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Disturbing Truth: Art, Finitude, and the Human Sciences in Dilthey

1. Introduction

IN AN EARLY NOTE WRITTEN AROUND 1876, WILHELM DILTHEY remarked concerning the hermeneutics of works of literature and art: “That there is more in beauty than a cognitive content [*Erkenntnisinhalt*]. Beauty is truth. But truths are not beautiful: That is, there is more in beauty than in truth” (*GS* 18: 109).¹ In the continuing dispute (*Widerstreit*) between art and philosophy, poetry and cognitive expertise, recent thinkers as diverse as Gadamer and Habermas have criticized Dilthey’s account of art, knowledge, and the human sciences for its “aestheticism.” As Rudolf Makkreel has shown, aesthetics serves as a model human science (*Geisteswissenschaft*) for Dilthey (15, 78), which is articulated in his middle works via a psychology of lived experience, and in his later works through the three-fold fore-structure or lived categories of understanding (*Verstehen*), lived-experience (*Erlebnis*), and expression (*Ausdruck*). Gadamer and Habermas conclude from the exemplary status of aesthetics that Dilthey formulated philosophy and the human sciences according to an inappropriate model of subjective aesthetic experience, privileging art over *Wahrheit* (truth) and *Geltung* (universal validity). This supposed aestheticism, which they also find at work in Nietzsche and his “postmodern” heirs, is considered inadequate because it disallows proper access to the truth of the work of art as a disclosive dialogical event (according to Gadamer), or to the validity claims of propositions about artistic expressions of authenticity and genuineness (according to Habermas).² Both authors use Dilthey as a foil for developing their models of tradition-oriented dialogue and consensus-oriented communicative action, despite Dilthey’s claim that the truth and cognitive content of works always concern more than—

and so are irreducible to—products of psychological motivation (*GS* 5: 320/*SW* IV: 238). Such criticisms miss the mark to the extent that Dilthey's "psychology" is descriptive and interpretive, rather than causal-explanatory, aiming at the elucidation of the singularity and contextuality (*Zusammenhang*) of a life. Gadamer and Habermas, according to a line of criticism that has its origins in the early Heidegger,³ argue that Dilthey's approach dooms our understanding of existence to the feared aestheticism of "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*), which is held hostage by a scientific positivism and nihilistic phenomenism that has historicism, psychologism, relativism and skepticism as its consequences in its forgetfulness of questions of truth and validity.

This established yet problematic interpretation is worth challenging, both for the sake of a more accurate account of the merits and faults of Dilthey's position, and also in order to illuminate the problematic assumptions underlying the contemporary dominant model of hermeneutics. It is worth reconsidering whether Dilthey "aestheticized knowledge," thereby undermining the notion of truth and ideal validity, or whether he developed an alternative conception of art and the aesthetic in relation to the finitude of human knowledge and experience. Perhaps he has been taken to task precisely because his aim is to radically distinguish art and the aesthetic from reductive and monistic discourses of truth and validity (*GS* 6: 116/*SW* V: 44). This nearly forgotten alternative would challenge articulations of art that proceed through universal and abstract categories of concept, discourse, and validity (*GS* 6: 119/*SW* V: 46), letting experiences of beauty and the sublime, in the recognition of their non-cognitive qualities that resist being brought to even the dialogical word, address and inform the philosopher's and calculative expert's masterful discourses of truth. Such a challenge opens the possibility of being responsive and attentive to the pre-discursive and perceptual-sensual elements of human life—that is, the possibility of being receptive to a truth that is in excess of discursive truth. Sensual and aesthetic experience involves an interruptive excess such that the moment in its singularity opens up a world and broader context, yet its senses resist being fully conceptualized, ordered, and reduced to an isolatable content of conceptual or discursive cognition. In Kantian language, a language that Dilthey redefined, such a moment contains the possibility of a reflective judgment proceeding from the singular toward the general rather than determinate judgment subsuming

particulars under universal rules.

This proposed reinterpretation of Dilthey raises a further issue: can art and its study be significant to inquiry in the human sciences, or does the potential incommensurability of art and discursive truth entail that art can say nothing to the human sciences? In order to show how Dilthey answered this question in the affirmative, that is, that art and poetry can speak to knowledge, we will need to consider Gadamer's criticisms and how responding to them opens up an alternative for rethinking hermeneutics itself. The enactment of such an alternative would perhaps begin to hint at the dissolution of the contemporary dominant paradigm of hermeneutics.

