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"Human beings bound and limited by the reality of life are liberated not only by art – as has often been claimed – but also by the understanding of the historical" - Wilhelm Dilthey (2002, pp. 237)

ABSTRACT

In this MA thesis, I study Wilhelm Dilthey's thought primarily through his historical writings, identifying their underlying methodological and theoretical commitments. I concentrate on the first volume of *Leben Schleiermachers* (1870) and three selected essays from the last decade of Dilthey's life, from 1901-1911. The comparison between texts from different periods allows me to identify both continuities and changes in his historiography. I then connect my analysis to Dilthey's philosophical thought, defining points of intersection and possible direct connections with his philosophy and historical writings.

My main thesis is that Dilthey's thought as a whole is informed in interesting and essential ways by his historicist convictions and the intuitions he gained through his work as a historian. Dilthey as a historian is thus not to be separated from Dilthey as a philosopher. I also argue that Dilthey's historical works reveal new perspectives on his philosophical thought, highlighting the practical aspects of his epistemology of history. Another central claim is that while Dilthey did develop and widen his interpretative machinery as a historian throughout his career, the very basic theoretical commitments remain relatively uniform. This supports the argument for viewing Dilthey's philosophical development in terms of gradual adjustments, rather than as a substantive shift from descriptive psychology to hermeneutics.

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Masterarbeit ist es, das Denken Wilhelm Diltheys vor allem durch seine historischen Werke zu studieren, und die methodologischen und theoretischen Grundlinien dieser Werke zu identifizieren. Ich konzentriere mich auf den ersten Halbband von *Leben Schleiermachers* (1870) und auf drei ausgewählte Texte von Diltheys *Studien über die Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes* (1901-1911). Die zeitliche Distanz zwischen den Werken erlaubt es, die Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten in die Theorie und Praxis der Geschichtsschreibung Diltheys zu analysieren. Am letzten Teil meiner Arbeit werde ich die Verbindungen und Verknüpfungspunkte zwischen der historischen und den theoretischen Werken Diltheys bestimmen.

Ich möchte folgende These aufstellen: die Intuitionen und Ideen die Dilthey durch seine Tätigkeit als Historiker erworben hat bilden ein integraler Bestandteil seines philosophischen Gesamtprojekts. Dilthey als Historiker und Dilthey als Philosoph sind nicht voneinander zu trennen. Weiterhin behaupte ich, dass eine Beschäftigung mit die historischen Werken Diltheys neue Perspektiven in seine Philosophie eröffnen kann. Besonders werden die praktischen Elemente in Diltheys Methodologie und erkenntnistheoretische Positionen betont.

Eine weitere zentrale These ist, dass obwohl Dilthey während seiner Karriere seine methodologischen Vorgehensweisen tatsächlich immer entwickelte und verbesserte, die grundlegenden theoretischen Ansätze jedoch relativ gleich blieben. Darüber hinaus behaupte ich, dass Diltheys philosophische Entwicklung nicht eine Überwindung von Psychologie durch Hermeneutik beinhaltet, sondern eher als graduelle Anpassungen und Verbesserungen in seiner historiographisch-philosophischen Theorie zu betrachten ist.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I study Wilhelm Dilthey's thought primarily through his historical writings. I claim that the intuitions and knowledge he gained as a practicing historian are a central aspect of his thought as a whole. I also claim that reading Dilthey's historical works can give new insight into his philosophical thought. While the practical methodology of his historical works does not directly correspond to his philosophical theory, which is rather to be understood as meta-level epistemological considerations, the historical and theoretical in Dilthey's thought intersect in interesting ways. In addition, it is well documented that Dilthey's historical writings did inform and inspire his philosophy¹ – unsurprisingly as he was working sporadically on both historical and philosophical texts throughout his career. Thus, the most important argument I want to make in this master's thesis is that Dilthey's work as a historian is an essential, organic part of his thought. It should not be treated as a mere biographical detail or a footnote in Dilthey's career, even when his historical works might not have the same modern appeal as his philosophy.

While Dilthey's intellectual development is "complex and convoluted"², his historical writings emphasize the continuities in his thought rather than shifts and radical changes. Dilthey, like any other thinker, of course developed and modified his positions throughout his career. I however maintain that these developments are not philosophically substantive shifts, but clarifications and improvements as well as adopting new concepts to accommodate these developments. I do however argue that in the 1870s Dilthey still had a more empirical and positivist conception of scientific history, which he later softened in favor of a more interpretative and structural approach. In short, my claim is that in *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey is still struggling to find a balance between a romantic-interpretative and systematic-scientific approach to history, but later he adopts a richer interpretative machinery that makes the tension between the two disappear. The early approach is characterized by strict adherence to textual sources but at the same time a strict rejection of speculative psychologizing and projecting novel-like narratives on the human life. The early approach also asserts individual life as the most central perspective on history; collectives that seem to transcend individual experience are considered as abstractions. Later Dilthey emphasizes a more structural and multi-faceted approach, which makes the individual less a configuration of shapeless intellectual currents and more into an active agent operating in the historical milieu. Understanding individual people and their

¹ See e.g. Martin Redeker: "Vorwort des Herausgebers der dritten Auflage" In: Wilhelm Dilthey: *Leben Schleiermachers I Halbband*. Berlin 1970, IX. (hereafter *Leben Schleiermachers* abbreviated LS)

² Frederick C. Beiser: *The German Historicist Tradition*. Oxford 2011, 325.

subjective psychological dispositions is not interesting for Dilthey anymore, the shared world becomes more central.

This thesis is divided into four main chapters. In the next chapter, I argue that Dilthey's historical works highlight his place as a historicist thinker and that historicism is maybe the most definitive influence of his intellectual identity. This is relevant also because in the following chapters I continue contextualizing Dilthey and his thought especially through his connection to the German historicist tradition. In the chapters three and four, I will analyse Dilthey's historical writings. The first of these chapters is about the first volume of *Leben Schleiermachers* (1870), the first *Halbband* of Dilthey's unfinished biography on the theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher. In the following chapter, I discuss three short historical essays published in the first decade of the 20th century. These texts are a part of Dilthey's ambitious project titled *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes*. His aim was to create a comprehensive presentation on the intellectual and cultural history of Germany from the 16th to the 18th century. This project was never published in its entirety either, but the different available texts form a coherent whole representing Dilthey's later views and thus provide a good comparison to *Leben Schleiermachers*. I try to avoid reading and analysing Dilthey's historiography only through his philosophy. While Dilthey's theory of history is a necessary background for my analysis throughout, in the first two chapters I analyse his methodological commitments first and foremost through the historical works themselves. In order to substantiate my arguments, I quote Dilthey's original works sometimes at some length. I use official English translations if they exist, and original German if there is no translation available – as is the case with all Dilthey's historical writings.

In the last chapter I connect my analysis of Dilthey's historical writings with his philosophical-historiographical works, concentrating on four texts in particular: the first book in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883), "Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology" (1894), "Contributions to the Study of Individuality" (1895–6), and "The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences" (1910). For some specific topics, I also use Dilthey's unfinished and posthumously published *Drafts for a Critique of Historical Reason*, where he discusses some particular and concrete questions of historiography. I analyse different points of intersection in Dilthey's historical writings and philosophy, further arguing for their close and organic connection. As suggested above, my main argument is that Dilthey's philosophical development should be seen in terms of continuities rather than radical shifts in his thought. More concretely, in chapter five I argue against the conception that Dilthey's move from *descriptive psychology* to *hermeneutics* should

be seen as a philosophically substantive shift. Especially the early commentators on Dilthey's work tended to divide his thought into two distinctly different periods and to claim that these two approaches are radically different.³ While this view has mostly been abandoned today, most scholars still see the shift in terms of a gradual but substantive change.⁴ I defend a view according to which Dilthey's shift from psychological to hermeneutical vocabulary is to be understood first and foremost as a perspectival change, not as a radical refashioning of his epistemological position. Furthermore, I discuss other aspects of his philosophical thought that relate directly to his work as a historian or reveal connections between his historical and theoretical works. I analyse Dilthey's views on individuality and community, his use of the concept of *Geist*, as well as his responses to the charges of relativism. Ultimately my claim is that Dilthey's historical writings shed light on these questions from a new point of view.

2. Dilthey and Historicism

Wilhelm Dilthey opens his Schleiermacher-biography by stating that while we can understand Immanuel Kant's philosophy without understanding him as a historical person, understanding Friedrich Schleiermacher as a thinker requires understanding his historical-cultural context and his life:

Die Philosophie Kants kann völlig verstanden werden ohne nähere Beschäftigung mit seiner Person und seinem Leben; Schleiermachers Bedeutung, seine Weltansicht und seine Werke bedürfen zu ihrem gründlichen Verständnis biographischer Darstellung. Daher ist das Verlangen nach einer Biographie dieses merkwürdigen und schwer zu deutenden Mannes früh geäußert und oft wiederholt worden.⁵

The same certainly applies to Dilthey himself – his thought is a convergence point of several different intellectual influences of the turn of the century. While I am not writing an intellectual biography of Dilthey (which would be an overwhelming but interesting task), I follow Dilthey's own theoretical convictions and emphasize the role of contextualization in understanding his thought. Dilthey participated in many contemporary debates and contributed to then-prominent questions, so his

³ Jacob Owensby: *Dilthey and the Narrative of History*. Ithaca 1994, 8-9.

⁴ Katharina Kinzel: "Inner experience and articulation. Wilhelm Dilthey's foundational project and the charge of psychologism" In: *HOPOS*, 8/2, 2018. In the paper, Kinzel herself defends a form of continuity view, but also provides a good overview of the current debate.

⁵ Dilthey: *LS*, XXXIII.

historiographical-philosophical positions cannot be understood without placing them in the surrounding intellectual-historical context. The same is true of his historical writings, which both conform to and break away from the conventions of the 19th century historical writing. In this thesis, I concentrate on Dilthey's connections to German historicism and treat him first and foremost as a historicist thinker.⁶ Especially among the anglophone Dilthey scholarship, there is a tendency to relate Dilthey to the philosophical traditions of the 20th century.⁷ Dilthey's relation to e.g. Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer is interesting, but his historiography highlights his firm place in the historicist tradition. While different interpretations shed light to other important aspects in Dilthey's thought, his historical writings and historiographical theory show him in a more practical light as a thinker who was first and foremost interested in the conditions of historical knowledge. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Dilthey's historical works also faithfully follow many historicist conventions and doctrines. He does have an individual voice as a historian, which makes his works a fruitful subject of analysis, but at the same time, he is writing in the tradition set by Ranke and other historicist historians of the 19th century. So, while I do not deny that Dilthey's thought existed in an interesting intellectual space between old and modern ideas, a further central argument of this thesis is that his historical writings highlight his place as a 19th century historicist thinker.

The concept of historicism has been used in several, even contradictory ways.⁸ The term has also been used polemically, maybe most famously by Karl Popper in his 1957 *The Poverty of Historicism*, which has led to gross misunderstandings over the meaning of the term. Popper's criticism is targeting views that assume a law-like fashion of historical progress, and consequently, assume that one can use the past to predict the future.⁹ This allegedly results in a dubious kind of metaphysics as well as morally questionable political theories. However, this kind of historicism could not be further away from the view advocated by Dilthey in his philosophy or historiography, as Dilthey is vehemently against the idea of postulating metaphysical historical laws.¹⁰ This is true of all historicist thinkers.¹¹ Dilthey wants to understand the past as it was, and he does this through illuminating, extensive description and structural analysis of the historical world. In his philosophical writings, Dilthey aims

⁶ See also the chapter on Dilthey in: Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*. 322-364.

⁷ For a comprehensive contextualisation of Dilthey's thought exploring especially the hermeneutic and existentialist dimensions of Dilthey's thought see: Jos de Mul: *The Tragedy of Finitude. Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life*. Yale 2004.

⁸ Ibid. 1-2.

⁹ Karl Popper: *The Poverty of Historicism*. London 1957, 3, 26-34.

¹⁰ See e.g. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences. Selected Works I*. Princeton 1985, 50. Hereafter abbreviated SW I.

¹¹ Beiser, *Historicist Tradition*. 9.

at providing a sophisticated methodological and philosophical grounding for history as a human science but does not posit metaphysical structure above the human world.

Because of the misconceptions and unclarity surrounding the concept, it needs to be further clarified what historicism is and what are the basic ideas Dilthey shares with the tradition of the German historicism. I will follow Frederick C. Beiser's definition, as it is both broad and clear enough to adequately designate the overall theoretical conception of historicism. In short, historicism is the fundamental historicization of individuals, culture, and values.¹² Life, the world, and every individual is seen as thoroughly historical. They are constituted through their historicity, and any kind of human science is scientific only if it acknowledges this fundamental principle. In addition to this fundamental historicizing of the human world, the 19th century historicism had three defining features. The goal was to establish history as an independent scientific discipline with its own methodology. At the beginning of the century, historicism contrasted itself with Hegelian metaphysics and philosophy of history, endorsing instead a strictly empirical, anti-metaphysical methodology. Later, when the Hegelian philosophy of history had lost a lot of its prominence among historians, positivism and naturalism became historicism's main opponents. Historicist thinkers emphasized that the methodologies of the natural and human sciences must be different. Thus, for example, Leopold von Ranke's (1795 – 1886) position in the first half of the 19th century is to be understood primarily as an antithesis to Hegel and Hegelian historiography, while positivism became a real challenge for historicism starting from Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884) in the mid-19th century.¹³ Dilthey's position is, however, to be understood in both of these traditions, as he is both against metaphysics and against reductive naturalist conceptions of the human sciences. This is because it was Dilthey's conscious attempt to create an epistemological basis for the historical school as a whole. In the preface to his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* from 1883, Dilthey states:

even today the Historical School has not yet succeeded in breaking through the inner limits which have necessarily inhibited its theoretical development and influence on life. Its study and evaluation of historical development remain unconnected from the facts of consciousness; consequently, it has no grounding in the knowledge that is ultimately secure; it has, in short, no epistemological foundation.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dilthey: *SW I*, 48.

Historicism is thus from the beginning an integral part of Dilthey's identity as a thinker and at the core of his philosophical project. While Dilthey's goal is to provide an epistemological grounding for all the human sciences, he understands the human world from a historicist perspective as thoroughly determined by the past.

3. The Epistemology of Individual Life – *Leben Schleiermachers* as a Renewal of Biography

Leben Schleiermachers is a key text among Dilthey's works. It has established itself as an essential work in the Dilthey canon and has also been a subject of academic interest, unlike most of his other historical works that have not yet been systematically examined. Thus, the Schleiermacher-biography is no doubt Dilthey's best-known historical work, which is why I cannot leave it out from my own analysis in this thesis. Dilthey worked on the biography throughout his life, and it inspired and informed his theoretical considerations.¹⁵ It exemplifies and illustrates many of his most central methodological and theoretical perspectives in a lively and concrete manner,¹⁶ albeit sometimes in a preliminary form – he published the first volume of *Leben Schleiermachers* before any of his notable philosophical writings. Compared to his other historical writings, the theoretical commitments are also somewhat easier to identify and analyse, both because of the length of the biography and because Dilthey provides a transparent overview of his methods and aims in the preface and introduction to the first volume. Biographical writings continued to be an important part of his occupation throughout his career, which illustrates how central and important Dilthey found individuals in understanding and writing history. In *Introduction to the Human Sciences* he claims it is the most important approach to history, representing “the most fundamental historical fact fully, clearly, and in its reality.”¹⁷ As the most comprehensive of Dilthey's biographical works, *Leben Schleiermachers* is also an obvious choice to illustrate and analyse this aspect of his historiography.

Dilthey was working on Schleiermacher's life and thought from the very beginning of his career until the very end of his life.¹⁸ The first part of *Leben Schleiermachers* accounting for Schleiermacher's

¹⁵ In the Preface to the Introduction to the Human Sciences Dilthey writes “[T]he exposition and critique of Schleiermacher's system presupposed an investigation into the ultimate questions of philosophy.” Dilthey: *SW I*, 52.

¹⁶ E.g. “Vieles von dem, was Dilthey später an Erkenntnissen über das Wesen der Geschichte und über die Besonderheit der geistesgeschichtlichen Methodik ins Bewußtsein erhoben hat, wurde bereits in seiner Schleiermacher-Biographie als gedankliche Voraussetzung lebendig und für die Untersuchungen fruchtbar gemacht.” Redeker: “Vorwort”. In: Dilthey: *LS*, IX.

¹⁷ Dilthey: *SW I*, 85.

¹⁸ Dilthey's occupation with Schleiermacher started already when he was studying at the university; he earned his doctorate from Berlin with a thesis on the ethics of Schleiermacher. Prior to beginning the Schleiermacher-biography, he had already edited a publication on Schleiermacher's letters, *Aus Schleiermacher's Leben. In Briefen*.

life from 1768 to 1802 was published in 1870 in Berlin. This first volume contains two books: "Jugendjahre und erste Bildung" about Schleiermacher's youth, family, and education and "Die Fülle des Lebens, die Epoche der anschaulichen Darstellung seiner Weltanschauung" which carefully reconstruct the cultural-spiritual context in which Schleiermacher lived, thought, and wrote as a young man. Even though Dilthey worked on continuing the Schleiermacher-biography up until the end of his life, this first part was the only section published in Dilthey's lifetime. The second part of *Leben Schleiermachers* was published posthumously in 1922 and consists of two books covering Schleiermacher's life from 1803 to 1807, his time in Stolp and in Halle. The second volume is unfinished, Dilthey's biographical texts end in 1807, whereas Schleiermacher died in 1834. The published chapters of the second volume are also quite fragmentary, as it was never finalized for publication by Dilthey himself. It was edited by Dilthey's student Hermann Mulert from several different manuscripts found in Dilthey's *Nachlass*.¹⁹ I will thus concentrate on the first volume.

In addition to *Leben Schleiermachers*, Dilthey also wrote a large number of texts dealing with Schleiermacher's philosophy and theology. Those were published in 1966 as part of the collected works, edited by Martin Redeker, under the two-volume book *Schleiermachers System als Philosophie und Theologie*.²⁰ These texts discuss Schleiermacher's system of thought from a theoretical point of view, approaching it as a coherent intellectual system, and also contextualising that system into a larger intellectual historical continuum. However, since this book is not biographical but clearly a theoretical analysis of Schleiermacher's thought, it falls outside of the scope of this thesis. However, it illustrates how committed Dilthey was to his Schleiermacher-project, seeking an in-depth understanding of both Schleiermacher's life and thought and how those two were intertwined. Ultimately Dilthey's central goal was to understand Schleiermacher's historical significance. In his works, Dilthey construes Schleiermacher as a reformer of Protestant theology. Schleiermacher's system creates a basis for a new systematic theology that frees Christianity from uncritical mysticism and reconciles it with Kantian epistemology and the rational and systematic demands of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.²¹ Equally important for Dilthey is Schleiermacher's contribution to the theory of interpretation, or hermeneutics, which he sees as an important step in

¹⁹ Hermann Mulert: "Vorwort H. Mulerts (Auszug) 1922". In: Wilhelm Dilthey: *Leben Schleiermachers*, 2. Halbband. Berlin 1970, XXII-XXIII. Mulert also shows that Dilthey had already planned a structure for the rest of the biography and that there were several existing manuscripts for the rest of the biography, which however he considered too fragmentary and unclear for publication.

²⁰ The book was heavily edited by Mulert from Dilthey's *Nachlass*, to the point that it is questionable to what extent it should be considered Dilthey's own work. Francesca D'Alberto, *Biographie und Philosophie. Die Lebensbeschreibung bei Wilhelm Dilthey*. Göttingen 2015, 14.

²¹ Martin Redeker, "Einleitung des Herausgebers". In: Martin Redeker (ed.) Wilhelm Dilthey, *Leben Schleiermachers II. Schleiermachers System als Philosophie und Theologie*, Berlin 1966, XXVIII.

the development of understanding the human world.²² These intellectual contributions constitute Schleiermacher's position in history. Dilthey's thesis is that Schleiermacher as a thinker and Schleiermacher as a man cannot be distinguished from each other: in order to understand one, we have to understand the other.

At the time Dilthey wrote *Leben Schleiermachers*, the scientific nature of biography was a topic of disagreement among historians and philosophers alike. Biography as a genre existed somewhere between literature and academic historical writing, i.e. between art and science.²³ Dilthey wrote the Schleiermacher-biography in this context, as a conscious attempt to break away from the artistic tradition of biographical writing and to create a new kind of biographical model to fit scientific standards.²⁴ In *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, he even maintains that biography has a foundational role for history as a discipline, and that "to describe and to understand the total being of an individual within his historical milieu is one of the highest achievements of historical writing."²⁵ In order to fulfil that role, however, biography needed to establish itself as an academically rigorous genre of scientific historical writing.

In the introduction to *Leben Schleiermachers*, Dilthey elaborates on the task of a biography: it presents an individual at the crossroads of cultural and social forces, and analyses how those merge in the life of the individual and how he, in turn, exerts influence on the world around him.²⁶ After this he challenges the reader who might expect a more traditional approach: "[v]on denen, welche diese Auffassung nicht teilen und der Biographie einen engeren Rahmen sowie eine geschlosseneren Kunstform wünschen, darf dieser Versuch wohl die Gunst erbitten, allein aus der Aufgabe, welche er sich stellt, beurteilt zu werden."²⁷ "Geschlossene Kunstform" here means a novel-like structure, a life-story. However, while Dilthey abandons this kind of literary-artistic form, he does not completely

²² Kristin Gjesdal emphasizes this aspect of *Leben Schleiermachers* in her paper "Enlightenment, History, and the Anthropological Turn. The Hermeneutical Challenge of Dilthey's Schleiermacher Studies". In: Giuseppe D' Anna, Helmut Johach, Eric S. Nelson (eds.): *Anthropologie und Geschichte. Studien zu Wilhelm Dilthey aus Anlass seines 100. Todestages*, Würzburg 2013, 333-354.

²³ See, eg. Jos de Mul, "Wilhelm Dilthey and Historical Biography". In: *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 57/226, 2003, 407-408. and D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 7-12.

²⁴ A similar argument is given by D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 16ff. Her view however only emphasizes Dilthey's positivism and empirical historiography, somewhat disregarding the romantic and hermeneutic aspects of *Leben Schleiermachers*.

²⁵ Dilthey: *SW I*, 85.

²⁶ "[Z]umal aber die Biographie eines Denkers oder Künstlers hat die große geschichtliche Frage zu lösen, wie ganz zerstreute Elemente der Kultur, welche durch allgemeine Zustände, gesellschaftliche und sittliche Voraussetzungen, Einwirkungen von Vorgängern und Zeitgenossen gegeben sind, in der Werkstatt des einzelnen Geistes verarbeitet und zu einem originalen Ganzen gebildet werden, das wiederum schöpferisch in das Leben der Gemeinschaft eingreift." Dilthey: *LS*, XXXIV.

²⁷ Ibid.

deny the artistic aspects of biographical writing, just as he does not deny them in his general historiography. For Dilthey, artistic and poetic imagination are closely related to historical understanding.²⁸ The main difference between the scientific and artistic approach is however that historical analysis is systematic, interested in contextual analysis, and sticks to available sources, while art can only ever express snippets of reality in a typified and condensed manner.²⁹ Scientific history aims at analysing the historical world as it was, art expresses commonalities and universal experiences through narrative examples.

The relationship between historical analysis and artistic expression in *Leben Schleiermachers* is a central question in this chapter. Even though the topic is not explicitly discussed at length in the book, I argue it is was one of the most important questions for Dilthey regarding biography as a genre. He returned to the question in the last years of his life in *Drafts for a Critique of Historical Reason* (the chapters are titled “The Scientific Character of Biography” and “Biography as a Work of Art”), there expressing some doubts on the suitability of biography for historical analysis.³⁰ However, as demonstrated above, in the 1870’s when the biography was published Dilthey still firmly believed in the possibility of creating a purely scientific biography. Young Dilthey is to be understood as a Rankean historian, who believed in empirical historiography and the possibility of grasping the historical world through sources. This is not to say that either Ranke or young Dilthey would not have been able to understand the complexities of historical interpretation.³¹ Both wanted to reach the essence behind historical facts, not simply record and present those facts. Neither of them denied that this interpretative work necessarily brings historical writing closer to literature, but still maintained that academic history should be mediated by rationality and objectivity.³² When Dilthey demands that biography should be established as a scientific genre of historical writing, what he means is that it should be based on the interpretation of sources alone, without adding anything that is not there. That said, I also claim that Dilthey’s conception of individual life is still ultimately romantic, and this is why his methodology sometimes does take a more romantic-hermeneutic form. I thus argue that

²⁸ The topic of Dilthey’s epistemology’s relation to poetics and poetic imagination would be a topic for another thesis, and unfortunately, I cannot discuss it in length here. However, see e.g. chapter “Poetry and Lived Experience” in Wilhelm Dilthey: *Poetry and Experience* (SW5). Princeton 1997, 250-252.

²⁹ See *ibid.* and Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi: “Introduction to Volume V”, In: *ibid.* 9.

³⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey: *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences. Selected Works III*. Princeton 2002, 269-270. Hereafter abbreviated SW III.

³¹ Especially Ranke is sometimes misconstrued as a “positivist” historian only aiming for strictly factual descriptions of the past. Beiser addresses these misconceptions in: *Historicist Tradition*, 254.

³² About Ranke’s conception of history and art: Jörn Rüsen: “Rhetoric and Aesthetic of History: Leopold von Ranke”. In: *History and Theory* 29/2, 1990, 190.

the methodology and narrative practice of *Leben Schleiermachers* are balancing between two different seemingly opposing perspectives, the systematic-scientific and romantic-literary.

In this chapter I analyse Dilthey's main methodological and theoretical commitments in *Leben Schleiermachers*, elaborating through examples how he constructs Schleiermacher's life story, or rather, how he portrays an individual life and its relation to the surrounding socio-cultural context. I also argue that through the Schleiermacher-biography Dilthey engaged in many of the epistemological questions regarding the individual-context relation which he later returned to in his theoretical works. Comparing the Schleiermacher-biography only to Dilthey's own philosophy would however not be enough to understand its epistemological, theoretical, and methodological commitments. This is why I will first briefly elaborate on Dilthey's place in the tradition of biographical writing in the 19th century. I will identify the relevant similarities and differences between *Leben Schleiermachers* and the conventions of the genre, as well as compare Dilthey's methodology and theoretical commitments to other biographers, historians, and philosophers. These comparisons will also serve to crystallize Dilthey's own positions and to place *Leben Schleiermachers* in its historical continuum. After that, I will discuss the theoretical aims of *Leben Schleiermachers*, as spelled out by Dilthey in the introduction. I then discuss the practical application of those theoretical commitments: the different methodological and narrative choices in the book, and their consequences. I also critically assess some of the inherent epistemological problems that Dilthey's theoretical commitments entail.

3.1. The Scientific Nature of Biography – What Makes *Leben Schleiermachers* Different

Upon its publication, *Leben Schleiermachers* was hailed as a major achievement, not only because of its considerable size and attention to detail but also because it departed from the conventions of biography as a genre.³³ It became an exemplary model for a new kind of intellectual history (Geistesgeschichte). According to Martin Redeker, the editor of Dilthey's collected works, it provided a new kind of conception of history and a new kind of epistemological model for dealing with intellectual history.³⁴

³³ Hans Peter Rickman: "Wilhelm Dilthey and Biography" In: *Biography* 2/3, 1979, 218. See also: de Mul: "Historical Biography", 441.

³⁴ "Das Buch wurde bald nach seinem Erscheinen das vielgerühmte Modell eines neuen geistesgeschichtlichen Verstehens auf Grund einer neuen Konzeption der Geschichte und der ihr entsprechenden Methode des historischen Erkennens. Es blieb dann viele Jahrzehnte die exemplarische Biographie der neueren Geistesgeschichte." Redeker, "Vorwort" In: Dilthey: *LS*, IX.

There are indeed important innovations that single Dilthey out as a biographer and make *Leben Schleiermachers* ground-breaking and a genuinely new kind of intellectual biography. However, while recognizing the originality and novelty of Dilthey's biographical approach, it is also important to consider the continuities and Dilthey's own intellectual context. The same theoretical questions and perspectives that Dilthey deals with appear already in Ranke's biographical writings and even more prominently in Johan Gustav Droysen's works. Dilthey's works should be interpreted in the continuum of the German historicist tradition, as well as in the wider context of the theoretical debates that were going on in his contemporary historiography. This is especially true for *Leben Schleiermachers* which he wrote so early in his career before his own philosophical positions had been crystallized. In this subchapter, I elaborate what connects *Leben Schleiermachers* to the traditional forms of biography, and where it departs from the conventions of the genre. This helps to illustrate concretely in which ways *Leben Schleiermacher* can actually be considered a renewal of biography as a genre and what constitutes the scientific nature of biography for Dilthey.

The 19th century saw both the development of history into an independent academic subject, as well as the rise in the popularity of biography as both a literary and historical genre.³⁵ The questions about the status of biography in relation to academic and scientific historiography were debated beyond Dilthey's closest intellectual circles. At the beginning of the century these theoretical ponderings were mostly in the brief introductory chapters of biographies, and there was little systematic historical-critical theorizing.³⁶ Towards the middle of the century, these discussions became more integrated into the general philosophical and methodological discussions about historiography, and thus more systematic and nuanced.³⁷ One can identify three theoretical questions or topics that feature implicitly in the 19th century biographical literature, and explicitly in the theoretical and philosophical discussions. Firstly, the question about the relation between an individual and the surrounding world – how far an individual is determined by his context. Secondly, the question that was discussed above: the relationship between the literary aspects of biography – the demands of good storytelling – and their relation to the academic demands of historical accuracy. Thirdly, how to deal with the private life of the biography's subject, and to which extent one can actually access this private life of an individual without falling into speculative and non-scientific storytelling. While Dilthey does not

³⁵ Barbara Caine: *Biography and History*. Basingstoke 2010, 29-30.

