WILHELM DILTHEY'S THEORY OF HERMENEUTICS

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. DILTHEY AND HIS AGE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. GEISTESWISSENSCHAFTEN VS. NATURWISSENSCHAFTEN</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. DILTHEY'S ESSAY ON HERMENEUTICS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. ELABORATION OF DILTHEY'S HERMENEUTIC PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Hermeneutics</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erlebnis-Ausdruck-Verstehen</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Language and Literature for Interpretation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF DILTHEY'S HERMENEUTICS</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Studies</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Studies</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Von deutscher Dichtung und Musik</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weltanschauungslehre</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: Translation of Dilthey's Essay</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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INTRODUCTION

Denn in dem geheimnisvollen, unergründlichen Antlitz des Lebens, mit dem lachenden Munde und den schwermutig blickenden Augen, suchen alle Geschlechter denkender und dichtender Menschen zu lesen, und auch das hat kein Ende. 1

Thus one writer has expressed the never-ending, all-absorbing quest for truth that motivates man as he finds himself thrust into a universe he does not understand. Perplexed and bewildered before the tantalizing figure of Destiny, he has ever sought to read in her inscrutable mask the answer to the riddle of life. Inspired with what they believed to find there, men throughout the ages have expressed their faiths in works of stone and sounds, of thoughts and words—monuments of their Weltanschauungen. 2 These "interpretations of reality" have, in turn, become the objects of study of other men, who were concerned to discover what they contained of truth and, more particularly, what they revealed about man himself.

Such a "philosopher of philosophy" was Wilhelm Dilthey,


2. G. S., VII, p. 379.

3. Dilthey, in analyzing these various world views in his Weltanschauungslehre, G. S., VIII, terms his study "philosophy of philosophy."
the man who wrote these provocative opening words. It is the purpose of this study to examine his approach to this problem, the means he employed, and the conclusions he reached, as well as the significance of his work in the field of humanistic studies.
CHAPTER I

DILTHEY AND HIS AGE

On the intellectual horizon the German scholar, Wilhelm Dilthey, rises as an imposing, though somewhat obscure and indistinct figure. Acknowledged as "the most important philosopher in the second half of the nineteenth century," this "lonely and neglected genius" has not enjoyed a reputation commensurate with the profundity and scope of his works. Among English-speaking peoples his writings have remained relatively unknown, as may be evidenced by the

1. The following brief biographical sketch will serve to acquaint the reader with the most important facts of what E. A. Hodges (Wilhelm Dilthey, an Introduction, p. vii) terms Dilthey's "unsentful" life.

Wilhelm Dilthey, the son of a pastor of the Reformed Church, was born in 1833 at Biebrich am Rhein, near Mainz. He studied at the University of Berlin, receiving his doctorate in 1864, and began his teaching career as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Basel in 1867. He made successive moves to Kiel and Breslau, returning finally to Berlin in 1882. He was made a member of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1887. Most of his writings appeared in the publications of the Academy, as well as in the Archiv für systematische Philosophie, of which he was co-editor. He died in Berlin as Professor Emeritus in 1911.

2. Ortega y Gasset, Concord and Liberty, p. 151.

comparative dearth of relevant material available.\(^1\) Even in his own country, where the German propensity for "constant mirroring of the soul" would seem to insure more immediate recognition of his introspective investigations, his fame has been late in coming. This may be attributed to a great extent to the fact that it is only fairly recently his works have been accessible for systematic study, while they are frequently forbidding as to content and form. Yet diffuse and fragmentary as they often may be, Dilthey's writings have a compelling force, for in them he resolutely addresses himself to the critical problems facing the thinking of his day with the "leidenschaftlichen Energie des um eine grosse Sache kämpfenden."

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1. Hodges' book, already noted, is the only one to date written in English on Dilthey exclusively, although sections in other more general works are devoted to his philosophy. In addition, articles have appeared in periodicals on various aspects of his theories. (See bibliography for listings.) At present Dr. Arnold Bergstraesser of the University of Chicago is at work on a much-needed English edition of Dilthey's works.


3. This has been accomplished through the efforts of the circle of Dilthey's pupils, including such men as Paul Ritter, Herman Nohl, Georg Misch, and Bernard Groethuysen, who have collected and edited his works for publication, each contributing introductory comments to the various volumes of the eleven that have appeared to date.

The age in which Dilthey lived and thought and wrote was marked by inner conflicts and outward changes. With Kant's dichotomy of reality into two spheres, the realm of nature (Natur) was gaining mastery over that of the spirit (Geist). Interest was centered on the phenomenal world, and here, through a series of rapid transformations, reality presented an ever-changing countenance. On the social and economic front the old order was giving way to the new in the wake of political and technical revolutions. Empirical investigations in the fields of the natural and physical sciences were reducing the material world to mechanical laws of behavior and development, while even that other large body of systematic studies sometimes called the humanistic sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) fell under the spell of the scientific method and applied positivistic procedures. Naturalism, materialism, realism were the order of the day. Humanistic faith and idealistic speculation of the preceding era, retreating before the onslaught of the triumphant sciences, gave way to rationalistic skepticism and epistemological proof. It was, indeed, "ein Abstieg, ein Abgleiten.

1. Dilthey discusses the predominant trends of his day in a lecture delivered in 1899, which appears under the title of "Die Kultur der Gegenwart und die Philosophie," in Vol. VIII, G. S., p. 194 ff. Good background sketches of this period may be found in Bochenski, Europäische Philosophie der Gegenwart, pp. 13-22, and in Brock, Contemporary German Philosophy, pp. 1-14.
Having swept away many of the assumptions on which rested old religious beliefs and philosophical convictions, science itself could offer only an empty relativism, while philosophy, shaken to its very foundations, withdrew into a shadowy realm of metaphysics. Dilthey could well exclaim: "Welch ein leerer Lärm und was für metaphysische Disputatio
ten!" The battle, then, lay between Geist and Natur, and the task confronting philosophy was to rescue Geist from the "mutilating" effects of Natur on the one hand, and on the other, to bring it out from the "shadows of metaphysics into the bright light of consciousness."  

Such was the intellectual climate in which Dilthey's thinking was nurtured. Starting his academic career as a student of theology, he soon turned to the broader field of philosophy, for which he had early shown a particular inclination. His awareness of the reality and problems of life is reflected already in his youthful papers, which have been collected by his daughter and published under the title


2. Dilthey portrays this crisis in the course of his discussion of the scope and evolution of the humanistic studies in his Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, constituting Vol. 1 of the Gesammelte Schriften.


of Der junge Dilthey. 1. Here he raises many of the questions with which he struggled all his days, for, as he often remarked, all his work was but the carrying out of the plans of his youth. He strikes the keynote of these plans in a lecture delivered during the closing days of his life, stating: "Ich war in einem unersättlichen Streben aufgewachsen, in der geschichtlichen Welt den Ausdruck dieses Lebens selbst in seiner Mannigfaltigkeit und Tiefe zu

1. As indicative of the direction his future intellectual efforts were to take, the following passage, written by Dilthey at the age of nineteen upon leaving the Gymnasium, may be cited as being particularly significant:

"Wie die Sterne, die ewigen, festen, unbeweglichen, sich zitternd malen in der schwankenden Woge, so strahlt der Widerschein der Ideale, der ewigen, uns aus der vorübergleitenden, sinkenden Welle des Lebens entgegen. Denn die Ideale, die ewig fern sind uns auch ewig nah. Es ist das Streben jedes guten Menschen, sie hinauszutragen aus ihrer ewigen Höhe in der Menschen Herzen und Häuser, es ist der Traum jeder edlen, tiefpoetischen Seele, sie menschlich geoffenbart zu finden und gefunden zu haben. Das ist die wahre Liebe, wenn wir, sei es bewusst, sei es unbewusst, in wahlverwandtschaftlicher Neigung einen Menschen zu unserem Ideale verklären, das Idealische, was in ihm liegt, ausbreiten über seine ganze Natur, die seelische wie die körperliche. Diese Liebe ist der höchste, schönste Jünglingstraum. Aber doch nur ein Traum, und Träume versinken; die schönsten am schnellsten. Wir haben im sterblichen das Unsterbliche gesehen, im Irdischen das überirdische, wir haben geirrt, phantasiiert im Traume, und darum sucht jede edle Seele sich aus ihm aufzurütteln und zu dem, was sie durch das Spiel der träumenden Phantasie zu sich herangerückt sah, sich zu erheben suchen in wachendem, ernsten und festen Handeln. Das ist jene allbekannte, oft ausgesprochene Wahrheit: jede große, tiefe Seele lebt, aber keine findet in der Liebe ihre ewige Befriedigung." (Op. cit., p. 1)

2. Ibid., "Vorwort," p. iii.
And, indeed, this insatiable striving to grasp the essence of life in its various forms was the dominant theme of a long and productive life.

In the same lecture Dilthey gives an insight into his own philosophical background. From the great poets—Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe—he learned of the inner unity and purposefulness of life; the historians—Thucydides, Machiavelli, Ranke—revealed to him the historicity to be seen in the course of world events; and his own studies of Schleiermacher's theological writings led him to recognize in the individual's religious experience the individuation of the universal. But chiefly it was the principles of Kant—Kant, who had once and for all set the problem for philosophy with his questioning of knowledge of the world as given in perception and understanding and his limiting such knowledge to that given in experience—which formed the foundation of his philosophical development:

Sein Ausgangspunkt in dem Problem der Allgemeingültigkeit des Wissens, der Notwendigkeit und Allgemeinheit der logischen und mathematischen Wahrheiten, seine Begründung der Naturwissenschaften auf sie, aber zugleich die Einschränkung des Wissens auf das Erfahrbare, ... --diese Sätze Kants bildeten die Grundlage meiner Entwicklung.

Such were the influencing factors that shaped his thinking and led him to take a stand between the two divergent trends stemming from Kant's teaching, expressing his

1. *S., S., V.* p. 4.
dissatisfaction with both schools:


As Nohl points out, the point of departure in Dilthey's thinking is to be found in the discipline of his religious training: "Die Apologetik der religiösen Erfahrung gegen den Logismus Hegels wie gegen den Materialismus und Determinismus der Naturwissenschaften hat er damals ganz in sich aufgenommen und sie ist sein eigentlicher Ausgangspunkt." He goes on to indicate the direction this thinking was to follow, turning from flights into transcendental spheres to take root in the soil of human experience:

Es war aber seine persönlichste Genialität, dass er diese Gewissheit eines höheren Lebens nicht mehr aus irgendeiner Transzendenz begründete, sondern entschlossen in Diesseits stehend, sie aus der lebendigen Erfahrung der menschlichen Existenz selber gewinnen wollte.

For, although Dilthey called for a return to Kant, he

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1. G. S., V, p. 4.
2. Herman Nohl, "Nachwort" to Die Philosophie des Lebens, p. 95.
3. Ibid.
was not content to remain at the same position but wished to go beyond it, pursuing a line implicit in Kantian epistemology but one that had not received sufficient attention—namely, determination of the basis of knowledge in the mental sphere. Here, he felt, lay the real task for philosophy in his generation:

Auch die Philosophie tritt in den Kreis der Erfahrungswissenschaften, welche auf den gesetzmässigen Zusammenhang der Erscheinungen gerichtet sind. Sie ist mit den übrigen Wissenschaften des Geistes in dem grossen Problem verbunden, eine Erfahrungswissenschaft der geistigen Erscheinungen zu begründen, und hier finde ich in erster Linie die Aufgabe unserer Generation.

So he proposed, as a counterpart to Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, a *Kritik der historischen Vernunft*, to determine how history and the other mental sciences are possible. His critique of Kant's doctrine was levelled at two points in particular. He felt that it made of time, and with it of life itself, a mere phenomenon, while the act of cognition became nothing but an intellectual exercise. As he says, "In den Adern des erkennenden Subjekts, das Locke, Hume und Kant konstruierten, rinnt nicht richtiges Blut, sondern der verdünnte Saft von Vernunft als blosser Denktätigkeit." He, rather, was to be concerned with the whole man in all his powers and functions—"dies wollend-fühlend-


vorstellende Wesen"—as he appears in the stream of time. His objective, the "herrschende Impuls" of his philosophy, was, then, "to seek to understand life from life itself and to penetrate ever deeper into the world of history." His method to gain this objective he outlines as follows:

...jeden Bestandteil des gegenwärtigen abstrakten, wissenschaftlichen Denkens halte ich an die ganze Menschennatur, wie Erfahrung, Studium der Sprache und der Geschichte sie erweisen und suche ihren Zusammenhang. Und so ergibt sich: die wichtigsten Bestandteile unseres Bildes und unserer Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit, wie eben persönliche Lebens-einheit, Aussenwelt, Individuen ausser uns, ihr Leben in der Zeit und ihre Wechselwirkung, sie alle können aus dieser ganzen Menschennatur erklärt werden, deren realer Lebensprozess am Wollen, Fühlen und Vorstellen nur seine verschiedenen Seiten hat. Nicht die Annahme eines starren a priori unseres Erkenntnisvermögens, sondern allein Ent-wicklungsgeschichte, welche von der Totalität unseres Wesens ausgeht, kann die Frage beantworten, die wir alle an die Philosophie zu richten haben.4

Dilthey's preoccupation with the historical aspect of human existence stems from his Berlin days. When he came there around 1850, the great intellectual movement that culminated in the establishment of history and related human studies was at its height. As Hodges describes it:

2. G. S., V, p. 4.
3. Ibid.
This was a revolution not in natural science, but in historical study, and it meant that history itself acquired a consciousness of method and direction which transformed it into a progressive science, while kindred studies such as philology, archaeology, anthropology, comparative mythology, sprang into life to support it and feed it with facts and principles. A new intellectual world came into being over against the world of the natural sciences, a world where nature is only the environment, and human action the central fact.

Moving into this atmosphere of intellectual ferment, 2 Dilthey had the "unschätzbare Glück" to meet and study with such renowned representatives of that movement as Bopp, the founder of comparative linguistics; Böckh, the great philologist; the historians Mommsen and Ranke; the geographer Ritter; and Jakob Grimm, the grammarian and student of German folklore. These Gelehrte, together with such eminent predecessors as Niebuhr, Savigny, Herder, and others, formed the so-called Historische Schule, and it was from their work that Dilthey learned the meaning of historical consciousness (geschichtliches Bewusstsein)—that life as revealed in history and civilization is an evolving reality, that culture is a complex of many factors working and developing together. ("Die Kultur ist zunächst die Verwebung von Zweckzusammenhängen.")

1. Hodges, op. cit., p. 5 f.

2. O. S., V, p. 7.

3. Ibid.
The Historische Schule, tracing this evolutionary process in its various aspects, amassed a vast store of information regarding nations, cultures, human society in general, but its proponents failed to give proper valuation to their facts by not going behind them to determine the inner relationships between the forces at work. Lacking a firm philosophical foundation in their approach, they resorted to abstract theories and metaphysical speculations, or, applying the methods of the natural sciences under the influence of Comte and the Positivists, were content with mere accumulation and description of data.

In the resulting confusion and relativism—"alles im Prozess fließend, nichts bleibend"—Dilthey saw the need for finding a secure ground on which these sciences could stand as a united whole, one that would give certainty to the historian, national economist, and jurist alike. Approaching the problem from an epistemological standpoint, he found an anchorage for his thinking in the facts of consciousness, for he says:

...Realität, wie sie ist, besitzen wir nur an den in der inneren Erfahrung gegebenen Tatsachen des Bewusstseins. Die Analysis dieser Tatsachen ist das Zentrum der Geisteswissenschaften, und so verbleibt, dem Geiste der historischen Schule entsprechend, die Erkenntnis der Prinzipien der geistigen Welt in dem Bereich dieser selber, und

die Geisteswissenschaften bilden ein in sich selbständiges System.\footnote{1}{"Vorrede," G. S., I, p. xviii.}

Out of his efforts in this vein came his epochal
\footnote{2}{This constitutes Vol. I of Dilthey's \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, with the sub-title of "Versuch einer Grundlegung des Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte." In his introductory remarks, p. 3, he states as his purpose that of making of these studies a "bewusst mitgestaltendes Organ" rather than a "dienendes Werkzeug der Gesellschaft."}

\textbf{Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften.}
Here it would not seem amiss to take a brief excursion into the realm of the Geisteswissenschaften, to determine the scope and constitution of these studies, their approach to knowledge and the sphere of inquiry peculiar to them, particularly as set forth by Dilthey in contradistinction to the Naturwissenschaften.

