I, 232 where he is treating the ongoing disciplinary differentiation of science. See also (1883) I, 354–9.

⁴² (1883) I, 53. See also I, 43–4, 127. One of the main reasons why Dilthey was committed to the idea of proving the existence of an inherently progressive movement in human history was that he believed that this was very crucial indeed if one were to motivate people to handle the socio-political crisis at that time in healthy and fruitful ways – see (1875) V, 35, 47; (1883) I, 3–4.

It is clear that Dilthey was attempting to handle one of the central problems in the classical philosophies of history. He was trying to account for the assumed fact that people without intending or knowing it, nonetheless could be said to have contributed to an ever ongoing realization of a progressive development. It is also clear that he was seeking a solution which differed from the way in which, for example, ADAM SMITH had attempted to solve it by postulating the existence of an 'invisible hand', or KANT by pointing to a 'purpose of nature' (*Naturabsicht*), or HEGEL by introducing the idea of 'the cunning of reason' (*List der Vernunft*). To his mind, such solutions had to be rejected as remnants of a metaphysical mode of thinking. He therefore attempted to find an alternative explanation of the trans-individual dimension of historical process. He did so in the main by asserting that a constant system of goals of action (*stetiges System von Zwecken*) operated in human history.⁴³ Although it was presented as a general solution to a general problem in the theory of historical process, he made only one single attempt to empirically demonstrate that people, without intending or knowing it, had nonetheless been furthering a progressive development. The attempt to prove this assertion was made through the analysis of intellectual history in the second book of *Einleitung* – an analysis based on the assumption that a recurrent, yet dynamic will to know (*Wille der Erkenntnis, Wissenswollen*) operated in the intellectual history of mankind.⁴⁴ Thus, to conclude this point, by attempting to put his conception of scientific history into practice in the second book of *Einleitung*, Dilthey sought to disclose an inherent law of scientific progress which in turn was used to justify that he, although rejecting the traditional form of a metaphysics of history, nonetheless still upheld the idea of human history as an universal and necessary purposive process.

*

In this paper I have contended that one of the central aims of Dilthey's *Kritik der historischen Vernunft* was specifically to provide an epistemological foundation for his conception of scientific history, and that consequently a central problematic in *Einleitung* cannot be adequately grasped without attending to his distinction between scientific history and historiography. I have attempted to specify the elements in both conceptions and to indicate the importance he attributed to each. Scientific history was seen, not merely as a programmatic conception of future research to which Dilthey attributed far-reaching implica-

43 See (ca. 1876), XVIII, 110–11. As far as I have been able to ascertain, Dilthey had not changed his position on this issue when he came to write *Einleitung*.

44 (1883) I, 48, 127–8.

tions but, as a model of research practice which he attempted to follow in his work as a historian of intellectual movements. Although he shared the commitment of historicists to empirical research and historico-critical method, there were nonetheless specific and radical points of difference between his conception of scientific history and that of the German historicist tradition. Dilthey distanced himself from that tradition in order to transcend what he saw as its limitations in theory as well as practice. I have also argued that in regard to some of the elements in Dilthey's conception of scientific history, as well as in regard to the specific questions he posed in his work as a historian of intellectual movements, an affinity can be identified between his aims and those of both the idealist and the positivist variants of a philosophy of history. The radical limitations of these latter traditions, as conceived by Dilthey, concerned their lack of theoretical sophistication as well as an inadequate research practice, and it was these limitations he hoped to transcend through attempting to put his own conception of scientific history into practice. Thus, as I see it, it was Dilthey's prolonged attempt to retain and combine theoretical commitments from German historicism, Anglo-French positivism and the German idealist philosophies of history, yet at the same time to seek arduously to transcend the limitations of these positions, that partly accounts for the uniqueness of his *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883) in the history of 19th century thought.

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