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## Wilhelm Dilthey: Classical Sociological Theorist

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### Abstract

This paper argues that Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) deserves to be regarded as a classical sociological theorist. We tend to think of Comte as the "founder" of sociology and count Marx, Weber and Durkheim as the "big three" classical theorists. Yet we ignore Dilthey. Dilthey is at least as important in his own way as Comte and other recognized classical theorists. In this paper some of Dilthey's key ideas are discussed to indicate the heuristic power of his interpretive social science.

The aspects of Dilthey's contribution which are discussed have all had a significant impact on contemporary sociological theory and research. They will continue to influence our thinking and empirical endeavors. I will emphasize such ideas as *Geisteswissenschaften*, hermeneutics, "the hermeneutic circle," *Verstehen*, *Sinnzusammenhang*, *Historismus*, *das Leben*, *Erlebnis*, and *Weltanschauung*. The English translation of those German terms is part of the interpre-

lem in this analysis. Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey's hermeneutic example, has clouded the sociologically heuristic meaning of that Dilthey, no less than any other classical theorist, must be analyzed and used using the best principles of sociological hermeneutics.

## I. Introduction

Wilhelm Dilthey (1831-1911) is a significant classical sociological theorist — not just a philosopher (Ortega y Gasset 1963), historian (Tuttle 1969; Kluback 1956) or humanist (Kuhns 1988) — who has contemporary relevance for sociological theory (Habermas 1971, 1984, 1987; Mesure 1990; Nisbet 1976; Radnitzky 1973; Plantinga 1980; Winch 1967). But Dilthey's significance is not fully recognized by everyone; in fact he is often overlooked entirely (e.g. Antoni 1959; Aaron 1968, 1970; Bottomore 1962; Bulmer 1984; Gadamer 1988; Jay 1984; Oakes 1987; Oberschall 1965; Popper 1972). In this era of what Weber referred to as the iron cage of rationality (Scaff 1989) Dilthey's work has relevance for contemporary sociological theory in many ways. He moves far beyond the critiques of inconsistent philosophical thinkers like Scheler (1958, 1961a, 1961b). Most obvious is Dilthey's impact on work in the "interpretive" mold (Turner, Beeghly and Powers 1995, 1998). Thus, for example, Giddens (1995) indicates Dilthey's contribution to Ethnomethodology. Prus (1996) argues that Dilthey is a root source of qualitative, ethnographic Symbolic Interactionism and Phenomenological Sociology. These are all aspects of what Ritzer (1996) calls the "Social Definition Paradigm" (SDP), although Ritzer does not highlight Dilthey's contribution. Ritzer lists Weber as the exemplar of the SDP; Neuman (1997) considers Weber and Dilthey as founders of Interpretive Social Science (ISS). Ironically, today Dilthey is more widely appreciated in Culture Studies and philosophy (Bambach 1995; Alexander and Seidman 1990) than he is in sociology.

Why is Dilthey often overlooked by sociologists? Part of the answer is provided by Kalberg (1997) in his discussion of the neglect of some of Weber's central insights concerning rationalization and the general thesis found in Weber (1965, 1968a, 1968b). The "parameters" of postwar American sociological theory did not extend to certain non-positivist traditions. Dilthey does not fit neatly into the positivist narratives that have been most influential among English-speaking sociologists, narrative accounts that start with Comte, Spencer and Durkheim. He is central to an earlier "German Tradition" (Levine 1995; Ormiston and Schrift 1990) which begins with Johann Martin Chladenius (1710-1759), Friedrich Ast (1778-1841) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). That tradition is not as well known to mainstream sociologists as the work of French and British thinkers, most of whom ignored Dilthey. The earlier German tradition is also not as well known to sociologists as the later German sociological thinkers, who drew on his insights without always explicitly giving him direct credit (e.g. Weber, Simmel, Mannheim). While aspects of Dilthey's work have been known to historians (Hodges 1952; Tuttle 1969) and are now becoming relevant to Postmodernists interested in Heidegger (Ormiston and Schrift 1990: 26-28), the history of continental hermeneutics (Mueller-Vollmer 1985: 1 - 53; Schleiermacher 1998 [1838]; Dilthey 1996) is not generally appreciated in mainstream sociolog-

ical theory. Part of the explanation for the neglect of Dilthey may be the manner in which his work has been translated. But even those with a knowledge of the German language still overlook Dilthey. Parsons (1937), who translated parts of Weber and did much to introduce Weber to American sociology, barely mentions Dilthey or hermeneutics. Yet, a full comprehension requires a background in the German debates of the nineteenth century (Kusch 1995).

In addition to Weber (Hughes 1958, Kaesler 1988), it is very difficult to conceive of the work of Simmel (Levine 1971), G. H. Mead (Martindale 1960), Schutz (1967), Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1997; Lemert 1971) without Dilthey's contribution to the German tradition in social science (Iggers 1973; Levine 1995). Martin Buber, a sociologist at the Hebrew University, was also influenced by Dilthey, who was his professor at the University of Berlin (Berry 1985: 27; Kepnes 1988: 194 - 206).<sup>1</sup>

Although it is not widely recognized, the German Historicist tradition (Iggers 1968), the German Hermeneutic Tradition (Mueller-Vollmer 1985), and the German Tradition in sociology (Levine 1995) are very important components in American sociology today. They have significance worldwide because of the Frankfurt School (Jay 1973) and the continued impact of the interpretive, hermeneutic approach (Ferraris 1988, 1996). Dilthey's use of the hermeneutic method and explanatory understanding is a key aspect of contemporary sociology, although that is usually not well understood. If the problems associated with structure versus agency and macro collectivities versus micro individuals are to be solved, there needs to be a return to a consideration of Dilthey's epistemological assumptions. That ultimately requires going back to Kant (1951, 1963, 1965, 1968) and Hegel (1965), and those like Schleiermacher (1998), Trendelenburg (Wach 1926) and Dilthey who interpreted them to create an epistemologically-grounded theory of interpretation (Palmer 1969; Simmel 1977 [1892]).<sup>2</sup> There are fruitful insights in Dilthey's work that are still worth considering (Tillman 1990). Therefore, it is worth reading Dilthey and further refining our comprehension of his contribution. It is time to bring Dilthey back in. The dialogue (Arnett 1986; Levine 1995; Mitscherling 1987) is impoverished by his absence.

There are several excellent texts in English which present different interpretations of Dilthey (Hodges 1949, 1952; Ermarth 1978; Rickman 1979; Bulhoff 1980; Plantinga 1980; Makkreel 1992).<sup>3</sup> Here I am less concerned with the nuances of different interpretations than with the central outlines of the generally agreed upon contributions.