2. Dilthey and the Question of Finitude

The issue of finitude is central to Dilthey's thought and its reception. Although Heidegger, Gadamer, and others have upheld that Dilthey fundamentally failed to grasp finitude, and is accordingly improperly hermeneutical, it is not so much a question of a lack as it is a radically different strategy of approaching finitude. Finitude does not only indicate the contemporary impossibility of traditional metaphysics and speculative philosophy but also the self-enclosed analysis of finite life, language, or self-transparent immanence. As can be seen in Rosenzweig, and later in Levinas, the continuity of immanence is constantly fractured by unintegrated alterity and transcendence. Although human life is dependent on the contexts of society, language, and communication for Dilthey, and as such is not defined by the fulfillment of transcendence in religious faith or an ethics of absolute alterity, such dependency complicates and obscures the transparency and continuity of immanence. The identification of consciousness, the body, the concept, or language as a privileged and transparent locus of truth proves itself to be illusory; meaning is haunted by meaninglessness, sense confounded by what resists it, and language bracketed by silences and what is not or evades being said. The world—through what Dilthey describes as its facticity, materiality, and resistance—interrupts and disturbs every discourse claiming truth. These moments, described by Dilthey as anarchic, occur in relation to art as well; there are moments in which the “artist is forsaken by rules” and “a new way of feeling reality has shattered the existing forms and rules, and when new forms of art are striving to unfold.” Such anarchistic disturbances and the shock of

the new do not last. These impulses become normalized through their reproduction and new dominant paradigms are established, Dilthey argues, unavoidably (*GS* 6: 104/*SW* V: 31). Reflection (*Besinnung*) is capable of establishing a new equilibrium and new self-understanding in response to the conditions and crises of the times which define a generation and epoch. It is incapable of thereby avoiding the facticity of interruption and the specter of its return.

Gadamer's vision of historical finitude asserts the priority and continuity of tradition as a horizon that is unsurpassable. Dilthey, however, articulated historical finitude through the play and conflict in each generation and in each individual of the self-reproduction of tradition (the old) and the interruption of the other and alien (the new) into history. In his critique of Dilthey, Gadamer reaffirms the continuity of history and the unity of meaning against what he sees as the interruptions and discontinuities of "historical consciousness," which is a sense of historicity that divides us from the past. Analogously—albeit not identically—to contemporary communitarianism, he asserts the unbroken process of historical transmission (regardless of the breaks that seem to define the enlightenment and modernity), not to directly return to traditional metaphysics and speculative philosophy, but in order to establish the mediating role of tradition, language, and community (V.2: 34, 143-144). Gadamer maintains that truth is not the product of methodical inquiry that can later be revised or rejected, nor is truth a paradigm that can be questioned and overturned: truth is an event of dialogue. Truth is the mediating "in between" that implies that non-relatedness can be related and alterity understood through spoken language and the living word. Gadamer's account of dialogical language grounds his "linguistic thesis," which suggests a linguistic idealism that displaces the imperfect yet necessary role for individual reflection, intersubjective communication, and scientific-empirical inquiry articulated by Dilthey. The linguistic thesis reverses Dilthey's radicalization of Schleiermacher's account of language and the ineffable: for Schleiermacher, language is also primarily a medium of identity and universality, even as language is challenged and revised by its relation to the creative, the singular, and the ineffable.⁴ Dilthey extends Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, especially in the direction of the individual. As Rüttsche has argued, linguistic and psychological interpretations are both necessary to hermeneutics, since one concerns

the universal and the other the individual who is to be understood. Both modes of interpretation include moments of universality and singularity, of communication and the unsaid and unsayable that resists and escapes being communicated (84-85). It is impossibility instead of tradition that is regulative of hermeneutics. The individual is the ultimate aim of understanding, even though such an understanding is, strictly speaking, impossible. The individual is in the farthest analysis ineffable.

Dilthey's articulation of the potential singularity of the work of art as well as the individuality of the person—which might seem to be another example of the romantic individualism that Walter Benjamin critiques under the guise of the “aura” and that the later Adorno defends against the annihilation of individuality in mass-produced and consumed society—undermines dialectical integration or a fully dialogical position, insofar as the mediation of words and meanings are provisional and incomplete as well as confronted by excess, resistance, and withdrawal. Language finds itself with limits that it can gesture beyond and yet cannot overcome. Notwithstanding the priority Dilthey gave to language as expression and mediation, i.e., social reality, through which understanding and interpretation work (*GS* 5: 319), not everything can be expressed in and understood through language (*GS* 14: 749-751), given human finitude, which is not then a self-enclosed immanence transparent to itself. Finitude rather suggests being delivered over to the non-transparent and the discontinuous, including the chaotic forces of our own emotional life, such that understanding and interpretation require an effort that might not be fulfilled. If the self is ineffable, and obscure to itself, then individual understanding consists of more than the clarity of self-understanding, and historical reflection involves more than self-recollection. The philosophical quest for self-knowledge inevitably forces the self beyond itself, its egoism, and soliloquy. As Dilthey remarked in his study of Goethe, projection into others is self-dismantling to the degree that its fulfillment in understanding others pulls the self beyond itself (*SW* V: 278).