Dilthey includes under the Geisteswissenschaften "the whole group of studies which have as their object the reality of history and society." Through the accomplishments of the Historische Schule, these pursuits were able to shake off the domination of metaphysics and natural science and to achieve recognition as systematic studies worthy of the name of "science." They set up as their particular province of investigation a "strange and theretofore unnoticed form or region of reality: the reality that is human life"—that is, human life as an entity distinct from its physical environment and not subject to the same immutable laws, but

1. G. E. G., I, p. 4. (Hodges' translation, op. cit., p. 157.)

2. Ortega y Gasset, Concord and Liberty, p. 143 f.
rather tracing out its own dynamic evolutionary process. As the Spanish scholar, Ortega y Gasset, points out, it was necessary for man to attain a definite knowledge of cosmic reality and the consistence of material phenomena in order to perceive the "puzzling peculiarity of the reality that is he, over against the reality of matter." Thus, with the advances made in the field of natural sciences, man came at last to the realization that he was something essentially different from the physical world in which he was placed and of which he was a part, that he possessed a spiritual quality, a mental capacity or reasoning faculty, that set him apart from it, that he was, in a word, Geist, rather than merely Natur.

As the term Geisteswissenschaften would indicate, then, these sciences concern themselves with the realm of mind, or spirit, as opposed to matter, or nature. Dilthey, himself, feels that the name is not fully expressive, for the

1. Ortega y Gasset, op. cit., p. 147.

2. Dilthey uses Natur to designate the material aspect of reality, that is, the world of matter and substance, which is the object of natural sciences (cf. G. S., VII, p. 148.) in contrast to its counterpart, Geist, representing the spiritual side, the realm of the intellect. Following his usage, nature will be used to indicate the material, and mind, the intellectual spheres of investigation.

3. Cf. G. S., I, p. 6. The difficulty Dilthey felt in assigning a proper term to this field is even more apparent when one tries to find an English equivalent for the German Geisteswissenschaften. To quote Hodges (op. cit.)
spiritual side of human nature can not definitely be separated from the psycho-physical unity, but the term does not stress the central point. Man is part of the world of nature and would be perceived as a physical object only, were it not for the fact that he gives outward expression to states of consciousness arising from drives and motives within. In so far as these manifestations of human experience, these Lebensäußerungen, are understood, he becomes an object of significance to the Geisteswissenschaften. Thus everything on which man as an effective agent leaves his stamp, or, again, in which the Geist objectifies itself,

p. 157), who terms them the "human studies": "Known in French as les sciences morales, in J. S. Mill the moral sciences. But 'science' is too narrow in English for Wissenschaft. 'Moral', 'mental', 'spiritual', and 'humane' are all unsatisfactory renderings of the other half of the German word. I have called them the human studies at the suggestion of Professor A. W. P. Wolters, of Reading. The 'cultural studies' (Kulturwissenschaften) of Rickert and his followers are a narrower group, not including any generalizing and explanatory sciences such as psychology and economics."


2. Ibid., p. 86. Here Dilthey states: "Als Gegenstand der Geisteswissenschaften entsteht sie /die Menschheit/ aber nur sofern diese Ausdrücke verstanden werden."
falls within the sphere of the human studies.\(^1\) The Naturwissenschaften, on the other hand, embrace objects of reality produced independently of the activity of the mind. Since Geist expresses itself in various ways in man—"in Gebärde, Mienen, Worten"—and these in turn assume objective form in political, religious, and social institutions and organizations, sciences investigating these fields of human expression comprise the Geisteswissenschaften; they include history, political economy, jurisprudence, political science, theology, the study of literature, art, and music, as well as philosophy and psychology. All of these relate to the same common factor, the human race—men in their relations to one another and to nature.

As Dilthey suggests, the fields of the Natur- and Geisteswissenschaften are in a sense not separate, but are rather different ways of viewing a two-sided reality. Inasmuch as they both concern knowledge, they have one aspect in common—that is, they both relate to facts of consciousness coming from experience. The Naturwissenschaften deal


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 86.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 70.

\(^4\) Cf., Georg Misch, "Vorbericht" to G., S., V, p. xcix.
with perceptions of outer objects coming to the consciousness through *Impuls* and *Widerstand*. They are thus merely appearances of reality (*Erscheinungen*), while the *Geisteswissenschaften*, pertaining to inner perceptions, have reality itself for their object of study. The coherence (*Zusammenhang*) of such facts is immediately experienced (*erlebt*) in the inner structure of the mind. This is the first and fundamental characteristic of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and the point from which these so-called human studies proceed.

If structure in the inner world, the world of spirit, is "*erlebt, lebendig, lebengesättigt*," in the outer world, the world of nature, it is abstract. The latter is composed of material objects whose essential nature is foreign to us, and connection of facts between these objects must be built up by abstractions, by hypotheses. Thus Dilthey can say that nature is to us "*stumm*", "*fremd*", that only through the power of our imaginations does it sometimes show a glimmer of life and become intelligible to us. But society is our


world, it is familiar to us, for it is made up of individuals sharing our own distinguishing characteristics of structure. On the basis of perceptions of our own inner states, we can follow the course of things in that world 

"with love and hate, with passionate joy, with the whole play of our emotions."  

"Die Natur erklären wir; das Seelenleben verstehen wir."  

Units of matter in the domain of the Naturwissenschaften are conceived of as the smallest possible elements no longer capable of independent existence but making up the constituents of molecules. Since it is only the outer appearance and behavior of bodies that can be perceived by the senses and thus make up the materials of study for the natural sciences, the existence of such units must be inferred. On the other hand, units for the Geisteswissenschaften are given in experience to the intelligence and are individuals, psycho-physical wholes, each one distinct from the other and a world in itself. The goal of the human studies is to single out these individuals, to analyze and describe them, and by use of comparative methods (Vergleichungen) these sciences are able to gain a clearer idea of individuation in principle, and so of humanity in general. Natural sciences, however, seek to find regularity and uniformity, and express

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2. G. S., V, p. 144.
such regularity by means of equations (Gleichungen). The latter sciences employ exact and logical methods of measurement and experimentation and proceed by induction to build up logical and coherent systems, within which the relationship between elements is one of cause and effect. In seeking to clarify phenomena, the natural sciences set out from certain basic assumptions and advance logically and methodically, with each step immediately dependent upon the one preceding and the entire "logisch durchsichtiges System" resting upon the original hypothesis. "Die Naturwissenschaften ordnen ihren Konstruktionsmitteln unter, indem sie durch Abstraktion die Gleichartigkeit der einzuordnenden Erscheinungen mit diesen Konstruktionsmitteln herbeiführen, Die Geisteswissenschaften dagegen ordnen ein...," Dilthey says.

The human studies consider the individual elements in relation to the whole, which for them is the "volle ganze Lebendigkeit," and the relationship here is one of mutual dependence (gegenseitige Abhängigkeit), each affecting and being affected by the other. Thus the Geisteswissenschaften are concerned with Wirkungszusammenhang rather than Kausalzusammenhang, the constant interplay of factors in the realization of goals and the setting of value-standards. In

1. G. S., V., p. 265.

2. Ibid.
contrast to that, the natural sciences are characterized by their Wertfreiheit, being rather concerned only with the function of each element within the whole.

By virtue of this dynamic, evolutionary nature of human life as it unfolds in the course of history, the materials of the Geisteswissenschaften offer peculiar difficulties in their treatment and interpretation. Dilthey speaks of the "Unermesslichkeit" and "Unvollkommenheit" resulting through summation from this never-ending, ever-extending process, reaching out from the past to the present and into the future. The heterogeneity and complexity of this store of knowledge, reflecting diverse cultures and interests, require of the Geisteswissenschaftler careful collection, critical sifting, and definite determination of facts. The methods employed in such research are description, analysis,


2. G. S., I, p. 324.
comparison, with man always as the object of investigation, sometimes as an individual, or again as part of an all-encompassing whole. With the application of such methods, Dilthey feels these sciences can achieve results corresponding to the mechanical explanations of the natural sciences. However, to do so, the Geisteswissenschaften require a tool with which to approach their materials, one to fill a role comparable to that of mathematics within the sphere of the natural sciences, a technique to serve as intermediary between fact and its interpreter. Dilthey sets forth his ideas on what sort of technique this should be in his essay on Hermeneutics.

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2. This intermediary function is suggested in the derivation of hermeneutics, the word coming from Hermes, in Greek mythology the messenger of the gods. In his role of go-between bearing divine decrees to man, Hermes naturally became associated with interpretation.
CHAPTER III

DILTHEY'S ESSAY ON HERMENEUTICS

Dilthey opens his essay, *Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik*, by posing the question of the possibility of gaining scientific knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of the individual and of human existence in general, and of the means we have of attaining such knowledge. This is a question of the greatest importance, for hereon rests the whole structure of the human studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Achieving such understanding and raising it to standards of universal validity involves a process peculiar to the human studies, which have here an advantage over the natural sciences in that they deal with an immediate inner reality and not merely with reflections on an outer reality.

Dilthey subjects the process of understanding (*Verstehen*) to close scrutiny, defining it as "the process in which, from signs given to the senses, we come to know a psychic reality whose manifestation they are." All such impressions,

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1. This essay appears in Volume V of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 317-332, with the following notation of the editor: "Die Aufsatz in Festschrift "Philosophische Abhandlungen, Christoph Sigwart zu seinem 70. Geburtstag 28. März 1900 gewidmet", Tübingen 1900, S. 185-202." A summary of the main points of the essay is given here; for a translation of the complete text see Appendix, pp. 92-119.

2. G. S., V, p. 318 (Hodges' translation).
whether visual or auditory, fixed or transitory, simple or complex—ranging "von dem Auffassen kindlichen Lallens bis zu dem des Hamlet oder der Vernunftkritik"—call for interpretation (Auslegung). This is performed by the individual through a process of reliving and re-experiencing (Nach-erleben) and reproducing (Nachbildung) in himself the elements of experience. So the foundation for understanding is supplied by the individual himself, "aus der eigenen Lebendigkeit übertragen," and by comparison of himself with experienced impressions of others he becomes aware of his own individuality.

Such Verstehen occurs in varying degrees, according to interest and qualitative differences in the individual. When applied to fixed modes of expression, it reaches a controllable degree of objectivity and attains the status of an art or technique—die Auslegungskunst. Its highest application is the interpretation of written documents, which preserve for civilization the true expression of the great minds of all times. Herein lies the immeasurable importance of literature for the understanding of spiritual life and history, namely "dass in der Sprache allein das menschliche Innere seinen vollständigen, erschöpfenden und objektiv verständlichen Ausdruck findet."

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 319.
Such a technique then becomes a key to the past, unlocking great treasure stores for man by making the whole past of humanity present within him and bringing him increased happiness through experiencing the charms and powers of vanished cultures. This technique of interpretation, which Dilthey terms hermeneutics when it is directed to specific goals and subjected to definite rules, thus becomes a basic link in the chain of studies grouped as die Geisteswissenschaf ten by furnishing an understanding of the very object of such studies, man himself.

Dilthey traces the development of technical exegesis from its appearance among the Greeks as a philological virtuosity in filling instructional needs to its final emergence on the modern scene as an instrument for probing the depths of the human mind as it seeks expression. He shows how its functions were extended and regulated in response to changing conditions and demands. From a purely philological exercise it developed into a grammatical-historical method when it came into contact with Aristotelian rhetoric and was applied in textual classification and valuation. Further use of systematic procedures arose with consideration of religious texts, and contradictions between sacred writings and current views and standards led to allegorical interpretation.

A higher stage in interpretive science was reached
during the Renaissance, when, having only fragmentary reports and remnants of the past with which to work, it became both creative and constructive. Religious controversies arising from the Reformation brought more rigorous consideration of content and context, with the use of psychological methods in interpreting the whole work in terms of purpose and composition.

Hermeneutics up to this point had been but a collection of separate rules, stressing now one and now another of its various functions, whether grammatical, historical, aesthetic-rhetorical, or factual. It was Schleiermacher, who rejected the separation of these various functions, all of which he felt must work together, and who went behind these rules to discover the creative ability of which the outer and inner form of a work are but the expression. He devoted his attention to an analysis of the process of understanding, which he conceived of as a Nachbilden, a Nachkonstruieren, whereby the individual reconstructs within himself the original conditions of experience. Interpretation, which had been before but a logical-rhetorical process, now applies concepts and seeks understanding in terms of the individual. Not only the individuality of the artist is here involved, but also that of the interpreter, who by "eine Nachbildung fremden Lebens" extends and complements his own.

Here arises a logical problem, in that all interpretation necessarily is a circular process. Understanding of the whole depends upon the separate parts, which in turn are fully understood only in terms of the whole. The same principle applies to individual works of an author in relation to his spiritual development, whereby each single work contributes to the comprehension and evaluation of the literary and philosophical significance of the author's aggregate production, in the light of which each individual work takes on new meaning. This reciprocity of influence between the individual instance and the constitute whole is constant and ever-extending as interest and emphasis shift from one to the other, and understanding in the final analysis can never become absolute but must ever remain relative. "Individuum est ineffabile." However, by following this process of understanding, interpretation may gain ever deeper insight and may discover truths of which the author himself was not aware, succeeding often "den Autor besser zu verstehen, als er sich selber verstanden hat." Dilthey considers this the highest triumph of hermeneutics.

In conclusion, Dilthey gives as the chief task of the hermeneutic science the formulation of a firm foundation for the Geisteswissenschaften by building a link between

2. Ibid., p. 331, 335.
philosophy and historic sciences. When related to the disciplines of epistemology, logic, and methodology, it furnishes more exact methods of evaluating widely divergent data in these fields and can cope with discrepancies and inconsistencies which would otherwise result in a hopeless relativism. He says:

...sie /die Hermeneutik/ soll gegenüber dem beständigen Einbruch romantischer Willkür und skeptischer Subjektivität in das Gebiet der Geschichte die Allgemeingültigkeit der Interpretation theoretisch begründen, auf welcher alle Sicherheit der Geschichte beruht.¹

¹ G. S., V., p. 531.
CHAPTER IV

ELABORATION OF DILTHEY'S
HERMENEUTIC PRINCIPLES

In this relatively short essay, this "kleine Skizze," as Wach refers to it, Dilthey propounds ideas which recur throughout his far-reaching studies, some of these theories often becoming the object of special and extended treatment. They are the leit-motifs which give his works unity, being variations of the same theme, the problem which was Dilthey's life-long preoccupation—namely, die Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften. It is natural that hermeneutics, dealing with the interpretation and understanding of the facts of consciousness as the central factor in establishing this foundation, should play an important role in his whole methodology. As Dilthey himself states, hermeneutics becomes the starting point for this Grundlegung, and, as such, it is basic to his own avowed purpose. As a result, we


2. As Hermann Nohl comments in his "Vorbemerkung" to Die Philosophie des Lebens, p. 4, it is possible to get an authentic and, to a certain extent, complete idea of Dilthey's philosophical position from the few pages there presented, "weil er immer aus dem Ganzen dachte, und so leuchtet das Ganze auch in solchen kleinen Stücken auf."

3. Dilthey makes the purpose of his undertaking quite evident when he states: "Denn man kann sagen, dass für die
find him turning often to a discussion of the problems involved in achieving the understanding requisite to the undertaking of laying the necessary groundwork upon which the human studies could be erected as a structural whole.

Indeed, some of Dilthey's earliest endeavors are directed toward this very end, with notes on hermeneutics, especially as formulated by Schleiermacher, appearing in his diary as early as 1859. From these youthful efforts came in 1860 his Preisschrift über Schleiermachers Hermeneutik, which gained him recognition as a scholar in the field of philosophy and letters. It was this work that furnished the material for the historical section included in the essay of 1900.