It is assumed here that social science (Giddens 1976) and history (Mandelbaum 1938, 1971; Collingwood 1956; Tuttle 1994) require acceptance of fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions (Dilthey 1927 Vol. VII [1907], Husserl 1962; Palmer 1969; Popper 1966; Radnitzky 1973), despite the very popular radical postmodernist critique of those assumptions (Heidegger 1962 [1927]; Gadamer 1988 [1960]; Sontag 1966; Rorty 1979; Rosen 1987). Instead of discussing those philosophical assumptions in depth, however, we will

turn to an overview of Dilthey's key concepts in order to "resume the dialogue" on those questions (Mitscherling 1997).

## II. Major Theoretical Contributions:

This paper will consider some of Dilthey's specific contributions, especially his contributions to sociology. (However, much of what is said is relevant to anthropology and social science generally.) It will emphasize his ideas of: (A) social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), (B) methodical interpretation (*hermeneutics*), (C) *the hermeneutic circle*, (D) understanding (*Verstehen*), (E) ecological nexus (structural form, *Sinnzusammenhang*), (F) historicism (*Historismus*), (G) Life (as existential experience, *das Leben*), and (H) worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*). However, this paper does not attempt to "cover Dilthey" in all respects. General treatments are available (e.g. Hodges 1952; Ermarth 1978; Plantinga 1980; Makkreel and Rodi 1989). They do not, however, succinctly stress the specific importance of Dilthey's key ideas for sociology (Martindale 1960; Maus 1962; Habermas 1971; Bakker 1995). By and large most sociologists are not familiar with Dilthey's contributions. Even specialists in theory often overlook his work.

### A. *Geisteswissenschaften*.

The term *Geisteswissenschaften* can be translated in many ways. Usually it is thought of as an early way of discussing the social sciences. Dilthey's use of the word *Geist* has been misunderstood because the term is often connected with Hegel (1965; Inwood 1992; Ashley and Orenstein 1998: Chap. on Hegel). For some, that is grounds for dismissing the idea out of hand. In Dilthey's case, however, it was more directly connected with John Stuart Mill (Hodges 1949; Makkreel 1992; McRae 1974). Thus, another reason that Dilthey has been neglected is that few sociologists comprehend the significance of John Stuart Mill's work in shaping the discourse on methods. Today, Mill's *Logic* would not be considered a work on the philosophical problem of symbolic logic but could be called a textbook on social science methodology and meta-theory.

Today we refer to Mill's moral sciences as the "social sciences" or even "sociological sciences" (*soziologischen Wissenschaften*). Dilthey was greatly influenced by Mill's "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences," which is Book VI of *A System of Logic* (1974: 831 - 952). Lewis Feuer has called Mill's Book VI "the most enduring essay on the method of the social sciences which has ever been written, ..." <sup>4</sup> Dilthey had great respect for Mill's classic. But Mill's approach to "moral science" made assertions which Dilthey thought were subtle errors. "No sooner was the expression successfully Germanized than Dilthey denied that Mill's empiricist — perhaps more importantly 'inductivist' — account of the human sciences would do; ..." (Ryan 1987: 171). Therefore, Dilthey wrote his own *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (or, "Introduction to Social Science"). That work has been translated by Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Thus,

Dilthey (1989 [1883]) is available to all English-speaking sociologists. Today we would call Dilthey's classic work a contribution to theory and methods. But the problem of translation still exists. For example, what does "human sciences" mean? Are the human sciences related to sociology?

The German word used in the translation for "moral" sciences is *Geist* (not the German word *Moral*) but the use of that word *Geist* was not necessarily Dilthey's first choice. At one point he even considered using a more literal translation, the old term "*moral-political sciences*" (*moralisch-politische Wissenschaften*; Dilthey [1936] GS XVIII: 221, cited by Makkreel and Rodi 1989: 10). Early drafts contain other terms like "sciences of human action" (*Wissenschaften vom handelnden Menschen*). Again, Dilthey was not primarily interested in following a Hegelian usage (Inwood 1992). He was as much Neo-Kantian as he was Neo-Hegelian (Bakker 1995).

However, the term *Geisteswissenschaften* - which is the word translated as human sciences — had been introduced into the German language in the 1849 translation of Book VI of John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* (Frisby 1976: xxi, footnote 35). As stated, Dilthey was impressed by Mill's work and accepted many aspects of Mill's methodology. For Dilthey, as for Mill, the key to understanding society is the individual. But unlike Mill, Dilthey did not think of individuals as *homo economicus*. He rejected the Utilitarian concept of the individual as a utility maximizer. Dilthey considered the individual in terms of the "whole man" or "whole woman," as a "person" (*Geist*, Greek *psyche*, "soul"). That is, Dilthey's social science was to be constituted on the basis of adequate understanding of the whole person as a human being.

Dilthey wrote his introduction to sociology in order to emphasize the notion that many people today call "methodological individualism." But his brand of methodological individualism (as opposed to Comtean structuralism) was somewhat different from Mill's methodological individualism. When Mill wrote about the moral sciences he thought of individuals as utility maximizers; when Dilthey wrote about the moral sciences he thought of individuals as whole persons (Misch 1960).

Dilthey was interested in human beings as flesh and blood persons (James 1950), although not just from a Heideggerian ontological perspective (Scharf 1997). For Dilthey, much of what we now call social science is properly concerned with that which makes human beings distinctively human, rather than animals (*homo sapien sapiens*), or income maximizers, or cogs in society (Habermas 1987). He did not want to base the scientific study of human beings on a reductionist model (e.g. *homo sapien*, *homo sociologicus*, *homo economicus*) (Dahrendorf 1968; Frisby 1976; Gluck 1985). He wanted to base his "social science" on the study of the whole person. He was not a socio-biologist or a positivist; he would not have considered "rational choice theory" to be a complete approach to what is most important in the study of human beings and society. (Rational choice theory is more closely linked to Mill.) His was an interpretive,

individualizing, "psychological" sociology. That approach has more heuristic value than many sociologists are willing to acknowledge. Dilthey would definitely not be seen as a fore-runner by those who take a strictly "positivistic" (Halfpenny 1982), behavioristic or rational-choice (Alexander 1995) perspective. But his work is extremely important as the classical grounding for interpretive approaches that look at human beings as whole persons. Many Feminist Sociologists, for example, might be interested in Dilthey's work. But he has not been taken up by Feminists (McDonald 1993). Marxists have also ignored Dilthey, despite Marx's interest in "species being" (Jay 1984; Rosen 1987). Anyone who takes a Symbolic Interactionist approach (Prus 1996) would want to read Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, which — with some changes in terminology — could easily be regarded as an "Introduction to Sociology" from the interpretive perspective (Dilthey 1989 [1883]).