³⁶ Falko Schnicke: *Prinzipien der Entindividualisierung. Theorien und Praxis biographischer Studien bei Johann Gustav Droysen*. Cologne 2010, 41.

³⁷ Ibid.

express the questions in exactly the same wording in his works, these are also the primary theoretical concerns of *Leben Schleiermachers*.

While Dilthey wrote about these topics also in his theoretical writings, the Schleiermacher-biography is an effort to contribute to these debates from the point of view of a practicing historian. The biography exists between theory and practice as it explicitly contributes to these theoretical questions while still being a concrete historiographical work. Two important features that for Dilthey constitute the scientific standard of biography are: 1) that an individual life does not have a plot, and thus cannot be characterized in terms of a novel-like narrative and 2) a biography is not based on speculative psychologizing.³⁸ As the very private and innermost experiences of an individual are not accessible to a biographer through sources, the intellectual development of the subject can only be determined through his relation to the surrounding intellectual influences. Dilthey describes his approach in the introduction:

[Diesem Plane entsprechend], habe ich mich nirgend gescheut, inhaltlich, sachlich auf die Grundlagen Schleiermachers in seinen großen Vorgängern einzugehen; ich habe nirgends bloß charakterisiert, Beziehungen angedeutet, sondern die Vorgänge nach ihrem Gehalt dargelegt, ihren Zusammenhang nach Ursache und Wirkung aufgezeigt. Nur wo eine Ausführung für diesen strengen Zusammenhang des Werkes entbehrlich erschiene, wäre der Plan überschritten, der diesem Versuch zugrunde liegt.³⁹

While I will further elaborate on this theoretical commitment later in the chapter, for now, it suffices to reiterate that for Dilthey the scientific nature and historical accuracy of biography are constituted through contextualising the subject; elaborating the influences and connections he had with the surrounding milieu. Understanding Schleiermacher's place in history is for Dilthey synonymous to understanding Schleiermacher as a thinker and as a person.

3.1.1. Droysen, Hegel, and the Great Man Theory

In *Grundriss der Historik*, Droysen comprehensively discusses the role of biography in historiography, deeming it as one of the main forms of narrative history.⁴⁰ For Droysen, as for Dilthey, the actual object of historical research is the sphere between the individual and the cultural-spiritual

³⁸ See also: D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 49-51.

³⁹ Dilthey: *LS*, XLV.

⁴⁰ Schnicke: *Prinzipien der Entindividualisierung*, 25-26.

reality.⁴¹ History studies how the historical-spiritual manifests itself through concrete, observable things, such as institutions, events, and people. Considering this, it is clear why for Droysen biography – writing about individual lives – is one of the possible methods to access this spiritual sphere. It is a vehicle for describing the manifestations of the historical and the cultural in an individual's life. For Droysen biography thus has a central place in the canon of historical writing. Here Dilthey is very much on the same theoretical ground with Droysen. For him as well individuality is interesting as a convergence point of ideas and influences, and the task of history is to uncover this process of converging through analysing its manifestations. However, Droysen's conception of biography as a form of historical writing is different from Dilthey's. For Droysen a biography tells the life-story of an individual⁴² and can thus only stay on the personal-individual level. Biography describes

das Werden dessen [darzustellen], wovon er erzählt – – – von der Jugend eines Mannes – – – beginnend, verfolgt er die Etwicklungen, und Tatsache auf Tatsache erzählend, läßt er das Werden dessen, wovon er handelt, gleichsam vor den Augen des Lesers vor sich gehen, und er kann das in dem Maß, als er das Tun und Wollen der Handelnden, das Hemmende und Fördernde in diesem Werden, dessen Zusammenhang mit Früherem, dessen Bedeutung mit Sicherheit erforscht.⁴³

Droysen thus subscribes to a more traditional conception of biography as a *narrative* (erzählerisch)⁴⁴ form of writing, similar to a novel-like literary narrative. It opens up a perspective to the past through a life-story, the emphasis is on events rather than on the thinking and worldview of the subject. For Dilthey in turn, exactly the latter two are the main subject matter of his biographies. For Droysen the possibilities of a biography to describe past realities are more limited than for Dilthey; a biography can only ever be a preliminary stage to grasping the “Gesamtzusammenhang aller historischen Gedanken.”⁴⁵ As shown above, for the early Dilthey biography is arguably the most important category of historical writing. In his inaugural address at the Prussian Academy of Sciences from 1887 Dilthey states: “[d]as bedeutende Individuum ist nicht nur der Grundkörper der Geschichte, sondern in gewissem Verstande die größte Realität derselben. – – – erfahren wir hier allein Wirklichkeit in vollem Sinn, von innen gesehen: nicht gesehen sondern erlebt.”⁴⁶ For Dilthey, at least

⁴¹ Ibid. 22-24.

⁴² Johann Gustav Droysen: *Historik. Die Vorlesungen von 1857*. Stuttgart 1977, 229-230.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Schnicke: *Prinzipien der Entindividualisierung*, 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey: *Die geistige Welt. Gesammelte Schriften V*. Göttingen 1924, 10-11. (Hereafter GS V)

still until the 1890s, biography in itself allows for a nuanced and comprehensive way to analyse the past in all its fullness, provided that the biography follows his theoretical model.

The question about individuality and its relation to history was, of course, more widely discussed than just among the German historicists, and it is interesting to contrast Dilthey with this wider discussion to carve out a more exact view of his position in the landscape of mid-19th century historiography. In a comprehensive and interesting study about Droysen and biography from 2010, Falko Schnicke elaborates the connections and similarities between Droysen's conception of individuality and Hegel's concept of *world-historical individuals*. He demonstrates how Droysen and Hegel both see individuals as simultaneously embedded in their historical situation *and* as the driving forces of historical change.⁴⁷ This conception echoes the then popular *great man theory*. According to the theory, history can largely be explained as the impact of great men who due to their exceptional abilities or characteristics had a decisive historical impact. This theory was popularized by a Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle in his 1841 book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*.⁴⁸ In short, according to all these thinkers, the possibility of a change or progress in history requires individuality transcending its historical framework. Creating something genuinely new is an expression of individual freedom, and all historical change happens through individuals. While for Hegel this ability to change the course of history denotes a historically exceptional individual and for Carlyle it is a sign of a hero, for Droysen this is potential present in every person.⁴⁹

Even though Dilthey often refers to Schleiermacher as a historically exceptional individual, his conception is closest to that of Droysen. Dilthey certainly does not constitute Schleiermacher as a world-historical hero and can hardly be accused of subscribing to any form of naïve Great man theory. However, his theory echoes a similar idea: it is still Schleiermacher's *individuality* that enables him to transcend his context and his *exceptionality* that makes his thinking so influential. For Dilthey, the root of this individuality and exceptionality is not a transcendent Spirit of History or some quality of heroism, but it is embedded in the historicity of Schleiermacher and constituted through the unique blend of influences converging in his thought. How exactly this individuation happens – or more precisely, what is its theoretical basis – is not clearly articulated in the Schleiermacher-biography. As I will argue in the following sections of this chapter, this constitutes one of the inherent problems of

⁴⁷ Schnicke: *Prinzipien der Entindividualisierung*, 62-68.

⁴⁸ Thomas Carlyle: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. New York 1888, 2. Dilthey was aware of Carlyle's works, and references him in different instances i.e. in *Drafts for a Critique* he argues that Carlyle was maybe the first one to have fully grasped the significance of biography for historiography. Dilthey: *SW III*, 269.

⁴⁹ Schnicke: *Prinzipien der Entindividualisierung*, 61.

Dilthey's anti-speculative and anti-metaphysical theoretical commitments. This romantic conception of deep individuality is hard to reconcile with the empirical and scientific demands of Dilthey's early historiography.

3.1.2. Historical Epochs versus Historical Continuity – Ranke and Leo

Leopold von Ranke, better known for his universal historical approach and national histories, also wrote biographical texts. However, he states that biographical narratives should be utilized first and foremost to understand the political and cultural *epoch*: biography is a means to an end, not an end in itself. We understand an epoch through the individuals living it:

mit den Individualitäten zugleich die Epochen, in welchen sie fallen, in Betracht gezogen werden; der Grund und Boden, auf welchem ihre Entwicklung basiert, die Einwirkung der gleichzeitigen Begebenheiten, die Rückwirkung auf dieselben; die Männer in ihrer Zeit, jede Zeit in ihren Männern.⁵⁰

Ranke is first and foremost a historian, not a philosopher, and thus his theoretical and philosophical views are less systematic than Dilthey's, or at least less systematically presented. However, in the historiographical practice, Ranke's conception of epoch reveals an illustrative difference between him and Dilthey. For Ranke's historiography epoch is an essential category, while Dilthey primarily uses a more fluid concept of *generation* to conceptualise Schleiermacher's relation to his surrounding historical milieu. For Ranke an epoch denotes a self-contained whole, a temporal sequence that has unique characteristics and historical particularity, and that is a worthy object of study in and of itself.⁵¹ While for Ranke the ultimate aim of biographical treatment of the historical material is to understand the epochal context, for Dilthey the aim is rather to analyse the interplay between the context and the individual. History for Dilthey is a dynamic continuum, not a series of epochs.

The difference between Ranke and Dilthey is also mirrored in the themes of their historical writings in general. Ranke is interested in political history, while Dilthey's interest lies in cultural-intellectual processes. Politics is much more tangibly manifested in the historical realities, while intellectual currents are much more evidently linked in the individual sphere. Political phenomena are more clearly limited both temporally and in terms of communities, and Ranke's emphasis on epochs makes

⁵⁰ Leopold von Ranke: "Erste Vorrede". In: *Leopold Von Rankes Historische Meisterwerke*. Hamburg 1932, 5.

⁵¹ Andreas Boldt: "Ranke: objectivity and history". In: *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 18/4, 2014, 457-474.

sense. Intellectual history in Dilthey's sense is primarily manifested in the thoughts and writings of individual thinkers, and different intellectual currents span across all historical periodisations. For Dilthey, Schleiermacher exists in relation to past, present, and future, and his historical significance is determined by the fact that his philosophy has a lasting legacy. In Ranke's conception, in turn, historical individuals can and must only be judged according to the standards of their epochal and social context. For example, the political theory of Niccolo Machiavelli – which Ranke found in itself reprehensible – was to be understood as a reaction to the political realities of the early 16th century Florence.⁵² Famously, for Ranke the goal of a good historian must only be to study historical figures for the sake of understanding what really happened. Dilthey's aim is to articulate far-reaching intellectual continuities between different epochs, generations, and contexts. In *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey does not periodise history but tries to describe its dynamic fluidity. Schleiermacher's historical significance is not constituted only through his connection to his own historical period, but also through his connections to the intellectual influences from previous generations, and the intellectual legacy he leaves for the following ones. Rankean “wie es eigentlich gewesen” – a faithful reconstruction of the past epoch – is thus not what Dilthey is trying to achieve. The epoch-spanning continuums in intellectual history are more important for him than determining and describing epochal particularities in Rankean style.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ranke's historicism opposed Hegelianism and the metaphysical philosophy of history. This kind of conception was prominently championed by the historian and philosopher Heinrich Leo (1799–1878), who argued that past epochs and personalities are to be understood as parts of a metahistorical narrative. In fact, the disagreement between Ranke and Leo sparked a bitter controversy between the two historians that went on for several months in different historical periodicals. For Leo history was to be understood in terms of necessary steps in the linear movement of the transcendent Spirit of History. The primary task of a historian is to determine the world-historical significance of phenomena, events, and individuals⁵³ – not dabbling in the insignificant details of epochal specificities. It is important to emphasize that while Dilthey also places Schleiermacher in a larger continuum of history and emphasizes his historical significance, his conception is strictly immanent. The historical significance of Schleiermacher is not transcendentally predestined or constituted. His new ideas are not a necessary manifestation of the

⁵² Leopold von Ranke: *Zur Kritik neuerer Geschichtsschreiber: eine Beylage zu desselben romanischen und germanischen Geschichten*. Leipzig and Berlin 1824, 193-202.

⁵³ Georg G. Iggers: *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*. Middletown 1982, 66-67.

linear progression of history in a certain direction, but an expression of genuine individuality, albeit in the framework of already existing intellectual influences. In other words, Dilthey's conception of an individual's historical significance is more anthropological and relativist than Leo's, for whom the world-historical significance of a historical figure is constituted through his relation to the great narrative of historical progress. Hegelian conceptions of history maintain that it is possible to arrive at a systematic general plan of history through the study of historical particulars⁵⁴, something that both Ranke and Dilthey vehemently opposed.⁵⁵ For Dilthey there is no non-contingent general direction of history, no great transcendental narrative or force determining where history is going.

I have sketched the points of disagreement between Ranke, Leo, and Dilthey in order to illustrate Dilthey's position in the conflict between historicism and the philosophy of history. While this disagreement was more prominent in Ranke's and Leo's time at the beginning of the 19th century, and thus took place before Dilthey's career, it still important as contextual background. The disagreements are illustrative of Dilthey's own position and highlight two important features of his historiography. While he rejects the speculative and metaphysical commitments of Hegelianism, he also departs from the Rankean idea of epochal history. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, he proceeds to develop concepts and approaches that both retain the anti-metaphysical and relativist historicist commitments, but also describe history as a dynamic continuum.

3.1.3. Biography as a Life Story of an Individual – Haym's Criticism

As already emphasized above, another theoretical debate relevant for contextualising *Leben Schleiermachers* is the question about the complicated relationship between the aesthetic demands of good and compelling storytelling and historical accuracy. From Homer and Suetonius all the way to the emergence of modern historical biography in the 18th century and until today,⁵⁶ writing about individual lives might be one of the most archetypical and popular ways of writing history. Telling the story of an exemplary figure not only allows a more emotionally appealing entry to past realities than just accounting for events and intellectual influences, but an exemplary figure can also serve as a vessel for rhetoric purposes and pleasing the reader or listener aesthetically. Understanding the past through stories with protagonists and antagonists is intuitively appealing because it creates meaningful narratives that are easy to identify with. However, because this literary and aesthetic

⁵⁴ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 264.

⁵⁵ For Dilthey's arguments against Philosophy of History, see chapters 14-17 in *Introduction. SW I*, 136-162.

⁵⁶ James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, a biography of lexicographer Samuel Johnson published in 1791 can be considered the first modern biography. See eg. Caine: *Biography and History*, 32-33.

character seems to be almost unavoidable in a biography, it has made academic historians suspicious of its suitability as a vehicle for exploring the past.⁵⁷ In the 18th and 19th centuries this close connection between biography and other literary forms, especially fiction, was most clearly present in the English literature. Victorian novels (such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*) dealt with individual lives purporting to be autobiographies, while biographies (such as James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*) aimed at an intimate portrait of the subject's inner life and personal traits, albeit restricted by the demands of Victorian propriety.⁵⁸ There was no clear-cut difference between the narrative styles in fact and fiction. As mentioned above, Dilthey's conscious effort was to create an alternative to this literary, artistic type of describing individual lives.

Francesca D'Alberto contrasts Dilthey's biographical writings with those of Dilthey's contemporary German historian and philosopher Rudolf Haym (1821–1901) who wrote popular biographies of von Humboldt, Hegel, and Herder. D'Alberto analyses the differences between how Dilthey and Haym construct the life-story of their subjects i.e. how the life and individuality of the subject are told. In her reading, Haym's works represent the above-mentioned more traditional narrative biographical writing.⁵⁹ Dilthey's disagreements with Haym are thus to be understood in broader terms: they exemplify his opposition to the aesthetic and literary form of biography in general. Dilthey also explicitly and disapprovingly blames Haym for imitating the English style: "so vermag ich Hayms W. v. Humboldt zuweilen nicht zu lesen vor Ekel über diese blasse und äußerliche Nachahmung des Englischen Stils."⁶⁰ As discussed above, this "English style" entails artistic, poetic, and novel-like attitude to the individual's life. Illustrative is also how Dilthey criticises the style of Thomas Babington Macaulay, "welche sich vorherrschend in der poetischen Anschauung anstatt in der wissenschaftlichen Verknüpfung der wesentlichen Erscheinungen bewegt"⁶¹.

Haym's Humboldt biography is titled *Wilhelm von Humboldt. Lebensbild und Charakteristik*. Already this points to one of the main points of difference between him and Dilthey. For Haym central

⁵⁷ Dilthey also points this out in his *Drafts for a Critique*, Dilthey: *SW III*, 246.

⁵⁸ Caine: *Biography and History*, 33-34.

⁵⁹ D'Alberto's treatment of Haym is of course much more nuanced than just using him as an example of the artistic and literary style of biography. That, however, is an aspect of her argumentation. While I might be over-simplifying her argumentation, I hope and trust it is not to the point of misrepresenting it. See D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 43-46.

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey; Clara Misch (ed.): *Der Junge Dilthey. Ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Tagebüchern 1852-1870*. Leipzig and Berlin 1933, 84.

⁶¹ Dilthey: *Zur Geistesgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Gesammelte Schriften XVI*, Göttingen 1972, 17. Hereafter (GS XVI)

are the individual characteristics of the protagonist. The personality is seen as a collection of individual personality traits. For Haym, important is the "wunderbare Individualität — — — sein inneres Sein und den allgemeinen Gang seiner geistigen Entwicklung"⁶². The historical contextualisation i.e. the larger socio-cultural developments function as a backdrop for understanding the characteristics of Humboldt's personality. The aim of Haym's biography is to create a portrait of Humboldt's life, to describe him as the protagonist of a life-story in which the surrounding historical context is something that merely defines his possibilities. The historical context is the milieu in which he lives, but he is not totally defined by it.⁶³ This kind of biography cannot avoid a certain literary character. The subject emerges as a protagonist of a life story and the narrative adopts characteristics of a Bildungsroman. This artistic or aesthetic aspect is what Dilthey consciously turns against in *Leben Schleiermachers*. For the reader, these theoretical commitments are concretized as painstaking analyses of the intellectual and cultural influences surrounding Schleiermacher. In other words, Dilthey sacrifices the individual life-story to the elaboration of the intellectual milieu and how it constitutes the individual.

For Dilthey important is expressing the fundamental historicity of Schleiermacher, and through that shedding light on Schleiermacher as a person and especially as a thinker. It is not the characteristics of Schleiermacher or his "inneres Sein" that Dilthey is interested in, but the overarching aim is to understand both the person and the time, as they both mirror each other and illuminate each other. The aim is to carve out Schleiermacher's individual position in all this, in short, his historical significance as a thinker. Dilthey wants to understand how Schleiermacher's thought and worldview developed in a certain historical context, but also to determine what in Schleiermacher's thought has a direct relation and significance for Dilthey's own contemporary philosophical milieu. Dilthey determines the continuities from Schleiermacher to his own day and through that defines what is really noteworthy and important in Schleiermacher's thought.⁶⁴ This — demonstrating

⁶² Rudolf Haym: *Wilhelm von Humboldt. Lebensbild und Charakteristik*. Osnabrück 1965, IV.

⁶³ D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 21.

⁶⁴ "Dennoch, in dem innersten Leben, Denken, Fühlen dieses Mannes ist etwas dem gegenwärtigen Geschlecht völlig Fremdartiges. Er, seine Zeit, seine Genossen: das alles ist von dem heutigen Tage durch eine Umwandlung in den Gefühlen, Ideen und Bestrebungen geschieden, wie sie sich kaum jemals schneidender vollzogen hat. — — — Ich will versuchen, den ganzen Lebensgehalt Schleiermachers inhaltlich darzulegen, seine Entwicklungsgeschichte und ihren Zusammenhang mit der großen geistigen Bewegung, inmitten deren er lebte, die hieraus sich ergebende umfassende Begründung seiner Lebens- und Weltansicht, aus ihren Grundlagen in den Ergebnissen seiner Vorgänger entwickelt, zur faßlichsten Form vereinfacht, endlich die Einwirkung dieses Lebensgehalts auf Ideen und Zustände. Ich möchte nicht erzählen bloß, sondern überzeugen. Ich möchte, daß vor der Seele des Lesers, wenn er dies Buch schließt, das Bild dieses großen Daseins stehe, aber zugleich ein Zusammenhang bleibender Ideen, streng begründet, eingreifend in die wissenschaftliche Arbeit und das handelnde Leben der Gegenwart."

Dilthey: *LS*, XXXVI-XXXVII (in the footnote).

Schleiermacher's relevance for his own contemporary philosophy – is Dilthey's rationale for writing the biography in the first place.⁶⁵

This theoretical attitude was also noticed and criticised by Dilthey's contemporaries. Haym himself, who was not only Dilthey's contemporary but also his friend, criticised *Leben Schleiermachers* in his generally very favourable critique for omitting the human aspect in favour of the philosophical. The criticism boils down to the question "lesen wir hier eine Biographie oder lesen wir ein philosophisches Werk?"⁶⁶ In Haym's opinion in the sections where Dilthey explicates the philosophical views of Schleiermacher and of the people surrounding him, he is actually writing philosophy himself (Haym uses the word *nachphilosophieren*) – not history. And indeed, Dilthey e.g. devotes some 50 pages to discussing the principles of Kantian philosophy, where the connection to Schleiermacher remains ambiguous at best. For Haym, such a long analysis of Kant's thought is unnecessary for the biography, as it is unrelated to the life of Schleiermacher. David Friedrich Strauß put a similar criticism in sharper terms, saying that while the work is "gewissem Sinne gründlich" it is "aber zerfasert, zergrübelt, peinlich" and "ohne einen Hauch zusammenschmelzender Phantasie."⁶⁷

As seen above, Dilthey himself states that the contextualisation of Schleiermacher is more important for him than crafting a reader-pleasing literary work. Concretely this means that Dilthey devotes at least as many pages to carefully describing and reconstructing the cultural-historical context in which Schleiermacher lived as for accounting for Schleiermacher's life-events. He does not characterize his personality in a novel-like manner: the portrayal of Schleiermacher's life does not fit the popular patterns and conventions of telling an individual life-story. For instance, Dilthey does not subscribe to an idea of a general, invariable life-pattern – such as an evolution from childhood innocence to wise old age.⁶⁸ This is not to say that Dilthey would wholly omit the important details and events in Schleiermacher's life, or that he would not characterize Schleiermacher at all, but that the actual meaning of those details and characteristics is constituted through their historicity. The meaning of Schleiermacher's life-events is determined through their connection to the surrounding world, as well as to the intellectual currents of the past and the future they anticipate, not through their connection

⁶⁵ It is symptomatic of his approach that he ends up somewhat over-emphasising Schleiermacher's philosophical originality and historical significance. Gjesdal argues that this is the case at least as to Schleiermacher's place in the development of the modern theory of interpretation/hermeneutics. Kirstin Gjesdal: "Enlightenment, History, and the Anthropological Turn". In: D'Anna et. al. (eds.): *Anthropologie und Geschichte. Studien zu Wilhelm Dilthey aus Anlass seines 100. Todestages*. Würzburg 2013, 334.

⁶⁶ Rudolf Haym: "Die Dilthey'sche Biographie Schleiermachers" In: *Preußische Jahrbücher*. 26/5 1870, 559.

⁶⁷ See: Redeker: "Vorwort". In: Dilthey: *LS*, XII.

⁶⁸ Rickman: "Dilthey and Biography", 219.

to Schleiermacher's personal development. While Haym's criticism is in many ways justified, and – as I will argue later – the problems he mentions in his critique are an inherent consequence of Dilthey's theoretical approach, this descriptive and contextualising approach is also what constitutes the scientific nature of *Leben Schleiermachers*.

3.2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Dilthey starts the introduction by briefly determining Schleiermacher's historical significance as a reformer of Christian Protestant religiosity: "ich schreibe das Leben des Mannes, der in der Entwicklung der europäischen Religiosität seit deren Umgestaltung durch die Aufklärung und ihren gewaltigen Vollender Kant bis auf diesen Tag die vornehmste Stelle einnimmt."⁶⁹ From the beginning, Schleiermacher's life and significance are constructed in relation to his place in the intellectual history of 19th century Europe. Dilthey also sketches another layer of analysis, the movement of the "German spirit", the intellectual development in Germany from the 18th to the beginning of the 19th Century:

[d]er Hintergrund meiner Darstellung liegt in der großen Bewegung des deutschen Geistes, welche mit Lessing und Kant anhebt, mit Goethes, Hegels und Schleiermachers Tode endet. Aus den Bedingungen derselben, ihrem Zusammenhang und Charakter muß Schleiermachers geschichtliche Stellung verstanden werden.⁷⁰

The Schleiermacher-biography has two objectives: to understand Schleiermacher's life and thought, and to understand the larger historical-cultural movements of his time. These movements constitute the cultural-historical context in which Schleiermacher lived and thought. This context, however, is not to be understood as a static milieu. It is a constant dynamic movement, or – rather – a nexus of different movements and intellectual influences. As discussed above, in contrast to the Rankean conception of an epoch, Dilthey tries to express the dynamism and constant movement of history. For him writing history is about describing processes and developments, not about past realities as static and self-contained wholes. Of this cacophony of different ideas and intellectual developments emerges a unity, a greater intellectual and cultural movement of the German spirit that is defined by Kant's philosophy and the German Enlightenment, Protestantism, and Romanticism. In the historical narrative, these phenomena converge and bring the German culture to a certain direction.

⁶⁹ Dilthey: *LS*, XXXV (in the footnote).

⁷⁰ Ibid. XXXVI.

Dilthey construes Schleiermacher as the focal point of different converging historical trends, which affect him and he, in turn, takes part in them.⁷¹ For a historian, the individual is an access point to historical reality, as that historical reality manifests itself in the individual. This relation, nevertheless, is not to be understood as a mere microcosmos-macrocosmos-theory. The intellectual milieu as a whole, the *structural nexus* (Strukturzusammenhang), makes individuality possible in its historical particularity. Instead of singular building blocks of history or historically and culturally determined mirrors of their context, individuals are considered as intersections in this nexus. For Dilthey important is to determine the intellectual framework that enables historical figures to think the way they do – much later in 1897 in a letter to his friend and fellow philosopher count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg (1835-1897) he uses the illustrative word *Denkmöglichkeit*⁷², which well describes his approach to the structure of historical reality. The particular historical situation in which a person finds himself is a framework which both restricts and enables a particular kind of existence and a particular kind of thought. Yet, the individuality of Schleiermacher is not wholly determined by the context, there is an aspect of his individuality that cannot be grasped by the biographer from outside. As already sketched above, the historian who is limited to interpreting the available sources cannot understand his individuality and life-experience in all its fullness:

Das alles erfuhr und durchlebte ein einzelner Mann, und nicht umhergeworfen vom Schicksal, sondern von einer inneren Gewalt getrieben, die ihn durch alle Kreise unseres menschlichen Daseins hindurchführte, bis in seinem beschaulichen Geiste der Kosmos der moralischen Welt sich erhob. Hier war eine Allseitigkeit nicht der Forschung, sondern des Lebens. Man begreift, wie unendlich mehr er selber war, als alle Aufzeichnungen, alle Forschungen, die wir noch von ihm besitzen.⁷³

Thus, despite Dilthey's empirical commitments, his conception of the individual is ultimately romantic. He starts the biography with the maxim "Individuum est ineffabile" – individuality is unutterable (or, indeed, ineffable). This maxim, especially used by the German romantic philosophers, means that the very essence of the individual is not to be reached with language, that at his core an individual human being has a mystic quality.⁷⁴ Dilthey does not go into speculative

⁷¹ Rickman: "Dilthey and Biography", 219.

⁷² Erich Rothaker (ed.), Wilhelm Dilthey, Paul Yorck von Wartenburg: *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm Dilthey und dem Grafen Paul Yorck v. Wartenburg, 1877-1897*, Halle 1923, 241.

⁷³ Dilthey: *LS*, XLII.

⁷⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer: "Text and Interpretation". In: Brice R. Wachterhauser (ed.): *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Albany 1986, 378.

psychologizing about the inner life of his subject, as it is not revealed by sources. The very intimate and personal in an individual is not accessible for the biographer; personality traits and characteristics are beyond what historian can determine from sources.

3.2.1. Conflict between Empirical Historiography and Romantic Conception of Individuality

As argued already in relation to both Droysen and Haym, for Dilthey scientifically valid historical inquiry concerns the interface between an individual and the surrounding context, or rather, how individuality manifests in the shared historical world. Still for Dilthey “individuum est ineffabile”. This quote is to be interpreted in two different but equally valid ways. The first way to understand it is along the lines sketched previously – that the very personal, immediate selfhood of Schleiermacher and his psychological states cannot be accessed through sources, and thus are unreachable for the biographer. The second way is to understand the quote as expressing a hermeneutic idea that the understanding of an individual is a never-ending process. Interpretation is a kind of a hermeneutic spiral where one can – through interpreting sources – always reach a clearer and more comprehensive understanding, but there is never an endpoint where a complete understanding would be reached. The maxim is thus both setting limits for empirical historiography, as well as declaring Dilthey’s romantic conception of individuality as an ultimately unreachable yet as the creative force responsible for historical change. On the one hand only that what the sources reveal is available for the biographer, on the other, individuality itself is a creative force that needs interpretation. I argue that in *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey is forced to navigate between these two somewhat contradictory background assumptions, the systematic-scientific (I also use the term positivistic⁷⁵) and the romantic hermeneutic.

Dilthey’s own descriptive psychology sheds further light on his methodology in *Leben Schleiermachers*. Even though Dilthey’s mature version of this theoretical framework from the 1890s⁷⁶ is less positivistic in nature and has more inherent hermeneutic potential⁷⁷, the basic theoretical attitudes represent his commitment to systematic psychological analysis. Martin Redeker

⁷⁵ Here I use the term “positivism” simply to refer to an attitude that relies specifically on scientific evidence, sources, and statistics, to reveal a true nature of how society operates. The term is of course somewhat anachronistic here, but I choose to use it as e.g. D’Alberto continuously refers to Dilthey’s methodology as “positivistic”. See e.g. D’Alberto: *Biography and Philosophy*, 48-50.

⁷⁶ The programmatic presentation of this view was in Dilthey’s 1894 “Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie”.