The history of hermeneutics held particular significance for Dilthey, who found in the nature of its development one of the cardinal features of this art clearly defined—its inconsummate and persistent progression and extension. For, as an auxiliary technique, a Hilfsmittel in the realm of the Geisteswissenschaften, hermeneutics has developed in response to the exigencies of the situation and

1. Cf. Der junge Dilthey, pp. 90-95 for these early works on hermeneutics.
the nature of the subject matter with which it was from time
to time confronted. A consideration of the succeeding
phases in its evolution, therefore, becomes illuminating as
to the scope and function of this interpretive technique;
and in tracing its development, Dilthey takes care to stress
just this aspect of the topic. What he depicts, then, is
not a static procedure governed by a rigid set of rules, but
a divinatory faculty which has been molded and refined by
application and usage.

Dilthey describes the development of interpretative
science as proceeding as slowly, regularly, and gradually
as experimentation in the field of natural sciences, passing
through successive stages of grammatical, rhetorical, philo-
logical, and historical methodology as emphasis and interest
shifted with the spirit of the times. On the other hand, he
comments that it has been the peculiar fate of hermeneutics
to arouse consideration only during great intellectual move-
ments when conflicts of ideas led to the formulation of
rules necessary to attain a community of understanding.
After such periods of heightened productivity, it would sink
into obscurity once more.

These two seemingly contradictory statements may be
reconciled and resolved into clarity and concord if one con-
ceives of the "slowly, regularly, and gradually" as refer-
ring to its progression from the simple to the complex, with
interpretation ever rising to greater heights of insight and understanding; on the other hand, the sudden outbursts of activity, so characteristic of advances which take place in all fields of learning during periods of great intellectual ferment, can be considered as the flowering of its sustained, steady growth. So regarded, hermeneutics becomes a force pulsating with life, and it is this latter aspect which Dilthey stresses in his discussions of the subject. With his constantly reiterated goal that of understanding life in terms of life itself ("Das Leben aus sich selber zu verstehen.") Dilthey naturally seeks a vital tool with which to approach his task.

One such period of exceptional growth and one that was decisive for the modern formulation of hermeneutic science occurred during the sixteenth century with the religious conflict of the various confessions; the intelligibility of the Bible was then the question of moment, the Lebensfrage, that evoked the storm of controversy from which interpretation emerged in a more definite and workable form. Dilthey devotes considerable attention to this development in his Auffassung und Analyse des Menschen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Here he shows that the work of the religious leaders and their zealous insistence on the autonomy of the

1. G. S., V, p. 4 and p. 398; cf. also VIII, p. 93.
2. G. S., II, pp. 90-245.
Scriptures over against the authority of the church fathers, coupled with the humanistic tendency toward a more critical evaluation of texts, "zu klarem, reinlichem und sicherem Verständnis von Schriftwerken," made of exegesis, which had hitherto been mere exercises in observation and explanation, a skilled technique capable of wider extension and application. With the uniting of various interpretative methods under one general standpoint, hermeneutics made its appearance on the modern scene, providing a point of departure of the greatest worth for the modern constituting of the Geisteswissenschaften. This necessary step for the formulation of a "genuine" hermeneutic Dilthey describes:

Hermeneutik entsteht aus einer philosophischen Verallgemeinerung der im Einzelnen angewandten Methoden. Aus ihrer Verbindung zu Einzelregeln entstehen observationes; diese im logischen Schema geordnet ergeben die bloss summarisch aufzählende Hermeneutik; wo aber diese Einzelobservationen sich unter Wirkung eines allgemeinen Standpunktes zu einem Allgemeinschema erweitert haben, entsteht die wahre Hermeneutik. Diese Schemata, gewissermassen letzte hermeneutische Kategorien, sind bei Schleiermacher aufzusuchen. 2

It was Flacius who performed this function when he promulgated the principle of the inner form, thereby paving the way for the final constitution of hermeneutic procedure in the hands of Schleiermacher, who saw in the inner form the

2. Der junge Dilthey, p. 90.
necessary starting point, "den springenden Punkt," for all interpretation. By making it his principle to regard the Scriptures in their entirety, that is, "die Schrift als ein Ganzes aus ihrer Totalität zu erfassen," Flacius maintained the independence of biblical interpretation from tradition and dogma. Rather, the Scriptures were to be considered as a whole of inner related parts, these individual parts all contributing to, and understandable in the light of, the general purpose and Tendenz of the whole. This idea of inner coherence became normative for exegesis and "musste den Grundgedanken der protestantischen Hermeneutik bilden."

This advance made by Flacius in hermeneutic theory, still within the limits of rhetorical considerations, was carried forward by Schleiermacher, who, accepting the idea of the unity of the whole work and the inner relation of its parts, conceived of the inner form as the expression of the author's own peculiar mental structure. He thus continued in the tradition of German transcendental idealism, with its categories of thought, for, as Dilthey points out, such a concept of the inner Denkform depends on "seeing in every sphere of mental life a distinctive form of the individual's

1. *Der junge Dilthey*, p. 93.
mind at work. 1 Basic is the idea that thought is regarded as an actual fact, and the mind or spirit (Geist) as an activity, "eine verlaufende Tätigkeitweise." Such a view was made possible by Fichte's extension of Kant's Kategorien, Denkformen, and Schemata in representing the ego as a thinking entity ever expressing itself in accordance with its own particular nature. It is this mental activity of an author that is to be grasped in each of his individual works, considered as a unit and seen in the perspective of his total development, in the whole body of his works, for--

...jedes literarische Werk ist ein Ganzes, dessen innere Form den Keimpunkt seiner Gestaltung und seines Nachverständnisses enthält. Jeder Schriftsteller ist ein Ganzes, in welchem ein innerer Zusammenhang die Abfolge der einzelnen Werke regiert und das Verständnis seines schriftstellerischen Charakters ermöglicht. 5

It was this principle that Schleiermacher carried out so successfully in his translation of Plato, which marks the beginning of a conscious technical handling of interpretation as a hermeneutic exercise. In his biography of this German philosopher and theologian, Das Leben Schleiermachers, Dilthey shows how Schleiermacher was able to bring the Dialogues to real understanding for the first time by classifying them on the basis of the development of Plato's

1. Der junge Dilthey, p. 91.
2. Ibid.
thought. Schleiermacher, "eine Plato verwandte Seele,"\(^1\) having attained a position in German idealism comparable to that of the Greek philosopher, could achieve clearer insight into the relation between the various works by recreating the spiritual atmosphere in which they were produced. "Die Herstellung jedes grossen geschichtlichen Zusammenhangs aus den Quellen fordert eine geistige Atmosphäre der Zeit, welche das Wiederverständniss möglich macht."\(^2\) This understanding is then accomplished by a "Sichversenken in die Sache,"\(^3\) a process of "Hineinversetzen, Nachbilden, Nach­erleben."\(^4\) Only then can any critical measures be employed in determining authenticity and chronological sequence.

Dilthey summarizes Schleiermacher's hermeneutic art as revealed in his Plato studies:

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Das Studium der inneren Form eines schriftstellerischen Werkes, die Erforschung des Zusammenhangs der einzelnen Schriften eines Autors untereinander und im Geiste ihres Urhebers, eine hierdurch bedingte streffe und kunstmaßige Methode der Interpretation, und daraus fliessend das unverbrüchliche Festhalten daran, dass erst, wenn die Kunst der Aus­legung ihre ganze Schuldigkeit getan, die Messer der Kritik in Tätigkeit gesetzt werden dürfen—dies
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\(^1\) Dilthey, *Das Leben Schleiermachers*, p. 652.


\(^3\) This self-absorption in the material at hand, which marks works of true critical value, is characteristic of Dilthey's own efforts, as pointed out by Nohl ("Vorwort" to *G. S.*, IV, p. vi) and by Groethuysen ("Vorbericht" to *G. S.*, VIII, p. vii).

\(^4\) *G. S.*, VII, p. 213.
alles geht aus von der Kunst, die Schleiermacher an Plato übt, und dem Bewusstsein, das in seiner Hermeneutik und Kritik zum Ausdruck gelangte.¹

Proceeding, thus, from mere grammatical and rhetorical to philological and historical and finally to a psychological approach, hermeneutics, as revealed in the study of its development, culminated in Schleiermacher; with his emphasis on the spiritual aspect, the Geist of the author, he united all these tendencies and forged them into a truly modern instrument of interpretation, one adapted for use in the sphere of the Geisteswissenschaften.

Dilthey ends the historical section of his essay with Schleiermacher's work, summarizing the chief points therein from which future development should come. However, he is not content that hermeneutics should remain static but seeks to rouse it from the apparent "Dornröschenschlaf" into which it had sunk after reaching this high point. He feels that interpretation had not kept pace with the advances being made by the Geisteswissenschaften, which were then extending their horizons with the addition of new materials for study and with the growth of historical consciousness. As might be expected, Dilthey, with his cosmic sweep of vision, believed that the course which interpretation should follow

¹. Dilthey, Das Leben Schleiermachers, p. 647.

². Wach, in referring to this lull in its development as a "Dornröschenschlaf," indicates that it was only apparent, the work being carried on by "stars of lesser magnitude." (Das Verstehen, Vol. II, p. 2).
lay in the direction pointed out by the Historical School, in whose principles he was well grounded. For only when viewed in the perspective of history do things gain real significance and become truly intelligible. He suggests that the weak point in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics was his failure to take cognizance of the factor of continuity, development from within playing too great a role in his conception of individuality. Rather than an isolated unit, "ein geschlossenes Ganze," it should be considered with respect to its position in the stream of time that makes up history, "in Zusammenhang mit den Gesetzen der Zeit." Only then do things assume their true proportions. The task of hermeneutics, then, which has always upheld the reliability of understanding against skepticism and arbitrariness, Dilthey expresses:

Gegenwärtig muss die Hermeneutik ein Verhältnis zu den allgemeinen erkenntnistheoretischen Aufgaben aufsuchen, die Möglichkeit eines Wissens vom Zusammenhang der geschichtlichen Welt darzutupf und die Mittel zu einer Verwirklichung aufzufinden.

Dilthey's hermeneutics, essentially an elaboration and extension of that of Schleiermacher, is necessarily centered on the problem of understanding, that is, comprehension of

1. Der junge Dilthey, p. 94.
2. Ibid.
the forms in which the human spirit finds expression. He makes that apparent when he says, "Aus Steinen, Marmor, musikalisch geformten Tönen, aus Gebäuden, Worten und Schrift, aus Handlungen, wirtschaftlichen Ordnungen und Verfassungen spricht derselbe menschliche Geist zu uns und bedarf Auslegung." This implies that in them is expressed something not immediately intelligible but nevertheless capable of being comprehended. The limits within which the role of interpretation is to be played he indicates:

Die Auslegung wäre unmöglich, wenn die Lebensäußerungen gänzlich fremd wären. Sie wäre unnötig, wenn in ihnen nichts fremd wäre. Zwischen diesen beiden äußersten Gegensätzen liegt sie also. Sie wird überall erfordert, wo etwas fremd ist, das die Kunst, das Verstehens zu eigen machen soll.

This suggests that understanding seeks to grasp the portent of some life experience that has assumed a definite form of manifestation. The basic relation with which interpretation is concerned, therefore, is the combination of Erlebnis-Ausdruck-Verstehen, constituting the sole process through which humanity as a geisteswissenschaftlich object is present for us. Dilthey analyzes these three concepts particularly in his Entwürfe zur Kritik der historischen Vernunft, included in Der Aufbau der Geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften. However, he has much to say

3. Ibid., pp. 191-227.
about them elsewhere in his writings, for he considers them important enough to declare that the Geisteswissenschaften "sind alle fundiert im Erleben, in den Ausdrücken für Erlebnisse und in dem Verstehen dieser Ausdrücke."

Dilthey defines Erlebnis as "the distinctive manner in which reality is present for me." It is the inner process by which we become aware of the world within and the world without. To translate the German literally, it is what we "get by living" in one particular moment in the course of life. Each such individual experience is joined to others to make up the coherent structure we know as life. Erlebnis, so conceived as a unity in itself and in relation to other experiences in the course of life, Lebensverlauf, gives significance, Bedeutung, to the whole of life, while it, in turn, gains meaning when viewed against the backdrop of life. To be accorded such recognition, experience must have assumed some form of expression, Ausdruck, to make it auf-fassbar, that is, comprehensible. As Bollnow declares in his discussion of this topic, "Erleben bedarf des Ausdrucks um sich verständerlich zu machen."

Ausdruck, then, conveys some aspect of life captured

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2. G. S., VI, p. 313.
at a particular moment. "Im Ausdruck ist das Leben festgestellt," Dilthey states. It is the outward symbol of an inner state and may appear in various forms. There are the means men use to communicate with one another in every-day life—gestures, actions, words; the more deliberate and enduring attempts of a creative artist to reveal his inner being, whether it be in writing, painting, or music; or, again, the embodiment of the human spirit as reflected in the communal structures that make up the institutions of society. Interpretation is concerned with expressions of a permanent nature, for they can be made the objects of extended study, while those of a transitory form depend on the intuition of the moment for comprehension. Of the fixed modes of expression, language offers the most complete, exhaustive, and objectively intelligible means of conveying the experiences of the human spirit. As we shall see, Dilthey is chiefly concerned with this form, although he displays particular insight in his discussions of other types, notably musical expression.

Experience having expressed itself in some definite form, it is the task of the understanding to make this Lebensäußerung intelligible, to grasp its significance with respect to the whole fabric of life. It assumes such significance by virtue of its partaking in the general fund of 

meaningful symbols and institutions which have come down to us throughout the course of history. Dilthey, following Hegel, uses the term, **Objektiver Geist**, when referring to the forms in which the human spirit has objectified itself over the span of human activity. By **objective spirit** we understand, thus, the manifestation of inner realities in the perceptual world. They take various forms, as exemplified in custom, law, state, religion, art, science, and philosophy. In a word, **objective spirit** constitutes the world about us which we know and understand and in which we move and experience life. In these manifold forms in which the human spirit has objectified itself there exists a common denominator, eine Gemeinsamkeit, a common bond between

1. Dilthey acknowledges his indebtedness to Hegel in this usage, but takes care to distinguish his own conception from that of Hegel's. He discusses the difference between them at some length, G. S., VII, pp. 148-152, stating: "Ich habe bisher diese Objektivation des Lebens auch mit dem Namen des objektiven Geistes bezeichnet. Das Wort ist von Hegel tiefserimig und glücklich gebildet. Ich muss aber den Sinn, in dem ich es gebrauche, genau und deutlich von dem unterscheiden, den Hegel mit ihm verbindet. Dieser Unterschied betrifft ebenso die systematische Stelle des Begriffes wie seine Abweckung, und seinen Umfang." With Hegel, who "constructs metaphysically," the term designates a stage in the development of the spirit, between the "subjective" and "absolute spirit," and is the "objectification in the moral world of the general rational will of the individual subject." It thus includes "the fund of common objects, common interests, and common activities, which the Spirit has created in the individual experiences of different self-conscious subjects." (B. A. G. Fuller, History of Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 309.) Dilthey, who "analyzes that which is given," seeks to base its reality in historical and social manifestations, rather than in an ideal construction.
individuals, "ein dem Ich und dem Du Gemeinsames." It is this which gives meaning to the world as handed down to us over the ages. Dilthey details this common element and its significance for our understanding:

In terms of this community of expression, this Objektiver Geist, we understand things directly around us, and from that we can proceed to those farther removed which are not immediately understood in themselves. Understanding thus may be viewed as existing on two levels, which Dilthey describes as "elementares" and "höheres Verstehen." The former refers to the medium of familiarity in which we are constantly immersed, "eingetaucht," by means of which


2. G. S., VII, p. 146 f.

3. Cf. G. S., VII, pp. 208-212 for a discussion of these two types of understanding, as distinguished by Dilthey.
elements of our every-day life assume significance for us. Elementary understanding, then, concerns the single, simple forms of reality, which are immediately perceived and understood, without reflection, because of their being part of this sphere of Gemeinsamkeit. They gain their meaning in terms of the objective spirit as it finds expression at the particular stage attained by humanity at a given time in the course of history. Dilthey reveals here his keen awareness of the sense of continuity in the unfolding of human history.