Today the distinction between social science and natural science (i.e. what Dilthey called the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften*) is maintained at almost every university, albeit the German terms are usually not recognized by native English speakers (Makkreel 1997 [1969]). In fact, the tendency is to mis-interpret the meanings of these words (e.g. Leahey 1997: 195 - 198). Dilthey did not invent the distinction, but his contribution to the debate on the exact epistemological grounding of that distinction is part of the reason for the widespread acceptance of a distinction. Today the term *Geisteswissenschaften* is translated as "social science" in most American and Canadian universities. Dilthey's views on the *Geisteswissenschaften* are in many ways taken for granted by all those who differentiate between "social science" and "natural science," even if they have never heard of Dilthey (Antoni 1959).

When the word science is used in English, it typically refers to the natural sciences. The social and natural sciences have not always been distinguished from one another (Speziali 1973). Even when there is a general recognition of some notion of "culture" (Kroeber and Kuckhohn 1952), little attention is paid to the philosophical roots of anthropological and sociological assumptions (Leavitt 1991). If there was no distinction in people's thinking then the blanket term science would automatically cover the social sciences too.

Even if one accepts some version of the "unified science" thesis (e.g. Nagel 1961 [1954]) it is still unlikely that the heuristic value of the distinction will be completely ignored (Radnitzky 1973; Rickert 1962; Spiegelberg 1965). Those who do not differentiate social science and natural science — or do not feel that it is an important differentiation — (and also do not simply take a positivistic version of the "unified science" approach, e.g. Durkheim 1964; Popper 1972: 153-190) are few and far between.

One of Dilthey's most significant contributions is that he made the distinction between "social science" and "natural science" more than a common sense kind of differentiation. He provided a philosophical rationale for the distinction and, in a sense, invented the *Geisteswissenschaften* (Alexander 1995). The distinction

between social science and natural science is so widely accepted today, even by people who have never heard of Dilthey, that it is accepted as a “natural” distinction, not a “constructed” one.

Unlike Heidegger (1962), Dilthey did not adopt an idiosyncratic concept of the individual human being (i.e. Heidegger’s *Dasein*). Dilthey was interested in a social science which was not completely materialistic and he constructed an epistemological basis for such a social science. Dilthey did not try to extend philosophy to a radically new form of ontology (Kisiel 1993; Scharf 1997). In Dilthey’s epistemology the possibility of a science for the study of human beings as social actors was real, even though it had never been done systematically in quite that way before. Dilthey did not attempt to challenge the fundamental assumptions of the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman world view. Heidegger’s dismissal of that world view may have led to an aristocratic “Junker” world view (Winson 1982: 403).

Dilthey’s *Geisteswissenschaft* made it possible for Weber (1968a), Schutz (1967 [1932]) and others to avoid the Heideggerian trap (Comay 1987). Schutz, for example, utilized Weber’s *verstehende Soziologie* in conjunction with Husserl’s “phenomenology” to develop a special kind of “phenomenological sociology.” He was willing to accept “traditional” ontological assumptions that Heidegger — in direct confrontation with Dilthey — rejected in the name of “anti-foundationalism” (Gadamer 1988: 195-344). The problems of modernity (Scaff 1989) do not have to lead to postmodernist rejection of epistemological foundations for social science.

### C. The Hermeneutic Circle

Postmodernists claim that accepting the ontological assumptions of any pre-Heideggerian philosophy involves a belief in something that has no foundation (Kisiel 1993; Bonner 1997). The postmodernist view is that if you start off with Judeo-Christian ontological assumptions you will arrive at conclusions that are already implicit in those assumptions. That is inevitable, they argue, due to the *hermeneutic circle*. Gadamer (1988), for example, has written on the hermeneutic circle and “totalizing” assumptions. But it would be a mistake to think that Heidegger or Gadamer discovered the notion. It was already well known in Dilthey’s day. Essentially the hermeneutic circle is the paradoxical situation where in order to know the parts it is necessary to know the whole, but in order to know the whole it is also necessary to know the parts. Where does one break into the circle? How does one discover “totality” without understanding the components? Is the circle always a “vicious circle” which simply leads to tautologies? Can it sometimes be a “spiral” which leads to a broader “horizon” of understanding?

Dilthey firmly believed that the problem of the hermeneutic circle is not insurmountable. It is a spiral not a vicious circle. Think of the interpretation of scripture. The understanding of any part of a text, for example Christian scripture, is

conditioned by the understanding of the whole text; but, one cannot understand the whole without understanding the parts. Nevertheless, one can learn more about the Bible. It is not necessary to give up altogether, or to leave interpretation to the politically powerful. Thus, for example, for Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin and other Protestant reformers (Ferraris 1996: 25 - 32 ), the Bible can be understood by itself alone, without necessarily having to rely on a tradition of interpretation. At the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church view became that the tradition of the Church had binding doctrinal authority. The way in which the words were understood by the early Church Fathers was the only right way to understand those words (Connolly and Keutner 1988: 4-5). What is left for the Roman Catholic scholar is exegesis of the original meaning of the words, as understood by the Church. For Luther, as for Roman Catholic theologians, the intention can be found in the text. There is one and only one correct interpretation versus many incorrect interpretations. The harmony of parts and whole is sufficient grounds to provide a correct interpretation of difficult passages like Romans 1:17.5 Of course, Luther felt that the Holy Spirit had to inspire any interpretation of scripture.

For Friederich Schleiermacher, however, the circle is not self-sufficient (Dilthey 1996). Instead, hermeneutic analysis is, in part, an aid to the original intention of the author of the text. The correctness of the interpretation of a text cannot be based merely on the immanent “text intention.” The author’s intention is also important. Both “grammatical” and “psychological” aspects have to be considered. But how can we interpret the intention of the author? Can we even be sure that the author knew his or her intention? We need to use some kind of psychological understanding (Dilthey 1962, GS V [1894]).

For Schleiermacher it is not possible to reach a definitive interpretation. We can reach a defensible interpretation, but we cannot rule out the possibility that we may be mis-interpreting the text either grammatically or psychologically. Dilthey then came along and argued that not only does the hermeneutic circle apply to the grammatical part of the hermeneutic analysis, it also applies to the psychological part (Dilthey 1977). That is, we can be relatively objective and “scientific” (*wissenschaftlich*) because we have an “intersubjective framework” that is based in reality. Our psychological makeup is not entirely arbitrary. Therefore, *Verstehen* is not a mystical identification or irrational grasping of reality; it is a kind of interpersonal “induction.” One might say that Dilthey believed that we are all “scientists of the human” in that as human beings we learn to comprehend and understand everyday life. We go through a series of “conjectures and refutations” from earliest childhood. We are all engaging in what Gandhi called “experiments with truth.” Thus, *Verstehen* is not a mystical “empathy” or “intuition,” or even a general “sympathy.” It is part of our psychological make-up to use a version of the “hermeneutic circle” even in everyday life (Dilthey 1985). Luther did not really just rely on the text by itself; he also used his objective knowledge of the world, which he had gained through intersubjectivity as a

human being. When Luther interpreted scripture it was not merely a matter of his getting locked into a completely tautological system. Nevertheless, we can obtain an even fuller understanding of Luther's implicit assumptions than Luther himself could have done (Dilthey 1959). There is not necessarily anything irrational about that.