⁷⁷ Kinzel: “Inner Experience”. See also chapter 5 in this thesis.

rightly argues that the Schleiermacher-biography already anticipates the theoretical framework of Dilthey's descriptive and analytic psychology.⁷⁸ Descriptive and analytic psychology attempts to "explicate how different processes converge in the structural nexus of consciousness".⁷⁹ In the biography, Schleiermacher is indeed seen as a nexus of consciousness in which different cultural-intellectual processes converge. It is the task of the biographer to explicate this nexus as much as he can – although he can only access and understand what he can actually verify through sources. The ethos of this theory is systematic and analytic, as it aims at a comprehensive description of the structural composition of the nexus of consciousness and the cultural nexus that constructs that consciousness. The cultural-intellectual reality – the cultural nexus – determining individuals' nexus of consciousness is independent of the psychic life of the individual.⁸⁰ The individual's consciousness is thus causally determined by the outside reality surrounding him, and this determination can be accurately and objectively described by the biographer. It is empirical because both the cultural structure and the nexus of consciousness are analysed through historical facts. This is the positivistic⁸¹ and systematic-scientific, "rigorous" aspect.

However, while this basic theoretical framework of descriptive psychology is there in the biography, Schleiermacher is more than a constructed nexus of consciousness comprised of different influences. There is always a residue, something that cannot be explained. This deeper level of individuality, the source of Schleiermacher's creativity and thus historical particularity is continuously implied in the biography. As established, it is however not reachable through the systematic-empirical approach Dilthey champions in *Leben Schleiermachers*. Kirstin Gjesdal emphasizes that in the Schleiermacher-biography, when analysing Schleiermacher's position in the hermeneutic tradition as well as in the general history of the Enlightenment and Kantian Idealism, "the young Dilthey carves out the theoretical basis for his own position." She continues: "[T]he Schleiermacher study is at one and the same time a genealogy, a systematic account of hermeneutics, and it is an exercise in interpretation. As such, it offers a unique point of entry into Dilthey's thought."⁸² In Gjesdal's interpretation, at least the seed of a hermeneutic interpretation was there already in Dilthey's early thought. Thus, in the 1870s Dilthey's methodology existed in an interesting intersection between this romantic conception of individuality and interpretation, and a more positivist attitude emphasizing empirical

⁷⁸ Redeker: "Vorwort" In: Dilthey: *LS*, XI-XII.

⁷⁹ Dilthey: *SW.II*, 173.

⁸⁰ Juha Varto: "Hermeneutiikka ja historismi: kaksi vuosisadanvaihdetta". In: Jarkko Tontti: *Tulkinnasta toiseen. Esseitä Hermeneutiikasta*. Tampere 2005, 43.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kirstin Gjesdal: "Enlightenment, History, and the Anthropological Turn", 333.

historiography and the duty of historians to stick to the available sources. Frithjof Rodi conceptualises this tension between an artistic-poetic and a systematic-scientific approach in Dilthey's early thought by placing him between Goethe and Kant. On the one hand, Dilthey adopts a Goethean romantic conception of "geniale Anschauung", postulating a somewhat mystic psychological source of creativity and individuality. On the other hand, he refuses to accept mere intuition as a scientific method and demands historical and psychological systematic analysis⁸³ and strict adherence to sources.

3.2.2. *Leben Schleiermachers* as Empirical Historiography

In her analysis D'Alberto emphasizes Dilthey's positivist tendencies, arguing that "Dilthey sieht in *Leben Schleiermachers* das Werk, das endlich mit der romantischen Tendenz der Biographie abschließt und eine positivistische, objektive und fundierte Historiographie realisiert, durch die das Leben in seiner ursprünglich historischen und relationalen Struktur Ausdruck findet."⁸⁴ While Dilthey's conception of a good biography operates on the level of the history of ideas – he is describing abstract intellectual currents rather than events – he is indeed a true Rankean in the sense that he believes in the primacy of concrete sources rather than any aesthetic, romantic or creative empathy.⁸⁵ Only through analysing sources can a biographer or a historian analyse the structural composition of a given historical milieu, he does not have a creative license above that. At the end of the first volume of *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey provides a long list of all the sources he has used in the writing process. This he does in order to make his study transparent: "so daß eine Nachprüfung meiner Untersuchungen jedem Mitforschenden offensteht"⁸⁶, thus maintaining that his research and reasoning in the book can be verified.

Also, Dilthey's early theoretical writings seem to support the view that he indeed did hold a more positivist approach. He for example claims that were it possible to have sources about everything, we could reconstruct intellectual processes in their entirety.⁸⁷ Studying sources using the right method can lead to historically accurate knowledge, which is not relative to the historian's interpretation.^{88 89}

⁸³ Frithjof Rodi: *Diltheys Philosophie des Lebenszusammenhangs. Strukturtheorie – Hermeneutik – Anthropologie*. Freiburg and Munich 2016, 33-38.

⁸⁴ D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 51.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁶ Dilthey: *LS*, XLV

⁸⁷ D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 48-49.

⁸⁸ Dilthey: *LS*, XLIII-XLIV.

⁸⁹ I will argue later, in chapter five, that Dilthey never ceases to believe that it is indeed possible to acquire objective knowledge in the human sciences. However, at the beginning of his career, his trust in sources seems to be somewhat

This somewhat naïve conception is also visible in his early texts about statistics, in a lecture *Volkszählungen* from the 1870s. There Dilthey is hopeful that statistics would bring the human sciences on the same basis as natural sciences, and “auf ein System von Gesetzen gründen.”⁹⁰ The young Dilthey thus believed in the possibility of creating empirically founded explanations and laws for the human world, providing that there would be enough reliable information available.

This positivistic conception of historiography is the basis of the theoretical and methodological framework of *Leben Schleiermachers*, but it also leads to theoretical problems. One cannot know what the sources do not say, otherwise one is in the realm of speculation. The interpretation of sources, uncovering and describing the links between different intellectual currents and Schleiermacher’s life and thought, cannot be done purely through clinging to what the textual sources actually reveal. Dilthey nevertheless claims that it is possible to reconstruct these connections and to understand Schleiermacher through the more personal sources from his immediate proximity – letters to and from him, diaries, and his own works:

Es bleibt von den Hilfsmitteln dieser Geschichte für den ersten Band zu reden. Die Geschichte der geistigen Bewegungen hat den Vorteil von Denkmalen, die wahrhaftig sind. Über seine Absichten kann man täuschen, nicht über den Gehalt des eigenen Innern, der in Werken ausgedrückt ist. Aber wenn sie nicht trügen, so sagen sie doch keineswegs alles, was der Historiker bedarf. Den ursächlichen Zusammenhang, die Entstehung der Ideen aus einem älteren Gedankenkreis oder aus dem Erlebnis und der Anschauung des Wirklichen sprechen sie nicht aus. *Hier sieht man sich auf Briefe und Tagebücher hingewiesen.*⁹¹

Dilthey’s emphasis on sources is also manifested in practice, not only as a methodological ideal. Especially in the first book he continuously quotes letters from Schleiermacher himself and his immediate family and friends. He uses direct quotations, which further highlights his commitment to objectivity. Dilthey also utilizes a broad range of sources that have something to do with Schleiermacher, for example quoting the diaries of “some friend” of Schleiermacher⁹² in order to elaborate Schleiermacher’s interests in his youth. Dilthey does however not question these quotes; what other people say about Schleiermacher is repeated without criticism or doubting their

more naïve than later in his hermeneutic theory when he starts to emphasize the importance of interpretative analysis in the constitution of objective knowledge.

⁹⁰ Dilthey: *GS XVI*, 69-72.

⁹¹ Dilthey: *LS*, XLIII. My italics.

⁹² Dilthey, *LS*, 20.

trustworthiness. This is again because the opposite would be speculative psychologizing, the motivations and emotions of people around Schleiermacher are not discussed. In addition to the primary sources, Dilthey also reconstructs what Schleiermacher (most likely) read and when he read it, as well as who he was friends with. These connections are historical facts that can shed light on Schleiermacher's thought without speculation. This kind of attention to detail continues throughout the book. The immensity and comprehensiveness of Dilthey's treatment of Schleiermacher's life and works and the amount of source material he uses indeed single *Leben Schleiermachers* out as a very ambitious historical work.

3.3. Narrativity and Emplotment

As highlighted above, *Leben Schleiermachers* is meant to be an intellectual biography, not a novel. Avoiding the traditional literary form does however not mean that Dilthey would completely abandon artistic and poetic expression. After all, he appreciated literature and poetry very much and believed that artistic imagination has the potential to provide valuable psychological insight and to describe lived experiences accurately.⁹³ So, by arguing that Dilthey attempts to abandon the artistic conventions of biography, I do not mean to claim that *Leben Schleiermachers* would lack all artistic expression per se – only that Dilthey does not build a narrative arch of a life story. One can say that Dilthey tries to avoid *emplotment* i.e. giving Schleiermacher's life an artistic and rhetorically laden narrative. The biography is meant to be a structural analysis of Schleiermacher's life and a study of the development of German philosophy, not a dramatic story one can identify with. Dilthey does not make Schleiermacher into an identifiable character. Most of the time he does not give much importance to Schleiermacher's concrete experiences, life-events, and their possible influence on his outlook on life. Some events that could be dealt with in an emotionally moving way, such as the death of Schleiermacher's parents, are simply mentioned in passing and not described in detail. These no doubt personally meaningful events in Schleiermacher's life are not dealt with or thematized.

Dilthey also avoids imposing meta-narratives: what he describes is what exists in the human world and is immanent to it. While this theoretical aim is clearly visible throughout the book, whether he in fact succeeds is another question. Dilthey does utilize some story-like narrative and aesthetic choices, that do remind the reader that they are indeed reading a biography here, not a purely philosophical work or an analysis of Schleiermacher's thought. These choices also adhere to the literary

⁹³ See e.g. Dilthey's "Goethe und die dichterische Phantasie" In: Dilthey: *Poetry and Experience. Selected Works V*. Princeton 1985, 235. See also Rudolf Makkreel, Frithjof Rodi: "Introduction" in: Ibid., 8-9. (Hereafter SW V)

conventions of Dilthey's time, raising the question whether biography after all necessarily has a narrative dimension that Dilthey cannot completely avoid.⁹⁴ Famously, Hayden White's radical claim is that all historical narratives are necessarily emplotted, "providing a meaning of a story by identifying the kind of story [being told]."⁹⁵ White recognizes basic structures of storytelling, claiming that all historical writing assumes the form of a Romance, Tragedy, Comedy or Satire, giving the narrative a meaning that does not exist in the pure, raw historical material.⁹⁶ While Dilthey tries to avoid adding such meanings, one could, of course, argue that *Leben Schleiermachers* does exhibit the basic structure of a "romance" in White's sense, understood as "a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience."⁹⁷ After all, the overarching narrative of the biography is Schleiermacher transcending the intellectual context by creating something new, it is a story of Schleiermacher developing into an individual thinker. This again brings out the dichotomy in *Leben Schleiermachers* – despite the scientific and empirical methodology and ideal, Dilthey's conception of *life itself* is ultimately romantic. Dilthey's more artistic passages also imply that despite theoretical assumptions about life and thinking as a relational interplay with the socio-historical context, for Dilthey individual life still – in and of itself – has a narrative structure.⁹⁸ Especially clear this narrative aspect is when Dilthey is talking about Schleiermacher's childhood:

Friedrich war von zarter Gesundheit. Schon der Knabe hatte ein Gefühl, er werde nicht alt werden. – – – Der zwölfjährige Knabe mit den klaren, edlen Linien des Gesichtes und den strahlenden Augen erschien der Mutter zart durchgeistigt. Die außerordentliche intellektuelle Begabung, die sich später, wie bei den bedeutendsten philosophischen Köpfen, so langsam zur Selbständigkeit entwickeln sollte, trat in dem Kinde mit Frühreife hervor. Mit vier Jahren hatte er zu lesen begonnen. „Der liebe Junge“ — schreibt die Mutter etwas später — „macht uns manche Freude und viel Hoffnung. Er hat das zärtlichste Herz und einen sehr guten Kopf.“ „Er ist der Kleinste in der ganzen Schule und kommt aus allen Klassen als einer der Obersten heraus.“⁹⁹

Talking about Schleiermacher's poor health and describing him as an extraordinarily mature child serves no visible purpose in actually understanding Schleiermacher as a thinker, but it brings the

⁹⁴ See also the chapter "Haym als Interpret Dilthey's: Die unvermeidbar künstlerische Form der Biographie" in D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 43-45.

⁹⁵ Hayden White: *Metahistory*. Baltimore 2014, 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁸ Owensby: *Narrative of History*, 79.

⁹⁹ Dilthey, *LS*, 10.

narrative forward and provides dramatic, emotionally appealing moments. It also gives Schleiermacher's childhood a meaning that is defined by his later life – his success at school and his maturity anticipate his success as a thinker, his self-doubts anticipate his singularity and individuality as a critical voice of his time. The future orientation gives meaning to the temporal sequences and even anecdotal events in Schleiermacher's life.

While a modern reader equipped with White's theoretical machinery might find romantic and other forms of emplotment, Dilthey's *aim* nevertheless is to avoid writing a story. Also, given that Dilthey's works precede the rise of the contemporary narrative theory of history by more than half a century, he of course does not himself use the "narrative" as a reflective concept and does not dwell in the analysis of narrative sentences, even in his theoretical writings. However, Jacob Owensby draws attention to the importance of Dilthey's doctrine of *Besser-verstehen*, that a historian – or a biographer – understands his subject better than the subject understood himself, and that this doctrine already entails a certain narrative perspective. A historian can construct the historical story from its conclusion and interpret events as anticipating other events, as he already knows the outcomes.¹⁰⁰ What is meaningful in the subject's life is determined by the whole arc of life. In *Leben Schleiermachers* every moment of Schleiermacher's life is determined by his place in history. Even though his future as a philosopher and theologian would not have been predetermined in his childhood, in the biography his childhood and youth become meaningful in terms of their relation to Schleiermacher as a historical figure. However, despite his theoretical aim to avoid the form of a "geschlossene Kunstform", these sections in the biography indeed sometimes do sound like a *Bildungsroman* and give it a narrative and artistic structure.

Along with the chapters describing Schleiermacher's life going forward, the biography consists of chapters that only concentrate on elaborating the intellectual context and Schleiermacher's place in it. The relation between these two aspects, the narrative and contextualising¹⁰¹ is not always clear, and the reader experiences it as a sort of a gap between narrative chapters and purely explanatory chapters, where Dilthey construes and analyses Schleiermacher's thought. For example, the last two chapters of the first book, "Der kritische Standpunkt Kants als Grundlage der Untersuchungen Schleiermachers" and "Das System Kants als Gegenstand der Polemik Schleiermachers" are almost purely a theoretical overview of Kant's philosophy. While these chapters provide a sophisticated

¹⁰⁰ Owensby: *Narrative of History*, 4.

¹⁰¹ D'Albeto makes a distinction between *Erzählen* and *Überzeugen* to describe these two registers of narration in *Leben Schleiermachers*.

analysis of Kant's position in the spiritual climate of the German Enlightenment and how this manifests itself in Schleiermacher's thought during this time of his life, Dilthey fails to clearly link Kant's influence in Schleiermacher's life. This is not just a stylistic discontinuity, but an intrinsic consequence of his theoretical approach. Since Dilthey does not provide a portrait of Schleiermacher's personality or his "inner self" – in other words, he does not even try to access Schleiermacher's psyche – the relation between his thoughts and his life is doomed to stay on the surface level. As mentioned above, already Haym's criticism points out this discrepancy between the two aspects. This is of course also where Dilthey's the claim to scientific accuracy comes into play, since it leaves out the speculative psychologizing, and only deals with what can be accessed through actual sources.

For the reader, this discrepancy between narrative and contextualizing passages manifests itself as a radical shift in perspective. Dilthey elaborates different intellectual configurations and then describes Schleiermacher's life and thought without establishing the connections or causal relations between these two. Personal letters and diaries show this connection hardly ever either. Dilthey's insistence on an empirical approach – what is actually possible to verify through sources – creates a discontinuity between the description of the personal level of Schleiermacher's life and the intellectual-historical context. Sometimes this feels like reading two different narratives: the story of the German Enlightenment and the story of Schleiermacher, and those stories do not converge in a seamless manner.

3.4. Spiritual Configurations as Analytic Categories

Dilthey's historiography operates with conceptualisations of different spiritual configurations. Apart from the most complex and difficult configuration, the individual, Dilthey describes entities such as *family*, *nation* (e.g. *Deutsche Geist*), *country*, *city* (*Berliner Geist*¹⁰²), *epoch* (understood in terms of some kind of *Zeitgeist*), and *generation*. In *Leben Schleiermachers* especially the two last ones feature importantly, in his later writings especially the idea of a "cultural spirit" is central. These spiritual configurations are internally coherent units that carry some kind of intellectual, cultural, and social influences, making them experienceable to individuals. In other words, they are transmitters of the abstract spiritual reality to the lived reality. One cannot experience a single spiritual object or thing without it being transmitted by some concrete carrier of that object. For example, the "spirit of the

¹⁰² Dilthey: *LS*, 212.

Enlightenment” cannot be experienced – or even discussed – without referring to the concrete expressions of that spirit: those people, works, and institutions that manifest the ideas of the Enlightenment. Of course, these spiritual configurations, people, institutions, philosophies etc. are also what makes those spiritual entities up. Dilthey does not postulate a separate transcendent and independent world of ideal entities. For example, the Enlightenment is a reality that exists in the interaction between individuals with other individuals, as its actualisations. Breaking the “richness of life” in these abstract conceptualisations allows Dilthey to treat it as a historian: to analyse it structurally and describe it.

These spiritual configurations are static only as far as they are abstracted from reality and made into objects of study. In reality, they too are constantly developing and changing. The objective of historical understanding is thus not to determine the essence of phenomena, but to understand the process-character of the historical world and to express that. Historian’s objective is to describe the continuous unfolding and development in the historical world, while still understanding and analysing historical specificities. In the biography, Schleiermacher’s development as a thinker is integrated into always different and new outer intellectual developments.¹⁰³ Analysing these different spheres of development requires placing Schleiermacher into a certain family with a specific character, into a generation with specific ideals, and into a worldview with a historically specific content.

3.4.1. Schleiermacher’s Formative Years and the Religious Familiengeist

The first book of the first “Halbband” of *Leben Schleiermachers*, “Jugendjahre und erste Bildung 1768 — 1796”, deals with Schleiermacher’s childhood, school years, and time as a student at the University of Halle, as well as his first occupation as a private tutor, and ends with him moving to Berlin. It begins with Dilthey accounting for the history of Schleiermacher’s family, covering two generations before Friedrich Schleiermacher from his father’s side. While at first this seems like an unnecessary introductory chapter, it has an important function. It describes the *religious spirit* of the Schleiermacher family (religiöse Familiengeist) that then manifested itself in Friedrich Schleiermacher:

Einem unbestreitbaren, tatsächlichen Verhältnis gemäß, das freilich bis jetzt nicht erklärt, ja nicht einmal in seinen wahren Grenzen als empirisches Gesetz festgestellt werden kann, steigert sich in einer großen Anzahl von Fällen ein bestimmter Familiengeist mehrere Generationen

¹⁰³ D’Alberto: *Biography and Philosophy*, 64.

hindurch, bis er sich dann in einem einzelnen Individuum zu seiner klassischen Gestalt zusammenfaßt.¹⁰⁴

While Dilthey does not provide a theoretical or empirical explanation on how this *Familiengeist* transfers from one generation to the other, he shows how the Schleiermacher family history, leading up to Friedrich, is constitutive of the environment to which he was born into and in which he grew up. The history of the family sheds light on the "schwerverständliche Charakter von Schleiermachers Vater"¹⁰⁵ and, through that, on the very early formative influences in the young Friedrich Schleiermacher's life. In this way, this *Familiengeist* can be interpreted as something less transcendent and vague than it would seem at first glance. It is nothing else than the fundamental historicity of an individual, the fact that one's self is formed in a particular family-environment. This is why it is permissible and even advisable for a biographer to account for the deeds of the subject's ancestors. *Familiengeist* is thus not to be understood as a transcendent, unchanging essence of a particular family. *Geist* denotes a certain component of the spiritual-structural configuration of the historical context as a whole and in this way, *Geist* is a useful category of historical analysis. *Familiengeists* exists as a pre-given condition of Friedrich Schleiermacher's existence and defines the framework in which his spiritual development is possible.

Dilthey treats Schleiermacher's childhood and youth as the formative years of his selfhood. The influences he encountered in his youth molded the very basic attitudes of Schleiermacher's thought. For example, the pietistic spirit colored Schleiermacher's youth. His childhood, as reconstructed by Dilthey, is almost wholly defined by religion, so much so that "auch sein Gemütsleben sich zuerst vom religiösen Gefühl aus entwickelt."¹⁰⁶ The pietistic upbringing and his parents' religious convictions – his father was a Reformed Church chaplain – are seen as formative of Schleiermacher's whole personality and as the very root or basis of all his thought:

Sein ganzes künftiges Dasein steht unter der Macht der Einflüsse, die in dem Knaben teils schon lebendig waren, teils nunmehr seiner warteten. Wie unsere Erinnerung in lebhafter Vergegenwärtigung dieser frühen Zeiten unserer Entwicklung sich kaum genug tun kann, so ist auch, ohne Ausnahme bei Jugendjahre und erste Bildung nahe, in ihnen bereits in einer wunderbaren Weise die Gestalt unseres künftigen Daseins gegenwärtig. So durchleuchtet Goethes Knabenzeit überall das unbefangenste Sichregen dichterischer Phantasie, so die

¹⁰⁴ Dilthey: *LS*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

Kindheit und die Knabenjahre Schleiermachers die Macht des religiösen Gefühls. Er war — trotz jener widerstreitenden Einflüsse und Anlagen — im Frieden Gottes schon, bevor er die Unruhe der Welt kannte.¹⁰⁷

Schleiermacher's school years among the Moravian Brethren (Herrnhuter), an influential Pietistic group at Niesky, continued this religious upbringing. At school Schleiermacher also developed his lifelong interest in the Greek and Latin classics, another important influence from childhood that defined his interests in adulthood. Dilthey tells us how during his time in Niesky Schleiermacher adopted a distinctive sense of Christian piety, based on a vividly imaginative and emotional relationship with God. Here, Dilthey gets quite poetic when describing the beauty of the religious life (also an instance of the above-mentioned switch from structural analysis to poetic expression):

In dem stillen, engen, unbewegten Leben dieser Gemeinden werden die leisen Bewegungen der Seele gefühlt, in den kleinsten Ereignissen wird die Hand Gottes gespürt. Und so wird nun das Verhältnis zur unsichtbaren Welt stärker als je vorher im Christentum in dem beständigen ununterbrochenen, friedvollen Umgang mit dem Heiland als ein gegenwärtiges Glück genossen.¹⁰⁸

Dilthey further argues that exactly this kind of ideal, romantic religiosity that Schleiermacher adopts as a teenager then continues to determine his understanding of religion for the rest of his life. As such, it is also the very basis of all his theology. Schleiermacher left Niesky to attend the Moravian seminary at Barby, where he stayed from 1785 to 1787. Here, Dilthey tells us, the dogmatic narrowness of the school conflicted with the increasingly critical and scientific spirit of Schleiermacher. While these religious doubts made him turn away from the Moravian pietism and pursue a more systematic and rationalist study of theology in Halle, and this is how Schleiermacher then developed further into a critical philosopher and theologian, the religious influences from his childhood and school-years remained constitutive of his thinking. Even later, during Schleiermacher's time in Berlin when he was studying and developing his critical theological and philosophical ideas, Dilthey still describes religiosity as an essential part of his personality: "[s]eine innere Entwicklung erscheint von der theologischen Aufklärung, von Kant und andern philosophischen Denkern beherrscht, sein Dasein von der einfachen, volkstümlichen Praxis der christlichen Aufklärung ausgefüllt."¹⁰⁹ Schleiermacher's individuality is constituted by the influences

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁹ Dilthey: *LS*, 183.

he is subjected to. In line with Dilthey's psychological principle about explicating how different processes converge in the structural nexus of consciousness, all Schleiermacher's characteristics and theoretical attitudes are acquired – and clearly described as such – rather than seen as essentially part of his selfhood.

3.4.2. *Generation and Zeitgeist*

D'Alberto draws attention to Dilthey's use of the concept of *generation*,¹¹⁰ which is maybe the most interesting analytic concept in *Leben Schleiermachers*. Dilthey returned to elaborate the concept theoretically in his 1875 essay "Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat"¹¹¹, which exemplifies that for the early Dilthey the concept was an integral tool in his historical analysis. Interestingly, in "The Problem of Generations", which still considered as a programmatic text on generation studies, Karl Mannheim presents Dilthey as a thinker who for the first time systematized the use generation as a theoretical concept in the German academic discourse.¹¹² According to Mannheim, the term had already been employed by French positivists as a quantitative concept having to do with statistical explanations of the human life, but Dilthey developed the term to fit the romantic and historicist conceptions of the German historiography.¹¹³ Thus Dilthey can be seen as one of the first thinkers to use and theorize on this key sociological concept. In the 1875 essay Dilthey defines generation as:

eine Bezeichnung für ein Verhältnis der Gleichzeitigkeit von Individuen; diejenigen, welche gewissermaßen nebeneinander emporwuchsen d.h. ein gemeinsames Kindesalter hatten, ein gemeinsames Jünglingsalter, deren Zeitraum männlicher Kraft teilweise zusammenfiel,

¹¹⁰ D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 53-61. While my reading of Dilthey's use of generation is heavily influenced by her analysis, I have tried to link it more concretely to Dilthey's textual practice and concrete use in the first book of *Leben Schleiermachers*. The main difference between her analysis and mine is that generally D'Alberto's analysis emphasizes generation as a privileged analytical concept in *Leben Schleiermachers* that gives a definite structure to the raw historical material and structures the whole individual-context relation, making it intelligible. While I am sympathetic to this interpretation and it might well be that Dilthey's indeed tried to use generation as a full-blown sociological concept, my interpretation is more conservative – maybe less charitable. Only concentrating on what Dilthey actually does with the concept in *Leben Schleiermachers*, I argue that it is only one layer of his analysis – albeit the most interesting for a modern reader.

¹¹¹ Dilthey: *GS V*, 31-89. For the discussion about the concept of generation see especially pp. 36-39.

¹¹² Karl Mannheim: *The Problem of Generations*. In: Paul Kecskemeti (ed.): *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London 1952, 280. "But the whole problem of generations took on a specifically 'German' character when Dilthey tackled it. All the traditions and impulses which once inspired the romantic-historical school were revived in Dilthey's work; in Dilthey we witness the sudden re-emergence, in revised form, of problems and categories which in their original, romantic-historicist setting helped found the social and historical sciences in Germany."

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

bezeichnen wir als dieselbe Generation. Hieraus ergibt sich dann die Verknüpfung solcher Personen durch ein tieferes Verhältnis.¹¹⁴

In *Leben Schleiermachers* the use of the concept is practical and not theoretically elaborated. The second book of the first volume, “Fülle des Lebens, Die Epoche der anschaulichen Darstellung seiner Weltanschauung 1796—1802” contextualises Schleiermacher in his own generation of thinkers, placing him in his contemporary intellectual-cultural context. The book ends in Schleiermacher’s break from this generational context when his individual thinking turns critically against the intellectual consensus of his generation. In the chapter “Trennungen” Dilthey describes Schleiermacher’s disagreements and differences with his peers in Berlin.

Dilthey defines the different periods in Schleiermacher’s life in terms of his relations to other generations and to his contemporaries.¹¹⁵ As mentioned above, even the death of Schleiermacher’s father – who nonetheless is in the first book described as an important figure in his life – does not have any kind of transformative effect in Schleiermacher’s life. The progression of his life-story is told not through life-events, but development happens when he enters new intellectual milieus, interacts with new friends and acquaintances, or is demonstrably influenced by different thinkers when he goes to school or university. Dilthey does a lot of “namedropping”, introducing a multitude of different intellectuals and their thought without necessarily elaborating on their direct connection to Schleiermacher. Because we simply cannot know the causal relations about who influenced Schleiermacher and how, the biographer is limited to listing the thinkers that might have influenced him in order to try to understand the possible connections: “in zeitlicher Folge die Männer nennen, die sicher auf ihn eingewirkt haben, Schleiermacher’s inneres verhältnis zu ihnen zu erfassen suchen.”¹¹⁶ This again exemplifies how Dilthey’s emphasis it is not primarily to tell Schleiermacher’s story but to describe the *structural framework* (Strukturzusammenhang) that enables the reader to understand the intellectual milieu where Schleiermacher lived and through that to understand his thought. In *Leben Schleiermachers* the individual story merges with the story of his generation, whereby Dilthey tries to determine the historical significance of them both.

Dilthey painstakingly reconstructs the intellectual context in Berlin – young Schleiermacher’s new “geistige Heimat”.¹¹⁷ This intellectual-social-cultural milieu is reconstructed mainly through the use

¹¹⁴ Dilthey: *GS V*, 36.

¹¹⁵ D’Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 53.

¹¹⁶ Dilthey: *LS*, 382.

¹¹⁷ Dilthey, *LS*, 183.

of the generation-concept, which proves to be a useful analytic category. It makes possible to merge the analysis of different individuals with the analysis of a collective intellectual *Zeitgeist* and its development. As defined in the quote above, a generation is a group of people roughly the same age, who live their childhood and youth and become men at the same time. Schleiermacher thus belonged to the same generation as the Schlegel brothers, Alexander von Humboldt, Hegel, Novalis, Wackenroder, Tieck, Fries, and Schelling.¹¹⁸ A generation can be understood as a sphere between the individual and the spiritual structural whole, an interface between large-scale intellectual phenomena and individual thinking. A generation, as a collective, is constituted by its separate individual members, but those members are also constituted by the generation. It becomes a characteristic of a historical moment that, along with other structural conditions, decides the limits of historical possibilities.¹¹⁹ It shapes the possibilities of an individual's intellectual development. Schleiermacher's generational context – the intellectual milieu in Berlin – is a context that on the one hand enabled his thought to develop but also limited and directed this development.