From this intimate circle of familiar objects, understanding advances to the more complex relationships between these simpler manifestations of experience. Higher understanding, which concerns the intricate web of life, "das Ganze des Lebenszusammenhangs," sets in when the elementary form is no longer able to comprehend—that is, when the latter is confronted with objects beyond its scope, when it comes to a "nicht-mehr-verstehen-Können." Dilthey depicts the two realms of understanding as an island, representing the familiar domain of "elementares", set in a sea of unknown depths, where "das höhere Verstehen" prevails. He says: "Wie eine Insel erhebt sich aus unzugänglichen Tiefen der kleine Umkreis des bewussten Lebens." To plumb the

2. G. S., VII, p. 220.
unknown depths the understanding must employ concepts shaped in the intimate atmosphere of this island base, carrying over the familiar into the foreign. Understanding on this higher level is, thus, essentially an inductive process, whereby the unknown is interpreted in terms of the known, as indicated:

In such a process the individual seeks to comprehend the structure in objects outside of himself in terms of his own inner structure; that is, from out the sea of the unfamiliar it seeks out that which is understandable in terms of its own nature, that which is common to both the subject and object. The subject of the Wissen is here one with its object. Das Gemeinsame becomes the basis for further understanding. Such a process is essentially "ein Wiederfinden des Ich im Du."  

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2. Ibid., p. 191, of. V., p. 111, where Dilthey says: "...in diesen wird nun das Du erlebt und auch das Ich wird hierdurch vertieft."
As Bollnow points out, Dilthey's theory of understanding is, indeed, almost exclusively centered on experience and its outward expression; it is "am Erlebnisausdruck orientiert." However, it is more than a passive recognition of such manifestations of experience; rather, it is a re-experiencing, a reliving of the original experience in the perceiving subject. We can understand the experiences of others by transposing (übertragen) them to ourselves, where by virtue of our own experience we form a reproduction, a Nachbild. "Nachbilden ist eben ein Nachleben," Dilthey says. In so reliving an extraneous event, which often reaches us only imperfectly or incompletely, we must supply something from within our own selves to form a continuous whole. The Gemeinsame, then, which is the key to our ability to comprehend the lives of others, is our own human nature; it constitutes our whole basis for understanding. Dilthey affirms this in these words: "Im ganzen Umkreis der Dinge ist allein der Mensch dem Menschen verständlich; alles übrige verstehen wir nur aus der Analogie desselben." Such understanding of others by a re-experiencing within ourselves leads to a better knowledge of our own nature by


3. Der junge Dilthey, p. 141.
making us more consciously aware of the processes and structure within us. Through this Nachbilden and Nacherleben we extend our own opportunities for experience and heighten our own individualities. "Das Erlebnis selbst erweitert und vollendet sich im Verstehen anderer Personen." And again: "Denn der Mensch vollendet sich allein in der Anschauung aller Formen des menschlichen Daseins, und kein anderes Organ ist ihm dazu gegeben, als das der Sprache und Schrift." 

The latter question stresses the importance of language and literature for interpretation in that they present their material in permanent form. Works of this sort are ever available for restudy and re-interpretation, through which ever greater insight and understanding may be attained. Here a salient feature of interpretation becomes evident, which Dilthey designates der Zirkel in understanding; as we enrich our own individualities through this process of reconstructing and reliving experiences, our own ability to understand is thereby extended and heightened. Dilthey also stresses this process of reciprocity in the interpretation of the whole of a work in terms of its parts, the latter, in turn, depending upon the whole for their meaning. "Aus dem Einzelnen das Ganze, aus dem Ganzen doch wieder das Einzelne." Interpretation, thus, is ever reaching out as we

1. G. S., VII, p. 145.
2. Der junge Dilthey, p. 88.
carry on this process of understanding through the recon-
stituting and reliving of experience.

The best opportunities for such Nachbilden and Nach-
erleben are offered in the records of history and in the
works of the great poets. Since life, according to the
historical conception of it, is a continuous stream, present
society lives on the ashes of the past, and by infusing
these with life from our own beings, we gain a wider under-
standing of the past and open up new vistas. This is par-
ticularly true with respect to the lives of great men of the
past, where by a process of Nacherleben we can relive the
glorious events of their fateful existences and, in a cer-
tain sense, make them our own—as, for example, in the
writings of Luther one may relive his religious experiences.
For this reason biography and autobiography are significant
modes of literary and historical expression. In autobiog-
raphy especially we gain an immediate insight into the inner
mental structure of the individual.

The same is true for the works of the great poets and
writers. These are men who have greater capacities for
living and experiencing, for the poet has greater insight
into the inner structure of life. Out of his reflections
over life come his works, which present events, experiences,
impressions, reshaped according to his own interpretation,
his Weltanschauung. Such expressions of experience,
"erhitzt und umgeschmolzen" in the fire of the poet's own soul, are then offered to us in his works for reliving. We come to see life through the eyes of the poet, and thereby our own capacity for living and experiencing is greatly extended. Thus it is that "der Dichter...lehrt uns, so zu fühlen und so die ganze Welt als Erlebnis zu geniessen." 2

In language the poet has the medium to express all that may arise in the human spirit, but he has other means to employ in the forging of his works; saga, myth, verse form, folk spirit are some of the elements with which he embellishes his poetry to convey the portent of his reflections on life. Dilthey recognizes the use of these auxiliary means when he states:

Der Vollzug der Leistung der Poesie ist in viel höherem Grad an den einheitlichen Prozess in der Seele des Dichters gebunden; aber kein Dichter ist der ausschliessliche Schöpfer seiner Werke; er empfängt ein Geschehnis aus der Sage, er findet die epische Form vor, in der er es zur Poesie erhebt, er studiert die Wirkung einzelner Szenen an Vorgängern, er benutzt ein Versmass, er empfängt seine Auffassung von der Bedeutung des Lebens aus dem Volksbewusstsein oder von hervorragenden Einzelnen, und er bedarf der empfangenden, geniessenden Hörer, welche den Eindruck seiner Verse in sich aufnehmen und so seinen Traum von Wirkung realisieren. 3

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2. G. S., VI, p. 131.

The poet, then, although he creates with all his powers, "aus der Totalität seiner Kräfte," is not the sole creator of his works, but he needs the final act of interpretation on the part of the reader to complete his task. Thus the poet's work reaches its culmination in the understanding of the reader, and here the role of hermeneutics becomes apparent. For through the process of Nachbilden and Macherleben of what the poet portrays, we extend our own scope of experience by making that part of the poet's life in some measure our own. Interpretation may go even farther, for by submerging ourselves in the author's work and its atmosphere, we may uncover elements of which the poet in his dichterische Phantasie was not consciously aware. Such a disclosure is possible, for poetic creation, as Dilthey depicts it, is a spontaneous production—"Der Ausdruck quillt aus der Seele unmittelbar, ohne Reflexion." In this sense we may indeed succeed in "understanding the author better than he did himself."

Dilthey stresses here what he terms das Divinatorische in exegesis. Such a divinatory faculty accounts for the most perfect examples of interpretation as demonstrated by

1. G. S., V, p. 396.
2. G. S., VII, p. 328 f.
the Ausleger with especial talent, such as Schleiermacher, for example. Expositors of this stature possess an affinity of spirit with the author, and Dilthey likens their ability to interpret unto a reproductive activity similar to the actual productive one:

Das kongeniale Verstehen entstand in Naturen, welche zwischen poetischer Produktion und reflektierender Aufnahme standen. Wilhelm von Humboldt, die Gebrüder Schlegel, Schleiermacher bezeichnen diesen Punkt. Es ist in der Tat eine der produzierenden ähnliche Tätigkeit, durch welche reproduziert wird.¹

Hermeneutics is thus essentially an act of personal skill exercised by the understanding. While this may vary in degree and extent in different individuals, it is, in any case, an active process of reshaping and reliving the elements of life and experience offered to the understanding in various modes of expression. As we appropriate these experiences and make them part of our being, our capacities for further understanding are thereby heightened and increased, so that interpretation may rightly be termed a never-ending process, "eine unendliche Aufgabe."² In its Unendlichkeit it is ever reaching out to new horizons and opening up new vistas of the human spirit. It thus ceases to be a mere technical device for the measure of individual works and becomes an approach to life itself, that enigmatic

¹ Der junge Dilthey, p. 90.
² G. S., V, p. 335.
reality which Dilthey terms "eine geheimnisvolle Verbindung von Zufall, Schicksal und Charakter." When hermeneutics addresses itself to this greater reality—considering the forces by which life is shaped, the various elements of which it is composed and their mutual reactions, the different forms of expression it has assumed, all this in relation to the stream of time that is history—then it may be said to fill the central role which Dilthey assigned to it in the foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften. For only in the light of history can real understanding of life be attained so that man can free himself from the restrictions imposed upon him by the relativity of human existence:

So kann der von innen determinierte Mensch in der Imagination viele andere Existenzen erleben. Vor dem durch die Umstände Beschränkten tun sich fremde Schönheiten der Welt auf und Gegenden des Lebens, die er nie erreichen kann. Ganz allgemein ausgesprochen: Der durch die Realität des Lebens gebundene und bestimmte Mensch wird nicht nur durch die Kunst—was öfter entwickelt ist—sondern auch durch das Verstehen des Geschichtlichen in Freiheit versetzt.

1. G. S., VII, p. 74.  
2. Ibid., p. 216.
CHAPTER V

APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
OF DILTHEY’S HERMENEUTICS

With Dilthey’s intense desire to grasp the essence of life in its manifold modes of expression, it is not surprising that we should discover throughout the voluminous works of this profound thinker a treatment of a wide diversity of subjects within the realm of the Geisteswissenschaften, all illustrating the application of his hermeneutic theories. "Meine Aufgabe führte mich durch sehr verschiedene Felder des Wissens," Dilthey says, and everywhere the guiding principle of his endeavor is "die Analyse des Lebens." This analysis is directed toward the various forms in which the human spirit has objectified itself, whether it be the inspired utterances of a poetic genius, the significant events in the lives of outstanding personages, or the institutions and organizations that have evolved in human society. For, as he points out in speaking of a "Hermeneutik der systematischen Organisation," not only individual works require interpretation, but the broader sphere of the productivity of man as a social and historical being as well.

Of this aspect he says:

Hermeneutik ist hier möglich, weil zwischen Volk und Staat, Gläubigen und Kirche, wissenschaftlichem Leben und Universität eine Beziehung stattfindet, nach welcher ein Gemeingeist, eine einheitliche Lebensform einen Strukturzusammenhang finden, in dem sie sich ausdrücken. Es besteht also hier ein Verhältnis der Teile zum Ganzen, in welchem die Teile vom Ganzen Bedeutung und das Ganze von den Teilen Sinn erhalten, und diese Kategorien der Auslegung haben ihr Korrelat in dem Strukturzusammenhang der Organisation, nach welchem diese teleologisch einen Zweck verwirklicht.  

His interest, then, is not focused on the isolated individual, but on the aggregate of individuals that constitutes human society and history. And, indeed, his emphasis is on the Zusammenhang within this structure, the curious interweaving of elements to form the pattern of the whole fabric, from which each, in turn, derives its own significance. The thread running throughout is the Gemeingeist, the human factor common to all, and in seeking to spin this out on the diverse fronts of the Geisteswissenschaften, Dilthey demonstrates his thesis that these "sciences of the spirit" do, indeed, constitute an autonomous whole. Of the various fields through which his interests led him we may cite history and biography, philosophy and psychology, literature and music, sociology and anthropology, pedagogy and religion. In his writings on these subjects his hermeneutic principles may be observed at work, revealing rare insight and penetrating understanding of determining factors

1. G. S., VII, p. 265.
and structural coherence. His studies in history, psychology, literary analysis, and philosophy (particularly Weltanschauung) may be singled out as most significant.

Dilthey’s works in the field of history are among his most important and best known contributions; they easily gain for him the reputation as the “foremost historian of civilization.” History for him does not mean mere accumulation of data, but it is rather the history of ideas, Geistesgeschichte. This is revealed in such representative works as “Das 18. Jahrhundert und die geschichtliche Welt,” included in volume three, appearing under the general heading of Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes; “Das natürliche System der Geisteswissenschaften im 17. Jahrhundert,” in Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit der Renaissance und Reformation, volume two; Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels und andere Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus, volume four. The intense interest he ever evinced for the geschichtliche nature of man’s existence led him down the many corridors of the past into the adjoining halls of anthropology, jurisprudence, and political

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1. Arthur Liebert, "Contemporary German Philosophy," Philosophical Review, Vol. XLIV, p. 39; in other articles of this series he calls him the "first among all historians of philosophy ... whom we honor most highly as a historian of modern intellectual life in general." (Vol. XXXVI, P. 411); and again (Vol. XXXVII, p. 570) "the greatest historian of intellectual history since Hegel."
science; these subjects, he felt, were aids as helpful in the study of history as physics and chemistry in the study of organic life. By such means, particularly by tracing the development through successive stages and noting the contributing factors, he strives to reconstruct the whole intellectual atmosphere of an era. Only thus can any real understanding of life be reached, for the whole past is immanent in any one moment of history. Life is but the unfolding of history; in fact, for Dilthey life and history are virtually synonymous. As he says:


Here again the emphasis is on Zusammenhang, the interaction and coherence of elements forming an entity. In this case the entity is the human spirit, whose nature, formation, and operation may be grasped by studying the products of history. For man, as the crossing point of various systems and cultures, learns what he is, not through "Grübelei" over himself, nor through psychological experiment, but through history. Dilthey suggests the importance of history

1. G. S., VII, p. 256.

2. G. S., V, p. 180; cf. VII, p. 279, where he says: "Der Mensch erkennt sich nur in der Geschichte, nie durch Introspektion."
for man in revealing the richness of the world in these words:

1. Der Junge Dilthey, p. 143.
investigation in which Dilthey was especially interested. With his recognition of man as the original fact of all history, he saw in this type of study the best opportunity to carry out the processes of understanding and re-experiencing of the subtle and varied influences at work between the individual and his environment, that relation of parts within the whole, the Strukturzusammenhang, which is so characteristic of the Geisteswissenschaften. Dilthey reveals this viewpoint when he says:

"Aus dem liebevollen Verständnis des Persönlichen, dem Nacherleben der unerschöpflichen Totalitäten, welches in der eignen Lebensmächtigkeit gegründet ist, entspringen so die grossen historischen Schöpfungen. In der Biographie am einfachsten stellt sich diese selbständige Wertung der Person, welche den Geisteswissenschaften eigen ist, dar."

This "loving understanding of the individual" is well exemplified in Dilthey’s own works in this genre, such as Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels and Das Leben Schleiermachers. The latter, although never brought to completion, has been acclaimed as a "Meisterstück geistesgeschichtlicher Forschung und Schilderung." The painstaking care he expended on this work and the penetrating insight he was able to gain into the innermost being of his subject are suggested in these words of John Oman: "Dilthey, with careful toil, has not only indicated every rivulet that trickled into the

1. G. S., V, p. 266.
2. H. Mülert, "Vorwort" to Das Leben Schleiermachers, p. iii.
stream of Schleiermacher's thought, but has circumnavigated every lake from which it might have come. In his introduction to the Schleiermacher study Dilthey indicates his biographical theories when he sets forth the aims and procedures embodied therein:

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 Lebensgehaltes 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.

The biographer's task, so conceived, is not merely to relate events and influences, but to present the whole complex of forces that have shaped the individual, against which he lives and acts, while shaping ideas and trends in his turn. This interplay of subject and milieu is portrayed so convincingly that not only the individual is brought to life before the reader, but through him the mental and social sphere in which he moved. Biography thus serves to make the general intelligible through the particular.


2. "Vorwort" to Das Leben Schleiermachers, p. v.
Dilthey's interest in the significant individual, as the greatest reality, der Grundkörper, of history, leads to studies in the fields of anthropology and psychology, which, he felt, were necessary for the proper interpretation of history, just as these subjects must take the historical factor into account in their methods. By virtue of his work in psychology, directed toward a better understanding of the individual as a geisteswissenschaftliche object, he has been termed the founder of the new geisteswissenschaftliche, or structural, psychology.

Dilthey found the purely explanatory methods of the prevailing psychology, dominated as it was by the natural - scientific tradition, inadequate to grasp the inner process, den seelischen Strukturzusammenhang. Instead of this erklärende psychology, he proposed one that should be descriptive and analytic, directed to the whole inner mental structure, "die Totalität des Seelenlebens, das Wirken des ganzen, vollendend-führend-vorstehenden Menschen." Rather

1. G. S., V, p. 10 f; cf. V, p. 225; here he states, in discussing modern biography as a form of history, "Der Mensch als die Urtatsache aller Geschichte bildet ihren Gegenstand."