With the benefit of hindsight there is also increased insight, not just for theologians. The same is even true for natural scientists. In contemporary work on the sociology of science it has become increasingly clear that there is a kind of "hermeneutic circle" even in positivistic science. Thus, for example, the notion of a "paradigm" in physics carries with it the implication that physical laws are not arrived at purely on the basis of empirical evidence and inductive logic. The falsifiability of an empirical test is closely associated with the initial paradigmatic assumptions built into the scientific theory. The logic of the hypothetico-deductive approach in science is circular. That does not mean that scientific theory is merely a vicious circle. Recognition of the fruitful aspects of the hermeneutic circle involves comprehension of the importance of grasping the parts in relation to the whole, as well as the whole in terms of the specific parts. Thus, we need to know the "major paradigm" in order to understand the way in which the specific research hypotheses are intended, but we need to have an accurate grasp of the detailed hypotheses to really know what the major paradigm is all about.

#### D. *Verstehen*

*Verstehen* as empathetic and non-empathetic interpretive understanding is central to social science. There has been much discussion of the precise meaning of *Verstehen* (Truzzi 1974), particularly the famous Abel-Wax debate (Abel 1954 [1948]). Should *Verstehen* always involve complete empathy or sympathy with the subject? It is generally agreed that *Verstehen* does not just involve empathetic understanding; it can also be a non-empathetic, unsympathetic interpretation. Dilthey (1959, 1976) makes that clear (Habermas 1971; Hodges 1952; Jung 1995; Makkreel 1992).

Few sociologists have bothered to carefully examine Dilthey's use of the term *Verstehen*. Dilthey's usage is not the same as Weber's since Weber attempts to incorporate causal adequacy in a way that Dilthey was not concerned to do (Ringer 1997: 29). Dilthey may have over-emphasized the degree to which natural sciences deal in causal laws. On the other hand, Dilthey's fears of a positivistic approach to social science may not have been groundless. Behaviorist approaches and socio-biology are the kinds of sociology with which he might have had difficulty (Alexander 1985). He might not have rejected them outright but he would have emphasized that they cannot provide "understanding" of human beings considered as distinctively human rather than simply as a part of nature. He would never have accepted the notion that sociology is merely a foot-

note to biology.

Dilthey stressed human agency. He "contrasted the 'freedom' of the human mind with the lawfulness of nature" (Ringer 1997: 29). That emphasis on human freedom is part of the reason that Dilthey is sometimes accused of irrationalism and vitalism. But unless we assume strict determinism there is every reason to accept Dilthey's concern with *Verstehen* of inner connections. Dilthey believed that we need to understand human meaning. Understanding is a part of comprehension of human agency.

The use which we as human beings make of hermeneutics when we interpret the actions of other humans is a "double hermeneutic" (Hollis 1996). The first step is direct understanding of an action. It is not altogether different from the direct understanding that we use to interpret the behavior of an animal. As human beings we know what someone is doing when she or he is swinging an axe or a golf club. But the second step is more complex. We also have to use "explanatory understanding." We need to be able to tell whether the axe is being used to chop down a tree or as a murder weapon. We need to be able to distinguish between an amateur and a professional golfer. We have to have an understanding of what W. I. Thomas called the "definition of the situation" and what Wittgenstein called the "game" (Hollis 1996: 370-371; Bartley 1985). Thus, for example, a classical philologist or biblical hermeneuticist must be able to not only recognize a specific text but also utilize explanatory understanding concerning the intention behind the text. Was it written as allegory or should it be taken on a more literal level? In English we use the term "understanding" to indicate the first step, regardless of whether we understand the behavior of a squirrel or of a ten year old child. When the term *Verstehen* is used we can be more certain that the second step is included. We cannot use "explanatory understanding" to fully grasp the behavior of the squirrel but we can use it to get a deeper sense of the social action of the child.

There is a general mistaken impression that *Verstehen* requires "empathetic understanding" of a kind that is basically irrational or mystical (Kepnes 1988). Sometimes the process of hermeneutic understanding is said to require "getting inside people's heads." However, Dilthey does not require that *Verstehen* include a complete and total comprehension of the inner workings of the "mind" of the other person or persons one wishes to understand. The kind of explanatory understanding that Dilthey has in mind is the kind of understanding that we all use everyday in order to get through life. When we interact with other human beings we use some measure of understanding. A person who did not use understanding would not be human. Even mentally challenged people still have a very good grasp of many interpersonal situations and develop a high degree of understanding a good deal of the time. We say, in popular parlance, that someone is "crazy" when that person does not conform to our view of what is "normal" behavior or action. We feel justified in making such judgments even if we are not trained psychiatrists because there are definite parameters of human conduct.

Perception is contextual (Hahn 1942).

Ringer (1997: 29) points out that "Dilthey never lost his conviction that empathy is an element of interpretation." He adds that Dilthey felt that *Verstehen* always contains "something irrational." That statement needs to be interpreted. It is true that explanatory understanding is not rational in the same way as a scientific law about natural processes (e.g. the periodic table of the elements, the structure of DNA) is abstractly rational (Kusch 1995: 95-121). However, it is very important to be clear about the use of the term "irrational" in this context. It simply refers to the use of a kind of logic that is not strictly logical and rational. Whenever we listen to someone without utilizing mathematical logic we are not being completely rational. But the kind of "irrational" empathy that Dilthey had in mind has nothing to do with complete lack of rationality. When we interact as human beings we do not follow "computer logic." People tend to react with hostility to pedantic casuistry in everyday life.

Ethnomethodological breaching experiments have made it very clear how finely tuned our cultural and sub-cultural understanding is. If we deviate even slightly we can cause people to be very upset. We have disturbed their sense of what is right. Thus, for example, the patron in a restaurant who makes and insists on a subtle logical point about the way in which items on the menu can or cannot be substituted for one another is likely to create hostility.

There are countless examples of the ingenuity of human understanding in everyday life which do not require some mystical or irrational notion of *Verstehen*. I recently walked into an electronics store for the first time in weeks, after having just had a lengthy conversation about a legal nicety. The clerk asked me, "Were you just speaking with someone?" I knew exactly what he meant; but, as a breaching experiment I decided to be strictly logical, as one would be in a court of law. "Yes," I said, "I was just talking with someone." Later on I had to explain to him that the person I had been talking with was not another clerk in that store. He had meant: "Were you talking with another clerk in this store just a little while ago?" The answer to that question would have been: "no." I further explained that I had just been dealing with legal matters and was thinking about legal niceties. (Of course I did not use the word "casuistry" in this everyday conversation.) When Dilthey points out that *Verstehen* requires "something irrational" he means that when we use *Verstehen* in ordinary life or in scholarship we need to move beyond a strict legal casuistry or mathematical logic. Ordinary conversation is not, strictly speaking, "logical." It requires a kind of fuzzy logic which is not the same as deductive symbolic logic.