A generation is also capable of creating new ideas, even though the root of this collective creativity is still the individual. Dilthey describes how Schleiermacher's generation inherited an intellectual milieu from Kant, Goethe, and Herder. His generation developed the inherited philosophical ideas further and to a different direction, and consequently, shaped the intellectual milieu for the following generation.¹²⁰ Because every generation inherits their intellectual legacy from the previous one, to fully understand Schleiermacher it is not enough to understand his own generation. The biographer also has to understand the previous one, as well as the influences he had on the following one. Concretely, this helps Dilthey to describe the multitude of intellectual currents that made up the intellectual milieu in which Schleiermacher existed.

D'Albarto argues that generation makes up the *objective* against which the individual can be placed and described.¹²¹ The concept indeed allows the historian to deal with complex intellectual phenomena, such as romanticism and the Enlightenment, in a more concrete manner. However, departing from D'Albarto's view slightly, I argue that in *Leben Schleiermachers* generation functions first and foremost as a structuring principle that allows Dilthey to describe the intellectual currents

¹¹⁸ D'Albarto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 54-55.

¹¹⁹ "...[D]emzufolge zeigt jede Generation Ähnlichkeiten hinsichtlich der Physionomie und auch des Charakters. Die Generationsbegriff artikuliert sich für Dilthey in einer Struktur, die verschiedene Momente der historischen forschung Charakterisiert und die Grenzen und Möglichkeiten der historischen Phänomene bestimmen kann." Ibid., 56.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 55.

¹²¹ Ibid., 56.

existing in a given historical milieu at a given time. Generations are conceived primarily as intellectual configurations, and thus as a concept, it remains somewhat elusive. Generation is not so much a concrete historical fact one can attach the individual into, but rather a collection of individuals that happen to exist under the same intellectual influences and thus shed light on each other. For the early Dilthey, the historical individual is the only “reality of history”, collectives and structures are all abstractions.¹²² I will argue in the next two chapters that Dilthey later revised this view and came to think that the historical world does indeed include categories and structures that transcend individual existence and that can be analysed by the human sciences. In *Leben Schleiermachers* however, generation and all other collective entities are understood as less real than individuals – as artificial-theoretical concepts, not as real building blocks of historical reality.¹²³

As argued above, in *Leben Schleiermachers* Kant is construed as the very backbone of the German Enlightenment and generally a grand figure that shadowed the whole intellectual milieu in which Schleiermacher existed and thought. This is why, as mentioned above, Dilthey dedicates a considerable number of pages to analysing Kant’s philosophy – understanding that is the key to understanding Schleiermacher. Kant’s system is conceived as a necessary precondition for Schleiermacher’s own system of thought, even though Schleiermacher later became a critic of Kant:

[a]us dem Entwickelten folgt, wie völlig unverständlich dieses Leben und seine große Aufgabe bleiben würden ohne eine ganz klare Einsicht in die Ideen Kants, deren Summe Schleiermacher zu jeder Zeit im ganzen voraussetzte, obwohl er zu manchen Zeiten von der philosophischen Strömung weit über sie weggerissen war, und dann in die Gedanken Kants, gegen deren Zusammenhang Schleiermachers Streben von vornherein polemisch gerichtet war, obwohl auch in ihnen viele Keime seines eigenen Denkens gelegen hatten.¹²⁴

However, as mentioned above, Kant is not an influence only for Schleiermacher, but his figure defines the whole intellectual agenda of Schleiermacher’s generation, they are all writing and thinking in relation to his philosophy, especially his epistemology.¹²⁵ In addition to Kant, they are also defined

¹²² Dilthey: *SW I*, 78-79.

¹²³ See e.g. Ibid. 85. “[O]nly the historian who, so to speak, *builds history from these life-units*, who seeks, through the concepts of type and representation, to interpret social classes, associations, and historical periods, and who *links together individual lives through the concept of generations*, only he will be able to apprehend the reality of a historical whole in contrast to the lifeless abstractions which are usually drawn from the archives.” My italics.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹²⁵ Dilthey’s remarks about Kant and epistemology, and his characterization of Schleiermacher’s critical thought resonate strongly with Dilthey’s own work. He saw his own theoretical project as the continuation of Kant’s philosophical project and fashioned his own theory of epistemology of history as the critique of historical reason. This also becomes clear in some passages of *Leben Schleiermachers*: “Kant war für seine weltgeschichtliche Aufgabe einer

by the previous generation romantic poets. “Zwei geistige Mächte haben die Generation, zu der Schleiermacher gehört, ganz gleichmäßig, welche Einflüsse auch sonst bei einzelnen hinzutraten, bestimmt: die Philosophie Kants und unsere großen Dichter.”¹²⁶ These influences are also described as a manifestation of a larger spiritual nexus transcending the generational context. For Dilthey, generation is thus not synonymous with general historical milieu. The latter, *Zeitgeist*, allows new kind of worldviews, ideals and scientific methods to emerge:

So Vielfaches brachte der anschwellende Strom unserer großen dichterischen Epoche: neue Ideale des Lebens, eine neue Weltansicht, Methoden sogar der wissenschaftlichen Forschung. Zunächst stellt sich uns die merkwürdige Gärung in den moralischen und gesellschaftlichen Zuständen und Anschauungen dar, wie sie aus den neuen Idealen des Lebens entsprang.¹²⁷

Trying to make sense of the different layers of spiritual configurations *Leben Schleiermachers*, one can separate three distinct spheres of intellectual development that Dilthey describes. However, those three spheres are closely intertwined and can only be treated separately for analytic purposes. The layers are *individual thought*, *generation*, and the general *Zeitgeist* of the time. In addition to this, a historian can describe different philosophies or literary influences, but these actually exist in one or more of the different spheres mentioned. For example, Kant’s philosophy was an expression of individual thought, but also – given how influential it was – an epoch-defining spiritual influence, that defined the preconditions for the worldview of the German Enlightenment. However, in the actual text of *Leben Schleiermachers*, Dilthey faces a problem: how is it possible to clearly articulate the actual differences between generation, *Zeitgeist* and the creative power of an individual, and how to concretely articulate how these spheres are connected. The crisscrossing intellectual influences rarely form verifiable causal cause-effect relations between different theories, ideas and thoughts, so Dilthey can only elaborate on the similarities and possible connections.

3.4.3. Individuation

Kritik der menschlichen Erkenntnis in einer einzigen Weise organisiert gewesen. Heute, nach den Arbeiten eines Jahrhunderts voll von philosophischer Gärung und Untersuchung, sehen wir durch die bedeutenden Versuche seiner Nachfolger diese Seite seines Systems auf die mannigfachste Weise beleuchtet, verdeutlicht, ja umgestaltet und fortgeführt; aber die Grundlinien an keinem Punkte ausgelöscht.” (Ibid., 92) In this way, Dilthey, at least implicitly, puts himself and his intellectual efforts in the historical continuum of post-Kantian philosophy.

¹²⁶ Dilthey: *LS*, 183.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 207.

One of the recurring themes of the biography is Schleiermacher going against the surrounding intellectual environment, or more precisely, Schleiermacher thinking critically i.e. independently. First time this is discussed in the third chapter of the first book, titled “Religiöse Befreiung”. The chapter describes Schleiermachers theological doubts, his disappointment with pietistic Moravian theology, and consequent decision to leave the Moravian school and take up more systematic theology studies at the University of Halle. Dilthey dedicates many pages to discussing how this decision and Schleiermacher’s religious doubts caused between a schism between him and his father. This disagreement is not only about Schleiermacher’s development as a thinker, but on a greater level it stands for a breach from the childhood home and transitioning from one intellectual milieu to another one – from the pietistic “virtuousness” (Frömmigkeit) to the rationalist and systematic academic world, from the childhood home to his own generation of thinkers. An illustrative section is in the sub-chapter “Die moralisch-religiöse Weltansicht der deutschen Aufklärung und Schleiermachers Stellung innerhalb derselben in dieser Epoche”:

Denn hier ist der historische Hintergrund für die Gestalt Schleiermachers; inmitten dieser deutschen Aufklärung sehen wir ihn in dieser seiner ersten Epoche sehr ehrlich und scharfsinnig bemüht, für seine geistige Eigenart Raum und Entwicklung zu suchen, ehrlich bis zu gelegentlicher Selbstanklage wegen der für einen einfachen Rationalisten unerhörten Ausschreitungen seiner wissenschaftlichen Phantasie; und zugleich sehen wir doch schon, ihm selber zum Trotz, diese Eigenart sich zu Gefühlen, Anschauungen und Ideen unwiderstehlich gestalten, vermöge deren er dann später eins der Häupter der gegen diese Aufklärung gerichteten Bewegung werden sollte.¹²⁸

In the chapter, Schleiermacher is first contextualised in the historical milieu of the German Enlightenment. Like in the more concrete and detailed case of Kant’s philosophy, also the larger-scale milieu of the German Enlightenment is a framework in which Schleiermacher’s individuality can form itself and ultimately critically turn against. This is the most significant breach in *Leben Schleiermachers*, and comes at the end of the second book, which is also the end of the first *Halbband*. Again, Schleiermacher’s generation exists in the mutual and shared milieu of the German Enlightenment. Schleiermacher turns against both his generation and the ideals of the German Enlightenment. Schleiermacher’s criticism towards these two spheres and his alienation from them happens separately. As I tried to articulate above, they are two different levels of Schleiermacher’s intellectual context. In the case of the generational context, Dilthey describes how Schleiermacher –

¹²⁸ Ibid., 83.

at the end of his years in Berlin – begins to think individually and to distance himself from his peers. In other sections, like in the quote above, Dilthey talks about Schleiermacher's more general criticism towards the Enlightenment – his doubts, feelings, and ideas that clash with the ideals of the Enlightenment and slowly turn him against it.

These moments of breaking away from the cultural context mark Schleiermacher's emergence as an individual. Critical thinking is how Schleiermacher's individuality individuates itself from its surroundings, where his *creative spirit* (schöpferische Geist) shows itself. Because of this ability, he is not a mere configuration of different intellectual currents, but a force capable of creating something new – this again reveals Dilthey's romantic conception of individuality. The last chapters of *Leben Schleiermachers* describe how Schleiermacher is different from the circle of Berlin intellectuals. He developed a new worldview (Weltansicht), thus managing to create something fresh and new – a new spiritual configuration that is not fully reducible to the influences surrounding him. This model of individual-milieu relation is however not free from the same problems discussed above in relation between narration and contextualisation – unsurprisingly, as they have the same root problem. Dilthey does not provide a clear explanation of how exactly this critical thinking comes about – how it is possible for an individual to have thoughts that are not simply reducible to something already existing. When and how the moment comes when an individual transcends the limitations of his context and stops being a mere convergence point of different ideas and influences?

In the essay 1895/96 essay “[On Comparative Psychology] Contributions to the Study of Individuality” Dilthey approaches the problem of individuation by referring to his descriptive psychological model. The questions the essay deals with were partly prompted by the theoretical problems he encountered while writing *Leben Schleiermachers*. In this descriptive psychological model, individuality is explained as an acquired nexus of cultural and intellectual influences. In the essay Dilthey claims that although we are indeed products of our socio-historical-cultural context, we are not totally determined by it. The context in which we live in continuously shapes our acquired nexus of psychic life. This happens gradually through experiences. These experiences, the way in which we interact with the spiritual totality surrounding us, differ from individual to individual. Thus, the originality and uniqueness of an individual – the fact that not everyone is and thinks the same – is because this acquired nexus is always different from person to person. The acquisition of different ideas always happens through unique individual experiences. This latter aspect of this theory does however not manifest clearly in the Schleiermacher-biography, it does not come across how this process of individuation actually happens. And since the whole second book of *Leben*

Schleiermachers deals with this topic, this inexplicability of the individual's creative force is theoretically problematic. Again, this is a natural consequence of Dilthey's theoretical commitments, which do not allow psychologizing or actually explicating the uniqueness of a person's experiences by relating them to life-events. Dilthey manages to show the reader a portrait of an individual as the point of converging influences, but not so much a theoretically grounded picture of Schleiermacher as a unique individual. Furthermore, he manages to show the novelty of Schleiermacher's thought, but not how his new ideas emerge and in what way his critical thinking is related to his life-events – what actually makes him think critically.

Of course, a casual reader of *Leben Schleiermachers* who is just interested in Schleiermacher's thought and life does not experience the lack of theoretical background of individuality as a great problem. However, one of my interests in this thesis is to analyse the possible shortcomings of Dilthey's epistemological foundation. Of course, *Leben Schleiermachers* manages to convince the reader that Schleiermacher's thought was genuinely new, even without theoretically explaining the origin of this newness. A reader of a historical biography might intuitively understand the concept of critical thinking without a comprehensive philosophical analysis and can understand the causal relations between large-scale spiritual influences and individual thought. My point is that Dilthey's empirical historiography is not sufficient to theoretically ground those causal relations. This understanding, interpreting the connections between different thoughts correctly, has to be based on something else than strict adherence to sources – in short, he needs a more flexible interpretative machinery. Dilthey indeed tries to answer these questions later in his theoretical writings, first with descriptive psychology and later with hermeneutics. It is easy to see how the difficulties he faced when writing *Leben Schleiermachers* thus translated into his theoretical considerations.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed Dilthey's methodological and theoretical paradigms in *Leben Schleiermachers*, and how those commitments manifest in the actual textual practice of the book. I have tried to demonstrate that Dilthey's aim was to create a new model of scientific biography for intellectual history, and he did this by distancing himself from several conventions and traditions of the genre. The scientific nature of biography for him meant a commitment to empirical historiography, as well as abandoning the traditional artistic-literary narrative form which presented the subject as the protagonist of an emplotted life-story. Concretely, these commitments mean that the biographer describes the subject primarily through contextualisation: he describes the intellectual

influences surrounding the subject through the spiritual configurations the subject co-constitutes with other individuals. However, Dilthey's ultimately romantic conception of individuality as the creative force that brings about historical change is in tension with this contextualising approach. If the subject can only ever be attainable for the biographer as a nexus of influences that can be analysed and described but this deeper level of individuality always stays as a mystic life force that cannot be accounted for, Dilthey's theoretical framework seems somewhat unsatisfactory.

It is important to remember that the first *Halbband* of *Leben Schleiermachers* was written at an early stage of Dilthey's career. It raised and concretized many of the epistemological questions he later dealt with in his theoretical texts. In the next chapter, I claim that these considerations led him to widen his theoretical and narrative machinery in order to better account for the individual's active role in history. These changes, however, do not imply a radical shift: *Leben Schleiermachers* already manifests many of Dilthey's central philosophical and theoretical views and thus gives a unique perspective on his development both as a historian as well as a philosopher.

4. Individuals, Structures and Institutions – *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes* widening the Scope of Historical Analysis

Comparing *Leben Schleiermachers* and Dilthey's later historiography, in general, there are more continuities and similarities than differences in his style and approach. However, all thinkers evolve and change over time. Given the time between the publication of the first part of the Schleiermacher-biography in the 1870's and the later texts on German history in the first decade of the 20th century, it would be peculiar if there were no differences at all as to Dilthey's theoretical framework and style. In addition, Dilthey's theoretical thought demonstrably developed during this time. The most famous development is the alleged shift from descriptive psychology to his mature hermeneutic theory at the turn of the century. However, as already briefly discussed in the previous chapter, all Dilthey's historiography can be interpreted to include themes from both his psychological and hermeneutic framework or can be read and understood without any knowledge of those background theories. There is no direct correspondence between his theory and his practice as a historian, even though it is clear that Dilthey was very aware of the methodological and philosophical assumptions behind his historiography.

In this chapter, I argue that Dilthey developed his theoretical and methodological grounding from *Leben Schleiermachers* slightly, although this change is not as much a methodological shift than just

adopting a more nuanced and wide-reaching perspective on studying history. The later Dilthey goes to a more life-philosophical direction, emphasising the lively unity of the human world as the subject of history – as opposed to his more dualist portrayal of the individual-context relation in *Leben Schleiermachers*. In other words, Dilthey goes from treating the historical-cultural context as a shapeless sea of intellectual influences to a more structural, concrete analysis of the human world. My argument is supported by Dilthey's letter to von Wartenburg from 1897. In the letter Dilthey writes that he wrote the Schleiermacher-book in a state of confusion, "in einer Art Dämmerung", and now – as he is older – knows better the greater currents of ideas which have shaped the historical world: "[d]agegen erkenne ich jetzt im hohen Lebensalter sehr viel besser die großen Linien der geschichtlichen Denkmöglichkeit, unter denen ein Mensch gelebt habe".¹²⁹ While the differences between Dilthey's early and later historiography are slight, he did indeed improve his theoretical framework and his way of writing history after dealing with the problems he encountered when writing *Leben Schleiermachers* in his theoretical writings.

During the last ten years of his life, Dilthey worked on an extensive *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes*, a collection of short studies on different themes of the German intellectual history of the 17th and 18th centuries. He had planned to publish a monograph about the history of the German spirit that would cover the era from Leibniz to Schleiermacher,¹³⁰ but never completed a coherent manuscript for this book. He worked sporadically on different themes and, like so many of his projects, also this remained fragmentary. The surviving texts cover a range of topics from Prussian *Allgemeines Landrecht* to the life of young Hegel, as well as the history of the Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and German literature. Dilthey thus continued with the same and closely related themes he had already dealt with in *Leben Schleiermachers*. Continuing with a biographical approach, he also wrote several shorter texts on important thinkers of the German Enlightenment. However, he also broadened the scope of his historical analysis. In the later texts, he dedicates more attention to the histories of institutions and collectives and ascribes them more clearly an independent historical existence. The cultural, historical, and political expressions of collective life are treated as independent units of history and as carriers of historical meanings. The historical context of an individual historical subject is not determined (only) by somewhat shapeless intellectual currents, like

¹²⁹ Dilthey; von Wartenburg: *Briefwechsel*, 241.

¹³⁰ Paul Ritter: "Introduction". In: Wilhelm Dilthey: *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes. Gesammelte Schriften III*, Darmstadt 1959, X. Hereafter abbreviated GS III.

was the case in *Leben Schleiermachers*.¹³¹ Now Dilthey manages to concretise these currents better and *show* the relations between individuals and different spiritual configurations. Intellectual currents are more tangibly manifested in institutions and collective experiences, which makes the individual's place in the historical reality better defined. While Dilthey's interest is still mostly in intellectual history, he still goes to adopt a more structural approach on the human social reality.

If in *Leben Schleiermachers* the relationship between generation and individual is the most important layer of analysis, now central are three layers of independent spiritual configurations: *the Enlightenment*, *cultural spirit* (Geist), and *institutions*. However, individual people still remain important and are still presented as the locus of historical change. Even when dealing with large-scale themes like in “Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die Geschichtliche Welt” or when discussing institutions, like the history of Prussian Civil Code, Dilthey still tells the history through individuals – they are the ones acting and thinking. However, Dilthey manages to avoid some of the theoretical problems of his early approach. He manages to describe the active engagement of individuals with their environment in more concrete and pluralistic terms. He carves out their position in the nexus of the available *Denkmöglichkeiten* in relation to collectives and institutions. Because of this more multifaceted analysis, the active role of individuals and their personal engagement with their context is better articulated. They emerge as subjects rather than as mere intersections of intellectual currents. I demonstrate this especially in the next subchapter when discussing Dilthey's short biography of Frederick the Great.

Because of the limited scope of this master thesis, I will only discuss three of Dilthey's later texts. These represent different perspectives on Dilthey's work as a historian, but also form a coherent whole as they all deal with the 18th century and with the German Enlightenment in some form. In order to analyse Dilthey's practice of historical writing in detail, I concentrate on selected texts and analyse those attentively and again substantiate my arguments through examples. I have opted to leave out his biography on young Hegel, even though it is arguably the best-known historical work from Dilthey's later period. This is because *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels* and especially its relation to *Leben Schleiermachers* has already been thoroughly discussed by Francesca D'Alberto, and I doubt I would have much new to contribute to that discussion within the limitations of this thesis. In addition, I want to concentrate on other than biographical and philosophical themes in Dilthey's

¹³¹ By making this claim I am, of course, somewhat simplifying *Leben Schleiermachers* – as we have seen Dilthey does describe institutions and collective identities in the Schleiermacher-biography – he just does not ascribe them as much importance.

historiography. Also, by choosing to concentrate on these less-known works, which the Dilthey-research until now has largely overlooked, I also hope to gain a fresh perspective on his historiography. The only paper (that I am aware of) dealing directly with Dilthey's later historical works is Gerhard Masur's "Wilhelm Dilthey and the History of Ideas" from 1952.

In all the selected texts, Dilthey sees the past through the prism of the German Enlightenment and romanticism and emphasizes the influence of Protestant Christianity as well as Kant's transcendental philosophy in the German intellectual history. Thematically the texts thus correspond closely to *Leben Schleiermachers*, which makes comparisons between early and later Dilthey easier. All of the texts are from Dilthey's last 11 years: "Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung" was first published in *Deutsche Rundschau* in 1901, "Das Allgemeine Landrecht" – a short study on the history of the Prussian law reforms under Frederick the Great – published posthumously¹³², and "Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die Geschichtliche Welt" also published in *Deutsche Rundschau* in 1901. "Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung" is, like the title already suggests, a short biography of Frederick the Great and his relation to the history of the German Enlightenment. Through this text, I briefly draw attention to the continuities and discontinuities in Dilthey's biographical writing. I also analyse the central concept of "the German spirit", one of the most important analytic categories in late Dilthey, as well as his conception of the Enlightenment. I then discuss his treatment of institutional and legal history with regard to his lengthy description of the history of the Prussian Academy and continue with the same theme also in the following sub-chapter on "Das Allgemeine Landrecht". "Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die Geschichtliche Welt" in turn is a study on the history of philosophy and history of historiography in the 18th century. The actual subject matter of this text is the evolution of historical thinking, an ideal and abstract phenomenon, and thus it provides yet another perspective on Dilthey's historiography. I draw attention to Dilthey's view of historical progress, as well as his relativistic attitude towards the history of philosophy. The overall aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the stylistic, thematic, methodological, and thematical continuities and discontinuities between Dilthey's early and later historical writings. Even though I analyse different aspects of Dilthey's thought through different texts, the central argument emerging from different layers of the analysis is that his interest shifted from individuals to structures.

¹³² Most of Dilthey's later texts published in his collected works are fragmentary and heavily edited by Dilthey's student Paul Ritter. While Ritter reassures the reader in his introduction (Dilthey: *GS III*, X.) that he has not added or changed anything content-related, the publication history is of course still something one has to keep in mind when assessing the texts as Dilthey's philosophy. I will nevertheless assume that the works indeed can be treated as Dilthey's own historiography, and thus it makes sense to include them as part of my research.

He abandons the idea of the individual as the primary perspective on the historical reality and starts to regard the structural configuration of the historical world as at least equally important.

4.1. The Individual and the Spirit – “Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung”

Even though “Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung” is much shorter than *Leben Schleiermachers*, it makes sense to describe similarities, parallels, and differences between the two biographies. The very basic understanding of the individual-context relation remains unchanged – only the methods of crafting the historical narrative change. Like in *Leben Schleiermachers*, in “Friedrich der Große” Dilthey constructs a reciprocal relationship between the subject and the milieu, in which both reflect each other but are not reducible to each other. The historical subject is both created by and a creator of the historical spiritual milieu he inhabits. This means that Frederick is at the same time both an active participant in the realization of the project of the Enlightenment, but his reign and his era as a whole are also a manifestation of the spirit of the German Enlightenment. Even though the description of the historical-cultural context is much more exhaustive in *Leben Schleiermachers*, the basic theoretical principles are thus to a great extent very similar. Both texts try to describe the interaction between the subject and his context, as well as the connectedness of large-scale historical phenomena to individual thinking.

Like *Leben Schleiermachers*, “Friedrich der Große” can also be described as an intellectual biography. The historical situation in Prussia is seen entirely through Frederick and several intellectuals, writers, philosophers, and scientists. The focus is in the history of culture and ideas, not in political or economic history. Dilthey treats Frederick less as a political-historical figure and more as a thinker and an intellectual. His aim is to understand Frederick’s spirit, his thoughts, and his inner world. Again, by understanding Frederick’s inner world and development as a thinker, we can understand the surrounding historical reality – even when his personal ideals are sometimes at odds with the ideals of the German Enlightenment. Dilthey dedicates many pages for carefully analysing Frederick’s philosophical writings and letters, such as his criticism of materialism, and explicating his other theological and metaphysical beliefs. Dilthey’s honest attempt thus is to understand Frederick as an individual thinker, not only as a historical figure. He also places Frederick among other great and popular writers of his time,¹³³ and genuinely appreciates him as an intellectual. For

¹³³ Dilthey: *GS III*, 171.

Dilthey, Frederick's historical significance is constituted through his contributions to intellectual history.

However, in addition to this biographical research interest of understanding Frederick the Great as a thinker, the central aim is to understand Frederick the Great *particularly* in relation to the German Enlightenment and his active role in it. In *Leben Schleiermachers* the aim had been to unravel the process of Schleiermacher's individuation from the historical context and to understand the historical significance of his thought. In "Friedrich der Große" the main focus is understanding and describing a particular historical phenomenon, namely the German Enlightenment, and Frederick's intellectual and practical contribution to it.

4.1.1. Narrativity, Individuality, Experience

The biography begins with an emotional, dramatic description of Frederick's first moments as the king of Prussia, as he is traveling to the capital "his soul filled with the last discussions with his king" in his deathbed "at the moment of his heroic end"¹³⁴. The young king feels the great expectations placed on his shoulders by his people, who expect him to be a reformer and to start something new. Other examples of this kind of emotional, first-person perspective are when, during the Seven Year War, Dilthey describes how Frederick loses his friends (generals) in the war, the mother whose love "had been the only warming ray of light in his youth", and sister "who had always understood him"¹³⁵. Dilthey's style here is both a parallel and a contrast to the narrative choices in *Leben Schleiermachers*. As discussed in the previous chapter, despite Dilthey's anti-psychologizing theoretical framework, the Schleiermacher-biography does use some conventional forms of storytelling. These kinds of dramatic, almost poetic narrative choices are not fully absent in early Dilthey. However, the storytelling aspect – a compassionate telling of the king's life – is more pronounced in the case of Frederick the Great.¹³⁶ While in *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey does more justice to Schleiermacher's times than the man himself¹³⁷, in this text Frederick the Great emerges more as an active participant of history than as a configuration of ideas. This is partly because Dilthey after all in his later years adopted a more narrative and literary style of writing, maybe now bringing his historiography closer to "geschlossene Kunstform".

¹³⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 128-29.

¹³⁶ This is also true of the *Jugendgeschichte Hegels*, where Dilthey also avoids the problems of the Schleiermacher-biography by concentrating more exclusively on the protagonist. See e.g. Gerhard Masur: "Wilhelm Dilthey and the History of Ideas", In: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 13/1, 1952, 104.

¹³⁷ Masur: "Dilthey and the History of Ideas", 104.

Of course, Dilthey's writing style is still mostly very matter-of-factly and straightforward, and the contextualisation of the subject is still the main focus. However, because of the more narrative form, Frederick's psychological development is not completely swallowed by contextualisation. The narrative is built more around concrete events that concretely reveal Frederick's relation to the German Enlightenment. His inner world is not solely determined by the dominant views of the time, but his thoughts exist and develop in contact with the surrounding world. D'Alberto describes Dilthey's new biographical model in the Hegel-biography:

das anschaulichste Beispiel dieses biographischen Modells ist die Auslegung der Beziehungen zwischen Hegel und der Aufklärung. Dieses Verhältnis wird von Dilthey nicht als ein spekulatives oder kulturelles Phänomen angesehen, sondern als eine Erfahrung, die in einer Reihe von »Tatsachen« zum Ausdruck kommt.¹³⁸

The same is true for "Friedrich der Große", Dilthey anchors the narrative more in historical facts than in non-tangible intellectual influences and describes how those facts converge in Frederick's experience. The aim is less the contextualisation of the subject to the totality of the historical-cultural milieu, and more the description of concrete experiences and personal attitudes, as well as the people, institutions, and ideas that are actually present in Frederick's life. According to D'Alberto, this is true also for the Hegel biography which "[betrachtet] primär den Zusammenhang der Erlebnisse, in welchen die historische Dimension auf die persönliche reduziert ist."¹³⁹ As argued above, Dilthey is thus able to establish the connection between the individual and the universal in a more concrete manner than in the Schleiermacher-biography.

As mentioned above, Dilthey's perspective on history is now also more multi-faceted than in *Leben Schleiermachers*. On the other hand, it is also less universal. He now divides the historical world into separate dimensions and describes and interprets those separately. In other words, he analyses different levels of historical manifestations and reconstructs them as independent phenomena which are structurally centred in themselves. Dilthey describes Frederick's personal relations and friendships, and how those influenced his decisions i.e. whom he appoints in positions of power. At the beginning of his reign, he, for instance, appoints only people with French education because of his personal preference of French culture over the German one. He describes the institutional

¹³⁸ D'Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 133.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 134.

dimensions of the German Enlightenment in a lengthy segment about the Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences, cultural dimensions by analysing the themes and conventions of literature and poetry, and the larger-scale worldview of the era by describing the works of several philosophers. The end result is less about objective correspondence to sources,¹⁴⁰ and more about a hermeneutic analysis of different aspects of reality.¹⁴¹

4.1.2. French and German Spirit and the Enlightenment

The concept of “cultural spirit” becomes central in Dilthey’s later historical writings – unsurprisingly, as the whole project is about the great intellectual movements in the history of the German spirit.¹⁴² Spirit here denotes a kind of spiritual configuration, or nexus, in the same sense as described in the previous chapter – not a metaphysical *Volksseele* or even a national identity. Again, *Geist* is first and foremost an analytic concept and a tool for historical analysis. However, consistent with my overall argument, I claim that it is now defined and used in a more concrete manner than in *Leben Schleiermachers*. Of all three texts discussed in this chapter, the concept of cultural spirit features most frequently and is best elaborated in “Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung”. Dilthey describes the tensions between the French and German spirits (Französische/Deutsche Geist) in Frederick’s life, and generally in the German Enlightenment.