Language and experience are essentially temporal, historical, and have the character of immanence. This can be distinguished from the immanence rejected by Levinas, accepting that Dilthey's model of immanent factual life striving to understand and express itself does not exclude that life being confronted by traces of the ineffable and unfathomable. This means that language—as unfolded in dialectical and

dialogical models—stumbles in its attempts to cross-over and cross-out the facticity, unfathomability, and singularity constitutive of a life. It is the experience of the ineffable or the non-relatable that calls forth for Dilthey imagination and responsiveness, the primary example of which is found in the work of art. The beauty of art is never without the pain of finitude, as Dilthey's Hölderlin shows (*SW V*: 25, 237, 344, 353). The complexity of life and intractability of what is other than myself elicit the responsiveness of understanding life from out of itself through inevitably indirect (i.e., artistic and interpretive) means in contrast to direct intuition, self-knowledge, or speculation that attempt to force life into its own reified model.⁵

Dilthey's critique of discourses of language and truth does not signify the abandonment of reflection in the name of celebrating the immediacy and irrationality of life and lived experience, as is sometimes thought given the importance he often attached to the "feeling of life" (which informs and transforms itself through artistic expression and aesthetic representation). The fundamental dispositions of the human subject are changed through its own activities and expressions, and should not be identified with or derived from representation and discourse, since neither representation nor its theoretical formulation in epistemology or psychology are adequate to the basic phenomena of the image, feeling, and attentiveness.⁶ Like the early modern concept of *conatus* and Nietzsche's will to power to which it is historically related, the "feeling of life" is inevitably confronted by resistance, differentiation, and its own inherent finitude. For Dilthey, this basic feeling is not an isolated and immune irrationality; it is already disrupted by the reflective break with immediacy. Reflection is grounded in the phenomenon of *Innewerden* (reflexive awareness) as a pre-reflective and pre-representational coming to self-awareness already present in sensual immediacy (*GS* 6: 139/ *SW V*: 68). *Innewerden* does lead to representation and reflection, and is itself shaped by them. Attempts to grasp the originary, the immediate, and the immanent proceed through their very interruption and the mediation of representation such that, for instance, the re-creation of lived experience (the *nach* of *nacherleben*) already introduces disturbance and impurity, the new and the different (*GS* 6: 134-135, 144/ *SW V*: 63, 73).

Dilthey's recognition of non-rational aspects of human finitude is not intended to deny, but to open and more thoroughly articulate

possibilities of rationality and science which have helped to liberate human life from irrational and authoritarian traditions (SW V: 284). Herbert Marcuse could accordingly claim that Dilthey articulated resources for challenging the irrationalist life-philosophy that followed and sometimes appealed to his work (5, 78). If reason includes the critique of reason, i.e., the awareness of the limits and finitude of reason itself, then Dilthey's project of a "critique of historical reason" is a radical enactment of Kant's critical project—especially as presented in the *Critique of Judgment*—under the conditions of historicity, rather than being the abandonment of rationality and celebration of the irrational. More interestingly, Dilthey grounded rationality in the imagination and explored how it is oriented by the feeling of life in the context of its historical conditions. Having established the significance of the imagination for reason, Dilthey analyzed the central role that art plays in articulating the character and scope of the human sciences as a primary example of this relation.⁷ Dilthey explicitly rejected "aestheticism," understood as "art for art's sake," due to its separation of beauty from lived experience. Dilthey evoked the analogous character of the creation and imagination of the poet, the philosopher, and the statesman as well as the more disciplined imagination of the scientist (*GS* 6: 185/ *SW* V: 115). Arguing for the irreducibility of knowledge and science to a merely aesthetic or subjective inner experience, Dilthey's works suggest that such aestheticism and subjectivism promise much, but are living in illusion insofar as they no longer confront or engage reality. Despite this almost Freudian suspicion, Dilthey did give art and aesthetic experience a partial priority when he argued that the model of aesthetics should inform and orient research and theory in the human sciences, especially the study of history.