Nevertheless, that does not mean that when we utilize our ability to "sympathetically understand" we also immediately empathize emotionally (in any deep sense). I can use *Verstehen* to understand a serial killer without necessarily empathizing with that killer's actions. We can use *Verstehen* to understand the crimes of a Nazi war criminal without necessarily empathizing with that war criminal's actions. It requires explanatory understanding to have any idea about

the holocaust; it does not require deductive logic to understand that a severe injustice took place. As human beings we have *Verstehen* when we see "Schindler's List."

Yet, text book after text book discusses Weber's *Verstehen* as if it required a kind of irrational empathetic or sympathetic *Einfuehlen*. That is, it is often assumed that Weber was concerned with being able to completely "feel" what it meant to be a holocaust victim, a Chinese eunuch or an Indian yogi. But it is not necessary to be a saint to understand Gandhi (Bakker 1993). However, it is necessary to have a sense of context (Miller 1996).

Now, of course, in all such situations the more one has a deep experience of the culture or sub-culture the more likely it will be that a deeper sense of empathy will occur. But *Verstehen* does not require that level of empathetic understanding. We can even use *Verstehen* to understand child molesters and sadistic killers. They are human, "all too human." But we do not necessarily have to walk in their shoes or condone their actions.

Of course, in ordinary life the level of *Verstehen* that is exercised outside of one's own cultural setting is often very low. When a victim says: "You don't understand!" that victim is right. No one who has a full stomach can understand how someone who is starving to death really feels. But if we limited our social scientific understanding (and practical application of that understanding in concrete actions) to only those things we personally experience then there would be even less concern with the plight of the world's hungry than there is. Ordinary people feel sympathy for starving children they see on television, even if they have never in their lives lacked more than enough food to eat and have become totally accustomed to luxuries. They may get cynical about the ways in which foreign relief agencies deal with hunger, but they understand that the child is hungry. *Verstehen* requires a certain degree of empathy but it does not require complete empathy to be useful scientifically.

The crucial difference between academic, intellectual *Verstehen* and everyday life *Verstehen* is that, hopefully, the frame of reference is expanded. The sociologist who has studied other people and groups different from her or himself (or her or his groups, etc.) is better able, ideally, to grasp something about what someone or some group different from him or herself is like. There is an underlying "human-ness" about us that makes everything human understandable at some level. But to move beyond ordinary common sense understanding it is necessary to do systematic research. The academic researches the evidence still available in the present in order to understand past social actions as objectively as possible (Tuttle 1969: 94-111).

That was Dilthey's point about *Verstehen* and that is the type of *Verstehen* that Weber learned about from Dilthey. We have become more and more aware of injustice. We now comprehend what it means to "blame the victim." There has been increased awareness of racism, sexism, genderism, classicism, ethnocentrism, ageism, able-bodied-ism and many other biases and prejudices. But aware-

ness of such things requires understanding. It is one thing to claim that understanding can never be perfect; we can never fully grasp what it is like unless we have personally gone through it. But it is another thing to claim that unless the sociologist or anthropologist has personally gone through it in every respect she or he has nothing to say about it.

Yet within the strict "positivistic" (Halfpenny 1982) or behavioristic paradigmatic approach there is no room for any kind of understanding since the essence of the positivistic-behavioristic approach is to study people as if they were no different from viruses, genes or atomic particles. Few academics would deny that it is sometimes useful to study genes without reference to the human meaning of the genes; we can safely assume that human meaning is not a part of the experience of the genes. Similarly, an econometric analysis of economic variables can be very useful, even without reference to understanding of the actor's (e.g. consumers) actions. (The assumptions about motivation are strictly Zweckrational, substantively "rational.") But, to extend that to mean that we should never introduce the understanding of human meaning is tantamount to denying that there is any difference between a sub-atomic particle and a human being.

All human beings who can speak a language are enormously sophisticated about *Verstehen* when it comes to their own immediate situation (Erben 1993). In the *Geisteswissenschaften* that "social" ability that is almost an a priori given (although perhaps not in the original Kantian sense) in familiar settings is extended to unfamiliar situations (e.g. the plight of a slave in the Roman Empire in the first century). *Verstehen* is a key aspect of what we call social science.

Weber adapted Dilthey's version of *Verstehen*. Whereas Dilthey was concerned with the uniqueness of immediate experience (*Erleben, Erlebnis*), Weber de-emphasized uniqueness (Kalberg 1997). Weber attempted to synthesize a concern with "meaning adequacy" with a concern with "causal adequacy." For Dilthey, causal adequacy was not a key feature of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Dilthey wished to emphasize the centrality of "meaning adequacy." In that respect Dilthey is closer to the Symbolic Interactionist Paradigm than Weber.

Nevertheless, Weber often resisted arguing that he had a causal historical argument. In his *Protestant Ethic*, for example, he never argued that the "protestant ethic" caused the "capitalist spirit." He merely argued that there was an "elective affinity" between the two "ethics." The protestant ethic had an elective affinity with the capitalist ethic; the spirit of capitalism had an elective affinity with the spirit of Protestantism. Weber "expressly excluded the recourse to psychological 'laws'" (Ringer 1997: 165) in his key understanding of how psychological tensions in the everyday orientations of seventeenth century Puritans got expressed through "methodical rationalization of their life conduct."

For the natural sciences the problem of human meaning is not as central in terms of the subject matter as it is in the social sciences. One could say that the natural sciences do not deal with subjects, only with objects. The geologist is not interested in the motivation of rocks; the astronomer does not emphasize the cul-

ture of stars; the physicist is not concerned with the roles of sub-atomic particles; the biologist is uninterested in the sense of community of bees. Human meaning is not a significant part of the theoretical focus of natural sciences, even though human meaning can often help in retrospect to inform us why natural scientists missed "the obvious." Dilthey's later work moves away from a radical bifurcation between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* (Mueller-Vollmer 1985: 148; Makkreel 1997 [1969]), but his essential insight about the centrality of *Verstehen* in social science remains valid. The rocks do not talk back; the stars do not blush.