Before describing how Dilthey deals with the French and German spirits in the text in practice, it makes sense to define their core ideals and differences. According to him, there are two outlets through which the cultural spirit can manifest itself: through art and through societal and political realities i.e. the hierarchical structure of society. Dilthey discusses both the French and the German spirit in relation to both of these spheres, creating a comprehensive theory on how they constitute national cultures. He defines the French spirit as rational, progress-oriented and classical, but absolutist in its ideals as to the organisation of state power. It is also secular and practical, defined by

¹⁴⁰ Dilthey does not directly or indirectly indicate his sources in any of the texts I analyse in this chapter. It is thus not for the reader possible to trace the argumentation – something that was important for Dilthey in *Leben Schleiermachers*. While Dilthey’s use of quotations in *Leben Schleiermachers* might not be up to today’s standards, there he does try to make his use of sources as transparent as possible and also marks secondary sources he uses in the footnotes. This might, of course, have to do more with the citing-conventions of the *Deutsche Rundschau*, but is nevertheless an interesting difference between the two texts.

¹⁴¹ See also D’Alberto: *Biographie und Philosophie*, 140. “In der Verbindung zwischen Biographen, in der Biographie Beschriebenen und objektiven Geist verabschiedet Dilthey sich von der Bestrebung, eine objektive Geschichte zu schreiben. Er trennt die verschiedenen Dimensionen der historiographischen Rekonstruktion.”

¹⁴² Masur uses the term “German Mind” while the later Dilthey-translations use the word “German spirit”. I opted for the latter, as I think it adequately enough conveys the same meaning as “Deutsche Geist”, even though the word “mind” might better convey one aspect of the concept: the word “mind” implies an essential connectedness to the thinking subject.

“Diesseitigkeit des Daseins” rather than occupation with transcendental ideals. The German spirit, in turn, artistically has more emotional depth. Rather than the ancient classical ideals of beauty, it seeks to express the totality of human life in all its forms. Goethe, describing the extremes of human emotion, is the prime example of this attitude. Dilthey traces the societal realities of the German spirit back to Protestantism, especially Luther. In a short fragment from *Drafts for a Critique* Dilthey briefly describes the German spirit¹⁴³:

- I. Politically, [the German spirit] is connected with the Middle Ages through Luther. Duties of office, calling, and occupational hierarchies in the city and the country...compare with Frederick the Great and contrast with France and Italy with their Roman notion of governance: the polis and the dominant citizens as a governing body.
2. Especially in Protestant Germany there developed a consciousness of calling, obligation, and objective mission. Every official, whether working for an industrial enterprise or for the railways carried out an objectively defined duty. This was the beginning of administrative hierarchy. The cities also fit into this system. Herein resides the true power of the German spirit. Here too Luther is a carrier of tradition.¹⁴⁴

In Dilthey’s view, the German spirit results in a hierarchically organised but lateral political system, where different communities – or occupational categories – define the place of their members in the society. In contrast, the ideal of the French system a top-down absolutist monarchy. As becomes apparent from the quote above, for Dilthey the societal organizational system is also closely related to the idea of personal duty and obligation. The German system advocates a feeling of duty to fulfil one’s place in the society and to do the work one is assigned to do. Dilthey thus argues that discipline and hard work are a result of a person’s subscription to Protestant values and that this kind of consciousness is at the very core of the German spirit. He also explicitly asserts that “the formation of our [German] spiritual life today leads back to Lutheranism”¹⁴⁵, again construing the Protestant faith as the very core force of the German historical development. Max Weber famously used the theory of the Protestant work ethic in his 1904-1905 work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*), thus writing the book roughly at the same time Dilthey wrote *Drafts for Historical Reason*. The existence or direction of a direct influence between the two thinkers is not a central question here, but the connection between them is

¹⁴³ The section is just five short paragraphs long and very fragmentary. It, however, is so directly parallel to Dilthey’s discussion on the German spirit in “Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung”, and sheds light to the concept, so it makes sense to include it here.

¹⁴⁴ Dilthey: *SW III*, 305.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

nevertheless interesting. Often Dilthey is treated rather as a somewhat obscure predecessor and preliminary of Weber and other sociologists, but – like Hans Bakker argues in his paper “Wilhelm Dilthey: Classical Sociological Theorist” – Dilthey should also be seen as a sociological theorist in his own right.¹⁴⁶ His historiography also benefits from this nuanced sociological understanding, as he is able to construct convincing accounts of spiritual totalities – such as the German spirit and how they manifest in different spheres of the human world from politics to state-organisation, as well as in philosophy, literature, and more general *Zeitgeist*.

Dilthey presents the German Enlightenment on the one hand as a conscious effort of Frederick the Great and his bureaucratic machinery and on the other as a naturally emerging cultural force. To some extent the Enlightenment values are thus construed as an import from outside the country, an external force that redefined Germany, but also as something that had to adapt to the German political-cultural milieu. The core principles of the Enlightenment were the same everywhere: “Die Grundzüge der Aufklärung sind überall dieselben: die Autonomie der Vernunft, die Solidarität der intellektuellen Kultur, die Zuversicht ihres unaufhaltsamen Vorwärtsschreitens und die Aristokratie des Geistes.”¹⁴⁷ “Aber wie verschieden mußte nun diese Aufklärung des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts in den einzelnen Länder wirken!”¹⁴⁸ Dilthey argues that the political structure and cultural realities of every country defined both the nature and the scope of the Enlightenment differently. In Catholic countries, France included, the clergy kept the lower classes unaware of the Enlightenment ideals and strictly committed to the feudal class system. In France, until the revolution, the Enlightenment thus remained a project of the upper classes, while the “germanisch-protestantische Aufklärung” was a societal programme that – while led by the king and his bureaucrats – penetrated the whole society. This explanation corresponds Dilthey’s understanding of the political aspects of the French and German spirits discussed above; in the absolutist French society the Enlightenment actualized differently than in the more lateral German society. The German Enlightenment was different from the French one exactly because the German spirit is different, defined by Protestantism and religious piety:

Doch nirgend war die innere Gemeinschaft aller Stände, wie der Protestantismus sie vermittelte, enger als in der Heimat der Reformation, und so war auch die Wirkung der Aufklärung nirgend gewaltiger. Die deutsche Aufklärung löste die christliche Religiosität aus den rohen Begriffen der Orthodoxie und stellte sie auf dem festen Grund der moralischen Person. – – – Sie

¹⁴⁶ Hans Bakker: “Wilhelm Dilthey: Classical Sociological Theorist”. In: *Quarterly Journal of Ideology*. 22/1-2, 1999, 66.

¹⁴⁷ Dilthey: *GS III*, 131.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

reformierte das Recht und vertiefte das Verständnis der politischen Welt; sie stellte sich überhaupt ganz in den Dienst der Gesellschaft und des Staates – – – Sie schuf sich zugleich in diesem Zusammenhang eine Literatur, die ihre französischen und englischen Vorbildern an Glanz und Genialität nicht erreichte, an Einheit, Klarheit und allgemeiner Wirkung aber weit übertraf. Und auf dem fruchtbaren Boden dieser Literatur ist dann doch die Blüte unserer klassischen Kunst erwachsen.¹⁴⁹

Dilthey describes the worldview of the German Enlightenment as a nexus of different ideas that seemingly are not that closely connected but nevertheless form a unified spiritual nexus. The worldview of the German Enlightenment is thus defined by Pietism and Protestantism, as well as Kantian moral philosophy – of course in addition to the general principles of the Enlightenment. Whereas in France the rationalism and progress-optimism of the Enlightenment resulted in the rejection of religion, in Germany the Protestant culture embraced those values in its own way – emphasizing the rationality, freedoms, and obligations of an individual.

In the chapter “Friedrich und der Französische Geist” Dilthey extensively describes the manifestations of the French spirit in art. Literature¹⁵⁰ is especially important in understanding the essence of the French spirit, as it both reflects and constitutes the French ideals. Also, literature is a tangible historical source that still exists and can be directly analysed and understood. Dilthey describes how the French literature shared a lot with the English literature, the same ideals of secularism, rationality and “der Freie Mensch” – all of which manifested the new rational, enlightened, and scientific spirit taking over in these countries in the late 17th century:

[d]ie Formen des dichterischen Ausdrucks waren – – – nicht mehr durch die freie impetuose Macht der Phantasie bestimmt, sondern von der Herrschaft des Rasonnements und des Wirklichkeitssinnes. Ihr Lebensideal drückte sich in den Begriffen der Humanität, des fortschrittes der Menschheit und der Befreiung derselben von den Schranken der kirchlichen und feudalen Ordnung aus.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵⁰ Here for Dilthey *literature* seems to be an umbrella term including every literary text that does not belong to the natural sciences, and thus includes philosophy, historiography, as well as novels. This is why literature is so important for Dilthey, as – methodologically speaking – he must consider them the most important “objectification” of the spiritual reality of a time.

¹⁵¹ Dilthey: *GS III.*, 87.

Despite the similarities between French and English literature, specifically French forms of the ideals of free thinking and rationality emerged in France, that gave French literature its independent identity: “sie [French Literature] wird die dichterische Form unter die Leitung der Vernunft stellen und die Konvention unterwerfen.”¹⁵² If Luther was the most prominent forefather of the German spirit, Descartes was the definitive figure of the French one. At the same time, the French spirit is thoroughly defined by the “ancient Roman spirit”, and thus directly indebted to Cicero, Caesar, and Augustus. It sought to express universal, unchanging aesthetic rules that had their root in the classical ideals. The German literature of the time was defined by different kind of spiritual powers.¹⁵³ Rather than showing the harmony and right order of things, it described the diversity of experiences, “individuelle Mannigfaltigkeit des Daseins”, as well as passions and emotions, “die dunkle Schwere des Gemütslebens.” Dilthey traces these tendencies back to German mystics and pietistic religious reformers, who valued the individual experience more than the rational harmony of ancient ideals.

Dilthey describes how these two different spirits – the French and the German one – converged in the overall spirit of the German Enlightenment, creating a historically and culturally contingent form of the Enlightenment. This movement responded to the needs and character of the Prussian state and people, as the (Anglo-)French movement had omitted certain qualities that then became central in Prussia. These particularly German features were the centrality of education and an endeavour towards the moral perfection of the individual in the Kantian sense.¹⁵⁴ Dilthey shows how these ideals were enhanced by the efforts of the state, by the universities and the academy, and by the new legislation of Frederick the Great’s state.

4.1.3. Frederick between the German and French Spirits

In Dilthey’s interpretation, the French and German spirits were in continuous conflict in Frederick’s life. Frederick the Great personally was more defined by the French spirit “nicht nur aus den Gewöhnungen seiner Jugend, aus der Herrschaft des französischen Geistes über die Höfe”, but also because he had a more personal relationship with the French spirit than with the German one.¹⁵⁵ The king of Prussia thus had a personal preference for French ideals rather than the German ones. His subjects, including the German-speaking intelligentsia that defined the general ideals and intellectual currents of the era in Prussia, were however defined by the German spirit. As seen above, the German

¹⁵² Ibid., 99.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁵⁴ Masur: “Wilhelm Dilthey and the History of Ideas”, 103.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 87.

spirit differs from the French one in several important aspects, which then caused tension in Frederick's life.

Dilthey describes Frederick's close relation to France and the French spirit in a somewhat critical tone. He points out that the French spirit was a foreign element introduced in the German culture – thus endangering its natural evolution, “[a]ls der neue König an das Werk ging, als er seine Mittel und Gehilfen wählte, schien doch ein fremdes Element in unsere Kultur einzudringen, und ihre natürliche Entwicklung zu gefährden.”¹⁵⁶ In the text, Frederick's relation to the French spirit and to the French version of the Enlightenment is concretized through his connection to French thinkers such as Voltaire. The king was in correspondence with French intellectuals, read French literature, and valued French ideals more than German ones. Dilthey also says that Frederick brought to his academy writers of “questionable value” and critically points out how much more Frederick valued French than German literature, calling it “eine Schranke seiner geistigen Bildung”¹⁵⁷. As Dilthey's aim, however, is to understand, not judge, Frederick, he treats this preference to all things French as a natural and unavoidable result of the king's education. The ultimate aim of the analysis is to fairly understand Frederick's being as a whole, “das Wesen seines Geistes ganz begreifen”, and determine his *Denkmöglichkeiten*. However, because of his French inclinations, upon his ascension to the Prussian throne Frederick the Great – “the greatest German in between Luther and Goethe”¹⁵⁸ – first clashed with the emerging national German Enlightenment and its interests.

As the king wanted to realize a far-reaching intellectual, financial and political programme to put the French Enlightenment values into use in Prussia, he was forced to ally himself with the German spirit. Thus, in order to further his Enlightenment-projects, he was required to compromise his personal preferences for all things French, and let the German politicians, writers, and intellectuals take their place as leaders of the German Enlightenment. Especially after the Seven Years War and the political tensions between France and Prussia, Frederick's emotional relationship to all things French – as manifested through his adoration to Voltaire in his earlier years – cooled down, and was replaced with a cool, “affectless friendship” with d'Alembert.¹⁵⁹ Despite still preferring French literature and art, he now more consciously teamed up with the German cultural elite.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 92.

The dynamic relationship between two entirely different spiritual configurations defines the intellectual milieu in which Frederick the Great existed, but also his place in that milieu. In contrast to the Schleiermacher-biography, Frederick is thus not so much a prism of his time through which Dilthey filters intellectual influences. There is a defined tension between his person and the historical situation in which he has to act. Frederick does not become an individual because he thinks critically, but because he is from the beginning separate from his surroundings. This tension-laden relation between the emperor's French spirit and nation's German spirit clarifies the private motivations of Frederick's actions and thought, this is how he individuates himself from the historical context. The nature and source of his individuality are more clearly defined than those of Schleiermacher. The difference between an individual and the surrounding intellectual milieu is constituted through this tension, and thus Frederick's individuality has a more defined character.

4.1.4. Spirit, Nation, and Cultural Unity

The differences between the German and French spirits have been elaborated above. In this section, I briefly discuss the theoretical grounding of those differences and how Dilthey's view relates to his contemporary debates. The idea that different peoples have different characteristics had of course been virtually a paradigm in all historiography long before Dilthey. However, in the late 19th and the early 20th century, nationalist ideologies and race theories gave new poignancy to the debates about the foundation of these differences. In German academia, these debates coincided and intertwined with the larger methodological debates on naturalism versus antinaturalism in philosophy and the controversy over psychologism – both very relevant questions in Dilthey's own philosophical project.¹⁶⁰ A comprehensive contextualisation of Dilthey's place in these debates is outside of the scope of this thesis, but in general, he represented an antinaturalist stance that could be called anthropological, as opposed to the naturalist and psychologist conceptions of the human and social sciences.¹⁶¹ His conception of the cultural spirit is also not idealist, but robustly anti-metaphysical.

While in his historiographical-philosophical writings Dilthey definitively distances himself from naturalist conceptions of nations and cultures, determining his position only through his historical writings would be more difficult. While Dilthey does not talk about biological differences about German and French people, some of his formulations seem to postulate essentialist differences

¹⁶⁰ For the German controversy over psychologism in the turn of the century, as well as Dilthey's role in it see: Martin Kusch: *Psychologism. A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge*. London and New York 1995.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

between different peoples. Dilthey mentions how the Latin nations “verharrten unter den Fremdherrschaft des Papsttums”¹⁶² and talks about the French spirit as “fremdes Element” in the German culture. These formulations seem normative, as they do seem to suggest that every nation has their own cultural evolution or path, or that every nation should be autonomous and free from unwanted outside influence. However, as shown above, Dilthey describes both the formation of Frederick’s personality and the formation of the German Enlightenment as a kind of synthesis of the French and German spirits. Elements from both merge in Frederick’s life and German culture, creating these new historically contingent configurations. Culture or nation thus is not something that wholly defines an individual, neither is it to be understood as an internally coherent community. Already in *Introduction* Dilthey objects to the concept of *Volksseele*, as it falsely implies a “unity of self-consciousness”, subordinating the individual wholly as a part of one unified community and defining him only through that one category.¹⁶³ He explicitly denies that any such thing as *Volksseele* or *Volksgeist* would exist as anything else than a theoretical construction.

In “Formation” Dilthey defines *nation* as a “structural unity of productive systems”. It is a structural configuration comprised of different *volitional structures* (*Zweckzusammenhang*) through which their participants display their commonalities and try to achieve common goals.¹⁶⁴ Only this active participation of individuals is what brings a nation about i.e. a unified nation is a system of interrelated cultural and political aims, which actualize in different layers of social and cultural life. Nations are thus not transcendently or biologically determined communities, but historically formed realities. This theoretical attitude comes across in “Friedrich der Große und die Deutsche Aufklärung”, where the German and French spirits are defined through their manifestations in politics and culture. They display different aims and ideals, and thus the resulting forms of communal and cultural life are different. These ideals and aims are presented as a result of historically contingent genealogies, not as essentialist and non-contingent qualities of Frenchness and Germanness. There is nothing necessarily more emotional and individualistic in the German spirit than in the French one, just as the French are not by nature more secular than the Germans. This is why Dilthey uses so much ink to describe the *formation* of these spirits. In addition to the French and German spirits, Dilthey also postulates a more general cultural-spiritual layer in Europe, drawing a distinction between Protestant and Catholic countries. The Netherlands, England, and Germany are defined by the same Germanic-Protestant spirit, France and Italy are related in their Roman Catholic spirit. This also shows that even

¹⁶² Dilthey: *GS III*, 92.

¹⁶³ Dilthey: *SW I*, 83.

¹⁶⁴ Dilthey: *SW III*, 165-167.

though Dilthey discusses national-cultural spirits in detail, he does not treat nations as monadic building blocks of European history or even as the most important layer of spiritual configurations.

Dilthey's view of nations and cultures is antinaturalist also in the sense that he did not believe that cultural differences can be explained using the methodology of the natural sciences. A relevant contrast here to Dilthey is Wilhelm Wundt's (1832-1920) naturalist *Völkerpsychologie*.¹⁶⁵ Wundt was interested in the general psychological laws (understood along the lines of natural sciences as causal stimuli-response relations), and how those laws translate into more general laws governing higher intellectual processes i.e. individual's existence as a part of a "Volksgemeinschaft".¹⁶⁶ Dilthey, in turn, denied the existence of causal psychological laws on both the individual and social level. In the next chapter, I return in more detail to Dilthey's rejection of explanatory psychology as a methodological grounding of the human sciences. For now, it suffices to say that his conception of nations, as well as the German spirit, is historicist – in the sense that history is the main explanative force in describing these phenomena. In contrast, Wundt's theory is non-historical and empiricist, asserting that historical phenomena such as nations and cultures, as well as their particularities, can ultimately be explained through unchanging psychological laws.

Dilthey stays clear from nationalist narratives and social-Darwinist meta-narratives and does not, at least explicitly, postulate any cultural hierarchies. Wundt, for example, did instrumentalize his theory for nationalist and political aims during the First World War, analysing the differences between the *Volksseelen* of Germany and its enemies.¹⁶⁷ Of course, Dilthey's antinaturalist and anti-essentialist conception of cultures would not even lend itself for such comparisons as easily. However, Dilthey does not at all discuss the role of minorities in the formation of the German Spirit. Since Dilthey defines the German spirit so much through Protestantism and Kantian philosophy, it is difficult to see how e.g. different religious denominations would fit the picture and thus his conception does seem to include an exclusionist element. In the turn of the century Europe especially the role Dilthey would assign to Jews as to the German cultural unity would be interesting. However, he simply does not

¹⁶⁵ See Kusch: *Psychologism*, e.g. 158-159. See also: Uljana Feest: " 'Hypotheses, everywhere only hypotheses!': on some contexts of Dilthey's critique of explanatory psychology". In: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 28, 2007. While Feest discusses Dilthey's relation to the *Völkerpsychologie* of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal, not Wundt, the paper illustrates how Dilthey opposed all conceptions that relied on explanatory psychology and not the descriptive psychology he championed.

¹⁶⁶ Rainer Diriwächter: "Völkerpsychologie". In: Jaan Valsiner: *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, Oxford and New York 2002, 49-50.

¹⁶⁷ Kusch: *Psychologism*, 215.

discuss the subject. While his silence on the subject might be telling, Dilthey cannot be accused of any blatant form of antisemitism or cultural racism.

4.1.5. The Prussian Academy as a Manifestation and as an Agent of the German Spirit

In a lengthy chapter Dilthey accounts the history of the new Academy of Prussia, *Académie des Sciences et Belles-Lettres*. The Academy is at the same time presented as Frederick's personal endeavour and as a larger scale manifestation of his cultural-political aims. In other words, while Frederick contributed personally to the development of the academy, as an institution the Academy also actualized cultural influences that exceeded Frederick's personal contributions. The Prussian Academy of Science and Arts thus left a lasting mark of Frederick's personality and reign in the history and culture of Prussia, but was not a fixed monument of his personal tastes. The identity of the Academy changed over the course of Frederick's reign, first being defined by French ideals and later transforming into an important agent of the German Enlightenment. As discussed above, the role of institutions and communities becomes more pronounced in Dilthey's later historiography. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this change from a theoretical point of view. Now I concentrate on describing the practical narrative choices in the text. The central argument in both cases however is that Dilthey now ascribes a more independent role for these collective entities and that the role of individuals in history is defined through their practical involvement in these collectives. Dilthey's analysis on the history of the Prussian Academy and Frederick's role in it serves as an illustrative case-study on this.

Consistent with the general narrative of the text, at the beginning of Frederick's reign the Academy was occupied by French writers and meant to spread the French Enlightenment ideas. It was a part of Frederick's cultural-political aim of creating Prussia as the intellectual capital of Europe. After the Seven Year War, the Academy became more pronouncedly an organ of the German Enlightenment. This subsequently manifested itself e.g. in the awards it granted and the personalities who were associated with it. As mentioned above, the Seven Year War also marked a more general shift in Fredericks cultural attitudes, detaching him from the French influence and making him more clearly an ally of the German Enlightenment. Consequently, the Academy now became increasingly German. No new international intellectuals were invited, and the key positions were in the hands of German-born thinkers and scientists. Structural changes in the Academy thus both manifested Frederick's own

change of heart, but also factually made the Enlightenment an increasingly national project.¹⁶⁸ The section about the history of the Academy is an illustrative example of Dilthey's development as a historian: the narrative goes forward, the reader has a grasp of why and how developments happened. The Academy is presented at the same time as a manifestation of the general historical milieu, an instrument of Frederick's own aims, and as an independent agent in the history of the German Enlightenment.

Dilthey's now departs from the usual individual-context relation. As an institution the Academy has a different kind of historical existence than an individual person or more theoretical concepts like generation and spirit. Dilthey starts to ascribe an independent identity to institutions and allows them to have a more subject-like status. As to the Prussian Academy, he construes it as an independent carrier of history and of meanings, with its own inner development. Institutions adapt to changing situations, their function changes according to the needs of the surrounding culture and yet they always maintain their constitutive central idea.¹⁶⁹ However, Dilthey treats the history of the Academy mostly through *methodological individualism*,¹⁷⁰ listing all the important personalities associated with it and describing what kind of ideals they bring in it. Historical development is presented as the result of individuals' actions and choices. Despite the heightened attention to institutions and structures, the motor of historical change is still always the individual. In practice this means that Dilthey accounts for the changing presidents, what they stood for, and how that affected the general identity of the Prussian Academy. Individuals are acting agents in the historical milieu but restricted and directed by the institutional structures surrounding them. Thus, institutions have a more tangible or "real" existence than structures like generation or spirit.

4.2. "Das Allgemeine Landrecht" as a Manifestation of the Spirit of the Enlightenment

Dilthey's essay on the General State Laws for the Prussian States (*Allgemeines Landrecht*), a civil code promulgated in 1794, was published posthumously as part of his collected works. The text was

¹⁶⁸ Dilthey: *GS III*, 130-131.

¹⁶⁹ Dilthey: *GS III*, 113. "Große Institutionen, welche sich die Tätigkeit der Menschheit für ihre Zweckzusammenhänge gebildet hat, passen sich mit unverwüsthlicher Lebenskraft veränderten Verhältnissen an. Wenn die Verfassung einer solchen Institution sich unzureichend erwiesen hat, wenn so manches in ihren Zielen nicht mehr der Zeit entspricht: ihre Wurzeln leben fort..."

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Heath defines methodological individualism as "the requirement that causal accounts of social phenomena explain how they result from the motivations and actions of individual agents, at least in principle." Joseph Heath: "Methodological Individualism", In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/methodological-individualism/>>.

I will, however, discuss Dilthey and methodological individualism in the next chapter more extensively from a theoretical point of view.

edited by his student Erich Weniger. It was not fully completed upon Dilthey's death and remained fragmentary, and consequently, the structure of the text is not as thought-through as in the other texts. As it, however, was meant as an addition to his larger analysis of the Prussian history under Frederick the Great (*Friderizianische Staat*) and is closely linked to his other projects on the history of the 18th century and the German spirit, it makes sense to include this text to my analysis. It is also a rare example of Dilthey's more political and legal historiography and can thus show new perspectives on his historical thinking, even when his focus remains still first and foremost on cultural and intellectual history. Also, it further exemplifies the importance of institutional structures in Dilthey's later historical writings as described in the previous section.

I will leave aside Dilthey's very detailed descriptions of the laws and legal codes themselves, as he dedicates a lot of attention to particular laws. It is nevertheless worth noting that he was not only interested in the laws as objectifications of the surrounding spirit – as cultural and historical artefacts to be studied – but also very informed about their practical contents. Typical for Dilthey, the text also includes a lengthy, quite technical analysis on the philosophy behind the *Allgemeines Landrecht*, and its relation to the ideas of *Naturrecht* and *Staatsrecht*, as well as the relation to the Roman law. For my purposes it suffices to analyse Dilthey's methods and techniques of historical narration on a broader scale. Through *Allgemeines Landrecht*, a particular objectification of the spirit of Frederick's reign, Dilthey can again access and grasp the historical reality in which it was created. Again, he seeks to understand the historical context through one particular albeit broad phenomenon. By analysing all the philosophical, moral, and philosophical ideas that come together in the particular (*Allgemeines Landrecht*), he can access the more general configuration of ideas that constitute the historical context (*Friderizianische Staat*).

Dilthey's main interest in his analysis is the ideological and philosophical core of the laws, not their practical, legal or political implications. The new general law of Prussia was not simply a collection of legal codes governing the lives of Prussian people, but something that was supposed to bring the spirit of the enlightened state in an objective, concrete form.¹⁷¹ In his *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Dilthey assigns law (generally as a phenomenon) a role as a mediator between two systemic wholes – *cultural systems* and the *external organisation of society*.¹⁷² In other words laws exist in a space between the people as a cultural community with shared values and objectives, and the people

¹⁷¹ Wilhelm Dilthey: *Zur preußischen Geschichte. Gesammelte Schriften XII*. Göttingen 1964, 146. Hereafter abbreviated GS XII.

¹⁷² Dilthey: *SW I*, 104-105.

as a socially organised volitional structure¹⁷³ that cements those cultural values in an organizational structure.¹⁷⁴ It unites in itself essential features of both types of social reality.¹⁷⁵ While Dilthey later slightly revised his theory of purposive systems and external systems, adopting a more multifaceted view of the structure of the human world (I will return to that in the next chapter), this distinction is illustrative here. Allgemeines Landrecht objectified the spirit of Frederick's reign: his personal ideals, as well as the broader cultural and political ideas of the German Enlightenment. At the same time, it was an organ of Frederick's state, through which it modernized itself by creating a new legal bureaucracy to control and educate its people. Allgemeines Landrecht thus had a practical aim; the new legal framework was meant to form a new order of things. The history of Allgemeines Landrecht is a story of the Enlightenment values and individual freedoms winning over the old medieval customs and creating a new society. It did so successfully, because it both manifested the cultural-historical Zeitgeist that was already receptive to those values and then factually brought those values into existence by creating a legal and organizational structure.

But what was the "Geist des Staates" that manifested itself in Allgemeines Landrecht? Dilthey defines the state here as Frederick's administrative machinery, the people associated with that machinery, as well as the intellectuals theorizing about the nature of the state:

[d]er Geist, der diesen Staat erfüllt, der in seinen Organen vom König bis zum letzten Beamten und Unteroffizier wirksam war, der in den Schriften Friedrichs, in Denkern wie Christian Wolff und Kant, in Juristen, Staatsrechtslehrern und politische Schriftstellern einen freien literarischen Ausdruck fand, hat selber sein allgemeines und dauerndes Wesen im Landrecht ausgesprochen.¹⁷⁶

Dilthey seems to imply here that it is the people belonging to the Prussian administrative and intellectual elite whose ideals were manifested in the law reform, rather than those of common Prussian people. In other words, the state laws were not a manifestation of the will of the people, but of the ideals of Frederick the Great and his officers and bureaucrats, all deeply convinced by the

¹⁷³ Dilthey also uses the very word "Zweckzusammenhang" to describe the Prussian Academy in "Friedrich der Große", see the quote in footnote 169. (Dilthey: *GS III*, 113.)

¹⁷⁴ See eg. Panu Minkkinen: "'Life Grasps Life': Wilhelm Dilthey's Minor Jurisprudence". In: *Law Text Culture* 21 (2017), 143-164.

¹⁷⁵ "On the one hand, law is shaped by their sense of justice, while on the other hand, it depends on the volitional unity which has been formed in the external organization of society. Accordingly, the law has neither wholly the features of the collective will nor wholly those of a cultural system. It unites in itself essential features of both types of social reality" Dilthey: *SW I*, 107. See also Minkkinen: *Ibid.*, 150-157.