History, like art, is neither a method nor a set of contents. It can be portrayed even less than art as a human product, or a realization of human goals and intentions. Dilthey both used and limited Vico's thesis that humans know history because they make it, since history goes beyond the capacity of both individuals and groups to construct it. For this reason, art is more transparent and open to individual experience and experiment than history and therefore serves as a guiding model for interpreting history and other human sciences. History (*Geschichte*) informs ways of life and comportment that call for a sensibility responsive to what is different or other than itself and the present

moment. This sensibility is most clearly indicated in the intensification and metamorphosis seen in the phenomenon of art, such that the human scientist can and should learn from art and its study in aesthetics. This follows from art being more than the creation of a spontaneous subject. Art is claimed by and answers to things. It is *aesthesis* and a receptivity and giving oneself over (*Hingabe* or *Hingebung*) to what is other in the experience and what lies potentially beyond it. The practice of history itself⁸ calls for both responsiveness and imagination in a movement towards another; these moments are lost in the focus on truth thought of as agreement and universal validity or dialogue as accommodation. As historical beings caught in the multiplicity and materiality of historical life, the human scientist can articulate and explore spheres of relatedness (*Zusammenhang*) that defy being articulated as one systematic unity (*GS* 7: 185). Dilthey is concerned with a relatedness and sameness (*Selbigkeit*) based on the intersection of human practices and institutions instead of being grounded in metaphysical notions of identity and unity.

Despite Gadamer's criticisms of intellectualism in the name of practical philosophy, universal hermeneutics remains captured in the metaphysical tradition that prioritizes the discourse of truth. In a sense, this is an ontological version of what Dilthey described as rationalist aesthetics, in which beauty is "a manifestation of the logical in the sensuous" (*GS* 6: 253). In the name of dialogical truth (*logos*) rather than logic, Gadamer "logocentrically" fails to acknowledge the plurality of ways in which truth discloses itself and the sensuality and bodily-receptive character of an art that is both less and more than discourse. Truth is superior to experiences of the beautiful and the sublime, as articulated in Kant and Dilthey, as the latter are only subjectively articulated moments of the non-subjective disclosure. Accordingly, philosophy is once again higher than poetry, since it can override its conflict and dispute (*Widerstreit*) with art to its own advantage. Philosophy can proclaim its priority because it is universal, whereas art is fixated on the unique, the singular, and the sensuous. However, this line of reasoning is problematic: responsiveness is only possible via disposition and sensibility; that is, in being attentive to the unique and the singular that can never be fully articulated or conceptualized. This defiance and withdrawal are due to the excess, overdetermination, fullness and texture of the singular and its contexts. If aporia and conflict

are constitutive, then each singular and each context is incapable of fusion in one synthesis or horizon. Human life is ensnared in multiple intersecting yet irreducible and incommensurable horizons, which Dilthey described as *Widerstreit*.

The question is not only whether Gadamer's criticisms indicate the inadequacy of Dilthey's thought, it more significantly concerns the appropriateness of the dominant discourse of contemporary hermeneutics. From the latter, it would follow that the truth of dialogue and discourse might be inadequate to the truth of testimony and responsiveness to the unique. Dialogue and discourse are the primary modes of disclosure or disclosedness, and disclosure presupposes responsiveness. This possibility is given in the awareness of the impossibility of disclosure insofar as all disclosure in narrative, explanation and dialogue also conceals and points towards the withdrawal of what it would attempt to articulate. Such a concern for approaching the singular is found in Dilthey's concern with biography and autobiography as narratives that enact the perspectival character of language and show the plurality and unfathomability within all immanence. In biography, the question "who?" is addressed to another, just as in autobiography it is addressed to myself. This seemingly unitary and simple question, "who?," evokes an unending response: the communicative and interpretive "who" is distinct from an explanatory "what." The singular and plural first and second person is a way of being addressed and as a result calls for its own way of responding, distinct from the "why" of third-person explanation.⁹ Dilthey's distinction between "inner" and "outer," "internal" and "external," refers to the difference between the first person and third person perspective. Thus, meaning and validity do not happen in relation to the "interiority" of private psychic states, they are social-historically situated symbolic formations of meaning and validity. The "internal" or first person perspective—both in its plural (we, you) and singular (I, you) forms—is radically distinct for Dilthey from the objectivating or "external" third person perspective (which perceives and constructs beings as abstract isolated objects).¹⁰ The first person perspective is symbolically reproduced through the interdependent nexus of signification of everyday life, or the life-world, which already involves distances and differences, resistances and withdrawals, that limit and interrupt the force and truth of language.