### E. Sinnzusammenhang

For Dilthey meaning is always contextual (Kamerbeek 1957). A text must be understood in context. We have to know what goes along with the text (con-text) to begin to be able to interpret the text. The way in which thought and language is contextual and intersubjective is often ignored. But "the way in which meaning hangs together" (*Sinnzusammenhang*) can only be ignored if meaning is context-free. In the study of human beings the context can often be crucial. This is a centrally important feature of Dilthey's view. The construction of a one-sided model of "man" such as *homo economicus* or *homo sociologicus* may have heuristic value for positivistic science, but it will not reveal human beings as human. What is lost in such models is the context. The concept of *Sinnzusammenhang* led to Husserl's *Lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*) notion, which influenced Schutz's phenomenological sociology. In everyday lived experience we have a sense of how things "hang together" (i.e. *zusammenhangen*) in terms of their meaning (*Sinn*) for us. In other words, our social reality is constructed and we get a sense of that reality in terms of our ability to sense the way in which meaning joins together in that socially constructed reality. We know from experience that if we go to another sub-culture or culture the way in which meanings are expressed can be quite distinctively different. The components may be different, but even if the components are essentially the same they may "hang together" differently.

The concept of "meaning" (*Sinn*) does not necessarily imply a total grasp of all aspects of the meaning. We may be greatly ignorant of very significant features of our circumstances. Nevertheless, for all practical intents and purposes in the here and now we have enough of a sense of how things hang together to be able to handle many relatively complex and subtle situations.

Of course, the more we can take a bit of objective distance from our situation and perhaps compare it to other situations which are different in subtle or in gross ways the more likely it will be that if drastic change takes place we will be immunized against the worst aspect of such change. People who have never experienced anything else are likely to be hardest hit when their familiar reality suddenly shifts. The ground has shifted out from under their feet. They are lost. They have lost direction. Thus, for example, someone who is born in a large met-



ropolitan area and who has never known any other way of life is likely to be devastated if he or she is suddenly confronted with an economic or social situation that requires a complete change of direction. The context is extremely important to a correct interpretation (Miller 1996).

The “frame” or “definition” (*Sinnzusammenhang*) of a situation is the context of that situation as we experience it as a whole. We understand the context in terms of its meaning for us as human beings; it is what meaning the “ecology” of the situation has for us (Bateson 1972). While human meaning is “subjective” in the sense that we do not all have the same contexts, nevertheless we all share enough common humanity to be able to get a grasp of the way in which others perceive the context, provided we are given the opportunity to learn about that context. The value of novels like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Max Havelaar* by Eduard Douwes Dekker (i.e. “Multatuli”) 6 is that such novels allow us to grasp the “frame” or “nexus” (*Sinnzusammenhang*) of the people depicted; we start to understand the context as it is perceived by the people who are immersed in it. Glaser and Strauss (1964) use the term “awareness contexts.”

In some ways the concept of nexus is also similar to Goffman’s use of Gregory Bateson’s idea of a “frame” (Goffman 1974: 7). Goffman states (1974: 10): “My aim is to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events ...” The notion of a frame (or framework) is the same as that of “context.” In Bateson’s presentation of the concept of a frame he uses the words frame and context to mean the same thing (Bateson 1972: 338). Dilthey’s concept of *Sinnzusammenhang* is — in Bateson’s words — the “ecology of the ideas which together constitute” a context for a group, subculture, system, culture, structure or collectivity. The context is the way in which things hang together in terms of their interrelated meanings. Such contexts or frames are “historical.” They are situated in historical time. .

Lukacs (1971: 153) points to Dilthey as a “really important historian of the nineteenth century” (along with Riegl and Dvorak) who noticed that the “essence of history” lies in changes in “structural forms” which determine “the objective nature” of “inner and outer life.”

However, neither the people who experience it nor the historian have direct access to immediate reality in these, its true structural forms. It is first necessary to search for them and to find them —...(Lukacs 1971: 153).

For Lukacs the “structural forms” constitute a “totality” (a structure that “hangs together”). It is possible to make an analogy with “ecology,” usually thought of these days in terms of biology rather than a historically changing “human ecology.”

It is important to see the particular utterance or action as part of the

ecological subsystem [or subculture, etc.] called context and not as the product or effect of what remains of the context after the piece which we want to explain has been cut off from it (Bateson 1972: 338).

The “structural form “ is dynamic and is also found in the sub-units; it is an inter-related set of entities which change (an ecological nexus). Hence, having discussed Dilthey’s key concept of *Sinnzusammenhang* we can consider history and historicism.

#### F. Historicism

The concept of “historicism” (Historicism), like positivism, is translated in many ways. It has been given different and often contradictory definitions (Morris 1972). There have been so many definitions that it is never completely clear what is meant. Some authors distinguish between Historism and Historicism (Popper 1957); others do not. For some authors *Historismus* is a completely irrational doctrine, while for others it is logical (Iggers 1973: 295-298).7

One key aspect of historicism, however, is attention to narrative detail. *Historismus* (Historism, as the term was once translated, or Historicism, as it is now most frequently translated) is the emphasis on the importance of details of historical description. The Historist or Historicist is someone who emphasizes what Windelband called the “idiographic.” That is, there is a concern with the historically unique and specific. Geertz’s concept of “thick description” in anthropology is a form of *Historismus*. The importance of the detailed case study is another example. Neither Geertz nor a contemporary depth psychiatrist (e.g. psychoanalyst or Jungian) would wish to apply a positivistic approach to the study of their interests (Bakker 1993). One problem in defining *Historismus* concerns whether or not it involves the assumption that only idiographic description is valid. Few German thinkers seriously argued that only the historical approach will yield valid and reliable scientific information about human beings. But they were concerned with arguing that idiographic description is not something that should be entirely discounted. It is not a “humanistic” pursuit that does not have *wissenschaftliches* qualities.

Historical study of details of a time and place help to construct a likely picture of the “nexus” (*Sinnzusammenhang*) of that situation. Anything less than accurate description of details will not allow for a reasonable approximation of the level of understanding that may be required. The more exotic and different the situation the more likely we will need “deep description” before we begin to understand meanings (Bakker 1993). The “thick description” of a Javanese village helps us to understand the cultural and sub-cultural nexus of the life of a Javanese villager or a Javanese family.

The term “historical” is not used by Dilthey to describe the contemporary discipline of history in the narrow sense (D’Amico 1989; Danto 1968). Instead, his-

torical here refers to any pattern that has taken place in real time. Our notions of time have been distorted by Cartesian two-dimensional space. We are sometimes led to think of time as something that moves like points plotted on graph paper, a kind of interval or ratio scale of time. But time is not experienced in equal segments of seconds, minutes and hours. We do not even experience days, weeks, months and years as approximately equal. The first five or six years of life pass in quite a different manner than the last years of life. Each stage of the life cycle may have different *Sinnzusammenhang*. The concept of "duration" is part of this. We experience half an hour in the dentist's chair far differently than we experience half an hour in a movie theatre watching a movie that we truly enjoy and which captures our imagination; yet, the duration of time may be roughly equivalent. In both cases the time, in retrospect, may be far longer than the time we spent driving a car on our customary daily commute. This notion of duration does not have to be mystified. Clock time is not the only humanly meaningful form of time. In fact, clock time is in some respects less humanly meaningful since it treats each unit of time, each minute, as equal. The last five minutes before quitting time is far longer than the five minutes it takes to go get a cup of coffee during a break.