¹⁷⁶ Dilthey: *GS XII*, 131.

ideals of the Enlightenment. The law reform was “in erster Linie eine Ausdruck des Willens, die Monarchie Einheit im Recht zu geben.”¹⁷⁷ At the same time Dilthey however also emphasises how the laws were, to an extent, relative to specific cultural systems: “[d]ie Lebensverhältnisse, die das Recht regelt, sind gegründet in den Bedürfnissen der Individuen, der Kultursysteme, der Organisationen”¹⁷⁸, which suggest a more organic and direct relation to the general socio-cultural cultural context and thus also to Prussian people. Here it is sometimes difficult to follow Dilthey’s argumentation, as the categories of people, state, and spirit are not always clearly defined and differentiated.

Dilthey recognizes and emphasizes the project-character of the Allgemeines Landrecht: that it came into being only because the leaders of Prussia created it, not because of necessary historical development or Prussian “geschichtliches Schicksal”¹⁷⁹. However, it still also emerges from a particular historical situation. Dilthey sketches a similar kind of structure as he did with regards to the history of the German Enlightenment discussed in the previous sections: like Frederick’s reign in general had to team up with the German spirit in order to succeed in bringing the Enlightenment values to Prussia, also his legislation also had to adapt to the cultural specificities of Prussia. It then came to embody the *general* will of the state and the principles of the German Enlightenment.¹⁸⁰ The legal reform started as Frederick’s and his bureaucrats’ Enlightenment-project but later developed into a more general project of objectifying the general spirit of the Prussian state in a coherent body of legislature.¹⁸¹ Through that, it also manifested the wider cultural context and the German spirit.

Dilthey’s discussion on the new church laws is an illustrative example of the organic relation between the German cultural context and the ideals of the new laws. He shows a connection between the ideological principles of the Landrecht and the German Protestant tradition and Kantian morality. As demonstrated above, for Dilthey such Protestant values are e.g. respecting one’s obligations (*Pflicht*) and the idea of *Sittlichkeit*, ethical life. These basic values led to a specific conception of individual freedom, based on individuals’ rationality (*Vernunftcharakter*). The laws thus respected the individuals’ right to think for himself: the church laws granted freedom of religion for all subjects.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 132.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁸⁰ Dilthey is of course not explaining the whole Allgemeines Landrecht only through the German spirit but also analyses European influences. For instance, he credits Montesquieu for the idea of the constitutional state and analyses how those principles are manifested in the Allgemeines Landrecht. This however is a minor aspect of his historical narrative.

¹⁸¹ “Dann aber vertiefte sich die Aufgabe dazu, dem Geist dieses Staates eine objektive Gestalt in einer Einheitlichen Gesetzgebung zu geben.” GS XII, 146.

They also treated different confessions as secular associations before the law, subjected to equal obligations and freedoms.¹⁸² As Dilthey's argument goes, it was not only the secular Enlightenment ideals and belief in science and reason but also the German own Protestant tradition that made secular monarchy and freedom of religion possible in Prussia. Because the Protestant ethos placed the monarch's authority above the clergy in all practical matters, the power spheres of the state and the church had already been separated in people's minds. Also, because in Protestantism, and especially in the pietistic movements, religion was considered as a strictly personal matter, it was easier to accept the existence of different religious confessions. If one's salvation is based on individual faith alone, the false belief of the neighbour does not threaten the whole community. The laws, while being initiated and drafted by the king and his bureaucrats, were thus rooted in and got their legitimation from the organizational and cultural reality of Prussia as a whole.

By emphasizing the historical limitations and socio-cultural roots of *Allgemeines Landrecht* and legal systems in general, Dilthey subscribes to the basic principles of the historical school of law.¹⁸³ This would again place him firmly in the historicist tradition. However, as he emphasises the active role of the sovereign and his bureaucrats as legislators – ultimately as the initiators of change in legal history – he departs from the historicist doctrine that explains law as the result of particular national characteristics. An example of this doctrine is Friedrich Carl Savigny's (1779-1861) theory of *Volksgeist*. For him, positive laws originate in the spirit of a people i.e. what is considered right in a particular society is made into a law.¹⁸⁴ Further departing from the paradigms of the historical school, Dilthey gives some credit to the natural right theories of law.¹⁸⁵ The cultural relativism implied by the historicist conception is restricted by his belief in some kind of moral uniformity across all cultural and historical diversity. He believes that behind all historically contingent legal systems there is a mutual root that regulates what we find right and wrong – a sense of justice – that is based on the commonality of the human experience:

Aber in jedem historischen Recht, in den Verhältnissen, die es regelt, gelangt doch ein immer gleiches, in der Natur menschlicher Verhältnisse und in der Kraft der Vernunft sie zu ordnen Gegründetes zum Ausdruck. Eigentum, Vertrag, Ehe, religiöse Gemeinschaften, Staat, Verbrechen und Strafe kehren überall wieder. – – Hierin liegt die Wahrheit des Naturrechts.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Ibid., 167-68.

¹⁸³ Unfortunately, Dilthey does not provide references so that this direct connection could be examined.

¹⁸⁴ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 214-215.

¹⁸⁵ See also Minkinen: "Dilthey's Minor Jurisprudence", 153-154.

¹⁸⁶ Dilthey: *GS XII*, 132.

An individual is not only culturally and historically constructed but essentially connected – through being a living and thinking human – to a commonality of human experience.¹⁸⁷ While staying clear from metaphysical conceptions of the human nature, Dilthey thus does approach a more rationalist understanding of morality and does postulate a universal basis for laws. While *Allgemeines Landrecht* objectified the spirit of Frederick the Great's Prussia, it also expressed a more basic, universal level of human existence.

In “Das Allgemeine Landrecht” Dilthey reconstructs, albeit not very systematically, an architectonic view of the structure of the human world. In his view, different cultural and organizational nexi converge in *Allgemeines Landrecht*, creating a new independent structure that has a real and tangible existence. As opposed to the spiritual configurations in *Leben Schleiermachers*, this structure is not comprised of ideas and influences appearing from thin air. Institutions function as interlocutors or interfaces between the individual and context, making the context tangible. Dilthey analyses and describes how different individuals, the bureaucratic machinery of Frederick's Reign, the general nexus of the Enlightenment and the more specific German version, as well as the general cultural milieu of Prussia come together to create the *Landrecht*. However, at the very core of this historically relative body of legislature is the universal need of human psychology to institutionalize and organize the society according to the universal idea of justice.

4.3. Dilthey as a Historian of Philosophy – “Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und Die Geschichtliche Welt”

Dilthey's text about “the 18th century and the Historical World” is a general overview of historical thinking in the 18th century. It deals with the historiography and social sciences in the 18th century, as well as with the more general historical worldview. It is an exercise in understanding different philosophers and their views rather than original philosophy. However, as a philosopher of history, Dilthey does have interesting things to say about the Enlightenment thinkers and their philosophical views about the past. The text reveals more clearly some of his own beliefs as to the epistemology of history when his objectivity sometimes gives way to implicit expressions of his own opinions. He is more visible to the reader as an author in this text. Although he refrains from explicitly expressing his own positions, he does assess the thoughts and theories of different philosophers quite readily –

¹⁸⁷ Dilthey: *SW I*, 98.

revealing, for example, his own preference towards the German tradition over other ones. Dilthey carefully analyses different thinkers from Voltaire, Montesquieu, Kant and Winckelmann to Hume and Gibbon, to only name a few. Consistent with Dilthey's other historical writings, these thinkers are contextualised mostly to their national context. Dilthey writes the history of the 18th century conception of history through national groups, making a distinction between the English, German and French historiography. This is why the concept of the cultural spirit is also central in this study, and sheds light on Dilthey's conception of the German spirit from yet another perspective.

Two most important themes emerging from Dilthey's discussion are his rejection of the idea of progress, and as a consequence, his relativistic attitude towards the history of philosophy. Typical for Dilthey, and also consistent with the conventions of his time, he begins his analysis on the historical views of the 18th century from their genealogy from ancient Greece onwards. This genealogy reveals that for him historiography and writing history are as context-dependent and historically determined as any other human activity. For instance, the Greeks wrote about their city-states and had a circular conception of time, corresponding to the political and religious ideas of their time. Christianity first brought about an idea of a universal human community with a shared history. Because of the rise of nation-states from the 15th century onwards, the idea of separate nations and their separate histories and identities became important, although the Christian universalist idea of humanity still prevailed.¹⁸⁸ Dilthey's view is relativist: how historians write history and how people see the past is determined by the political and cultural circumstances and interests, as well as the paradigmatic ideas of each time. However, this relativism is difficult to reconcile with his clear preferences towards a certain kind of historiography and style of historical writing.

Dilthey is primarily interested in the emergence of academic, scientific historiography. This he sees as an achievement of the Enlightenment. In his view, from the 16th century onwards a more secular view of history replaced the metaphysical-religious one that had defined historical consciousness until then. According to Dilthey, now history became more interested in the human life itself. The immanent social world became the subject matter of historiography, not life in terms of God's transcendental plan for humanity. However, while already 16th and 17th centuries created some tools for scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) history – such as the idea of source criticism – history emerged as an academic discipline only in the 18th century. This new history used natural scientific methods and mathematics, trying to create a purely naturalist human science. The grounding ideas of this new

¹⁸⁸ Dilthey: *GS III*, 216-17.

scientific worldview were a belief in the autonomy of human rationality and its unlimited power to understand the world, as well as an unshaking trust in progress.¹⁸⁹

Dilthey's view of the Enlightenment is critical, revealing his own romantic and hermeneutic, as well as antinaturalist sympathies. He analyses the works of Voltaire, Fredrick the Great, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon,¹⁹⁰ arguing that these thinkers saw history progressing linearly. They were also optimistic: "diese frohmütig und lebenssicher vorwärts schreitenden Menschen der Aufklärung erblicken in aller Vergangenheit nur die Stufen, die emporführen zu ihren eigenen Höhe."¹⁹¹ This optimism was connected to the new scientific worldview: historical progress could be seen in terms of the new hypotheses about the origins of the universe and the idea of biological evolution.¹⁹² As already established, Dilthey's historicist and relativist convictions oppose this kind of view – the past should not simply be seen as the prehistory of the present. His criticism is implicit at the beginning, but it becomes clear especially when he discusses the theories of Justus Möser, emphasizing his universal historical view. Möser, according to Dilthey, is exemplary in his ability to see the human world in its full liveliness and humanity:

Welch ein Gegensatz zwischen der ganzen historischen Anschauung dieses unvergleichlichen Mannes und derjenigen der französischen und englischen Geschichtschreibung des Jahrhunderts! Die strukturlöse Darstellung der Kultur einer Zeit, wie sie diese Voltaire, Hume, Robertson und Gibbon gegeben hatten, war hier ersetzt durch den Gedanken eines inneren Zweckzusammenhanges, welcher die verschiedenen Daseins-äußerungen in einer Epoche verknüpft.¹⁹³

Möser did not judge past epochs according to modern standards but saw them as unified wholes that could only be measured against themselves. Möser also recognised the fundamental historicity of the world,¹⁹⁴ while the methodology of the English historians, for instance, lacked in "genetic understanding"¹⁹⁵. Möser is thus presented as the first representative of a quintessentially German historical mind, which makes him a key player in Dilthey's overall project of understanding the German spirit. Thinkers and writers like Goethe, Herder and Schlözer followed in Möser's footsteps,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 209.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 256.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 257.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 246.

all sharing the same belief in the fundamental historicity of life, and that history should be written appreciating this fact. Dilthey's reconstruction of the German historical mind also corresponds to his idea of German literature with its "nothing human is alien to me"-attitude.

Considering how much attention Dilthey dedicates to Möser and his explicit approval of his ideas, Möser's role in the development of German historiography is construed as crucial. Dilthey concentrates on those theoretical aspects in Möser he is also championing in his own philosophy, thus placing himself in the same continuum as him. Implicitly the text also reconstructs the history of German historicism – or of the core ideas of the German historical school. As shown in chapter two, providing a rigorous epistemological basis and scientific methodology for the historical school was at the core of Dilthey's philosophical project. The historical analysis in "Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und Die Geschichtliche Welt" is thus also closely linked to his overarching philosophical project. Blaming the Enlightenment thinkers of the "ahistorical" progress-belief,¹⁹⁶ Dilthey juxtaposes the Anglo-French Enlightenment philosophers and their optimistic and scientific, but ultimately naïve view of history with the life-philosophical and hermeneutically deeper German conception. Dilthey's historical narrative thus also had contemporary relevance, implicitly defending the historicist conception against positivism and naturalism.

In the text, Dilthey construes a narrative of historical change, from a non-academic to academic and scientific historiography. However, nowhere does he indicate that this historical change would be a desirable evolution in the sense of evolving and progressing – doing so would be counter-intuitive after having explicitly opposed the idea of historical progress. The old ideas transform into new ones according to the changing historical realities, serving the needs of that particular reality. He does not judge the historians of the past according to modern ideals and scientific standards but contextualises them. It is unclear whether Dilthey's relativist attitude would also apply to natural sciences, but as to the social sciences, Dilthey at least employs methodological relativism. As shown above, as a philosopher of history himself, he has opinions on the right and wrong ways of writing history. It is unclear whether and to what extent Dilthey would actually relativize his own position. In the next chapter, I argue why I think Dilthey would *not* relativize his own position or deny the possibility of objective, universal knowledge in the human sciences. However, as a philosopher of history writing

¹⁹⁶ Naturally Dilthey also appreciates several individual thinkers from the non-German tradition. Maybe the most interesting of these is his appreciation on Montesquieu, as he favourably assesses his socio-political climate theory. Even though Dilthey's theoretical writings show that he does subscribe to a similar kind of principle, in his historical writings this principle is implicit at most, and never really thematized.

historical works, and as a historian writing a philosophy of history, Dilthey balances between the demands of the universal validity of philosophy and value-free historiography. As Masur poetically puts it: “[H]e was obliged to work uncompromisingly in two spheres at the same time, to consider the temporal and the eternal simultaneously, and to apportion to each its actual importance.”¹⁹⁷

This dichotomy between Dilthey’s universalist and relativist tendencies is actualized in that Dilthey clearly seeks to understand different ways of historical thinking in their context, but ultimately does reveal a preference towards a particular kind of German historiography. As shown above, Dilthey’s preferred kind of historiography is characterized by *Lebensphilosophie*, hermeneutics, and the primacy of interpretative understanding. Dilthey dedicates most attention to German thinkers and presents their life-philosophical conception of culture and history as the most admirable way of writing history. The art of writing history “bedarf einer geistigen Anschauung des Zusammenhanges, welcher die Vorgänge verknüpft und ihnen Leben und eine aus dem Gemüt stammende innere Kraft mitteilt”¹⁹⁸. However, while Dilthey subscribes to these basic attitudes of the German historiography of the 18th Century, he is less impressed with the connected *philosophy of the spirit* (*Philosophie des Geistes*), which looked for ways to integrate the cultural history with the rules of nature and to explain history through universal and unchanging laws. As established, Dilthey rejects these kinds of metaphysical commitments and thus also his criticism of the philosophy of the spirit should be interpreted in terms of his contemporary criticisms against the Hegelian philosophy of history.

In this subchapter I have tried to show how “Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und Die Geschichtliche Welt” does, maybe partly unwillingly, reveal some of Dilthey’s own theoretical attitudes and commitments. He shows clear preference towards German historiography and rejects the Enlightenment progress-narratives as well as historical-philosophical theories that postulate lawlike rules of history – whether those are based on naturalist or idealist conceptions. This highlights his historicist theoretical and methodological convictions. However, as Dilthey himself is at the same time defending a relativist conception of history, his own position seems contradictory. I will return to this contradiction in the next chapter and analyse how Dilthey tries to solve it in his philosophical writings. My argument, in short, is that Dilthey’s relativism in his historiography should be understood primarily as methodological/descriptive relativism that simply recognizes that there exist a multitude of different philosophical ideas and that they have historically and culturally relative merits. Dilthey’s relativism is not a universal theoretical doctrine. While there is something

¹⁹⁷ Masur: “Dilthey and the History of Ideas”, 96.

¹⁹⁸ Dilthey: *SW III*, 222.

unsatisfactory in this explanation, it might however highlight how for Dilthey historiography is first and foremost a practical endeavour used to *describe* and *analyse* the human world, free of normative judgments.

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in his later period Dilthey's widened his methodological machinery, adopting a more structural and multi-layered approach to studying past realities. While the individual-context relation remains central, he now more readily ascribes independent historical existence to institutions and communities. Ideas and influences are tangibly manifested in these institutions and form the historical reality that determines the possibilities for individual thought and action. Through this architectonic, layered view, Dilthey's aim is to construct the history of the German spirit, showing what kind of ideals and ideas make up the German social-political-cultural reality. This is not because of any nationalist rationale of constructing Germany as superior to other nations, as Dilthey's historicist and relativist convictions would prevent such an attitude. In the two first texts discussed he indeed does not posit hierarchical differences between cultures and peoples but treats concepts like the German spirit as analytic categories. However, the extent of his relativism as to the development of scientific history is another question. I argue that while Dilthey indeed aims at objectivity and indeed sees writing history as an activity that is historically and culturally relative, his own preferences are still visible to the reader. As I will return to this topic in the next chapter (5.5), this last subchapter also serves as necessary background for that analysis.

5. Intersections Between Dilthey's Historiography and Philosophy

As established in the introduction, Dilthey's theory of history is first and foremost to be understood in terms of meta-level considerations, in the same manner as the philosophy of science is independent of the natural sciences. Thus, Dilthey's historical and philosophical-historiographical writings are not directly related in the sense that his methodology would directly and ostensibly follow from his theoretical principles. The disconnect is because of the obvious difference between practice and theory. His theoretical writings determine the object of the human and social sciences in general and the epistemological foundation for understanding that object, while his historical writings describe the human world from a particular perspective. History is only one of many human sciences, dealing concretely with a given topic. However, as argued above, history does have special significance for

Dilthey's intellectual project in general, and not only because he was a historian himself. Because the human world is permeated by history, understanding of the historical is essential for all of the different human sciences.

History is also an integral part of Dilthey's own philosophical argumentation. He considers understanding the historical development of the human sciences as essential for his own epistemological project. It is telling that the second part of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* is essentially an account on the history of the human sciences¹⁹⁹:

This work – – – will combine a historical approach with a systematic one in order to attain as much certainty as possible about the philosophical foundations of the human sciences. The historical approach traces the developmental path of philosophy's previous efforts to provide such a grounding; it seeks to determine the historical setting of individual theories within this development and to assess the historically conditioned value of these theories. Indeed, by penetrating this developmental nexus, the historical approach seeks to determine the innermost impulse of contemporary science. In this way the historical account prepares the ground for the epistemological foundation, which will be the theme of the second half of this study.²⁰⁰

From the beginning Dilthey thus emphasizes that the human sciences are historically constructed, being very explicit that any attempt to define them must take their historical development into account.²⁰¹ As briefly discussed at the end of the previous chapter, this historicist and relativist conception conflicts with Dilthey's simultaneous attempt to provide a robust epistemological grounding for the human sciences. I will consider this conflict and Dilthey's attempt to overcome it in the very last section of this chapter.

While Dilthey's epistemology of the human sciences does not in itself present normative demands or imply direct consequences for a practicing historian, his theoretical attitudes and philosophical conceptualisations reveal interesting points of intersection between his theory and historical works. Those intersections are the main theme of this last chapter. I also further discuss the changes in Dilthey's historiography from *Leben Schleiermachers* to *Studien zu der Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes*, analysing whether those differences are in some relation to the changes in Dilthey's theoretical attitudes. Dilthey of course changed and developed throughout his career both as a

¹⁹⁹ "Metaphysics as the Foundation of the Human Sciences: Its Dominance and Decline", Dilthey: *SW I*, 171-219.

²⁰⁰ Dilthey: *SW I*, 47.

²⁰¹ See e.g. *Ibid.*, 78.

historian and philosopher. However, I argue that Dilthey's philosophical thought should not be divided into two distinct phases – psychological and hermeneutic – as has been the traditional view in Dilthey scholarship, but to be understood in terms of gradual adjustments in his philosophical positions. The fact that there are no *radical* changes in Dilthey's historiography from *Leben Schleiermachers* to *Deutsche Geist* supports this continuation argument over the view that Dilthey would have radically refashioned his epistemology of the human sciences.

Even though Dilthey's philosophy is not a “how-to” guide for writing history or for practicing other human sciences, his historical writings do presuppose the philosophical background he develops in his theoretical texts. There are no contradictions between Dilthey's actual methodology and his epistemology of history, and several frequently used concepts establish clear and organic connections between them. As shown in the chapters above, Dilthey builds his historical narratives from a very theoretical point of view, using theory-laden terms such as *generation*, *spirit*, and *influence* (*Wirkung*) as the building blocks of his historical narrative. It can thus be assumed that Dilthey was consistently aware of the theoretical and epistemological background of his methodology, even if he is not directly thematising it in the texts.

I compare Dilthey's historiography to his philosophy only through some selected writings that give an understanding of the basic principles of his philosophy. These texts span through different times in his career, thus illustrating the different periods of his philosophical development. I hope this allows me to be able to substantiate my arguments, even though fine-tuning them would require a more broad, in-depth, and comprehensive outlook on his philosophy. Dilthey's 1883 *Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History* is a programmatic text, outlining the motivation and foundation of his philosophical project. *Introduction* was originally planned as the first volume in an extensive and comprehensive series of monographs that aimed at bringing the human studies on a rigorous epistemological foundation, but Dilthey never finalized this project, at least not in the initially planned form. The essays “Ideas for a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology” and “[On Comparative Psychology] Contributions to the Study of Individuality” are both from 1895/96, and a part of Dilthey's attempt to establish his descriptive psychology as the epistemological foundation of the human sciences. The latter also discussed the problem of individuation, which was central in my analysis of *Leben Schleiermachers*. His hermeneutic phase I approach through the 1910 text “The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences” as well as his incomplete *Drafts for a Critique of Historical Reason*.

In this chapter I will first discuss Dilthey's philosophical development, more precisely the alleged shift from descriptive psychology to hermeneutics, making my argument for the continuation view. I will approach this topic from two angles, first through Dilthey's concept of *understanding* and then through his conception of the formation of social and cultural life. I also argue that Dilthey's development as a historian corresponds to his shifting theoretical attitudes, as he develops a more comprehensive theory of the structural formation of the human world. I then proceed to discuss descriptive psychology as a method of the human sciences, and then the problem of individuation both in Dilthey's theoretical and historical writings. After that I discuss the concept of *Geist*, arguing that Dilthey's use of the concept establishes a clear conceptual link between his philosophy and history. At the very end of the chapter I discuss the challenges his historicist convictions pose to his philosophy, especially when it comes to relativism.

5.1. Dilthey's Philosophical Development

As already briefly discussed in the previous chapters, the traditional account among Dilthey scholarship – albeit now already widely discredited in its most radical form – is that Dilthey's philosophy underwent a substantive shift from descriptive psychology to hermeneutics in the last decades of his life.²⁰² Rodi claims that it was especially Heidegger's influence that made this interpretation prominent, and that Heidegger's negative appraisal of Dilthey's psychology and positive view of his hermeneutics also influenced the later reception.²⁰³ Even if today's Dilthey-scholars do not consider this alleged shift a radical revision in Dilthey's philosophical position, they still emphasize the gradual changes that led Dilthey to adopt a hermeneutic theory and abandon his attempts to found the human sciences on psychology.²⁰⁴ As this account goes, this shift would have happened sometime around 1900, and thus *Introduction* and "Ideas" would both represent the psychological position while "Formation" is advocating a hermeneutic theory of the human sciences.

Kinzel shows that Dilthey-scholars tend to see this shift as an improvement in Dilthey's philosophy and stress the limits of his descriptive psychology.²⁰⁵ Even more symptomatic is that in much of the more general (non-Dilthey specific) literature his descriptive psychology is often either almost completely brushed aside or seen as a failure that Dilthey had to abandon in order to arrive to his

²⁰² Owensby: *Narrative of History*, 8-9.

²⁰³ Rodi: *Lebenszusammenhangs*, 104-105.

²⁰⁴ See Kinzel's discussion on the modern reception of Dilthey's descriptive psychology in: Kinzel: "Inner experience". and Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 337-338.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

mature hermeneutic theory. Often his hermeneutic theory is presented as his only substantive contribution to philosophy, and certainly as his main contribution. Indeed, many Dilthey scholars seem to have a clear preference for Dilthey's hermeneutics and accuse his psychological approach – if they are interested in it at all – of subjectivism, psychologism,²⁰⁶ or some forms of naturalist undertones. Maybe the most radical form of the last accusation comes from Ali Zaidi, although the same prejudices are often reflected in other critical accounts of Dilthey's psychology. According to Zaidi's interpretation this “shift reflects Dilthey's radicalized view on the essence of the human social world, it is a shift from the Kantian epistemological question “[h]ow do we know?” to the ontological question on the nature of human social reality – – – in the *Einleitung* he [Dilthey] is still attempting to connect the human social realm to the natural world through the bio-psychic processes that he outlines in his descriptive psychology.”²⁰⁷ Zaidi continues to argue that later in his hermeneutic period Dilthey adopts a more radical view, according to which the human world is truly independent of the natural world and thus as an object of study radically different from the world of nature. Zaidi thus argues that Dilthey's shift from descriptive psychology to hermeneutics also implies that Dilthey adopts a dualist ontology and that the difference between the human and natural sciences would be “not only of attitude but of different natures”²⁰⁸.

Zaidi is correct in the sense that Dilthey's interest indeed seems to shift (between *Introduction* and “Formation”) from epistemological “how is it possible for an individual to understand the human world” to a more wide-reaching theory about the structure of the human world. Nevertheless, I argue that during Dilthey's whole philosophical career his view on the very basic epistemic principles remain the same. At least – as Kinzel argues – Dilthey's descriptive psychology already has inherent hermeneutic potential that then is actualized fully in his later hermeneutic period.²⁰⁹ Beiser too makes a convincing argument that Dilthey did not abandon his psychology per se, only he did not develop it into the foundationalist system of the human sciences he had originally envisaged.²¹⁰ I also maintain that Dilthey did not abandon his descriptive psychology in favor of hermeneutics, but rather changed his vocabulary and conceptualizations to accommodate his more nuanced and complex view of the human world more accurately. Dilthey's philosophical development is thus rather be understood in terms of refining, clarifying, and broadening his theory than to be divided into distinct phases. This

²⁰⁶ For the historical and contemporary charges of psychologism against Dilthey, see Kinzel, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Ali Zaidi: *Islam, Modernity, and the Human Sciences*. New York 2011, 122. In his book, Zaidi discusses the philosophy of human sciences. He addresses the relationship between Muslim and Western social thought, especially concentrating on the search for meaning and transcendence in the human sciences.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Kinzel: “Inner experience”.

²¹⁰ Beiser: *German Historicist Tradition*, 339.

view, emphasizing continuums rather than changes in his thought, is also supported by my reading of his historical works. As argued in the previous chapter, it remains relatively uniform in its methodology and background assumptions throughout Dilthey's life, even though his analytical and conceptual toolbox becomes more multi-faceted.

5.1.1. Descriptive Psychology and Hermeneutics as the Epistemological Foundations of *Understanding*

As shown in chapter two, Dilthey's main philosophical objective is to defend the independence of the human and social sciences – on the one hand from the naturalist and positivist methodologies of the natural sciences, and on the other from the universalist metaphysical assumptions of the philosophy of history. This goes hand in hand with the defining question of his philosophical project: what the human world is and how do we gain scientifically valid knowledge about it. Contra Zaidi, I argue that the epistemological and ontological questions were both there, intertwined, from the beginning to the end. The difference between natural and human science for Dilthey is not a clear-cut methodological or ontological difference. He claims that the natural and human sciences are different because of their different cognitive approaches to their object of study – we explain nature, but we understand the human world.²¹¹ In Dilthey's definition, the main task of the natural sciences is to arrive at law-based causal *explanations*, whereas the human sciences aim at *understanding* the organizational structures of human and historical life.²¹² This idea, which in its basic form was first introduced already in *Introduction*²¹³, remains a central argument in Dilthey's philosophy throughout his works. The core of his philosophical project is to define what this *understanding* is and what is its epistemological foundation.

Dilthey's first definition of understanding in the human sciences relies on the notion of "inner and outer experience". This idea is best articulated in "Ideas" and "Study of Individuality", as in the *Introduction* he only outlines the distinction without elaborating on it further. The outer experience is the way we experience the world outside of us, the world that is "distinct from the self".²¹⁴ It

²¹¹ Dilthey: *SW II*, 147.

²¹² Rudolf Makkreel: "Wilhelm Dilthey". In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/dilthey/>>.

²¹³ Even though he does not introduce *understanding* as an epistemological concept yet, the whole first book of *Introduction* Dilthey gradually moves toward the argument that the ultimate goal the task of the human sciences is to understand the historical socio-cultural world in its complexity. He also already makes the argument that because the human sciences deal with substantive value judgments, not only with robust facts, they are different from the natural sciences and bring them closer to human experience. *SW I*, see especially 78-79.

²¹⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey: *Understanding the Human World. Selected Works II*. Princeton 2010, 213. Hereafter *SW II*.

combines several outer perceptions into a “nexus of intelligibility that expands our cognition of the external world.”²¹⁵ The outside world is articulated in the inner experience. The content of the inner experience thus is the “complex of processes by which, through discursive thought, one or more inner perceptions are brought into a nexus that makes these facts of the human world more intelligible and that expands the conceptual cognition of the inner world.”²¹⁶ The outer world becomes meaningful in this reflexive awareness; facts of the outer world and one’s inner experience – emotions, perceptions, and thoughts – form a psychic nexus that can be observed introspectively. In other words, together the inner and outer experience make up the individual’s psychic nexus. Dilthey thus conceives the human psyche as intentional. It emerges from the interaction between the subjective experience of the individual and the world outside. It acquires the contents of the inner experience from outside but also relates to that content through previous experiences, emotions, and volition.