2. O. F. Bollnow, op. cit., "Vorwort," p. iv; Arthur Liebert in his series on contemporary German philosophy, Philosophical Review, Vol. XXXVI, p. 421, says, "Dilthey became the creator of what is called descriptive psychology. He also calls it structural psychology."

3. G. S., V, p. 11; cf. I, p. xviii, where he asserts: "Mich führte aber historische wie psychologische Beschäftigung mit dem ganzen Menschen dahin, diesen, in der Mannig-
than start out with hypotheses and seek to explain the phenomena of the spiritual world according to a cause-effect relationship, den Kausalzusammenhang, which is the approach of the former, this new psychology has as its object the completely developed psyche, whose structure it proceeds to define. "Ihr Gegenstand muss der entwickelte Mensch und das fertige vollständige Seelenleben bilden. Dieses soll in seiner Totalität aufgefasst, beschrieben und analysiert werden," Dilthey avers. The attention is here directed to the Strukturzusammenhang. The structural unity of the spirit, the innerworkings of this "bundle of drives and feelings," falls within the scope of our inner experience, where it is grasped by us through our own mental structure. It is thus that we may achieve the understanding that is the basis for interpretation. This inner experience as the key to our understanding Dilthey delineates:

Der Strukturzusammenhang wird erlebt. Weil wir diesen Strukturzusammenhang, welcher alle Leidenschaften, Schmerzen und Schicksale des Menschenlebens in sich fasst, inne werden, darum verstehen wir Menschenleben, Historie, alle Tiefen und Abgründe des Menschlichen.

Fältigkeit seiner Kräfte, dies vollend-vorstellende Wesen auch der Erklärung der Erkenntnis und ihrer Begriffe (wie Außenwelt, Zeit, Substanz, Ursache) zugrunde zu legen, ob die Erkenntnis gleich diese ihre Begriffe nur aus dem Stoff von Wahrnehmen, Vorstellen und Denken zu weben scheint.

2. Ibid., p. 206.
Descriptive and analytical procedures employed in the study of the individual naturally lead to the comparative method: "Die beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie breitet sich in der vergleichenden Psychologie aus, wie der Stamm eines Baumes in seinen Zweigen," Dilthey writes. In his Über vergleichende Psychologie, with its studies of the individual, he shows that individual differences are quantitative rather than qualitative, arising from a preponderance of one particular side of man's nature. An analysis of various types gives a better view of human nature as a whole, for in each group certain characteristic features are accentuated against the background of general human traits: "Der Begriff des Typus bezeichnet dann also das herausgehobene Gemeinsame." Das typische Sehen thus becomes the means of presenting the uniform as well as the recurrence of differences, gradations, and affinities among human types.

The works of the poets come to the fore in this consideration, for das typische Sehen plays an important part in their delineation of human individuation. Portrayal of singular examples of human conduct and character, as presented in literary productions, is achieved through the accentuation of various typical tendencies. "So bringt der Dichter vom Gefühlle aus das Wesenhafte im Singularen oder

2. Ibid., p. 279.
das Typische hervor." In fact, the mark of a great poet is his ability to produce through the constructive force of his imagination a type of person or action going beyond the specific experience from which it is drawn, but so presented as to be generally comprehensible. It is a matter of the general reflected in the singular.

Thus for the proper understanding of a poet and his works it is necessary to have a knowledge of this imaginative process, which Dilthey analyses in Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters. The poet is a collector of experiences, which furnish the raw material for his creative work. "Der Ausgangspunkt des poetischen Schaffens ist immer die Lebenserfahrung, als persönliches Erlebnis oder als Verstehen anderer Menschen, gegenwärtiger wie vergangener, und der Geschehnisse, in denen sie zusammenwirken." These single events and experiences, whether they be the poet's own or reflections of those of others, are brought to life and expression in the poetic work. "Jedes poetische Werk macht ein einzelnes Geschehnis gegenwärtig." The poet, with his greater capacity for feeling and perceiving, encompasses a wider range of experience and thus teaches us "to feel and

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1. G. S., VI, p. 188.
2. Ibid., pp. 103-241.
3. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 196.
4. Ibid., p. 197.
to enjoy the whole world as experience."

The technique of the poet is the transformation of that which he has experienced in so forceful and coherent a form that it engenders in the reader an illusion of reality; and the latter, through the significance which it thus assumes for him, is granted lasting satisfaction and enjoyment. Dilthey lists "Motiv, Fabel, Charaktere und Handlung" as the elements of poetry through which this transformation is accomplished.

By such means the poet presents us his "Abbild der Welt," an image of the world as he sees it, and in so doing, he not only reveals his own individuality, but reflects the Zeitgeist, the tenor of the times in which he lived. Writers of the same epoch and locale, while maintaining their own peculiar characteristics, will, thus, show certain similarities of thought and expression, sharing as they do a common heritage of intellectual culture and being subject to the same general conditions of life. A group of writers so related constitute what Dilthey terms a Generation, the designation for "ein Verhältnis der Gleichzeitigkeit

1. G. S., VI, p. 131; of. V, p. 397: "So offenbart die Geschichte der Dichtung die unendlichen Möglichkeiten, das Leben zu fühlen und zu gewahren, die in der menschlichen Natur und ihren Beziehungen zur Welt enthalten sind."

2. G. S., VI, p. 128.

3. Ibid., p. 162.
von Individuen.⁴ The sequence of such generations with the attendant cumulation and transmission of intellectual wares creates an historical continuity of ideas.

Transformation des Erlebten, typisches Sehen, Bildungskraft des Dichters, dichterische Phantasie, Zeitgeist, Generation, historische Kontinuität—these are some of the concepts which serve as accoutrements for Dilthey's critical faculty in evaluating literary works. This critique is directed not merely to a routine consideration of form and content, but seeks to reveal, through a discerning and penetrating analysis of the work as a whole, the peculiar mental structure of the author concerned, as well as the stages in his intellectual development. He strives to reproduce the creative process as affected by circumstances in the author's own life and conditioning factors of his time.

Dilthey's literary studies, thus, in accordance with his historical preoccupation, stress the developmental aspect and are in reality Geistesgeschichte. His emphasis on Dichtung as part of the geschichtliche process is disclosed in the introductory passage to his Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, which he opens with the statement:

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¹ G. § 25, V, p. 37; as Dilthey points out (ibid., p. 36) he made use of this concept in his Leben Schleiermachers ("Ich habe in meinem Leben Schleiermachers versucht, von dieser Vorstellung einen umfassenden Gebrauch zu machen," he says.), while it sets the tone and is the outstanding feature of his essay on Novalis, included in Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung (p. 269 ff.), cf. post, p. 75.
Die dichterische Arbeit jeder Zeit ist von der früheren Epochen bedingt; ältere Vorbilder wirken; das verschiedene Genie der Nationen, die Gegensätzlichkeit der Richtungen und die Mannigfaltigkeit der Talente machen sich geltend; in einem gewissen Sinne ist in jeder Zeit die ganze Fülle der Poesie vorhanden. Dennoch zeigt die Literatur der neueren Völker eine gemeinsame Entwicklung, die in typischen Stufen verläuft. Ich gebe derselben nach, um die geschichtliche Stelle zu bestimmen, an welcher im Verlauf der europäischen Poesie die deutschen Dichter, die ich hier darstelle, eingetreten sind.¹

In his approach to literary interpretation, then, Dilthey considers a work, not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a vital link in the history of ideas, reaching out from the past into the future.

One of Dilthey’s most illuminating studies in this area is Von deutscher Dichtung und Musik, which Liebert terms "a wonderful monument to the extraordinary range and profundity of Dilthey’s scholarship."² Here he gives a comprehensive sketch of the evolution of the German spirit and its determining forces, showing how these factors shine through the works of representative authors of various epochs and determine the poetic form, from the lyrics of Walther von der Vogelweide to the historic dramas of Schiller. Each distinctive type is to be considered the expression of the spirit of the age as reflected by one of its exponents. Here again he stresses Zusammenhang and Zusammenwirkung of...

various elements, such as history, culture, Gemeingut, personal experience, all working together to influence the particular mode of expression.

Dilthey reveals that his comprehension of the manifestations of the human spirit is not limited to literary forms but encompasses musical expression as well. Paralleling the development of poetry from the early lays of the heroic epoch, he traces the evolution of German music from the religious consciousness of the Gemeinde as expressed in the chorale, with its consummation in Bach, to the later more individual forms it assumed. As illustrative of the latter he cites the musical dramas of the objective genius that was Mozart, portraying the rich fullness of life, and the passionate outbursts of the human soul conveyed by the subjective utterance of Beethoven's symphonic works.

Dilthey's concentration on the inner man comes sharply into focus in his essays on Lessing, Goethe, Növalis, and Hölderlin, appearing under the significant title of Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. As the name suggests, he regards the author's life experiences as the source of the ideas forming the motifs of his work. Though these literary sketches are in a sense biographical in nature, Dilthey refrains from a mere enumeration of mundane details, being concerned with these only in so far as they influence the author's personality, shape his reactions and view of life.
and ultimately find expression in his writings. As Mahrholz describes his method:

Unter Zurückdrängung aller biographischen Details sucht Dilthey aus den Grunderlebnissen und Erlebnisformen der Persönlichkeiten ihre Werke und Dichtungen abzuleiten. Nicht mehr jene akribisti-
sche Einfluss- und Vorbild-Suche, in welche die Schererschule, das Wort des Meisters vom Ererbt en, Erlernten und Erlebten dogmatisierend, allmählich verfallen war, ist das methodische Ziel Diltheys, sondern die scharfe Herausarbeitung der Grundform des Erlebens, und der einschneidenden Wendungen im Lebensgange, der Begegnungen mit Büchern, Gedanken und Menschen, die Epoche im Leben des Genies machen und gestaltende Kräfte auslösen. ¹

Dilthey's geistesgeschichtliche approach represents a great advance over the superficial efforts, the "an der Oberfläche hintastenden Bemühen" of the positivistic school, and indeed bore much fruit in the field of literary history. The Scherer school, while stressing the importance of detailed investigation, conducted its research according to constantly changing viewpoints, with the result


2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. As Otto Wirth states in his study of Scherer, Nadler, and Dilthey as literary historians: "Gundolf with his great biographies of Goethe and Stefan Georg, Korff with his 'geistesgeschichtliche' interpretation, Unger with his 'Problemgeschichte,' Strich with his criticism of style, Walzel, the advocate of the 'Wortkunstwerk,' Bertram with his mythologizing method, Cysarz with his vitalism, and to some extent Wiegand with his literary interpretation according to 'Längs- und 'Querschnitten'...to name only some of the contemporary literary historians—they all acknowledge Dilthey's influence." (Op. cit., p. 46.)
that it frequently became lost in a maze of details, "so dass
man eher verwirrt als gefördert das Werk aus der Hand legt,
wenn man es im ganzen Zuge zu lesen sucht." It was a study,"mehr in die Breite als in die Tiefe gehend," which did not
attempt to analyze the store of accumulated facts to dis-
close the living, thinking, and acting person behind them.
But it is just here at this very point that Dilthey focuses
his attention on the individual himself, probing into the
innermost reaches of the spirit. In the above mentioned
studies of four great German writers Dilthey demonstrates
his ability to grasp the essence of the author's nature as
revealed in his works, thereby imparting greater significance
to the works themselves.

Of Hölderlin Dilthey says:

Alles trieb ihn aus der Welt des Wirkens und
Geniessens nach innen, in die Tiefen der Dinge, in
eine totale Einsamkeit. Unablässig und angestrengt
lauschte er den Stimmen in seinem Innern und in der
Natur, ob sie ihm das göttliche Geheimnis mitteilten,
das in allen Dingen schläf. Und so kam zu ihm die
prophetische Kunde von Möglichkeiten einer höheren
Gestaltung der Menschheit, von kommendem Heldentum
unsrer Nation, von einer neuen Schönheit des Lebens,
welche den Willen der göttlichen Natur mit uns ver-
wirkliche, von einer Poesie, die den ewigen Rhythmus
des Lebens selbst ausspräche, der uns unausgesprochen
umgibt. Zugleich aber entstand ihm sein eigenstes
und tiefstes Erlebnis, wie aller Grösse und Schönheit,
die aus dem göttlichen Zusammenhang hervorgeht, immer
zugleich in uns ein Leiden am Leben mitgegeben ist.

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2. Ibid., p. 36.
jede Offenbarung der göttlichen Einheit in Liebe und Befreundung der Menschen ihre schmerzliche Trennung, und der Freude über die innere Kraft der lastende Druck der schweren Dinge. Immer tiefer grub sich seine hilflose Seele in die Erfahrungen von dem gemischten und zweideutigen Charakter des menschlichen Daseins. Der Adel seiner Natur rettete ihn in ein leises, stillgesassenes Resigniertsein in sich selbst.

Here he draws the background for the noble resignation which speaks, in language of rhythmic beauty suggesting the rhythm Hölderlin saw in life, from out of the tragic lines of the novel Hyperion or the tragedy Empedokles. Dilthey develops at length the various forces which shaped the author's personality—autocracy in government, social and economic pressure, religious restraints. All of these and more worked together to drive this sensitive and pure nature, devoted to the highest ideals of beauty and humanity as epitomized for him in Greek antiquity, to seek refuge in an inner world, in a realm of loneliness from which ultimately there was to be no return. With his penetrating analysis of the innermost being of this lyrical genius, Dilthey conveys the poignant pathos in the struggle of Hölderlin's helpless soul confronted with the "dissonant harmony" of human existence.

With the opening remarks of his essay on Novalis, Dilthey creates a vivid impression of the aura of magical enchantment which hovers over this outstanding figure of the

1. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 350 f.
Romantic School and colors the impassioned outpourings of his poetic soul. This ethereal quality is brought out in the following words:

Novalis zeigt uns alle Dinge in einem ihm eigenen Lichte. Indem wir nur seinen Namen uns zurückrufen, so umfängt uns die Welt, wie sie ihm erschien, wie ein abendstilles Tal einem Wanderer, der mit den letzten Strahlen der Sonne vom Gebirge hinabsteigt: stille, warme Luft ringsum: in weissem mattem Glänze steht an dem noch bläulichen Himmel der Mond: träumlich umschlossen uns die Berge, aber sie engen uns nicht ein: kein Gedanke kommt uns, dass jenseits ihre Pfade nach unruhigen Städten und Ländern laufen.¹

Having sketched the outlines of the mystical, misty realm in which this sensitive soul moved, Dilthey considers the forces shaping this "subjective nature, given over to mental sensations to the point of oblivion of the totality of phenomena which make up the world," as he continues:

Alles vereinigt sich zu diesem Eindruck, seine Denkart, sein Schicksal, die Verhältnisse, in denen er lebte. Er war so fern von dem Lärm des Tages. Die Not des Lebens berührte ihn nicht. Eben kaum gereift, erlebt er jene glücklichen Jenaer Tage, in denen die romantische Weltansicht in ihrer Blüte stand, in denen Friedrich und Wilhelm Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck und Schelling den Traum einer neuen Poesie und Philosophie träumten. Er prägt dem, was damals geschah, etwas von seiner vornnehmen, tiefen Seele auf; bevor er das dreissigste Jahr erreicht hat, stirbt er. Über seinem Andenken liegt ein Schimmer von Poesie, der auch aus allen Worten seiner Freunde glänzt, sooft sie von ihm reden.²

¹ Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 268.
² Ibid., p. 281 f.
³ Ibid., p. 268 f.
Here Dilthey brings out that intellectual phenomenon he terms "generation," signifying a circle of closely allied figures, each of whom, while maintaining definite individual traits, exhibits the same general tendencies by virtue of sharing a common spiritual heritage and being subjected to the same social, political, and cultural conditions of the time. He selects Novalis as representative of that generation designated as "romantic" and traces in his intellectual development the forces within and without that produced in him his particular fanciful bent. His frail constitution, the peaceful and pious atmosphere of his home, and his pleasant associations early in life with important personages, the prevalent doctrines of natural philosophy and galvanism, and above all his will to die engendered by the death of his child sweetheart and sublimated in time into a union with the world beyond—all these united to turn his spirit from the plane of cold reality to an imaginative world of mists and shadows in which the mystical blue flower beckoned everywhere as the symbol of the ideal and everything assumed a magical cast. "Der geistige Verkehr, die Liebe, die Religion—alles ward ihm zu einer Art von Zauberrei." This "Zauberrei" found expression in the mystical religious fervor of the Geistliche Lieder and the fairy tale-like atmosphere of Heinrich von Ofterdingen, revealing

1. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 288.
a world view based on the unity of poetry and science. Throughout his study of Novalis Dilthey stresses the prism of subjectivity through which the poet's world is refracted into a spectrum of many-hued images of a "märchenhafte" quality.