In psychoanalysis the Bergsonian notion of time as "subjective" duration is brought out very clearly. Thus, the book *Prince of Tides* concerns one man's reliving of a situation in historical time that dominated all aspects of his adult life. It was "repressed" and it needed to be brought out into the open so that he could come to terms with it. An event which took hours dominated many years of his inner life and absorbed much of his energy.

While it is not necessary to explore the topic in depth here, there is a sense in which Freudian psycho-analysis is a hermeneutic interpretation of the biographical history of the individual. The analyst may not be involved in a natural science endeavor at all. Instead, the psycho-analyst may be said to be concerned with the detailed reconstruction of the idiographic aspects of personal biography. We tend to think of Historicism only in terms of macro structures but the concept pertains equally well to micro structures; one's autobiography is amenable to interpretive understanding. What the psycho-analyst is interested in is a deep historical understanding of a person's life. Therefore, it is worthwhile to turn to what Dilthey meant by the concept of Life.

### G. *das Leben*

The concept of "Life" (*das Leben*) is a central aspect of Dilthey's refusal to analytically separate different aspects of the human lived experience. Life is the central aspect of what is often called the Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), a concept that many American sociologists associate primarily with Schutz (1967). Dilthey was interested in studying the actual lived experiences of people in their *Lebenswelt*. Each individual person has a "Life" experience and that is something that should

not be discounted by the desire to achieve scientific knowledge. The core of the *Lebenswelt* is *Leben*. Now, in Dilthey's schema the notion of life is not the same thing as a natural science notion of life (e.g. as in the "life sciences"). What Dilthey refers to by *das Leben* is life as we experience it in our daily lives. When a married couple chats about the events of the day they are talking about Dilthey's "life." They may skip over some aspects of what happened and they may spend many hours going over very specific details that could not possibly be of much interest to someone who is not part of the *Sinnzusammenhang* of that marriage. Similarly, when two friends get together they gossip away about this and that. They are sharing their experiences of life and thereby constructing a common nexus of understanding. *Leben* is not an abstraction. That is to say, the word "*Leben*" is a symbolic referent that points to something very real. The experience of life is universal. Class, status or power have nothing to do with whether or not we experience life. All human beings experience life in some manner. The very rich billionaire experiences life. The very poor person on welfare experiences life. The Pope experiences life and the socialist bookkeeper experiences life. The concept of life is so obvious that it is something we forget about.

It is easy to underestimate the originality of Dilthey's contribution. We tend to think of the concept of Life in everyday, common sense terms (Owensby 1991). The gap between scientific explanations of nomothetic aspects of biological life and social scientific understanding of idiographic features of a single person's Life is not always clearly brought out. For Dilthey the understanding of Life required a reconceptualization of the meaning of experience. As individuals we experience the world not as scientists but as persons. We do not approach our lives with the rigorous experimental logic of a classic research design. Instead, we rely on anecdotal evidence and subjective evaluations.

### H. *Erlebnis*:

The lived experience of human beings is, for Dilthey, the key to our knowledge of the world. Scientific understanding (i.e. *wissenschaftliches Erklären & Verstehen*) is not the ultimate basis of knowledge (Roddi 1969). Instead, Dilthey's epistemology is based on lived experience in its totality (Misch 1960). Each human being has a Life and has, as a consequence, a complex nexus of lived experience. Sociologists who study the biographies of individuals can recover some of that lived experience and as a result can present generalizations that are one step or more removed from the *Erlebnis* itself. But the lived experience is the fundamental starting point.

This epistemological view is startlingly simple and yet, at the same time, it is profound. Who can doubt that even the most positivistic scientist must, when she is at home, have some kind of lived experience. She will come home and interact with other people. Perhaps she is single and lives alone; she still interacts with

her cat or dog. Her attitude to the cat is that of person to pet, not that of scientist to laboratory animal. If she is in a relationship she will interact with her partner or spouse. She will not ask for operational definitions of everyday life phenomena but will live as a human being, taking many things for granted. If she suddenly acts like a scientist in the home then anyone who lives with her will be baffled by the actions she undertakes. As Garfinkel reports about such "breaches" of everyday life assumptions, the family members quickly think that something is wrong.<sup>8</sup>

It is precisely because Dilthey stressed the importance of everyday life experience that he rejected some of the implications of the work that Comte and Spencer published before 1900. It was pointed out above that Dilthey's criticism of Comte and Spencer should not be taken as a wholesale condemnation of all types of sociological inquiry. His thinking is closer to "methodological individualism" and Ethnomethodology (Giddens 1995) than it is to Comtean notions of the emergent properties of social structures. As he says in his "Postscript" to his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (Dilthey 1989: 497):

My polemic against sociology concerns the stage of its development that was represented by [Auguste] Comte, [Herbert] Spencer, [Albert] Schaeffle, and [Pavel Fedorovich] Lilienfeld[-Toal].

He goes on to clarify what he means (Dilthey 1989: 498):

My attack on sociology thus cannot be directed against a discipline of this sort [i.e. Simmel's formal sociology], but is rather aimed at a science that seeks to comprehend in one science everything that occurs *de facto* within human society. Such comprehension would be based on the following principle: whatever occurs within human society in the course of its history must be integrated into the unity of one and the same object.

This would be like concluding that, since mechanical, physical, chemical and biological processes are connected in nature and occur within the same material-physical world, they must therefore be comprehended in *one* science.

He further explains that such a comprehensive sociology would either constitute "... as Simmel correctly remarked, the great pot on which the label 'sociology' is stuck ..." or an encyclopedic point of view that would constitute a part of the "human sciences."<sup>9</sup>

But, he points out, Comte and Spencer do not think of sociology as a label or an encyclopedic point of view. Instead, they see society as "... the principle that explains religiosity, art, morals, and law." In this sense, he adds, Comte's and Spencer's versions of sociology are "metaphysical." They assume that the purpose of the individual can be reduced to society. He argues, instead, that "The individual is a structural unity that forms a self-contained whole" (Dilthey 1989: 499).

Nevertheless, the method is "heuristically valuable" and use of the theory of evolution by Comte and Spencer "...has in fact had a stimulating and productive effect."

He concludes:

But since this method runs up against the above-cited facts, which can be explained just as well in terms of individuals as socially, its inability to constitute a science becomes apparent. Thus "sociology" is ultimately the name for a type of explanatory procedure and for a number of works which, in accordance with a broad principle of explanation, deal with social facts; it is not the name of a science (Dilthey 1989: 499-500).