This argument suggests that the life-world is more than a sphere

of communitarian repetition and antiquarian reproduction of a common continuous identity, since it can be challenged and transformed by the emergence and upsurge of the anarchic and new. In the language of the early Heidegger, it is only on the basis of everyday familiarity that the unfamiliar appears, and yet this inexplicit familiarity is already laden with the unfamiliar. Ordinary language as the discourse of everydayness can therefore be confronted with the impossibility of the closure of its immanence in everyday understanding or as a systematic totality: the everydayness of the life-world is a repetitive practice of forgetting as well as memory, as the immanence of life is already implicated in the invisible and the uncanny (*GS* 7: 266). The present, which is not fully present to itself, is laden with a past that it can never fully remember and a future that remains hidden and unexpected.¹¹ Gadamer is correct that the authority of dialogical truth did not emerge from Dilthey's reflections: for Dilthey, consciousness is differentiation and, as such, is characterized by its self-alienation and distance from the familiar. This unfamiliarity challenges all attempts at reestablishing a past familiarity that never was. This nostalgia is burdened by the uncanniness within everydayness and the estrangement and possibilities for renewal and transformation that simultaneously work within and against the identity of a tradition. The limits of appropriation, for example, as indicated in the question "who?," justify reversing Gadamer's reading of Dilthey concerning non-relatedness and non-disclosedness in art.

3. Gadamer's Critique of Dilthey's "Aestheticism"¹²

Dilthey has been criticized by Gadamer for limiting hermeneutics to a doctrine of art (*Kunstlehre*), oriented according to an idea of understanding correctly, given the universality of misunderstanding. In Gadamer's view, Dilthey missed the philosophical dimension of hermeneutics, in which understanding is to be interpreted ontologically as the way humans are in the world and in a tradition. Dilthey thus oriented hermeneutics as a doctrine of art on the false scientific idea of method and took understanding to aim at correctness instead of truth. The concept of correctness introduced a false emphasis on psychological interpretation, in which the interpreter attempts to identify with the author. Despite hermeneutics becoming universal in Dilthey's idea of a universal doctrine of art applicable to all forms of communication, he failed to achieve the universality of hermeneutics (as understanding)

demanded by Gadamer in the wake of Heidegger's groundbreaking analysis of understanding as our way of being-in-the-world.

Gadamer's criticisms are only partially answerable when we reply with the resources of Dilthey's hermeneutical writings. Since the word hermeneutics lacked a "universal employment" in Dilthey's works, it remained of limited rather than universal scope, insofar as finitude and multiplicity constitute philosophy and human existence. Whereas finitude evokes the universality of hermeneutics for Gadamer, as the individual is always dependent on something greater than itself, it implies the finitude and incompleteness of all mediations and horizons for Dilthey. The individual is not only a reflection of the whole and an intersection of multiple systems and life-worlds, but is a break and interruption; as singular, it intimates something that resists meditation by knowledge and tradition. Dilthey becomes as such a major target for Gadamer because his "irrationalism" and "individualism" challenges the transparent immanence of language. Gadamer's criticisms are answerable, if we turn to Dilthey's larger philosophical project in its hermeneutical significance. Dilthey did not name this project hermeneutics, and yet it is hermeneutical in considering the scope and limits of understanding and communication. It is perhaps anti-hermeneutical in recognizing the possibility of the force and resistance of the non-communicable that would throw the ideals of dialogue and consensus, linguisticity and communication-action into question.¹³

If Dilthey's hermeneutics emphasized the correctness of an understanding to be guided by the theoretical articulation of an art and practice, this is far from meaning that Dilthey presupposed correctness as the sole model of truth. Instead of being about correctness, Dilthey's thought aims at an imaginative receptiveness to otherness. This responsiveness is emphasized in the "*nach*" of "*nach-erleben*" and other related words: "*nach*" indicates an "after" that invokes distance and differentiation through repetition. This distance is not overcome by reproduction understood as copying an original or the repetition of identity; instead, Gadamer considers receptiveness merely as the correctness of repeating identity. Understanding is modeled according to the primacy of production and in effect is in danger of being reduced to the instrumental rationality contested by Gadamer (WM 280).