An entirely different atmosphere pervades the analysis of Lessing, the author here being presented in his role of "Dichter der Aufklärung." As such, Lessing centered his attention on the dignity of human nature and the moral problems of man's existence in this world. Dilthey emphasizes Lessing's kinship with the modern humanistic spirit, setting the tone for his discussion with these words:

"Lessing dagegen ist unseres Geschlechts. Wo er den Faden von Ernst und Falk fallen liess, oder vielmehr wo die Hand des Todes ihn abriss, inmitten der Untersuchung über die Einschränkungen unseres Wesens, welche auf der Natur und den Formen der gesellschaftlichen Verbindungen, der staatlichen wie der religiösen, beruhen, inmitten der damit verknüpften Untersuchung über den Zusammenhang dieser Formen mit den besonderen geographisch-historischen Bedingungen, unter welchen sie sich bilden: da glauben wir diesen Faden wieder aufnehmen zu können. Ja uns dünkt, dass ein Mann seiner Art unter uns sich besser, weit besser befunden hätte, als in der engbrünstigen Epoche, in welcher er aufwuchs,... eingeklemmt zwischen Gelehrtenhochmut und Predigerhochmut."

He makes us feel throughout the force "dieses schneidigen, nüchternen, männlichen Menschen," who, as the first German to form an independent and positive Lebensansicht,

1. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, p. 17.
completely freed from all tradition and preference as well as aversion, assumed such a commanding position in German thought, shaping and directing it into broader channels. He regards Lessing as "der wahre Träger des fortschreitenden Geistes unserer Literatur," whose "reformatorische Streben," ever directed toward recognition of the dignity of the individual, produced such significant contributions as Laokoon and Die Hamburgische Dramaturgie in aesthetics, Minna von Barnhelm as the vehicle for illustrating his new conception of dramatic technique, and Nathan, in which is crystallized that lofty tolerance which motivated his long and bitter struggle with orthodoxy. In all these Lessing is clearly revealed as "der unsterbliche Führer des modernen deutschen Geistes."

In seeking to account for the "vielzersplitterten, rastlosen, alle Interessen der Zeit umfassenden Tätigkeit" of this man, Dilthey analyzes the influence of the critical, rational attitude of the Enlightenment, with which the author was early embued. He considers such factors as his schooling in Pietistic orthodoxy, life in a growing metropolis where political and theological discussions were ripe, introduction

to the theater and interest in literary controversies of the time, all of which united to awaken an awareness of the conflicts and problems confronting man. Feeling himself at variance with the established order and having gained a deeper understanding after experiencing its conflicting elements, Lessing was able to rise to new heights of insight and perception. His life and works, thus, represent essentially a synthesis of these conflicting elements, as Dilthey suggests in the following:

In this passage Dilthey makes quite clear his theory that the work (Dichtung) expresses the author's experience (Erlebnis), in this case the death of the author's wife, from which came the spirit of noble resignation in the face of fate's cruel blow, as expressed in the heroic figure of Nathan. One has only to compare this with Scherer's account of the same event to appreciate the tremendous advance accomplished by Dilthey's hermeneutic procedure over the positivistic method. Scherer says simply:

Damals war er soeben ein friedeseliger Mann geworden. Einsam und oft im Kampf mit Noth und Schulden hatte er bis ins achtundvierzigste Lebensjahr seine Bahn durchmessen; endlich schien ihm das Glück zu lächeln; seine äusseren Verhältnisse hatten sich gebessert; eine klare thatkräftige Frau, Eva König, die Witwe eines Hamburger Freundes, war am 8. Oktober 1776 mit ihm getraut worden. Sie hatte den besten Einfluss auf ihn; machte ihn ruhiger, stetiger und hielt ihn von übereilten Entschlüssen ab. Aber am Weihnachtsabend 1777 gab sie ihm einen Sohne das Leben, der schon nach 24 Stunden starb, und am 10. Januar 1778 war sie selbst eine Leiche. Lessing schrieb herzzerreissende Briefe, Briefe mit dem bitteren, menschenfeindlichen Lachen seines Tellheim, seiner Orsina, Briefe voll so tiefen unergründlichen Jammers...2

He goes on to discuss—not, to be sure, without some appreciation of the author's sufferings—how Lessing in this mood produced his polemic writings bearing on theological

1. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, p. 127 f.

disputes. However, it is the sympathetic but passive understanding of a spectator rather than the actual reliving and refeeling of the occurrence such as Dilthey evokes.

The contrast between the "kleinliche Schmäßelei in den Privatakten des Klassikers" characteristic of the Scherer school and Dilthey's "bohrendes Grübeln über historische Wirksamkeiten von Geistesmächten" becomes especially apparent in the Goethe studies, where, as Mahrholz points out, the former all too often gets lost in everyday details. Something of the difference in treatment may be seen in comparing their respective discussions of family and early environmental influences. Scherer writes:


Goethes väterliche Familie zeigt einen Lebenslauf in rasche aufsteigender Linie: der Urgrossvater Hufsschmied, der Grossvater Schneider, der Vater

1. Mahrholz, op. cit., p. 25.
2. Ibid., p. 93.

While Scherer's work did represent a contribution to current literary studies with its Detailforschung and resulting abundance of material, it was nevertheless a rather superficial investigation of which it could scarcely be said that it attempted to plumb the depths of the author's true being. A parallel passage from Dilthey's analysis reveals a suppression of mere material details, the focal point being rather the inner man. The critic here seeks to penetrate into the spiritual nature of the poet as expressed in

1. Scherer, _op. cit._, p. 479 f.
his works. He shows how the lack of restraint in Goethe’s early training and his consequent receptivity to life, conditioned by the intellectual climate of the time, helped to shape and release the creative force from whence Goethe’s work springs:


So entstand unsere dichterische Literatur. Ihre Ideale waren die des persönlichen Daseinsk.-Liebe, Freundschaft, Menschlichkeit, aufgefasst in deutschen Gemüt, Heimatsgefühl, Naturfreude. Der Frühling dieser Dichtung umgab Goethe. Er selber hatte aus seiner fränkischen Stammesart, wie sie sich am Oberrhein und am Main in freien Städten und in den milden geistlichen Herrschaften entwickelt hat, die Gabe empfangen, die eigene Individualität freudig zu fühlen, die fremde gelten zu lassen und im Genuss des Tages und der Stunde zu leben. Die patrizische Stellung seiner Familie in der alten Reichsstadt gab ihm Selbstgefühl, Sicherheit und unbehinderte Bewegung. Eine regellose Erziehung, ohne die Bindung und Disziplinierung der Schule, gestattete die freie Entfaltung seiner geistigen Kräfte, seiner Phantasie, aber auch seiner Neigung, sich seinen Ge- mützuständen ganz zu überlassen. Für eine solche Natur war das erste Bedürfnis, im Leben zu tummeln, durchzufühlen, was es enthält, und es auszusprechen. Eine einzige Reizbarkeit des Gefühls befähigte ihn zu unendlichem Glück, aber auch zu grenzenlosem Leiden.¹

¹. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 223 f.
Dilthey makes us feel here the irresistible power of the poet's imagination, "das Dämonische," which becomes the theme of his discussion and which, as Mehrholz brings out, is lacking in the Scherer studies. It is this driving force, "das innere Getriebe und die nach aussen tretende Handlungsweise solcher dämonischen Naturen von ihrer Organisation aus," that distinguishes the poet from the ordinary man. While it may appear to us as a wonder, something quite apart from the normal drives and impulses of man, Dilthey suggests that it is essentially a more powerful organization of certain basic processes, by which the poet is released from the usual course of life and is driven relentlessly to give vent to his impressions, building up a second world apart from the one of our actions. Die dichterische Phantasie he terms, then, "ein unwillkürlich gesetztes, vom gewöhnlichen Leben und dessen Zwecken losgelöstes Schaffen aus der Fülle der seelischen Kräfte." This is nowhere to be seen more clearly displayed than in Goethe, and it is therefore fitting that Dilthey devotes considerable space to

1. Mehrholz says, op. cit., p. 25: "Es fehlt der ganzen Schererschule der Blick für die Dämonie schöpferischer Menschen, die Einsicht in die Hintergründe und Abgründe der menschlichen Seele, das Gefühl für die wirkliche Würde der Originalität."

2. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 188. Dilthey shows how this was early manifested in Goethe, Ibid., p. 226.

3. Ibid., p. 193.
an analysis of this phenomenon, the whole Goethe sketch appearing under the title of Goethe und die dichterische Phantasie.

As the germinating force from which poetic creation springs, the dichterische Phantasie must be comprehended for the understanding of the author's works; in fact, it becomes the central factor in the study of literary history. Dilthey writes in this connection:

Die Phantasie des Dichters, ihr Verhältnis zu dem Stoff der erlebten Wirklichkeit und der Übelieferung, zu dem, was frühere Dichter geschaffen haben, die eigentümlichen Grundgestalten dieser schaffenden Phantasie und der dichterischen Werke, welche aus solcher Beziehung entspringen: das ist der Mittelpunkt aller Literaturgeschichte. An keinem neueren deutschen Dichter wird diese zentrale Stellung der Phantasie im dichterischen Schaffen so deutlich als an Goethe, und keiner fordert zu seinem Verständnis so die Einsicht in das Wesen der Phantasie. Dies ist in der Stellung begründet, die Goethe im Zusammenhang der europäischen Literatur einnimmt. 1

Goethe, as the "classic example" of this creative force, is thus to be understood in his life and works in terms of this instinctive, constructive impulse. The first and most decisive characteristic of Goethe's work is the fact "dass sie aus einer ausserordentlichen Energie des Erlebens erwächst." 2 Dilthey details the various facets of Goethe's poetic genius which combined to give his works their

1. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 175.
2. Ibid., p. 188.
3. Ibid., p. 179.
unequalled brilliance and richness. He cites particularly the poet's keen awareness of the manifold manifestations of life as parts of a unified whole ("Immer lebte er in der Einheit der Dinge und in der Struktur ihrer Teile zum Ganzen.")

The variety and vitality of his lived experiences, which, being of such great force, necessarily sought expression ("...dass Erlebnis in ihm überall und unmittelbar mit dem Drang zum Ausdruck verbunden war.")

as well as his tendency to reflect over life and its significance ("Diese Schicht von Nachdenken über das Leben ist der mütterliche Boden, aus dem seine Dichtung erwächst."). The overwhelming force of this great subjective personality permeates all his works and permits us to relive his experience in and through them, as Dilthey states here:

Só führen uns die Dichtungen Goethes immer zurück auf den grossen Menschen, der in ihnen zu uns redet. Jedes seiner Werke weist hin auf die Persönlichkeit, die in allen gegenwärtig ist. Er lehrt uns, Menschen und Dinge unbefangen, rein, unabhängig von ihrem Verhältnis zu unserer Person auf uns wirken zu lassen, das Leben in seiner Fälle und Harmonie aus ihm selber zu verstehen, seinen Wert zu genießen und jedem Schicksal, jedem Verlust neues froh jmiges folgerichtiges Handeln entgegenzustellen. Seine Kraft zu überwinden, zu vergessen, sich zu erneuern teilt sich nicht nur in Schriften uns mit, sondern sie wirkt aus allem was und Kunde von diesem Leben gibt. Und kein Schelwort, das von Briefen und biographischen Bemühungen weg auf die Dichtungen hinweist, wird dies

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1. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, p. 245.
Verhältnis umzukehren und Leben, Natur und Entwickelung Goethes zu Mitteln, seine Werke zu verstehen, herabzudrücken imstande sein. Denn was der Mensch in der Arbeit seines Lebens schliesslich gewollt hat, das ist es auch was, wann sein Tag vorübergegangen ist, uns zu ihm hinsieht und unseren Blick letztlich festhält.

Goethe’s works thus represent one distinctive form of the poetic experience, which may be expressed in various ways, according to the poet’s own nature. To illustrate this Dilthey resorts to the comparative method, contrasting on the one hand Shakespeare, the extrovert, who, with his interest centered on the world of affairs, gives a reflection of life (Spiegel des Lebens), with Goethe, on the other hand, who, with his introspective bent, turns to reflections on life and expresses ideas and ideals. These two outstanding figures, ”die beiden grossen germanischen Seher, die am tiefsten dem Leben in sein unergründliches Antlitz geblickt haben,” thus complement one another, and qualities to be found in one serve to highlight those of the other. Dilthey summarizes the results of this comparative study:

Fassen wir alle Züge des dichterischen Schaffens von Shakespeare zusammen, so erleuchten sie durch den Kontrast die poetische Grundrichtung Goethes. In der Einleitung ist die Stellung beider in der europäischen Literatur dargelegt worden; der hier erörterte Unterschied tritt nun ergänzend hinzu. Shakespeare liebte vorherrschend in der Welterfahrung, alle Kräfte seines Geistes dem, was um ihn in Welt und Leben geschieht, entgegenstreckend. Goethes eigenste Gabe

1. Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, p. 267.
2. Ibid., p. 201.
The elements of experience, the source from which the poet draws his work, are to be considered as materials which the poet's imagination (Einbildungskraft) reshapes and molds in accordance with his inner nature. As Dilthey points out in his discussion of Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters, the force of this reproductive process, the Nachbildung, by which these raw materials are transformed, "erhitzt und umgeschmolzen," depends on the respective strength of the feelings (Gefühle), emotions (Affekte), and volition (Willensvorgang). It is the interplay of these three aspects of the mind that color the dichterische Phantasie, the preponderance of one or the other determining its particular cast. The poet's work thus reflects how he views the world (Lebensbild), the significance it assumes for him (Lebenswert), and his position with respect to it (Lebensideal). Works of literature thus become vehicles for the

2. Ibid., p. 254; cf. G. S., V, p. 394.
expression of the author's Weltanschauung.

Weltanschauungen, representing as they do interpretations of reality of various individuals, have their roots in life; they are a part of life itself. So the analysis of life which ever motivated Dilthey necessarily leads to an analysis of these world views. In his studies on Weltanschauungslehre he presents them as man's attempt to fill a deeply felt need for some foothold in this fleeting and circumscribed existence. Throughout the ages these Weltanschauungen, these systems of thought set up by man in answer to that need, have assumed various forms, each one purporting to possess absolute validity, only to be superseded or refuted. However, in the face of a constantly changing conception of reality, the necessity for solving the riddle of life and the world, "der unauslöschliche metaphysische Trieb," nonetheless persists. As Dilthey says, "Die metaphysische Wissenschaft ist eine historisch begrenzte Erscheinung, das metaphysische Bewusstsein der Person ist ewig."


2. Specifically, Vol. VIII of his Gesammelte Schriften, bearing the general title of Weltanschauungslehre, Abhandlung zur Philosophie der Philosophie, although the subject is naturally treated in various studies, e. g., Die Philosophische Weltanschauung, in Vol. V, including a discussion of types.

3. G. S., VIII, p. 222.

In analyzing the types of Weltanschauungen that have been expressed in religions, literature, or philosophies, Dilthey distinguishes three groups in accordance with his recognition of the triple nature of the human spirit—idealism of freedom, representing the predominance of the volitional faculty; objective idealism, of the contemplative and affective; and naturalism, of the cognitive. Such widely diverse views naturally present problems of validation and clarification. Dilthey presents the conflict arising from these divergent positions and gives his final verdict in his whimsical sketch entitled Traum.