The ability to access one’s own psychic nexus is the condition for understanding other people. In short: we can understand their thought-processes and feelings because we understand our own. The understanding of others requires the re-creation of their nexus, and according to that re-creation, we explain their manifestations of life. “Everywhere inner experience cooperates with outer experiences that also allow for the transformation of the inner world into a foreign body.”²¹⁷ This possibility of understanding is based on the universal validity and transferability of thought processes and feelings. Apart from making understanding between individuals possible, the transferability of spiritual life allows for an access to a more general nexus of psychological phenomena. This nexus of “spiritual-cultural processes”²¹⁸ is not individual anymore, but intersubjective. Even though I only have direct introspective access to my own inner experience, the homogeneity of the psychological structure between different individuals thus allows for an understanding of the socio-cultural world. Dilthey’s subjectivist reliance on introspective awareness is thus balanced by a strong universalist conception of the structure of the human mind.²¹⁹ The very basics of the psychological structure of individuals and – by extension – of the shared world, remain unchanged despite all the individual, cultural, and historical differences. A social scientist, whether he be a sociologist, anthropologist, economist or historian, has a much more direct and personal access to his object of study than a natural scientist. He relates to it through his own inner experience. Even if a historian writes about a culture that is long gone, there is still something that connects him organically and directly to that historical reality

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 214.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 215.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 219.

²¹⁹ Kinzel: “Inner experience”.

or culture. In his descriptive psychology, Dilthey conceived this universality of the human psychological structure as the epistemological foundation of understanding others and understanding the human world in general.

The later Dilthey moves away from his psychological vocabulary and in "Formation" he conceptualises the foundations of the epistemology of human sciences slightly differently. He abandons the concepts of inner and outer experience, and now conceptualises the relationship between the individual and the universal in terms of *lived experiences* (Erlebnis) and *understanding* (Verstehen). Lived experiences are the immediately given inner states – not only the constant flow of sense perceptions, but also the norms, values, and emotional affects that arise from our interaction with the world. Lived experience is the phenomenally given unity of the life-world. It does not refer to the inner emotional states of every individual but rather to their openness to the reality of life and their immediate awareness of it.²²⁰ However, the lived experience can only be individual and subjective, as it is always about our own singular experiences – the experience of being a living being in the world. Only through understanding can an individual overcome the boundaries of his subjectivity. Understanding establishes the intersubjective connection, and understanding is possible because individuals are linked by a commonality to a kind of cultural and historical togetherness.

Understanding first overcomes [this] limitation of the individual lived experience and, at the same time, bestows the character of life-experience to personal lived experiences. Extending to various people, creations of human spirit, and communities, it widens the horizon of the individual life – – – opens up the path that leads from the common to the universal.²²¹

Understanding of the human life has a circular character. We observe the manifestations of life around us and relate to them and thus they become a part of our subjective lived experience. Starting from this subjective lived experience we can, through understanding, reach the intersubjective world. Because of the essential connectedness of individuals through this intersubjective world, we can also see the universal and shared components of our own subjective lived reality. The manifestations of life by other people are observable as something external from ourselves, but we also relate to them through our individual experience. Whereas the object of the natural sciences is a world full of foreign objects ready to be looked at, analysed, and defined, the human world is full of meanings and

²²⁰ Andrus Tool: "Wilhelm Dilthey on the Objectivity of Knowledge in Human Sciences". In: *TRAMES*, 61/56/1, 2007, 7.

²²¹ Dilthey: *SW III*, 162.

phenomena that the scientist understands precisely because they are not just objects of his outside perception. They are directly part of his lived experience. Human phenomena are intelligible because they articulate something shared, the historian (or any other scientist) relates to them through his inner experience and because he himself lives in the world in which those phenomena have meanings.

Considering my characterizations of the epistemological basis of understanding in “Ideas”, “Study of Individuality”, and “Formation”, I argue that Dilthey’s shift is only slight. Even though the emphasis of his psychology is slightly more subjectivist than his hermeneutics, the very basic idea remains the same throughout. The epistemological foundation of the human sciences is understanding (rather than explaining), and that understanding emerges from the interaction between an individual and the surrounding socio-cultural-spiritual world. While Dilthey conceptualises this understanding somewhat differently in the texts I have discussed, there is no clear-cut shift. The differences are rather fluid and can often be seen as merely perspectival. In “Ideas” understanding is based on the shared psychic nexus which is a necessary, natural precondition of human psychology. In “Formation” the root of understanding seems to be the essential historicity of every individual and thus a feature of the world rather than the human psyche. In the early Dilthey this shared commonality is conceptualised as the uniformity of human psychology, later he emphasizes the importance of the socio-historical context of the individual. In “Ideas” understanding starts with the individual, in “Formation” the starting point is the manifestation of life. However, neither the individual nor the context can be done away with.

While the philosophical expressions of the theory are of course more detailed and comprehensive,²²² the central structure of Dilthey’s general theory of understanding is presupposed in his historiography. This is especially clear in his biographies since those deal directly with the individual-context relation. His descriptive psychology corresponds directly with the idea of historical figures as points of intersection in a historical-cultural milieu: the outer world becomes internalized in their inner experience and both the inner and outer shed light to each other. As shown already in the *Leben Schleiermachers*-chapter, the human individuality – or individual psychology – is not understood in terms of hypothetical cause-effect relations, but as a configuration comprised of outside influences that can be analysed and described. In his later historical writings, these influences become more

²²² Also, as emphasized in the previous sections, Dilthey’s theoretical writings deal primarily with the epistemological conditions of understanding, and thus the perspective of the scientist, while in the biographies Dilthey wants to describe the subject’s – Schleiermacher’s or Frederick’s – relation to the world.

tangibly manifested in the historical reality, too, which corresponds to Dilthey's shifting interests from individuals to manifestations of life.

As argued throughout this thesis, at least for the early Dilthey the totality of life exists through individuals, in them we "erfahren [wir hier] allein die Wirklichkeit in vollem Sinn, von innen gesehen: nicht geschehen, sondern erlebt."²²³ For Dilthey, the historical-cultural world can only be the subject of understanding if it is first experienced, i.e. if it becomes real in the experience – in this case in the lived experience of a historical figure. Thus, even when Dilthey emphasizes individual psychology as the primary nexus of understanding, the hermeneutic circular structure is already presupposed. The historical world only opens up for the historian because it has been experienced by someone, and that experience has been translated into different objectifications – be it literature, historical works, or letters. And because there are uniformities in the human experience, we can understand Schleiermacher and Frederick the Great. Even though their life-world is culturally and historically distant from us, in some essential ways it becomes intelligible through their experience, since they relate to it through volition and emotion. The experience mediates the historical reality for the historian, making interpretation possible.

5.1.2. From the Contextualised Individual to the Structural Formation of the Human World

Biography remained a central form of historical writing for Dilthey throughout his career, but – as argued above – his interest shifts from an emphasis on individuals to an emphasis on collectives and the structural composition of the human world. This comes across also from *Drafts for a Critique*, in the section about biography. There he argues that while biography grasps the "most basic form of connection between life itself and history"²²⁴ – namely, the connection between the individual lived experience and the outside world – it cannot grasp the social and cultural reality in its entirety. He demands that "we must turn to new categories, configurations, and forms of life that do not appear in individual life."²²⁵ In his later career, Dilthey decided that the historian cannot filter the totality of life through an individual but needs to find categories that transcend individual existence. The inner intelligibility of lived experience does not yet alone constitute understanding,²²⁶ but the interpretation

²²³ Dilthey: *GS V*, 10-11.

²²⁴ This at least seems to be Dilthey's argument, due to the fragmentary nature of the texts it cannot be taken for granted, Dilthey: *SW III*, 266.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 269-270.

²²⁶ Makkreel: "Dilthey".

of lived experience – of the phenomenally given human world – requires analysing the manifold ways the forces of life can converge. As argued in the previous chapter, this attitude is visible in his later historical writings, as he now treats the historical-cultural world more as a concrete collection of manifestations of life demanding action from historical individuals. Rather than a backdrop consisting of abstract influences that then converge in individuals, the human world is a collection of historically determined objectifications of the human spirit through which the historical individual has to navigate.

In essence, Dilthey became more aware of the complexity of the human world, and consequently developed a more complex analytical machinery to grasp this complexity better. In “Formation” the intersubjective world is considered as a formation that transcends the psychic life of all the individuals existing in that world, and thus has an independent existence. The individual does not seem to be the “größte Realität” of history anymore, as it had been in *Introduction*,²²⁷ in his inaugural speech to the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1887²²⁸ and arguably still in his essays on descriptive psychology. In “Formation” Dilthey develops a theory of ideal units as carriers of life-experience.²²⁹ As opposed to the earlier texts, now Dilthey allows that different kind of collective entities, such as nations and states, to possess a certain kind of self-understanding and independent identity. These communities are not only manifestations of individuals’ volitional activity anymore but transcend their existence. These ideal units can thus be the objects of historical and cultural inquiry.

Makkreel draws attention to Dilthey’s distinction of communities as *purposive systems* (Zweckzusammenhang) and as *productive systems* (Wirkungszusammenhang)²³⁰, which is illustrative here. As briefly discussed in relation to the “Das Allgemeine Landrecht”, in *Introduction* Dilthey conceives cultural systems – laws, language, religion etc. – as purposive systems. Individuals join these systems or form associations in order to further certain objectives; to answer to certain needs that arise from the human nature, but which cannot be individually achieved.²³¹ For example, religion is a purposive system that exists in order to provide people with answers to fundamental questions about life and death, and language arises from the need to communicate. In *Introduction* an individual is conceived of as a point of intersection between these different purposive nexi,

²²⁷ Dilthey: *SW I*, 85. Individual as a “life-unit” is the most “fundamental historical fact.”

²²⁸ Dilthey: *GS V*, 10-11. “Die bedeutende Individuum ist nicht nur die *Grundkörper der Geschichte*, sondern in gewissen Verstande der *größte Realität derselben*.” My italics.

²²⁹ Dilthey: *SW III*, 156-157.

²³⁰ Makkreel: “Dilthey”.

²³¹ Dilthey: *SW I*, 104.

embodying several of them at once. As objects of study these associations are always abstracted from the “enormously complicated reality of life”²³², their study is based on “second-order theories”²³³. Thus, Dilthey is unwilling to consider these larger collectives as carriers of history.²³⁴ In short, in *Introduction*, he does not grant these kinds of groups an independent existence, they are merely theoretical abstractions whereas the individual as a volitional and thinking being is the basis of all analysis.

The later Dilthey reconceives his notion of purposive systems as *productive systems*. “No cultural system will embody merely the purposes it was meant to fulfil – – – It is to be understood more generally as producing objectifications that express human values as well as purposes—leaving open the extent to which specific goals are achieved.”²³⁵ According to this conception, systems both manifest and create values and purposes. They do not only fulfil a purpose but also reshape the world by producing new values and meanings, sometimes in a way that was not foreseen or planned. Going back to the example of the Prussian Landrecht: as established above, for Dilthey laws are purposive systems. Allgemeines Landrecht has an explicit purpose, the laws were drafted to regulate the lives of Prussian people according to the German Enlightenment principles. But as Dilthey describes the laws and their organisation in the text, it becomes clear that the collection of laws is also a productive system that produces new values and meanings. It is not a mere manifestation of its purpose, or a group of individuals joining together to achieve an end, but also something that has an independent existence and that reshapes historical reality. The same is true for the Prussian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The Academy is conceived as an organisational structure that has a pre-given purpose – to develop the cultural life of Prussia towards the French Enlightenment ideals – but it then develops into an organ of German Enlightenment.

Dilthey treats these productive nexuses as independent units that are centred in themselves and are reluctant towards any possible outside influences. These influences are assimilated into the structures of the nexus itself, its identity, however, is defined by its constitutive value assessments and set goals.²³⁶ These nexi form a wider productive system that limits and influences individuals’ possibilities. Each historical milieu with its web of productive nexi creates a life-horizon that both restricts and enables individuals to act and think: “[s]uch a horizon places life, life-concerns, life-

²³² Ibid., 131.

²³³ Ibid., 92.

²³⁴ Makkreel: “Dilthey”

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Tool: “Objectivity of Knowledge”, 12.

experience, and thought-formation in a certain proportion.”²³⁷ Dilthey however still treats these productive nexuses as logical or ideal, rather than real subjects. The individual is still the ultimate motor of history; conceptualizing these productive systems as logical subjects does not force Dilthey into postulating them as superempirical real subjects. They are however more than mere sums of their parts, objectifying and manifesting the historical reality in such ways that are not reducible to the aims of the participating individuals. They are available for historical analysis as historical objectifications. This shift from individuals to communities is thus to be understood as Dilthey broadening his interpretative machinery, not abandoning the individual for the sake of collectives.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the developments in Dilthey’s philosophy are somewhat reflected in his historiography, too. In *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey’s approach is primarily empirical: his portrayal of Schleiermacher is not full and perfect because of the lack of source material about all possible historical facts. Dilthey thinks that we could understand Schleiermacher’s life and his context through determining all the intellectual and cultural movements he partakes and the influences converging in his thought. In other words, historical understanding is mainly about understanding the shapeless intellectual currents surrounding and influencing the historical subject. Later Dilthey seems to have abandoned this idea of full understanding, rather emphasizing – also in his historiography, not only in his philosophy – the complex and manifold composition of the human world. An individual relates to the world not only through the ideas he manifests or develops, and not only through large-scale ideal communities such as generation, but also more concretely through established institutions and communities. This shift in Dilthey’s historical texts is not as easy to determine or as conceptually clear as the developments in his philosophy. However, when one reads the historical texts through the lens of his philosophy, the changes in his emphasis and style make sense in light of this philosophical development.

5.2. Descriptive and Analytic Psychology as a Historical Method

In *Introduction* Dilthey asserts that psychology is most basic human science.²³⁸ As demonstrated above, psychology also continued to be an integral and essential part of Dilthey’s thought throughout his career. This, however, does not undermine my thesis that history is the most essential component or perspective of his thought, as for him psychology meant something different than the modern academic discipline. For Dilthey, human psychology is thoroughly historical; it is historically and

²³⁷ Dilthey: *SW III*, 198.

²³⁸ Dilthey: *SW I*, 81.

culturally constructed. Apart from being the very basis of all understanding of the human world, his descriptive and analytic psychology was thus also a methodological approach for the human sciences. The basic idea is that it takes the given phenomenal unity of the human world as its starting point and from that proceeds into a structural analysis.²³⁹ Above I discussed the basic epistemological principles of Dilthey's descriptive psychology and argued that he never abandoned this approach per se, but rather adopted a hermeneutic vocabulary to accommodate a more nuanced approach. This is why descriptive psychology is at the very core of all of Dilthey's historical writings and intersects with it in important ways. I have discussed some of these connections already in the previous chapters but in this section, I will concentrate on descriptive psychology as a method of the human sciences, as well as Dilthey's criticism of explanatory psychology and history that emulates its methods.

For Dilthey, psychology can be a foundational human science only if it is conceived of as being *descriptive*. It describes facts and establishes connections between those facts.²⁴⁰ In other words, it describes and analyses how social and cultural features assimilate in our experience, without positing speculative psychological laws. Human psychology exists only in the interaction with the surrounding world; “[m]an as a fact prior to history and society is a fiction.”²⁴¹ As argued above, this attitude mirrors Dilthey's theoretical framework in his biographies. Schleiermacher's and Frederick's individual psychology is described in terms of an interplay between their experiences and influences from outside. For example, understanding Schleiermacher is not possible without considering the intellectual life of Berlin in which he actively participated.²⁴² The actual practice of life, engagement with the surrounding world, is where human psychology manifests itself and only there it is observable from outside. These manifestations are historical facts that are available for a historian and make writing history possible. This study is empirical, even though in addition to the facts the historian needs a “good historical sense.”²⁴³ Dilthey's conception of psychology is anthropological, and in *Introduction* he indeed sees them as two sides of the same coin. There he proposes “psychology and anthropology” – understood as a two-headed discipline – as the fundament of all human sciences.²⁴⁴ Even when he later introduces his descriptive and analytic psychology, the anthropological perspective remains an integral part of Dilthey's conception of psychology.²⁴⁵ The

²³⁹ Rodi: *Lebenszusammenhangs*, 92 and 106.

²⁴⁰ Dilthey: *SW I*, 82.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁴² Makkreel: “Dilthey”

²⁴³ Dilthey: *SW I*, 75.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴⁵ Riccardo Martinelli: “Defining human sciences: Theodor Waitz's influence on Dilthey” in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 26/3, 2018, 498-518.

only way to produce knowledge of human psychology is to describe and analyse socio-historical particularities, and contrast them with the features that seem to remain the same throughout history (such as the basic sense of justice, as mentioned in the previous chapter).

As mentioned, the starting point of descriptive psychology is the wholeness of life. From this original experience of the unity of human life it proceeds to analyse and describe different structures, elements, and relations that are present in the human world.²⁴⁶ Descriptive psychology requires careful and skilful analysis. According to Dilthey, throughout the centuries some of the best psychological insight has been provided by poets and artists. Art, especially literature, can express the unity of cultural life while making it intelligible for an individual.²⁴⁷ In “Formation” Dilthey writes “[a] lyrical poem makes possible, through the sequence of its verses, the re-experiencing of a nexus of lived experience — not the real one that stimulated the poet, but the one that, on its basis, the poet places in the mouth of an ideal person.”²⁴⁸ The fact that Dilthey emphasized the capabilities of poetic imagination in giving us psychological insight does not mean that his descriptive psychology would be based on some kind of speculative imagination. His idea is that both art and history can articulate something about the human world because they both have their epistemological foundation in *inner experience*. Descriptive psychology is the basis through which we can conceptualize this original phenomenological unity of human experience. While the arts indeed can articulate this experience in a typified, idealised form by means of fiction, history and other human sciences must do that analytically by a process of structural articulation.²⁴⁹ This structural analysis what Dilthey aims at in his historical writings, but his appreciation of arts maybe also makes the more artistic features of his writings more theoretically grounded and understandable.

Dilthey contrasts his descriptive psychology with a competing naturalist conception of human psychology. *Explanatory psychology* (erklärende Psychologie) tries to uncover causal laws regulating human psychology and thus, according to Dilthey, explanatory psychology falsely employs the methodology and theoretical framework of the natural sciences. The main advocates of such a natural-scientific approach were John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer in England and Hermann von Helmholtz in Germany.²⁵⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, in the German context e.g. Wilhelm Wundt championed something along the lines of explanatory psychology, and Dilthey’s well-known

²⁴⁶ Rodi: *Lebenszusammenhangs*, 92.

²⁴⁷ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 333. See also: Dilthey: *SW I*, 84.

²⁴⁸ Dilthey: *SW III*, 235.

²⁴⁹ Makkreel: “Dilthey”.

²⁵⁰ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 332.

controversy with Hermann Ebbinghaus (1850-1909) also boils down to the question about the natural-scientific nature of psychology.²⁵¹ Dilthey's aim was to develop his own conception of psychology against such views, and – by extension – he opposed any historiography that was based on a naturalistic and mechanistic theory of the functioning of the human mind.

Dilthey condemns explanatory psychology as speculative and relying on unfounded hypotheses. He also claims that it is not able to grasp the original connectedness of the actual lived experience and thus it is not suitable as the epistemological basis of understanding the human world. Explanatory psychology tries to explain human psychological phenomena referring to a “limited number of univocally determined elements”²⁵² – in other words, it seeks to explain human psychology through mechanical cause-effect relations or as biologically determined responses to stimuli. Already in the very beginning of *Introduction* Dilthey conceives his task as an antithesis to this kind of naturalist conception:

When Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Buckle made a new attempt to solve the riddle of the historical world by borrowing principles and methods from the natural sciences, the Historical School could only protest ineffectually against their impoverished, superficial, but analytically refined results by appealing to a more vital and profound intuition which, however, it was unable either to develop or to ground.²⁵³

In 1862 Dilthey published a critical review of Henry Thomas Buckle's (1821-1862) *History of Civilization in England* (original from 1857), which provides an interesting perspective on Dilthey's aversion against this kind of approach as to historiography. Buckle's way of writing history is indeed comparable to the logic of explanatory psychology: his aim is to establish rules and all-encompassing, universally applicable causal explanations that regulate the human world. This he seeks to do by studying history and determining laws from empirically observable recurrences and the regularities of human action. His aim is thus to bring history to a similar empirical basis with the natural sciences. He wants to rescue history from “the hands of biographers, genealogists, collectors of anecdotes”²⁵⁴ and show causal reason-outcome relations in history. For instance, he seeks to show how different types of cultural development result in different kinds of political environments, religions, and

²⁵¹ Ebbinghaus's very polemical review of Dilthey's *Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* however concentrates mostly on accusing Dilthey of misunderstanding the paradigms of modern (natural-scientific) psychology. See e.g. Kusch: *Psychologism*, 163-165.

²⁵² Dilthey: *SW II*, 116.

²⁵³ Dilthey: *SW I*, 48-49.

²⁵⁴ Henry Thomas Buckle: *History of Civilization in England*, New York 1884, 671.

cultures. Buckle is not merely studying history for its own sake but believes that through determining universally applicable laws by studying history we can “indicate the path of our future progress.”²⁵⁵

Dilthey’s criticism of Buckle and *History of Civilization in England* is crushing. He does admit that Buckle has extensive knowledge about history and a very sharp mind, but adds that his intellectual merits are not in the area of historical writing.²⁵⁶ The main point of Dilthey’s criticism is that Buckle confuses the empirical study of nature with the empirical study of the human world, and for Dilthey “eine Empirie ohne die richtige Methode, hört auf, Wissenschaft zu sein.”²⁵⁷ While causal relations between phenomena are clearly observable in the natural world, when it comes to humans it is impossible to determine what causally leads to what. One cannot access the inner motives of individuals or to determine all causal reasons leading to certain events. To use Dilthey’s own example, it is impossible to know all the reasons – strictly causal reasons or inner motives – that led to the fact that Alexander the Great and Frederick Barbarossa decided to go swimming to a certain place in a certain time, which subsequently led to their demise. As the reasons are impossible to determine, we have to call these occurrences *coincidences*.²⁵⁸ History, for Dilthey, is not about explaining these coincidental historical facts – about what *happened* and why it happened – but rather about understanding and describing the cultural-historical structures and how they allow individuals and collectives to act. As argued in the chapter on *Leben Schleiermachers*, individual psychology, understood in terms of inner motives and decision-making processes, is also outside of the scope of history and other human sciences in general. Descriptive psychology can only describe things that are manifested in the shared reality. A thought or an idea that is not expressed cannot be analysed scientifically, as it is not a historical fact.

5.3. The Problem of Individuals and Methodological Individualism

As shown above, Dilthey’s descriptive psychology is grounded on the idea of a universalist view of human psychology. However, if the psychological structure of individuals is always in some relevant sense analogous, how can we account for individual differences? Of course in his theoretical writings Dilthey does not settle for the mystic and romantic conception of individuality discussed in relation to *Leben Schleiermachers* but tries to create a robust theoretical foundation. Dilthey’s answer is that although we are to some extent products of our socio-historical-cultural context, we are not totally

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 672.

²⁵⁶ Dilthey: *GS XVII*, 106.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 105.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

determined by it either. The context in which we live in continuously shapes our acquired nexus of psychic life. This happens gradually through experiences i.e. through interacting with the spiritual totality surrounding us.²⁵⁹ Because people experience different things at different times, the inner experience is formed differently, and so the acquired nexus ends up being different from individual to individual. Individuality is thus not a collection of unique personality traits, but something that each of us acquires through experience.²⁶⁰ Every individual is understood as a unique psychic nexus, a configuration of different acquired qualities and ideas.

While this theory of individuation does in principle account for the way Dilthey describes Schleiermacher's individuality, it still seems somehow unsatisfactory. As argued in the previous chapters, throughout Dilthey's historical writings the acting and thinking individual is postulated as the force of history. Only concrete actions by individual people can bring about change in history – providing that they are in a position in which they can bring change about, and only in conjunction with the world that already is receptive to the changes. This conviction is also expressed in *Introduction*, where Dilthey posits individuals as "psycho-physical life-units", indicating that the individual human being is the only real force of life.²⁶¹ As already shown in chapter three in relation to Droysen and Hegel, the idea of individual freedom as the ultimate driving force of history was not new in Dilthey, but rather a popular doctrine.²⁶² Beiser argues that it can even be considered a paradigm among historicist thinkers, pointing to a strong tradition of nominalism in historicism.²⁶³ Only individual existence is real, everything transcending that is an abstraction. This brings us back to the problem of romantic individualism discussed in the Schleiermacher-chapter: there seems to be a conflict between the view of the individual as a configuration of outside influences, and the individual as the only real subject of history.

I propose that one way out from this conflict is to treat Dilthey's view as a *methodological* rather than metaphysical doctrine. Rather than a nominalist thesis about how the world is built, it is a practical and metaphysically neutral attitude towards explaining and describing history. Dilthey's stance can be called methodological individualism – slightly anachronistically, as the concept was introduced

²⁵⁹ Dilthey: *SW I*, 81.

²⁶⁰ Makkreel: "Dilthey"

²⁶¹ Dilthey: *SW I*, 80-81.

²⁶² See chapter 3.1.1. Also Ranke, in the introduction to *Historisch-Biographische Studien*, briefly sketches a theoretical structure of history that corresponds to this view. For Ranke, too, individuality is the carrier of freedom while the community or society (*Gemeinwesen*) establishes historical necessities that primarily restrict the freedom of an individual. Leopold von Ranke: *Leopold von Ranke's sämtliche Werke : 40/41. Historisch-biographische Studien*, Leipzig 1877.

²⁶³ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 5.

by Max Weber in *Economy and Society* (posthumously published in 1922), and as a term coined by his student Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950). The doctrine maintains that in sociological analysis social collectives must be treated as “resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action.”²⁶⁴ Historical change and cultural phenomena are explained through the deeds and ideas of influential people because those are the only ones we can understand and describe.

It might seem inconsistent that I insist that in his later writings Dilthey comes to consider collectives and institutions as more and more important and independent units in the formation of the human world, while at the same time I emphasize Dilthey’s commitment methodological individualism. However, as argued above, Dilthey always considers communities as logical subjects. Agency in history is reserved for people as individuals. Taking “Allgemeines Landrecht” as an example again: while in this study Dilthey conceives the Civil Code as an independently existing system that transcends all individuals, the story of its historical development is told through explicating the roles of different individuals in this process. Dilthey draws attention to several particular actors and their contributions in the creation and implementation of the reforms and analyses their significance in the historical process. In addition to explicating Frederick the Great’s practical or Kant’s intellectual contribution, he discusses extensively the roles of the two main architects of the legal reform, Samuel von Cocceji and Carl Gottlieb Suarez. He analyses how their personalities and personal contributions affected and shaped the outcome of the process.²⁶⁵

In “Formation”, the latest, Dilthey reconceptualizes individuality, moving completely away from the notion of individuals as primary building blocks of history. Now even an individual is only as an abstraction and is also to be considered as a *logical* subject of history.²⁶⁶ He now emphasizes the process-character of the psychic structure: “what I have previously described as the acquired nexus of psychic life – – encompasses our representations, evaluations, and purposes, and it exists in the connection of these constituents. – – the acquired nexus exists in distinctive connections – in relationships of representations, in assessments of values, in the ordering of purposes.”²⁶⁷ Individuality is in a constant state of formation, as individual life “unfolds into an *infinite* richness of

²⁶⁴ Max Weber: *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. Volume I*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1978, 13.

²⁶⁵ Dilthey: *GS XII*, 143.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁶⁷ Dilthey: *SW III*, 102.

life”.²⁶⁸ While his theory of individuation seems by and large to remain the same, now Dilthey emphasizes how individual life is a constant process of becoming. It only exists as a process. The only real subject of the human world is the infinite richness of life, and it converges in infinitely many ways. As mentioned above, in *Drafts for a Critique* Dilthey calls for turning to new categories, configurations, and forms of life that do not appear in individual life.²⁶⁹ This indicates that in his last years he was ready to move away from his own paradigmatic individual-context relation. However, since Dilthey does not provide examples of such categories and configurations and given how important psychology is in his philosophy and individuals in his historiography, this should not be given too much importance in relation to Dilthey’s philosophy as a whole. The basic assumption in his philosophy is that while every individual exists as an intersection/nexus, the social and cultural world does not exist without those individuals and their activity – and cannot be analysed or described apart from that activity. His interest in individuals is nevertheless to be understood as a methodological rather than an ontological doctrine.

5.4. The Concept of Spirit/Geist in Dilthey’s Thought

The concept of spirit/Geist is at the very core of Dilthey’s thought. After all, he is theorizing about the possibility of knowledge in *Geisteswissenschaften* i.e. “Sciences of the Spirit”.²⁷⁰ Adopting the term *Geisteswissenschaften* was however not a self-evident decision, as he initially resented the implied dualism to the natural and spiritual world, as well as the dubious Hegelian undertones.²⁷¹ Before settling to use it in *Introduction*, Dilthey had used terms like “moral-political sciences” and “sciences of the practical world”.²⁷² It has been suggested that Dilthey would have borrowed the concept from Jacob Schiel’s German translation (1862–63) of John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic*, where the “moral sciences” are translated as *Geisteswissenschaften*. However, as the concept had been used throughout the 19th century by different historians and philosophers, it is impossible to track Dilthey’s direct source.²⁷³ Interestingly, despite the initial doubts, the term Geist then became

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 156.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 269–270.

²⁷⁰ I have – for clarity – used the conventional translation “human sciences” for Dilthey’s *Geisteswissenschaften*, even though it fails to grasp the exact meaning of the word. This is unfortunate, as Dilthey’s conception of Geist is especially important in the context of this thesis because it is such a central category in his historiography. Translating *Geisteswissenschaften* as human sciences and Geist (as I do most of the time) as spirit loses the organic connection between theory and practice.

²⁷¹ Beiser, *Historicist Tradition*, 325.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Martinelli: “Defining Human Sciences”, 512–513.

an essential concept both in his historical writings and philosophy and establishes an organic connection between the two.