Since Dilthey's critical remarks about sociology were published in the later part of the nineteenth century and mainly focused on Comte and Spencer, they should not be read as an indictment of all of the various kinds of sociology. Dilthey's "Postscript" could as easily be read as an argument in support of what has come to be known as "methodological individualism." It also includes an appreciation of Simmel's "formal sociology" (e.g. superordination versus subordination as characteristics of external organization). Yet, because Dilthey was critical of a "metaphysical" belief in social facts and tended to emphasize the significance of societal regularities as having their basis in the individual as much as in "sociability," he is often regarded as having made no contribution to sociology at all.

For Dilthey the individual person lives his or her own life and reflects on that life in terms of personally meaningful lived experience. What is meaningful to one person may not be to another. It depends on one's view of the world (Green 1988; Hodges 1949).

#### I. *Weltanschauungen*:

Dilthey believed that there are ways in which human beings view the world as a whole (Hodges 1952). These views of the world or worldviews can be quite varied. Today the term worldviews is used frequently by many writers in many disciplines but it has no clearly agreed upon lexical meaning, no standard ideal type models, no operational definitions, and no rigorous testing of empirical materials, synchronic or diachronic. Dilthey's own version of comparative worldview theory is remarkably like Sorokin's better known differentiation among sensate, idealist and ideational "cultures." It is quite possible that Sorokin was influenced by Dilthey.

While some of Dilthey's writings about worldviews are schematic, along the same lines as Sorokin's analysis of social and cultural dynamics, it is nevertheless also true that Dilthey discussed worldviews in a more directly Symbolic Interactionist manner. The *Erlebnis of das Leben* provides people with a person-

development of sociology as a discipline (Levine 1995).

One implication is that Dilthey should be given more adequate and systematic treatment in texts and a significant amount of time should be devoted to Dilthey in undergraduate and graduate courses on classical theory. Dilthey should be viewed as a sociological theorist in his own right, one who contributed directly to the traditions of Interpretive Sociology, Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenological Sociology and Ethnomethodology.

Dilthey is not merely a precursor to Weber or Simmel. Just as we are now beginning to understand that Hegel is not merely preliminary to Marx, it will eventually become clear that Dilthey is not just preliminary to Weber. Just as we now know that Nightingale was not just a nurse, Dilthey is more than just an obscure theorist, worthy only of a footnote or a short passage. At the very least Dilthey's contribution to hermeneutics and interpretation should be acknowledged (Mueller-Vollmer 1985) and his views on *Geist* should not be treated as straw man arguments (Hawthorne 1990).

Another implication of the argument of this paper is that Dilthey is relevant to contemporary theory and research. The precise relevance of Dilthey's classical statements should be carefully considered by those interested in such topics as: Symbolic Interactionist methods (Glaser and Strauss 1964; Prus 1996; Schwandt 1997), speech acts theory (Geis 1995), resentment (Scheler 1958), modernity (Mandelbaum 1938; Scaff 1989; Leahey 1997), gender (Schwartz and Rutter 1998), semiotics (Silverman 1983) Weberian comparative and historical sociology (Scaff 1989; Giddens 1995), and many other intellectual concerns (Kamerbeek 1957).

All of the fruitful research approaches which Social Definitionists, Phenomenologists, Ethnomethodologists, Sociologists of Knowledge and Weberian Interpretive Sociologists (Ritzer 1996) have utilized owe a debt to Dilthey's theoretical and methodological statements and analyses, even though that debt is not appreciated and has largely gone unrecognized. It is much more common to mention Mead (Jung 1995), or Simmel (Levine 1971), or Schutz (1967 [1932]), or Weber (1949 [1903-1917]) as the originators. Dilthey's "ghost" — more than Marx's ghost — is there in the background. This brief review of Dilthey's key concepts will provide a service if it helps to make it clear to a larger audience why Dilthey is a classical sociological theorist, a notion which is starting to gain some recognition (Boudon, Cherkaoui and Alexander 1997). But it will be even more useful if it also helps to inspire a detailed consideration of how Dilthey's research on topics such as the socio-political context of Hegel's early work and the rise of the Prussian bureaucracy (Dilthey 1927, 1996) provides a model for both sociology of knowledge (Gluck 1985) and comparative-historical (Kalberg 1994) research. Like Marx (Graham 1992), Dilthey remains our "contemporary." He is not just of antiquarian interest (Giddens 1990; Owensby 1991; Alexander 1990). He can help to inspire work in micro (Prus 1996; Miller 1996; Schwartz and Rutter 1998) and macro (Scaff 1989, 1998) sociology, as well as theories

which attempt to bridge the macro-micro divide (Habermas 1971, 1984, 1987).

The great divide among intellectuals of the twenty-first century will concern the stance one should take to modernity (Leavitt 1991). It is widely recognized that Heidegger's (1961, 1962) critique of Dilthey (Gadamer 1965, 1988; Kisiel 1993; Scharf 1997) is an important contribution to the rise of Postmodernism. But Heidegger's "anti-foundationalist" stance (Comay 1987) is not as definitive as some Postmodernists and Poststructuralists suggest (Habermas 1971; Jung 1995). Unlike the analysis found in Bambach (1995), this paper suggests that Dilthey's "vision" (Berry 1985) is a useful way of approaching many of the problems which are central to pressing intellectual concerns in sociology (Bottomore 1962), culture studies and more generally (Ortega y Gasset 1963, Mitscherling 1987).

## End Notes

1. While it is customary to write about the "German Tradition" it should be pointed out that German does not mean citizen of Germany; it is the German-language tradition, a tradition widely shared in Austria, Hungary and Scandinavia. Buber, now thought of as a Jewish writer, was a master of the German language.

2. Elaboration of how Dilthey was influenced by other thinkers like Ast and Schleiermacher is not possible here. Dilthey (1996) presents his own account, but his interpretation of the work of predecessors and contemporaries is itself controversial (Ferraris 1996, Schleiermacher 1998: editor's introduction). Dilthey's relationship with the Neo-Kantians of the Baden School is a subject of dispute (Bakker 1995, Burger 1976, Oakes 1987). A careful statement can be found in Hughes (1958).

3. Since this paper is written in English for an English-speaking audience I will restrict myself to English sources, where available. However, there is also an abundant literature in German, Spanish, Italian (Ferraris 1988), Dutch (e.g. Kamerbeek 1957) and other languages. A few such sources will be noted but there is no attempt here to integrate them systematically. A comprehensive survey of the Dilthey literature would include Dilthey 1957, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1962, 1976, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996).

4. Personal communication. Professor Feuer's lectures at the University of Toronto, 1976-1977, were concerned with Mill's work, originally published in 1843 and translated into German in 1849. Dilthey cites the eleventh English edition of 1879 (Dilthey 1989: 157-158). "My theory," he wrote in an early draft, "makes it possible to replace the mechanical clatter of induction and deduction in Comte, Mill, and Spencer with insight into the sovereign nature of the human intellect, into how it appropriates objects and constructs them by means of the conditions of consciousness" (Dilthey 1989: 500). Dilthey argued that a "gen-