Recognizing every Weltanschauung as the product of one particular thinker in one particular era, he acknowledges its limitations in applicability to one definite set of circumstances. "Jede Weltanschauung ist historisch bedingt, sonach begrenzt, relativ." The "fearful anarchy of thought" resulting from such a stand he resolves with the very historical consciousness that produced this doubt; that is, the various theories have become differentiated according to an inner law. Dilthey sets forth as his final, "liberating" avowal the fact that these are based on the nature of the

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1. G. S., V, p. 399 ff.
2. G. S., VIII, p. 218 ff.
3. Ibid., p. 222.
4. Ibid.
universe and the relation of the perceiving spirit to it. Thus each one may be said to contain the truth, in that it presents one side of reality. "Die Wahrheit ist in ihnen allen gegenwärtig." Here, however, we reach the limits of human understanding, for we can never attain a view of the whole of reality. "Es ist uns versagt, diese Seiten zusammenzuschauen. Das reine Licht der Wahrheit ist nur in verschieden gebrochenem Strahl für uns zu erblicken."

In this realization Dilthey feels that the human spirit is freed from the bonds imposed upon it by the transitory and circumscribed nature of material existence. For by proceeding beyond the understanding of the individual instance as an isolated phenomenon to its interpretation in relation to the whole, we gain an insight to the one abiding reality in the human sphere—life itself, ever unfolding and expressing itself in a myriad of forms.

Die Melodie unseres Lebens ist bedingt durch die begleitenden Stimmen der Vergangenheit. Von der Qual des Augenblicks und von der Flüchtigkeit jeder Freude befreit sich der Mensch nur durch die Hingabe an die grossen objektiven Gewalten, welche die Geschichte erzeugt hat. Hingabe an sie, nicht die Subjektivität der Willkür und des Genusses ist die Versöhnung der souveränen Persönlichkeit mit dem Weltlauf.

1. G. S., VIII, p. 223.
2. Ibid., p. 222
3. Ibid., p. 224.
CONCLUSION

It has been seen that Dilthey's guiding principle, Analyse des Lebens, led him into many fields, wherever the human spirit has found expression. This prodigious endeavor, "dieses Gehen nach allen Seiten hin im Endlichen, um das Unendliche Leben der geistigen Welt in der Metamorphose ihrer Formen zu erblicken und das Allgemeine, das der besondere Fall ist, zu erfassen," finally culminated in the formulation of what Ortega terms "the new great Idea in which man is beginning to abide—the Idea of life." In the final analysis, then, Dilthey's theory of hermeneutics becomes more than an interpretative technique, but rather, as Bollnow suggests, a philosophical procedure.

The comment has been made that Dilthey never succeeded in thinking through to the end, that he failed to build up a systematic structure, and it is true that many of his

1. Georg Misch, "Vorbericht" to G. S., V, p. xxv.
2. Ortega y Gasset, Concord and Liberty, p. 132.
3. O. F. Bollnow, Dilthey, eine Einführung in seine Philosophie, p. 188.
5. According to George A. Morgan in his article, "Wilhelm Dilthey," in the Philosophical Review, Vol. XLII, Dilthey reached no conclusions, his major works were not finished (p. 351), he did not achieve great unity of vision (p. 377), and he did not have the "satisfaction of having completed something whole and enduring" (p. 380).
works are fragmentary and incoherent. But are not such "flaws" rather mute evidence of the ephemeral nature of Dilthey's problem, which serve to bear out some of his tenets -- the Mannigfaltigkeit and Mehrseitigkeit of life, the Zusammenhang and Zusammenwirkung of parts within the whole, the geschichtliche Bewusstsein, which defies the establishing of absolute concepts?

Dilthey's real significance is not to be sought in his final conclusions, but rather in the stimulating effects of the efforts of hermeneutic's "unvergesslichen Förderner und Vorkämpfers." In Morgan's words, "In what he began rather than in what he finished lies the merit of Dilthey." With his awareness of the immediacy of life and his absorption in the multiplicity of its forms, with his appreciation of individuation and its self-realization within the whole, with his constant striving toward an envisioned goal, he breathes something of the warm Romantic spirit into the cold air of factualism. His role is that of a Wegweiser pointing the way to a new land, and many of the words that this "stammering genius" failed to speak have found utterance in other voices, and much of the work he cut out has been

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carried on by other hands. The important fact is that Dilthey did see that goal and by his own intense striving toward it directed others in his path. So it is not without justification that Unger applies the "much misused" word "Faustian" to his efforts, for is there not an echo of the spirit of unending striving embodied in that classic German figure to be heard in the following words of Dilthey?

1. In the field of hermeneutics itself Wach has carried on Dilthey's pioneering efforts; Tröltzsch, with his Der Historicism und seine Probleme and Der Historismus und seine Überwindung continue the problem of historicity; in psychology Jaspers has extended studies of the role of understanding while Spranger's Lebensformen is a development of Dilthey's Typenstudien; in literary studies Walzel, Strich, Unger, and Gundolf are but a few who acknowledge Dilthey's leadership (cf. p. 69 ante); in art and aesthetics his pupil, Nohl, has further developed his theories in such works as Die Weltanschauung der Malerei; while in philosophy Misch, his son-in-law, with his Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie, pursues further the great new "Idea of life," and Dilthey's own position is illuminated by the trend toward existentialism as found in such men as Heidegger.

4. Der junge Dilthey, p. 87.
APPENDIX

THE ORIGIN OF HERMENEUTICS
1900

(Translation of Dilthey's Essay)

In an earlier essay I have discussed the portrayal of individuation in the world of men as it is achieved in art, especially in poetry. Now we are confronted with the problem of the scientific understanding of individuals, and, indeed, of the great forms of individual human existence in general. Is such understanding possible, and what means do we have of attaining it?

This is a question of the greatest importance. Our actions everywhere presuppose the understanding of other persons; a large part of human happiness springs from the re-experiencing of the inner life of others; the whole of philological and historical learning is based upon the presupposition that subjective recapturing of the singular can be raised to objectivity. The historical consciousness built on this makes it possible for modern man to have present in himself the whole past of humanity: beyond the confines of his own time he looks out into past cultures;...
their energy accrues to him, and he enjoys again their charm: a great increase of happiness comes to him from this. And, as much as the systematic human studies may deduce universal laws of relationship and comprehensive systems from this objective apprehension of the singular, they depend, nevertheless, for their foundation on the processes of understanding and interpretation as well. Hence the certainty of these sciences as well as that of history depends on whether the understanding of the singular can be raised to the level of universal validity. At the very portals of the human studies we are thus met with a problem which is peculiar to them in contradistinction to all natural science.

To be sure, the human studies have the advantage over the natural sciences in that their subject matter is not a phenomenon produced in the senses, a mere reflection of something real within the consciousness, but the immediate inner reality itself, and this, moreover, as an interrelation experienced from within. Yet it is just from the manner in which this reality is presented in inner experience that great difficulties arise for its objective comprehension. They are not to be discussed here. Furthermore, the inner experience, through which I become aware of my own states, can never make me conscious of my own individuality. Only by comparison of myself with others do I experience that which is individual in myself; only then am I conscious of
that in my own nature which deviates from others. Goethe is quite right when he says that this most important of all our experiences is not easy for us and that our insight into the extent, nature, and limits of our powers always remains quite incomplete. Knowledge of the existence of others, however, comes to us first of all only from without, through sensory data, gestures, sounds, and actions. Only through a process of reconstructing that which, in separate symbols, enters our senses do we round out our inner reality. Everything—subject matter, structure, the most individual traits of this complementary process—must be supplied by us from our own living self. How then can a consciousness, having its own particular nature, gain objective knowledge of a strange and completely different type of individuality through such reconstruction? What sort of process is this which, seemingly so heterogeneous, appears among the other processes of cognition?

This process in which, from signs given to the senses from without, we come to know an inner reality, we call understanding. That is the common term of usage; we can arrive at a definite psychological terminology, of which we are in such need, only when every expression, already precisely coined and defined clearly enough to be usable, is adhered to by all writers alike. Understanding of nature—interpretatio naturae—is a figurative expression.
However, the perception of our own states is also, though improperly so, termed understanding. To be sure, I may say: I do not understand how I could have acted so; I do not understand myself anymore. But with that I mean to say that a manifestation of my nature which has been projected into the sentient world confronts me like that of a stranger and that, as such, I am not able to interpret it; or in the other case, that I have gotten into a state at which I gaze in amazement as if it were foreign to me. Accordingly, by understanding we mean the process of apprehending a psychic reality through the sensory signs by which it manifests itself.

This understanding extends from the comprehension of child-like babbling to that of Hamlet or of the Critique of Pure Reason. From out of stones, marble, musically formed tones, out of gestures, words, and writing, from actions, economic institutions and constitutions the same human spirit speaks to us and requires interpretation. And, indeed, the process of understanding, so far as it is determined by the common conditions and means of this type of cognition, must everywhere have common characteristics. In these fundamental features it is the same. Should I wish to understand Leonardo, for example, the interpretation of actions, paintings, sculptures, and writings go hand in hand, and, in fact, in a homogeneous, uniform process.
Understanding shows various degrees. These are conditioned first of all by interest. If the interest is limited, so is the understanding. How impatiently we listen to many an explanation; we fasten our attention on only one point in it which is of practical significance for us, without being interested in the inner life of the speaker. In other cases, however, we strive to penetrate through every expression, every word, into the inner being of the speaker. But only when the manifestation of life is fixed and we are thus able to return to it again and again, can even the keenest attention turn into a skilled process in which a controllable degree of objectivity is attained. Such skilled understanding of permanently fixed manifestations of life we term exegesis, or interpretation. In this sense there is also an art of exegesis whose objects of study are sculpture or paintings, and F. A. Wolf even had demanded an archaeological hermeneutic and criticism. Welker was in favor of it, and Freller sought to carry it out. But Freller already points out that such interpretation of mute works depends everywhere on an explanation from literature.

Indeed, the immeasurable importance of literature for the understanding of spiritual life and of history lies in the fact that in language alone the human spirit finds its complete, exhaustive, and objectively intelligible expression. Thus the art of interpretation has its center in the
exegesis or interpretation of the records of human existence as they are contained in writing.

The exegesis of these records, and the critical treatment of them which is inseparably bound up with it, was accordingly the starting point of philology. Basically, philology is the personal art and virtuosity applied in such a treatment of written records, and only in connection with this art and its results can there flourish any other interpretation of works or of historically reported actions. We may be mistaken about the motives of the actors of history; the actors themselves may cast a deceptive light over them. But the work of a great poet or discoverer, of a religious genius or a true philosopher can never be anything but the true expression of his inner life; in this mendacious human society such a work is always true, and, in contrast to all other expressions in fixed symbols, it is in itself capable of a complete and objective interpretation; indeed, only through it do the other artistic monuments of an age and the historic actions of its contemporaries appear in the right light.

The art of interpretation has developed just as gradually, regularly, and slowly as, for instance, the art of inquiry into nature through experimentation. It arose and maintains itself through the personal and ingenious skill of the philologist. According to its nature it is also transmitted to others, that is, predominantly through
personal contact with the great masters of exegesis or their work. But at the same time every art proceeds according to rules. The rules teach us how to overcome difficulties. By means of them the gains of personal skill are handed down. Hence the formulation of its rules grew early from the art of exegesis itself. And from the conflict of these rules, out of the struggle between various trends concerning the interpretation of vitally important works and the consequent need to justify these rules, there arose the hermeneutic science. It is the technique of exegesis of written records.

This science, basing the possibility of universally valid interpretation on the analysis of the understanding, presses forward finally to the solution of the quite general problem with which this discussion began; the analysis of inner experience is joined by that of the understanding, and both together demonstrate for the Geisteswissenschaften the possibilities and limits of universally valid knowledge in them, so far as these studies are conditioned by the way in which psychical facts are originally given to us.

I intend now to demonstrate this regular development in the history of hermeneutics: how, out of the need for deep and universally valid understanding, philological virtuosity arose, and from this the laying down of rules and their codification in relation to an objective which, in its particular nature, was determined by the state of science at a
given time, until finally, in the analysis of the understanding, the positive starting point for the laying down of rules was found.

1.

Technical exegesis (ἐρμηνεία) of the poets developed in Greece from the requirements of instruction. During the period of the Greek enlightenment ingenious play with the interpretation and criticism of Homer and other poets was popular wherever Greek was spoken. A firmer basis resulted when the Sophists and the schools of rhetoric brought this interpretation into contact with rhetoric. For the latter, when applied to eloquence, contained the more general theory of literary composition. Aristotle, the great classifier and analyzer of the organic world, of the state, and of literary productions, taught in his rhetoric how to divide the whole of a literary work into its parts, to distinguish forms of style, to note the effects of rhythm, phrase, metaphor. The definitions of the effective elements of speech, such as example, enthymeme, maxim, irony, metaphor, antithesis, are even more simply listed in the Alexandrian Rhetoric. And the Aristotelian Poetics quite explicitly had for its object the inner and outer form of poetry, as it may be derived from the nature and purpose of various poetic types, as well as its effective elements.

A second important advance was made in the technique
of interpretation and the formulation of its rules in Alexandria philology. The literary heritage of Greece was brought together in libraries, textual revisions were carried out, and through an ingenious system of critical symbols the results of critical work were notated. Spurious writings were rejected, subject catalogues of the whole existing store were made. Philology as a technique, founded on an intimate understanding of language, of textual criticism, higher criticism, exegesis, and evaluation, had come into being: one of the last and most characteristic creations of the Greek mind; for it goes without saying that, since Homer's time, the delight in human discourse was a most powerful stimulus to this critical spirit. In addition, the great Alexandrian philologists began to be aware of the rules contained in their ingenious technique. Aristarchus was already proceeding consciously according to the principle of determining Homeric usage precisely and comprehensively and of basing on it the explanation and definition of texts. Hipparchus quite consciously based factual interpretation on literary-historical investigation by pointing to the sources of the Phaenomena of Aratus and interpreting this poem according to them. Among the extant poems of Hesiod spurious ones were recognized; from the epics of Homer a large number of verses was rejected, the last song of the Iliad and, with even more unanimous agreement, a part of the next to the
last and the whole last song of the *Odyssey* were declared to be of more recent origin. This was made possible through the masterly application of the principle of analogy, according to which something like a canon of linguistic usage, of mental horizon, of inner conformity and aesthetic value of a poem, was set down and anything contradictory to it was rejected. Certainly, the application of such an ethical-aesthetic canon in the case of Zenodot and Aristarchus is quite apparent from their way of accounting for antithesis: \[ \delta \alpha \tau \delta \alpha \eta \rho \varepsilon \pi \varepsilon \zeta', \] that is, *si quid heroum vel deorum gravitatem minus decere videbatur*. Furthermore, Aristarchus referred to Aristotle as his authority.

In the Alexandrian school methodical consciousness about the proper procedure for interpretation was heightened even more by the opposition to the Pergamene philology, a conflict between hermeneutic tendencies which nevertheless was of world-wide historic significance! For in Christian theology it appeared on a new level, and two great historic views concerning poets and religious writers were formulated by it.

From the Stoic school, Crates of Mallos introduced into Pergamene philology the principle of allegorical

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1. "unseemly", "unbecoming".

2. "if anything seemed less fitting to the dignity of heroes or gods".
interpretation. The long-enduring force of this interpretive method rested primarily on the fact that it resolved the contradiction between religious documents and a refined world view. In this respect it has been a necessity for the commentators of the Veda, of Homer, of the Bible and the Koran alike—an indispensable as well as useless art. Yet at the same time there lay at the basis of this method a profound view concerning poetic and religious productivity. Homer is a seer, and the contradiction in him between deep insights and sensually coarse ideas can be explained only if one conceives of the latter as mere poetic means of representation. But the interpreting of this relationship as the intentional cloaking of a pneumatic sense in images gave rise to allegorical interpretation.

2.