As an act of production calling on imagination and receptivity, understanding can only mean "understanding differently": difference

emerges in a repetition in which the moments are at least numerically distinguished. The recognition of alterity is a response to what is different as and in its non-identity rather than in its being created or produced as different; this is the difference between a relative and conditional other and the Other as transcendent and interruptive, which for Levinas is the possibility of ethics. It can be argued that Gadamer inadequately thinks difference, given that it is explicated through the creation of meaning via tradition and dialogue. The tradition is an excess of meaning for the individual intentional subject, as Gadamer asserts, yet the universality of the hermeneutics thesis suggests that there is no excess to language and tradition (*WM*: 208).

Dilthey's limited or finite hermeneutics does not imply that the world is inherently and fully comprehensible and intelligible. On the contrary, his denial of claims to the primacy of production and the assumption of intelligibility characterized his confrontation with the Idealism of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Dilthey's finite hermeneutics, which retained the importance of the individual as well as the community by distinguishing psychological and linguistic interpretation, needs to be articulated in relation to its context from which its genuine hermeneutical import can be drawn out. Bernasconi notes how Gadamer's project in *Truth and Method* and his essays on art is to establish "historical continuity" and to "absorb aesthetics into hermeneutics" (Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* xvi). Dispelling Dilthey's emphasis on the discontinuous and non-identical, on the sensuous and the empirical, Gadamer contends for a different vision of art in relation to finitude, in which art is subsumed under the universal and philosophical discourse of truth. Tradition and ingenuity absorb the limits imposed by the idea of method. In reading Dilthey after Gadamer, it might be asked: Should a philosophical account of truth be allowed to dictate to art, explaining what its truth should be, or should philosophy be open and receptive to art in its plurality and difference precisely insofar that it is "non-philosophical" and "non-universal," perhaps disturbing philosophy in its emphasis on knowledge and truth? Philosophy always wants the last word.

4. Art and the Human Sciences

Hermeneutical thinkers such as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger¹⁴ and Gadamer have emphasized art as central to understanding

life, and they can all be read as demanding an “aestheticization of life,” given their different yet parallel emphases on the significance of art and poetry. Yet each is similarly concerned with the dangers of such aestheticization. We find a warning against this tendency in Dilthey’s assessment of the aestheticization of all aspects of life undertaken by the German Romantics: art does not only promise; it is not only positive. Art requires illusion, delusion, and seduction in the moments when it asks to tear the world apart or suggests a total submersion of personality and morality into the beautiful.

Despite Dilthey’s warnings about the primacy of art and a determination of the sciences according to an ideal of art in aestheticism, art remains crucial to his conception of the character and scope of the human sciences, and he drew on art as the primary model of human activity. Dilthey argued against reducing the human sciences to aesthetic experience and discourse at the same time as he intimated the importance of art as a model of orientation for how to consider research and theory in the human sciences. As sciences, the human sciences are constituted in part by a concern for the general and universal. The question of justification and validity in the case of the human sciences is faced with the further question of that which is singular and unique. The first person perspective constitutive of hermeneutics inherently demands the concern for individuality as much as individuals understand themselves hermeneutically *as* individuals in social life. Humans are socialized through the reproduction of the life-world, and it is in relation to this that the difference of individuation transpires. It is significant that whereas Habermas analyzes social reality into systems and life-world, Dilthey unfolded it as the threefold relationality of individual, systems, and life-nexus. An adequate analysis of the life-world or, more broadly, the life-nexus (*Lebenszusammenhang*) requires a consideration of the perspective of individuation: if one is to take the content of individuality seriously, which contemporary hermeneutics seems to fail to do, then Dilthey is correct that biography and autobiography are important ways of accessing the interpretation of individuals *as* the individuals they perceive themselves to be. Individuals understood as social-historical beings already interpret themselves through non-universalizable forms of narrative and differentiation, such that their self-understanding defies being reduced to “a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life” (*WM*: 276).

The recognition of the finite and singular character of the historical was the defining insight of the historical school, which Dilthey charged with a lack of insight into the need for the abstract, general and universal in the human sciences. It is in art that Dilthey saw a different way of articulating the relation of the universal and the singular; art can intensify the non-universalizable aspects of experience and disclosure instead of universalizing them. Intensification can also take place through stylization, such that a type can be generated that can illuminate a period or nation. In art one finds the possibility of strengthening that which is unique and of relating it to a whole without the reduction that worried the historical school; art provided a model for considering the relatedness of singular and whole, the unique and the general. Narrative emerged as the way the human sciences could talk about individuals as well as stylized types such as periods or nations. These types are interpretive rather than causal categories, categories that would retain their relation to the singular. This meant that there was an irreducible conflict (*Widerstreit*) between types, narratives, and perspectives.