Another alternative for Geisteswissenschaften in Dilthey's time was *Kulturwissenschaften*, which was mostly advocated by neo-Kantian philosophers.²⁷⁴ However, as Makkreel observes, the conception of cultural studies was too absolutist and impersonal for Dilthey, as it excludes his anthropological psychology from human studies. It is not an impersonal and objective notion of culture that is the object of human studies but the structural unity of all human world, as experienced and created by humans. The aim of the human sciences is "das Wesen und Wirken der Menschengesistes in Menschengeschichte erkennen"²⁷⁵. Spirit thus designates the realm of the scientific inquiry about the human world; it is everything and exclusively that what is created by human activity: "Human being can only understand what it has created. — — — everything on which human beings have impressed their productive stamp forms the subject matter of the human sciences."²⁷⁶

Despite the metaphysical connotations of Geist, the term has a strictly phenomenological meaning for Dilthey.²⁷⁷ It is to be understood as a psychological term, to mean the totality of life as it appears in experience to the human mind. As has become clear in the previous chapters, Geist/spirit can also refer to smaller-scale nexi, to the spiritual configurations discussed in the previous chapters. *Schleiermachers Geist*, *Berliner Geist*, and *Deutscher Geist* all conceptualize abstract spiritual nexi that are to an extent centred in themselves, but which however then also exist in relation to each other and as constituents of larger scale configurations, such as *Zeitgeist* or a generational context. The term Geist works well as an analytic category for structuring and systematizing historical inquiry, breaking the complex and manifold constitution of the life-world into abstract units that can be objects of scientific history. Dilthey expresses this idea already in *Introduction*, where he criticises the conceptions of *Volksgeist* or *Volksseele*. For him, those "mystic" concepts can only become objects of scientific study if one first analyses and understands the "different aspects of the life of a people, such as its language, religion, and art, and apprehending how they interact."²⁷⁸ Understanding a

²⁷⁴ Rudolf Makkreel: "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Neo-Kantians: The Distinction of the Geisteswissenschaften and the Kulturwissenschaften" In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 7/4 1969, 21.

²⁷⁵ Ulrich Herrmann: *Bibliographie Wilhelm Dilthey: Quellen und Literatur*. Weinheim 1969, 48.

²⁷⁶ Dilthey: *SW III*, 170.

²⁷⁷ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 328.

²⁷⁸ Dilthey: *SW I*, 93.

spiritual configuration, such as the German Spirit, as a historically contingent and constituted phenomenon requires a skilful interpretative and systematic analysis of its structural constitution.

In “Formation”, Dilthey redefines Hegel’s concept of *objective spirit*, abandoning its idealist metaphysical commitments. While for Hegel objective spirit refers to the objective and rationally grounded patterns of social life – such as state, laws, and nation²⁷⁹ – Dilthey widens the concept to refer to the entire shared spiritual reality, “the manifold forms in which a commonality existing among individuals has objectified itself in the world of the senses”.²⁸⁰ The objectification of the spirit is “the actualisation of human spirit in the world of the senses”²⁸¹, the manifestation of the cultural, historical, and social ideals in the world we live in. It refers to all expressions of human life from moral norms to language, from institutions to philosophy, from laws to art. As the totality of the human world is comprised of the objective spirit, the objectifications of the spirit also encompass manifestations of irrationality and meanings that were not necessarily intended. For instance, an artist might express, or objectify, meanings and ideas that he did not consciously plan to convey with his artwork. In order to understand history in its fullness, a historian must deal with all manifestations of life, not merely expressions that are intended to communicate a state of mind.²⁸²

Dilthey’s use of the concept of the objective spirit also establishes a direct conceptual connection between his (later) historical texts and philosophy. It is explicitly used (albeit only in the title) in *Das Allgemeine Landrecht*, as the name of the first chapter is “Der Friderizianische Staat und die Objektivierung seines Geistes im Landrecht”²⁸³. Since *Das Allgemeine Landrecht* was written around the same time as “Formation” (the exact date is not known, as the text was published posthumously), this is an obvious example of the direct and organic interaction between Dilthey’s historical writings and his historiography and philosophy.

The objective spirit is also the epistemological fundament establishing the possibility of understanding between people. It expresses meanings that are shared:

²⁷⁹ Paul Redding: “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel”. In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition) URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/hegel/>>.

²⁸⁰ Dilthey: *SW III*, 229.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁸² This also brings us back to the doctrine of *besser-verstehen*, the idea of understanding historical figures better than they understood themselves, as discussed in chapter 1.2.3.

²⁸³ Dilthey: *GS XII*, 131-132.

From earliest childhood, the self is nurtured by this world of objective spirit. It is also the medium in which the understanding of other persons and their life-manifestations takes place. For everything in which spirit has objectified itself contains something that is common to the I and the Thou. Every square planted with trees, every room in which chairs are arranged, is understandable to us from childhood because human tendencies to set goals, produce order, and define values in common have assigned a place to every square and every object in the room.²⁸⁴

The objective spirit does not only enable understanding between contemporaries but because of the essential historicity of the world, we can understand past objectifications of the spirit as well. Dilthey defines the objective spirit as thoroughly historical, in which the past becomes “a continuously enduring present for us.”²⁸⁵ This implies a kind of genealogical understanding: the history of different phenomena and things is an essential constituent of their existence. This means that we can understand the past because we have inherited the world from the previous generations and are aware of the historicity of every aspect of the human world. This is why for Dilthey “knowing something” means knowing its history – knowledge is not a priori, but historically constituted (see the next section). This attitude also explains why for Dilthey as a historian it is so important to trace back the intellectual history of phenomena very far into the past, e.g. starting the analysis of the French spirit from antiquity. While the concept of objective spirit is not – apart from the one example mentioned above – directly used in his historiography, the basic theoretical idea it expresses clarifies his theoretical attitudes. Historical facts are objectifications of the human spirit in a tangible form, and thus those objectifications can be studied, analysed, and ultimately understood.

5.5. Objectivity of Knowledge and Relativism

Dilthey writes in the preface to his *Introduction* that until his philosophy the “study and evaluation of historical phenomena [has remained] unconnected with the analysis of facts of consciousness” and, consequently, “it [has had no] grounding in the only knowledge which is ultimately secure – – in short, no philosophical foundation. Lacking a healthy relationship to epistemology and psychology, this school [the historical school] has not attained an explanatory method.”²⁸⁶ *Introduction*, and consequently Dilthey’s philosophy in general, is thus from early on conceived as filling this gap: creating an epistemological foundation for the historical school (and by extension all the human

²⁸⁴ Dilthey: *SWIII*, 229.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ See e.g. Katherina Kinzel: “The history of philosophy and the puzzles of life. Windelband and Dilthey on the ahistorical core of philosophical thinking”. In: Martin Kusch, Katherina Kinzel, Johannes Steizinger, Niels Wildschut, (eds.): *The Emergence of Modern Relativism. The German Debates from the 1770s to the 1930s*. London 2019.

sciences) so that they would be able to produce scientifically valid knowledge while still retaining their independent methodology. For Dilthey scientifically valid knowledge means, quite simply, objective and universally valid knowledge. Thus, as a philosopher Dilthey defends the claim that it is possible to attain universally valid knowledge in the human and social sciences. However, as a historian and historicist, he seems to be a relativist of some sort. For him, values, morals, and even philosophical systems are historically and culturally contingent. This historicist principle is clearly visible in his historiography, a prime example of this is the last text discussed in the previous chapter “Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und Die Geschichtliche Welt” in which he contextualises historical consciousness culturally and historically. His foundationalist philosophy and these relativist tendencies seem to be in conflict.

Dilthey, among other notable historians of the late 19th century, was indeed also accused of relativism. The opposing views came from two sides: on one side were the natural-scientific thinkers, for whom relativism was not a serious contender. On the other side were philosophers. The historical relativisation of knowledge systems, beliefs, and values seemed to lead to undesirable epistemological uncertainty,²⁸⁷ calling into question the very possibility of valid and universal knowledge. Edmund Husserl famously criticised historicism – and Dilthey directly, as its representative – in his 1910 programmatic essay on phenomenology, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science”.²⁸⁸ While Husserl later came to appreciate Dilthey’s philosophy as a precursor of his own phenomenology, in the essay he sees historicism as a philosophically dubious attitude that denies the existence of universally valid meanings and relativizes everything historically and culturally.²⁸⁹ And indeed, not only do Dilthey’s historical texts seem to purport relativism about philosophical systems, but also his philosophy includes aspects that relativize and historicize reason in general. For example, Beiser discusses Dilthey’s ambivalent relation to Kantian transcendental epistemology: “on the one hand, history is the *object* of Kantian criticism, and so brought within its agenda; on the other hand, however, history is also the *agent* or *instrument* of criticism. Dilthey intended his project to be a critique of the ahistorical pretensions of reason, and he was convinced that Kant’s philosophy had more than its fair share of those.”²⁹⁰ Despite this, Dilthey did not see himself as a relativist.²⁹¹ While his philosophy acknowledges the inherent historicity of reason and philosophical theories, it also

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Edmund Husserl: “Philosophie als Strenge Wissenschaft”. In: *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, 1 (3) 1910/1911. His criticism of historicism and Dilthey in the section “Historizismus und Weltanschauungslehre” 323ff.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. See also: Varto: “Hermeneutiikka ja Historismi”, 47.

²⁹⁰ Beiser: *Historicist Tradition*, 324. Italics in original

²⁹¹ Martinelli: “Defining human sciences”, 512.

maintains that historical knowledge needs a strong epistemological grounding “so as not to disintegrate into relativism.”²⁹² His epistemology of the human sciences thus combines the notion of reason being historically constructed but also being able to produce universally valid knowledge.²⁹³ This is also important, because – I believe – as a historian Dilthey believed that his historical writings, too, had a claim to some degree of objective and universal validity.

5.5.1. Explanatory Laws in the Human Sciences

Before getting back to Dilthey and relativism, it makes sense to discuss what he means with objectivity and objective knowledge in the human sciences. Kant – the ultimate authority of epistemology in Dilthey’s time – had regarded only general relations between natural phenomena as objects of objective knowledge. For Dilthey’s human sciences however also unique phenomena – not only the laws of nature – need to be considered as legitimate objects of research.²⁹⁴ History, sociology, or any other human science would hardly be worth doing without a possibility to acquire objective knowledge about singular events. Dilthey’s critique of historical reason thus had two quite concrete challenges as to the objectivity of knowledge: to determine whether there are explanatory laws of the human world and to determine how objective knowledge about unique historical facts and phenomena is possible. Also, if there are explanatory laws, what are they based on. As seen above, Dilthey rejects both explanatory psychology and philosophy of history as a possible basis of such laws. In *Introduction* he also sharply criticises sociology, which he sees as the Anglo-French equivalent of the German philosophy of history. Both see the unique and particular in history just “as a raw material for their abstractions” and through such abstractions try to force history to “divulge its ultimate secret”.²⁹⁵ Of course for Dilthey such a “secret” does not exist, the unique phenomena in history do not reveal a neat net of causal laws – ideal or natural.

At the beginning of his career, Dilthey believed in the possibility of creating explanatory laws for the human sciences in another sense, very much according to the model of the natural sciences. Makkreel argues that the hope that these kinds of explanations would be possible lasted at least up until 1887 when *Poetics* was published.²⁹⁶ In *Poetics* Dilthey still seeks to formulate inner explanations, based on psychic causality, about human imagination and the effects of poetry.²⁹⁷ Also in *Introduction*

²⁹² Kinzel: “The puzzles of life”

²⁹³ Dilthey: *SW III*, 158-160.

²⁹⁴ Tool: “Objectivity of Knowledge”, 5.

²⁹⁵ Dilthey: *SW I*, 141.

²⁹⁶ Makkreel: “Dilthey”

²⁹⁷ See e.g. Makkreel: “Introduction”. In: Dilthey: *SW V*.

Dilthey refers to the human universal psychological structure as an explanation for laws “governing human life in general.”²⁹⁸ One can also detect this more psychologicistic framework in *Leben Schleiermachers*, where he does seem to believe in the *possibility* of causal explanations of Schleiermacher’s psychological development, the problem is just the lack of sources. What makes this early approach different from explanatory psychology is however that it is still descriptive. It explains human psychology through its involvement with the surrounding context, and through its manifestations in the shared world. The psychological universalities Dilthey posits are based on a historical analysis, not on hypotheses about physiological causal connections in the brain. For example, humans everywhere, irrespective of their cultural and historical context, seem to form families and have similar core ideas about things like justice and beauty – this tells us something about what is universal in human nature. Those universalities also have explanatory force in the human sciences and could function as a basis for formulating some universal laws. Since Dilthey’s own psychology, however, is so different from explanatory psychology, this would – at least in his own view – let him off the hook from any charges of psychologism and reductive naturalism.²⁹⁹

However, when Dilthey developed his descriptive and analytic psychology in the 1890’s, he came to modify his views slightly.³⁰⁰ As discussed in the previous sub-chapters, Dilthey’s descriptive psychology does not seek to establish causal psychological explanations. It describes and analyses the interaction between human psychological structure and the socio-cultural world i.e. the relation between inner and outer experience. The explanatory laws in the human sciences he postulates now are not psychological anymore (even though Dilthey still posits a universal structure of the human psyche) but have to do with the structural construction of the human world and the human experience in it. The explanatory laws are not located in the individual’s head, but in the reciprocal context-individual-structure of the human experience. This attitude becomes even more clear in “Formation”, which emphasizes the need for an analysis of the laws and structures governing the human lived experience.

It can be debated whether, especially with his shift to hermeneutic vocabulary, Dilthey also moved away from foundationalism.³⁰¹ I argue however that Dilthey still remains committed to the existence

²⁹⁸ Dilthey, *SW I*, e.g. 138.

²⁹⁹ Varto: “Hermeneutiikka ja Historismi”, 46.

³⁰⁰ Makkreel, “Dilthey”

³⁰¹ Both Gjesdal (“Enlightenment, History, and the Anthropological Turn”) and Beiser (*Historicist Tradition*), rightly, point out the antifoundationalist tendencies in Dilthey’s philosophy. There is definitely a conflict between the foundationalist and anti-foundationalist tendencies in Dilthey’s thought, but I believe that until the end of his life he was committed to finding an epistemological foundation for the human sciences that would render objective knowledge

of a structure that governs the human world and of which we can also have universally valid knowledge. While this is not a naturalist or psychologist cause-effect structure, it is an unchanging framework that governs the human experience. Dilthey discusses the complexity of these relational structures governing lived experiences in “Studies Toward the Foundation of the Human Sciences”:

I am tired from overworking; having reviewed my files, I worry about their unfinished contents, whose completion demands incalculably more work from me. All this “about”, “of”, and “toward”, all these references of what is remembered to what is experienced, in short, all these structural inner relations, must be apprehended by me, since I now want to apprehend the fullness of the lived experience exhaustively. And precisely in order to exhaust it, I must regress further in the structural network to the memories of other lived experiences.³⁰²

This passage shows that Dilthey still does believe that it is – at least in theory – possible to understand the structural composition of lived experience in its fullness. Of course, a historian or any other scientist only attempts to describe a portion of the historical-cultural reality. A historical account might be scientifically valid and valuable even if the historian is not able to recreate the lived experience of a historical figure in its fullness or to fully describe the structural network governing the formation of the whole historical era. Still, Dilthey believes that it is, at least in principle, possible to apprehend the complex and manifold composition of the human world in an objective manner.³⁰³ My argument, in short, is that while Dilthey did abandon the original hope that the human sciences might arrive at explanatory laws in the same sense as natural sciences, he still believed until the end of his life in the possibility of an explanatory method of the human sciences that is objective and universal.

Moving on to the question about knowledge concerning unique phenomena. Gaining objective knowledge about historical facts – when a particular war started or a king died – is of course simply a question of the availability of sources. What requires interpretation is detecting and understanding the intended and unintended *meanings* in those sources.³⁰⁴ In Dilthey’s view, although meanings and intentions are historically and culturally relative, it is possible for a historian who has enough sources and the ability to interpret those sources to understand meanings objectively. Singular events and

possible, and thus did not abandon his foundationalist project. Whether he actually managed to find that is, of course, a separate question.

³⁰² Dilthey, *SW III*, 50.

³⁰³ See also: *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁰⁴ Tool, “Objectivity of Knowledge”, 11.

phenomena acquire a definite meaning in relation to the surrounding world, much like single isolated words acquire a definite meaning only in the relations within a sentence.³⁰⁵ Historical phenomena and manifestations of life do have definite meanings that can be detected because their context gives them their meaning. Our descriptions and accounts of these phenomena might, of course, be incomplete because of the lack of sources, but that does not make the knowledge less valid or less objective.

For Dilthey, history is an account of the rich and multifaceted nexus of life. It tries to grasp as much of the totality of life as possible, but it cannot go beyond it. Dilthey's historical narration is so descriptive and concentrated on explanation and illumination because through those we can grasp definite meanings and ultimately gain objective and valid knowledge of the subject matter. Objectivity of historiography lies in contextualization and understanding what is historically constructed in each phenomenon – not in postulating meta-historical meanings and rules. This is why Dilthey's works are somewhat tedious to read, and yet the reader also has to appreciate and admire the richness of his historical illumination of a certain time, and the masterful way Dilthey intertwines different intellectual currents into contextualisation of people, thoughts and artworks.

5.5.2. Historical and Methodological Relativism

As mentioned above, in “Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die Geschichtliche Welt” Dilthey does not judge the pre-Enlightenment historians according to modern ideals and his own scientific standards but contextualises them in their historical-cultural milieu. While he does seem to reveal some kind of preference for certain historians and their way of cognizing the historical world, he is careful not to let his own opinion be too visible. In the review of *History of Civilization in England*, Dilthey in turn harshly criticises Buckle for seeing all past forms of historiography as unworthy and childish.³⁰⁶ Thus, for Dilthey, historical explanations and philosophies are only to be measured against the worldview of their time. This historicist principle seems to make Dilthey a historical relativist, which makes Husserl's criticism valid and fitting. However, since Dilthey did not see himself as a relativist and ultimately believed that objective knowledge is possible, what are we going to make of his relativism? This is also a question of whether his relativism is self-refuting, since he both relativizes historical reason in his historiography, but also offers a philosophical theory of history that he supposedly would not consider relative.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Dilthey: *GW XVI*, 100-101.

Another relativist aspect in Dilthey's historiography is that it lacks a metanarrative. While for instance Buckle's deterministic view of the human world also includes a strong metanarrative of historical progress, Dilthey is very sceptical of the idea of progress and is explicitly critical of the Enlightenment progress-optimism. Historical change in Dilthey's writings is not evolution in the sense of evolving and progressing towards a goal or from a simple to a more complicated form. The old ideas transform into new ones according to the changing historical realities, serving the needs of that particular reality. There is no necessary development, history does not have a pre-given direction. Dilthey sees history as intertwining intellectual movements that are fully immanent to the world itself, so historiography cannot postulate a transcendental meaning-giving structure to save itself from relativism.

I argue that as a historian we can consider Dilthey a *methodological* or *anthropological relativist*. He simply recognizes the existence of substantive historical and cultural differences. His relativism is an inherent part of his methodology, but not necessarily an epistemological doctrine. In fact, until he and historicism in general were challenged by philosophers about relativism, he might well have considered his stance quite unproblematic and intuitive. It is simply an awareness of the fact that there are different beliefs and belief systems, as well as values and norms, that are historically relative. As a historian and also during his early career as a philosopher he is not interested in the existence of absolute truths – rather his relativism is either neutral on those questions or ignores them, concentrating on practical descriptions rather than epistemological principles. Dilthey's thought is a "radical philosophy of immanence"³⁰⁷: we can understand history and life only in confines with the life itself. The methodology or epistemological framework of the human sciences does not form a dimension outside of life itself.³⁰⁸ Reason cannot fall back to a priori stances. Knowledge is always about practice: how things actually *are* rather than how they should be.

However, Dilthey had to come up with a philosophical argument that would save his philosophy and historicism in general from regressing to relativism, as well as protecting historicist historiography from epistemological and moral nihilism. Being a practicing historian of philosophy himself, Dilthey was acutely aware of a "crisis of the historicization of philosophy" and the broader "crisis of historicism"³⁰⁹ and that a philosophical defence was needed. Kinzel provides a more sophisticated

³⁰⁷ Jos De Mul: "Dilthey's narrative model of human development: Necessary reconsiderations after the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer". In: *Man and World* 24, 1991, 420.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Kinzel, "Puzzles of life".

and broader account of Dilthey's defence against relativism³¹⁰ than I can do here. Now it suffices to concentrate on the basics of his argument: the uniformity of the structure of the human life in general. As established above, in addition to his historicist convictions, Dilthey had strong universalist convictions about human psychology. Kinzel refers to his position as *immanent universalism*: "while ethical values and the principles of reason are strictly immanent to lived experience, they also share a universal basis in the dynamic structure of psychic life."³¹¹ If our psychological structure is always relevantly similar, also the functioning of the faculty of reason and the way we do value-judgments has to have a common ground.

Dilthey's reply to the relativism-accusations was his theory of worldviews, which he never developed into a full-fledged and comprehensive philosophical or historiographical view. The plurality of different philosophical systems is indeed rooted in life; belief-systems emerge as answers to problems and questions that arise in the interaction between humans and the outside world – Dilthey calls them "puzzles of life".³¹² However, Dilthey claims that there are at least three recurring basic types of worldviews that characterize all the historical formations of philosophical thinking: *naturalism*, *the idealism of freedom* and *objective idealism*.³¹³ Naturalism tries to explain the world by causal explanations, objective idealism "affirms reality as the embodiment of a harmonious set of values and is monistic",³¹⁴ and idealism of freedom is characterized by the belief in the sovereignty of the will and is dualistic. The details of this theory are not important here, but it is interesting to note that this theory of worldviews is widely based on the intuitions and knowledge he gained through his work as a historian. His argument, in short, is that by analysing the recurring themes in the different formations of worldviews and philosophical systems, one can determine the ahistorical core of thinking and human reason. The recurrence of the same core ideas, as well as the application of rigorous conceptual thinking, are what makes up the non-relative in the historically changing forms of philosophy. Even when philosophical views are shaped by contingent historical factors, there is an essential continuity that unites all philosophical thought. While not everyone finds Dilthey's defence against relativism completely satisfactory, it is fully in line with his philosophical project as a whole. It is also a prime example of how also as a philosopher Dilthey is committed to his historicist convictions, and how essential history is in Dilthey's philosophical thought in general. For him historical analysis is equal to philosophical analysis, they complement each other.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ For an overview of Dilthey's Theory of worldviews see e.g. Ibid. and Makkreel: "Dilthey"

³¹⁴ Makkreel: "Dilthey"

It is somewhat unclear to which extent Dilthey would consider his own philosophy as historically relative,³¹⁵ but as argued above, he did believe in the possibility of objective knowledge. Possibly he did not fashion his own philosophy in terms of contingent worldviews but rather as meta-level considerations. In any case, he seems to be unable to resolve wholly the problem that his historicist relativism seems to refute his own theory's claims for universal validity. It also does not seem completely satisfactory to simply note that as a historian Dilthey is a methodological relativist, but as a philosopher he does not care about relativism, or that his own epistemological ponderings would be on a meta-level that is exempted from all historicization and relativisation. De Mul poetically expresses Dilthey's unescapable predicament: he finds himself in a "tragic contradiction between the philosophical desire for universal validity and the realization of the fundamental finitude of every attempt to satisfy that desire."³¹⁶ However, Dilthey could judge, with good reasons, that his theoretical thought shares something of the ahistorical nature of philosophy, as it is based on a rigorous and systematic analysis. In "Formation" Dilthey indeed carefully explicates different methods of rigorous analysis one can use in the human sciences. So, even when Dilthey would be ready to accept that there are aspects in his philosophy that are only relatively true, he could fall back on the idea of its ahistorical core. While Beiser is no doubt correct in saying that Dilthey to some extent relativizes Kant's philosophy, he also must regard it as ahistorical to a great extent – as expressed in the first Dilthey-quote in this thesis: "Die Philosophie Kants kann völlig verstanden werden ohne nähere Beschäftigung mit seiner Person und seinem Leben."³¹⁷ Since Dilthey fashioned his own project after the Kantian model as the *Critique of Historical Reason*, maybe we are to understand Dilthey's philosophy in similar terms.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter might not be seamlessly joined together by one clear narrative or argument since my aim has been to explicate several intersections between Dilthey's historiography and philosophy. However, this, the fact that there indeed are such clear conceptual and methodological connections, supports my main argument that Dilthey's historiography is an integral part of his philosophical thought. His philosophical theories are not only informed by his intuitions as a historian, but he often integrates history as an essential part of his philosophical argumentation as for example in his theory

³¹⁵ See e.g. Kinzel: "Puzzles of life"

³¹⁶ De Mul: *Tragedy of Finitude*, 154.

³¹⁷ Dilthey: *LS*, XXXIII. and the cond chapter of this thesis.

of worldviews. The historicist attitude however also challenges the universal validity of his philosophical project, calling into question the very possibility of universally and historically non-relative valid philosophical theories.

I also discussed Dilthey's philosophical development in light of the continuities and discontinuities of his historiography, making the case that his philosophical career should rather be understood in terms of gradual adjustments than substantive shifts. He did indeed develop his theory of interpretation to accommodate a more comprehensive theory of the structural formation of the human world but did not change his framework radically. His descriptive psychology – as a methodological attitude – is at the core of his historiography, even though he might have fine-tuned his theoretical conceptions throughout his career. As a fully immanent and non-speculative attitude, it provides a basis for objective and valid knowledge in the human sciences.

6. Final Remarks and Conclusions

In this thesis, I have analysed both theory and practice in Dilthey's historiography. The two do not always seamlessly correspond to each other: epistemological commitments sometimes conflict with narrative practice, commitment to the relativity of knowledge calls into question the historian's own position, and sometimes the sheer complexity of the human world simply escapes an exhaustive systematic analysis. Dilthey, at the same time both a systematic philosopher and a sensitive intellectual historian, was of course very aware of these occasional discrepancies. This might also be the reason why practically all his major projects remained unfinished, from *Leben Schleiermachers* and *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Geistes* to his philosophical project of the critique of historical reason. They were all colossal attempts at exhaustive analyses – practical and theoretical – aiming to build a comprehensive theory for understanding the human world. However, no analysis was ever comprehensive enough for him. Rather than resorting to either naturalist or idealist speculation in order to formulate a neat rationally constructed system, he preferred to leave questions unsettled. His theory cannot fall back into either naturalist or idealist hypotheses; it is radically anti-metaphysical.

The fact that Dilthey might not have provided a definitive epistemological basis or a comprehensive and exhaustive system for the human sciences does not make his attempts any less interesting or valuable. While he aims for systematicity and scientific rigor, in my interpretation he emerges first and foremost as a thinker who is interested in the very practical questions of historiography and

writing history. He is not as concerned about the metaphysical and epistemological commitments his theories entail as he is of their practical usability. This is why I believe that e.g. Dilthey's commitment to individualism and relativism should first and foremost be considered as methodological rather than ontological doctrines. Of course, this does not mean that the possible problems such as the disparity between his relativist historiography and the universalist aims of his philosophy would completely disappear, or that Dilthey would completely disregard them. It just means that the practice of writing history sometimes requires a different kind of approach than philosophical questions and that those questions should be seen as separate.

Dilthey philosophizes about the epistemology of history: how do we understand, analyse, and describe it in the best possible way. He formulates analytical categories and concepts as methodological tools, building a bottom-up architectonic view of the human world. This highlights his position as a sociologist thinker, who influenced and was influenced by the German tradition of interpretative sociology in important ways. These sociological features of Dilthey's thought, together with his historicism, reveal him as a thinker who was acutely aware of the infinite complexity of the human life but yet willing to tackle that complexity. He tackled it not through overarching and all-encompassing theories and abstractions, but with a sensitive analysis that he developed throughout his career. As I have argued in this thesis, from 1870's *Leben Schleiermachers* to his later works from the first decade of the 20th century, Dilthey widened his methodological machinery and adopted a more structural and multi-layered approach to understanding history.

I have discussed the changes and continuities in Dilthey's thought, both historiographical and philosophical. While my reading emphasizes the continuities – that the core theoretical ideas remain the same – it also reveals a development in terms of gradual adjustments. Somewhat simplified: Dilthey moves from regarding the individual as the prism of reality to a structural understanding of the formation of the human world. While Schleiermacher is primarily construed as a converging point of intellectual influences, in Dilthey's later historiography the historical world is described as a collection of tangible historical facts. The historical individual is not the only possible access point to this reality, but now only one constituent of the historical reality as a whole. However, because the human world is essentially a creation of human activity – nothing else and nothing less – we understand it not as a collection of foreign objects but as something we relate to through emotions and volitions – through the human psyche. This is why psychology as a science that studies the reciprocal relationship between human experience and the outside world remained central for Dilthey

throughout his life. This is also why individuals as feeling and thinking agents still hold a special place in Dilthey's later historiography, and he continues writing biographies.

Another – related – development I have identified is a movement from empirical historiography to a more interpretative approach. In *Leben Schleiermachers* Dilthey aimed at creating a scientific biography, which meant a commitment to a strictly empirical approach. His later approach, which I have above described as structural, is more interpretative, analysing the connections between different historical facts and phenomena. Whereas in *Leben Schleiermachers* the main goal is to determine the intellectual influences that shaped Schleiermacher's thought, in the later essays the aim is to interpret the connections between individuals and phenomena. This new emphasis – interpreting a whole through its parts and parts through their place in the whole – corresponds to Dilthey's mature hermeneutic theory.

Through analysing the intersections and connections in Dilthey's philosophy and historiography, I have shown that the intuitions and knowledge he gained through studying history are a central aspect of his thought as a whole. I have also shown that Dilthey's philosophical argumentation is based on the idea of the fundamental historicity of the world and that for him the understanding of the historical is integral to any kind of human science or philosophy. Thus, the most important argument in this thesis is that Dilthey's background as a practicing historian is not a mere detail of his biography or a side-note of his philosophical career, but an essential part of his identity as a thinker.

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