If I am not mistaken, this conflict reappears, but under changed circumstances, in the struggle between the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools of theology. Their common ground was naturally the assumption that an inner connection of prophecy and fulfillment joined the Old and New Testaments. For the use of prophecies and symbols in the New Testament required such a connection. Starting out from this assumption, the Christian church was placed in a complicated position over against her opponents in regard to the exegesis of her sacred writings. Over against the
Jews she needed allegorical interpretation in order to carry over the Logos-theology into the Old Testament. On the other hand, over against the Gnostics she had to guard against too extensive an application of the allegorical method. Following in Philo's footsteps, Justin and Irenaeus attempted to set up rules for the determination of limits and application of the allegorical method. In the same struggle with the Jews and Gnostics, Tertullian adopted the procedure of Justin and Irenaeus, but developed, on the other hand, effective rules for a more exact hermeneutics, although he himself does not always follow them faithfully. In the Greek church the conflict was fought out on the basis of principle. The Antiochian school interpreted the texts according to grammatical-historical precepts only. So Theodorus of Antioch saw in the Song of Solomon only an epithalamium. He saw in Job only the poetic formulation of a historical tradition. He rejected the superscriptions of the Psalms and refuted, in regard to a considerable part of messianic prophecies, their direct reference to Christ. He did not acknowledge a double meaning of the texts but only a higher connection between incidents. On the other hand, Philo, Clement, and Origen distinguished in the texts themselves between a pneumatic and the actual meaning.

A further step in the development from interpretive art to hermeneutics, in which the latter was raised to
scientific consciousness, was the growth, out of this con-
flict, of the first consistent hermeneutic theories of which we have knowledge. According to Philo καυνούς and γνομοι της ἀληθοριάς existed; they are applied in the Old Testament, and their knowledge accordingly must have been the basis for his interpretation. On this, Origen, in the fourth book of his work ερί ἀρχα, and Augustine, in the third book of de doctrina christiana, based a coherently presented hermeneutic theory. By way of contrast, two hermeneutic works of the Antiochian school appeared, which unfortunately were lost: Diodorus τίς διαφόρα μετρία καὶ ἀληθοριάς and Theodorus de allegoria et historia contra Origenem.

With the Renaissance, interpretation and the formulation of rules concerning it entered a new phase. The age was separated from classical and Christian antiquity through language, conditions of life, and nationality. Accordingly, interpretation now became, even more than it had been formerly in Rome, a way of transporting oneself into a foreign spiritual life by means of grammatical, factual, and

1. "rules", "canons".
2. "laws of allegoria".
3. "concerning rules".
4. "Some differences between outward appearance and allegoria."
historical studies. And this new philology, polymathy, and
criticism had often only reports and fragments with which to
work. Hence it had to be creative and constructive in a new
manner. Thus philology, hermeneutics, and criticism reached
a higher plane. An extensive body of hermeneutic literature
from the next four centuries is available. It represents
two different currents, in as much as the classical and the
biblical writings were the two great forces which one strove
to assimilate. The precepts of classical philology were
designated as ars critica. Such works, among which those of
Scioppius, Clericus, and the incomplete work of Valesius
predominate, presented in their first section a hermeneutic
theory. Countless essays and discourses dealt with inter-
pretation. We are indebted, however, to biblical interpre-
tation for the definitive formulation of hermeneutics. The
first significant and perhaps the most profound of these
works was the Clavis of Flacius (1567).

In this work the sum total of all rules of interpre-
tation which had been formulated up to that time were first
united into a system, and this by means of the postulate
that, through the technical procedure in accordance with
these rules, an understanding of universal validity should
be attained. Through the struggles of the sixteenth cent-
ury Flacius arrived at this basic point of view, which does
indeed govern hermeneutics. He had to contend against two
fronts. Both the Anabaptists as well as restored Catholicism defended the obscurity of the Holy Scriptures. In opposing them, Flacius learned a great deal from the exegesis of Calvin, which in many instances had gone back to the basic principles of interpretation. The most urgent pursuit for a Lutheran of the time was the refutation of Catholic traditionalism, which doctrine had just been formulated anew. In the controversy with the protestant scriptural principles, the right of tradition to determine the interpretation of the scriptures could be based only on the contention that an adequate and universally valid interpretation could not be derived from the biblical scriptures themselves. The Council of Trent, which met in 1545-1563, took up these questions from its fourth session on; in 1564, then, the first authentic publication of the decrees appeared. Later, some time after the work of Flacius, Bellarmin, the representative of Tridentine Catholicism, most aptly attacked the intelligibility of the Bible in a polemical treatise and thereby sought to prove the necessity of tradition as a supplement to it. In connection with these struggles Flacius undertook the task of demonstrating the possibility of a universally valid interpretation by way of hermeneutics. And in wrestling with this task he formulated for himself means and rules for its solution which no former hermeneutics had set forth.
When an interpreter encounters difficulties in his text, he has an expedient of sublime nature at hand with which to solve them: the coherence of the work as expressed in the vital Christian religiosity. Translating this from the dogmatic mode of thought into ours, this hermeneutic value of religious experience is only one special case of the principle by which every interpretive process contains, as one of its factors, exegesis according to objective relationship. Alongside of this principle of religious interpretation there are also rational ones. The first of these is grammatical interpretation. Flacius, however, was the first to grasp, in addition to that, the importance of the psychological or technical principle of interpretation, according to which the individual passage must be interpreted from the intention and composition of the work as a whole. And he is the first one who, in this process of technical interpretation, methodically applied the findings of rhetoric concerning the inner coherence of a literary product, its composition, and its effective elements. Melanchthon had paved the way for him with his remodelling of Aristotelian rhetoric. Flacius himself was conscious of having first methodically employed, for the unequivocal fixing of passages, the means provided through context, purpose, the proportion and congruity of the single parts or sections. He expresses the hermeneutic value of this means from a
general viewpoint of methodology. "Certainly everywhere else the individual parts of a whole gain their intelligibility from their relation to this whole and to its other parts." In tracing this inner form of a work he goes as far as to consider style and the individual effective elements and sketches quite acute characterizations of Pauline and Johannine style. It was a great advance, even though still within the limits of rhetorical concepts. After all, for Melanchthon and Flacius each work is written according to rules, just as it is understood according to rules. It is like a logical automaton, which is invested with style, images, and figures of speech.

The lack of form in his work is overcome in the hermeneutics of Baumgarten. In the latter, however, a second great theological-hermeneutic movement made itself felt. In Baumgarten's reports of a Halle library there began to appear on the German horizon beside Dutch interpreters the English freethinkers and commentators of the Old Testament, who worked according to ethnological considerations. Semler and Michaelis were trained through association with Baumgarten and through participation in his work. Michaelis first applied a unified historic conception of language, history, nature, and law to the interpretation of the Old Testament. Semler, the predecessor of the great Christian Baur, destroyed the unity of the New Testament canon, set
the real task, namely, that of comprehending every single work in its local character, then joined these writings to a new unity which was furnished through the vital historic conception of the original Christian struggle between Jewish Christendom and the Christians of a freer order, and in his preliminary work concerning theological hermeneutics he traced the whole science with resolute determination back to two factors: interpretation according to linguistic usage and to historical circumstances. Therewith the liberation of exegesis from dogma was completed, the grammatical-historical school was founded. The keen and prudent mind of Ernestis then created in the _Interpres_ the classical work for this new hermeneutic. The study of it helped Schleiermacher in developing his own hermeneutic. Yet even these advances were accomplished within definite limits. In the hands of these commentators, the composition and thought complex of each work of an era were resolved into the same threads: the locally and temporally conditioned scope of ideas. According to this pragmatic conception of history, human nature, uniformly disposed with respect to religion and morals, is limited only externally as to time and place. It is ahistoric.

Up to this point classical and biblical hermeneutics had proceeded side by side. Should not both be regarded as applications of a general principle? Meier, a disciple of
Wolf, took this step in 1757 in his "Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst". He actually gave as broad a definition of his science as possible: it should set up rules which were to be observed in every interpretation of symbols. But the book shows once more that new sciences can not be invented on the basis of structure and symmetry. In this way only blind windows are produced through which no one can see. An effective hermeneutic could arise only in a mind in which the mastery of philological interpretation was combined with a genuine philosophical talent. Such a one was Schleiermacher.

These are the conditions under which he worked:

Winckelmann's interpretations of art works, Herder's sympathetic understanding of the spirit of eras and peoples, and the philology pursued under the new aesthetic viewpoint of Heyne, Friedrich August Wolf and his pupils, especially Heindorf, who worked in closest communion with Schleiermacher in Platonic studies; all this combined in him with the method of German transcendental philosophy of reaching out behind that which is presented in consciousness to a creative capacity which, operating uniformly and unconsciously, produces in us the whole form of the world. It was precisely the combination of these two forces which gave rise to the art of interpretation peculiar to him, as well as to the definitive founding of a scientific hermeneutic.
Hermeneutics, up to that time, had been at best a body of rules, the parts of which, that is, the individual rules, were held together through the purpose of a universally valid interpretation. It had distinguished the functions working together in this process of understanding as grammatical, historical, aesthetic-rhetorical, and factual. And, aided by the philological mastery of many centuries, it had formulated the rules according to which these functions must operate. Schleiermacher now went beyond these rules to the analysis of the understanding, that is, to the understanding of this teleological conduct itself, and from this understanding he deduced the possibility of a universally valid exegesis, its auxiliary techniques, limits, and rules. However, he could analyze the understanding as a re-creation; a reconstruction, only in its active relation to the process of literary production itself. In the active perception of the creative process through which a vital literary work originates, he recognized the condition for the understanding of the other process, which, from written symbols, comprehends the whole of a work and from this the intention and spiritual make-up of its author.

However, a new psychological-historical perception was needed to solve the problem thus raised. We have traced the relation with which we are here concerned from the connection existing between Greek interpretation on the one
hand, and rhetoric as the technique for a certain type of literary production. But the conception of both processes had always remained a logical-rhetorical one. The categories to which it was applied were always matters of putting together, logical coherence, logical arrangement, and then investing this logical product with style, metaphors, and similes. Now, however, completely new concepts are applied in order to understand a literary product. Now it is a unified and creatively working faculty, which, not conscious of its task of shaping and forming, takes up and develops the first suggestions for a work. Conceiving and spontaneous shaping are inseparable in it. Individuality is felt at work up to the finger-tips and in single words. Its highest expression is the outer and inner form of a literary work. And now this work meets with the insatiable need of supplementing one's own individuality through the observation of others. Understanding and interpretation are thus life itself, ever active and effective; they achieve fulfillment in the technical exegesis of vital works and their relation to one another in the spirit of their author. This was the particular form which the new conception assumed in Schleiermacher's mind.

However, a further requisite for this great plan of a general hermeneutic sprang from the fact that the new psychological-historical perception was transformed by
Schleiermacher himself and his colleagues into a philological art of interpretation. In Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Schlegel brothers, the German spirit had just turned from poetic production to a sympathetic understanding of the historic world. It was a mighty movement: Böckh, Dissen, Welcker, Hegel, Ranke, Savigny were determined by it.

Friedrich Schlegel became Schleiermacher's guide in philological art. The concepts which guided Schlegel in his magnificent works on Greek poetry, Goethe, Boccaccio, were those of the inner form of the work, the development of the author, and the organized whole of literature. And behind such single contributions of a reconstructing philological art there lay for him a plan for a science of criticism, an ars critica, which was to be based on a theory of productive literary capacity. How closely this plan coincided with Schleiermacher's hermeneutic and criticism!

From Schlegel also proceeded now the plan for a Plato translation. Through it the technique of the new interpretation was perfected, and Böckh and Dissen applied it first to Pindar. Plato must be understood as a philosophical artist. The goal of interpretation is the unity between the character of Platonic philosophizing and the artistic form of Platonic works. Philosophy here is still life fused with the dialogue, and of such an artistic form that it compels individual re-creation of the actual thought sequence. At
the same time, however, according to the strict unity of Platonic thinking, every dialogue must continue what has preceded, prepare for what is to follow, and spin out the threads of the various parts of the philosophy. If one traces these relations between the dialogues, a continuity of the main works is discovered, which discloses the innermost intention of Plato. According to Schleiermacher, the real understanding of Plato can come only through grasping this skillfully constructed coherence; in relation to this, the determination of the chronological sequence of his works is less important, although this may agree in many instances with the inner coherence itself. Böckh could well say in his famous critique that this masterpiece first made Plato accessible to philological science.

Schleiermacher's mind combined, for the first time, such philological skill with a real philosophical talent. And the latter had been trained in transcendental philosophy, which first supplied the adequate means for just this general formulation and solution of the hermeneutic problem. So arose the general science and technique of exegesis.

The reading of Ernesti's *Interpres* guided Schleiermacher in making the first draft of his hermeneutics in the fall of 1804, since he intended to open his course of exegetic lectures in Halle with it. Effectiveness was given to it above all by a pupil of Schleiermacher of the
Halle period, Böckh, in the magnificent section in his lectures on philosophical encyclopedia.

I will stress the passages of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic upon which, in my opinion, future development depends.

Any exegesis of written works is only the technical developing of the art of understanding, which extends throughout all of life and deals with every type of speech and writing. The analysis of understanding is therefore the basis for the formulation of hermeneutic rules. The latter, however, can be accomplished only in conjunction with the analysis of the production of literary works. The combination of rules which determine the means and bounds of interpretation can be based only on the relation between understanding and production.

The possibility of a universally valid interpretation can be deduced from the nature of understanding. In the latter the individuality of the commentator and that of the author do not oppose one another as two totally different entities; they have both been formed on the basis of human nature in general, and this makes possible the community of speech and understanding among men. Here the formula-like expressions of Schleiermacher can be psychologically explained. All individual differences are, in the final analysis, not caused by qualitative differences of persons from one another, but only through differences in degrees of
their mental processes. By transporting himself vividly, in a sort of probing manner, into a historical milieu, the commentator is able momentarily to emphasize and augment one set of mental processes, while allowing others to recede and so to bring about a reconstruction of another's life.

If we look at the logical side of this process, we realize that it is a matter of recognizing a connection on the basis of only relatively definite, single symbols, a process which is continuously assisted by the available grammatical, logical, and historical knowledge. Expressed in our logical terminology, this logical phase of understanding consists accordingly in the cooperation of induction, the application of general truths to the particular case, and the comparative method. The next task would be the determination of the particular forms which the logical operations just mentioned and their combinations may assume.

Here the central difficulty of all interpretation makes itself felt. The whole of a work is to be understood from the individual words and their combination, and yet the complete understanding of the single part presupposes that of the whole. This circle is repeated in the relation of the single work to the mentality and development of its author, and it recurs in the relation of this single work to its literary type. Schleiermacher solved this difficulty practically and most admirably in his *Introduction to the*
Platonic State, and in postscripts to his exegetic lectures. I find other examples of the same method. (He began with a survey of the structure, which is comparable to a hasty reading; gropingly he encompassed the whole context, he illuminated the difficulties and paused to take a reflective glance at all the passages granting insight into the composition. Only then did real interpretation begin.) Theoretically we reach here the limits of all interpretation; it always accomplishes its task only up to a certain point—all understanding remains thus only relative and can never be completed. *Individuum est ineffabile.*

The division of the process of understanding into grammatical, historical, aesthetical, and factual interpretation as Schleiermacher found it was rejected by him. These distinctions merely indicate that grammatical, historical, factual, and aesthetic knowledge must be present when interpretation begins and may influence every part of it. But the act of understanding as such can have only two phases which are present in the cognition of a spiritual creation on the basis of linguistic symbols. Grammatical interpretation starts out in the text by going from combination to combination until it reaches the highest synthesis in the creative inner process; and it proceeds to the inner and outer form of the work, from there, however, to the perception of the total unity of the works as provided by the
mentality and development of their author.

Here the point is reached from which Schleiermacher masterfully develops the rules of hermeneutics. Of basic importance is his theory of outer and inner form, and especially ingenious are the tentative statements for a general theory of literary production which might furnish the instrument for literary history.

The final goal of hermeneutic methodology is to understand the author better than he understood himself—a principle which is the necessary consequence of the theory of unconscious creation.

Let us summarize: understanding develops into interpretation which achieves universal validity only with respect to literary monuments. If philological interpretation in hermeneutics becomes too aware of its method and its justification, then the practical usefulness of such a discipline, compared with the unstudied exercise of this process, may not be highly esteemed, as F. A. Wolf rightly declares. But beyond this practical usefulness in the business of interpretation itself, a second, and its chief, task seems to lie, in my opinion, in the following: over against the constant inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity in the domain of history it should furnish the theoretical basis for the universal validity of
interpretation on which all certainty in history rests. Within the continuum of epistemology, logic, and methodology of the Geisteswissenschaften, this theory of interpretation becomes an important link between philosophy and the historical sciences, a basic constituent in the foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften.
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