The structural human sciences of the external organization of society are complemented by and at times in conflict with those human sciences that attempt to address and articulate the individual: both the analysis of individual and society, event and structure, are necessary for the human sciences in order for the conflict of methodologies and perspectives to be productive and essential. The human sciences refer to an individual who can be analyzed as a cross-section of systems and processes, who also remains in its excess and withdrawal ineffable (*GS* 1: 29).

Dilthey situated the human sciences in relation to a prescientific life-nexus and its forms of understanding: the understanding found in the human sciences is thus a derivative form of everyday understanding that is informed by considerations of epistemology, strategies of interpretation and explanation, methodology and theory. However, the distance (*Abstand*) that is introduced by reflection and theory is already operative in the everyday life-world insofar as life does not present itself as a continuous, seamless or transparent totality.¹⁵ Dilthey understands life in its interrupted, incomplete, and differentiated immanence. Immanence indicates the impossibility of going behind or beyond life to find an original principle that would govern and

explain it; instead, life is to be understood from out of itself: life has the character of immanence and facticity,¹⁶ it is disclosed as and in resistance, withdrawal, and reversal. The facticity of life is the last ground of knowledge because knowledge does not penetrate its own facticity (*GS* 1: 322; *GS* 13: 53). The immanence of life is not transparent to itself, so that life does not show itself as a determinable totality; rather, immanence is indeterminate and as such always already a broken and self-distanced immanence. Instead of being a relic of positivism, self-distance is a characteristic of the facticity of life itself.¹⁷ Immanence is itself already a break such that it has a tendency toward transcending itself, even if a transcendent principle or a self-articulated systematic totality is impossible to determine.¹⁸ The uncanniness of life is already disclosed in everydayness and familiarity is not without its strangeness. As Kant spoke of purposiveness without purpose, Dilthey elucidates the motility of a life that strives to go beyond itself, even if the transcendent is not given to it. The intersection of immanence and transcendence prevent the closure and self-transparency of either; Ricoeur described this tendency in Dilthey's thought as transcending finitude without abandoning finitude in realizing an absolute (53).

Art is a central expression and objectification by which to interpret lived experience; because of the character of interpretation in art, Dilthey articulated aesthetics as a model human science. As a human science, aesthetics integrated various perspectives for the study of art: art history, the sociology of art production and reception, the psychological study of the artist, and the study of style, form and technique. In the *Imagination of the Poet: Elements for a Poetics?* (hereafter called *Poetics*), Dilthey clarifies why aesthetics is a model human science:

... the poetic formative process, its psychological structure, and its historical variability can be studied especially well. The hope arises that the role of psychological processes in historical products will be explained in detail through poetics. Our philosophical conception of history was developed from literary history. Perhaps poetics will have a similar significance for the systematic study of historical expressions of life. (*GS* 6: 109/*SW* V: 36)

According to Dilthey, the human sciences have three necessary moments: (1) epistemology, as the study of the scope and limits of

knowledge and of the different sciences; (2) psychology, as the study of the agents who are the carriers of social-historical life; and (3) history, insofar as humans are essentially historical beings whose self-reflection has a historical character. Why should poetics play a crucial role in this constellation? Besides addressing art as a realm where the singular is suggestively manifest, poetics offers insights exactly into the practices and reflections of epistemology, psychology and history. In art, there is an immediacy of imagination and responsiveness that can guide the articulation of these issues in other fields of human inquiry. Creation—by means of the imaginative transformations that can transcend what is or seems to be the case—and the understanding of what is created is typical in art. All human products involve the activity of production, the reception and appropriation of products: the model of creation or production is insufficient, given that these processes and products suggest a facticity outside both conscious and unconscious activity. The axiom that humans can know history because they make it is partial; history is equally the interruption of making and its knowing.

Later in his *Poetics*, Dilthey remarked that in poetics “universally valid norms have been discovered. Since the nature of the poetic process is transparent, we are able to describe the process of creativity and derive its norms here with a greater clarity than has been possible in other fields.” He continues, “The extraordinary significance of poetics, and of aesthetics in general, for the study of all historical phenomena is thus confirmed. The significance derives from the fact that conditions for a causal explanation are more favorable here, and therefore the major questions of principle can first be decided here” (*GS* 6: 190/*SW* V: 120). Poetics might be thought to be a model human science because of its success as a science, as a discourse of truth about the world. However, once we consider the relation of poetics to history, the argument can be made that this is not the primary explanation for the priority of art: poetics is special for how it relates the general to the singular, the uniformities of human nature with the historicity of human existence, the individual and the historical situation. According to Dilthey,

No mistake of method is more disastrous than the renunciation of the scope of historical and biographical facts in the formation of a general science of human nature. The achievements of human nature exist for us and can be studied only in the midst

of society. The same relationship obtains between universal science and the analysis of historical phenomena for all other major expressions of social life. (GS 6:107/SW V:35)

Methodological and theoretical considerations do not comprise the whole of understanding, and reflection on understanding in the human sciences intrinsic does not exhaust the question of understanding as such. Dilthey's philosophy of the human sciences relates to a "phenomenology" of historical consciousness and the life to which consciousness is bound.

Art presents a phenomenon where both the general and individual can be more thoroughly considered. As such, it provides a model for other sciences where this ambiguity is inescapable. Dilthey could claim in 1883 that "History was an art for us because there, as in the imagination of the artist, the universal is intuited in the particular and is not yet separated from it by abstraction and expressed directly, which first occurs in theory."¹⁹ Both art and history concern the illumination of the particular in its particularity and in its more general significance; this allows for the development of typology and morphology as types of study essential to the human sciences, insofar as the researcher finds a particular that resists being subsumed under a universal concept and a universality that does not eliminate reference to the particular. In contrast to a classificatory ordering of a particular under a universal, a movement between particular and universal is called for.

This does not exhaust the significance of art for the human sciences, which is indicated by the role of imagination and responsiveness in art. In art, participants can most clearly interpret the processes of creativity and imagination as well as those of reception, response and interpretation. For Dilthey, the artwork attempts to separate itself from reality and can intensify and transform elements of reality. In responding to art, its participants are addressed and claimed in this intensification and transformation. Interpretation of artistic works calls forth a response to the singularity of the work of art, a singularity that makes a universal appeal through the Kantian *sensus communis*. As the poles are irreducible, and the circle is in its never ending circulation constitutively incomplete,²⁰ responsiveness necessitates the work of interpretation through the play of the imagination. If humans as interpreters do not know the universal *as* universal nor the singular *as*

purely singular, then each response is finite, incomplete, and without end. Art promises transcendence from reality through the free play of the imagination and sentiments, and its utopian dimension still remains beyond reach and realization. That is why it is art, and art has the character of both playfulness and the tragic in Dilthey's works.

5. Conclusion

The critique of Dilthey offered by Gadamer and Habermas shows that, notwithstanding their rejection of the primacy of theory in the name of practical philosophy, they remain within the metaphysical tradition of the priority of the discourse of truth. This priority distorts their articulation of the life-world that is not only to be thematized through the identity of language but can be examined as a multiplicity of events. It is not only disclosed as a sphere of common social identity; it is the place in and from which individuation arises. This life-world can be illuminated otherwise in art and aesthetic experience, since the poet can deviate from its norms such that art is akin to dreams and madness (*GS* 6: 138/*SW* V: 67). The art-work can indicate, intensify, and heighten both its event-character and its reference to that which is individual and unique; art need not rationalize the prediscursive dimensions of the life-world into concepts and propositions. As Kant argued in the *Critique of Judgment*, art can occur as play without determinate concepts, as purposiveness without predetermined purpose. Art can intensify and strengthen noninstrumental experiences of the beautiful or the tragic and the sublime (*GS* 6: 147/*SW* V: 76). The life-world is illuminated as potentially more than the repetition and reproduction of everydayness, common life, and that which happens usually and for the most part: the singular and the exceptional can also come to word and vision; there is the entrance of the alien and new that exceeds every "fore-having" or pre-structuring, throwing these into question. Art can highlight and intensify both of these moments, the old and the new, the same and the different; art can stylize or typify a commonality or it can point to that which is unique or uncanny, beautiful or sublime.

According to the discursive model of truth, truth is superior to experiences of the beautiful and the sublime that are to be understood from out of the concept and event of truth. Philosophy remains higher than poetry since it expresses the universal whereas art lingers in the idolatry and seduction of the sensuous, of the unique and the singular.

The interpretation of Dilthey developed here has begun to show that the responsiveness necessary for the human sciences, in its quest for universality and validity, is only possible by being attentive to the unique and the singular. It requires imagination, which, although playful, is not restricted to play. Dilthey demonstrates how imagination is necessary in the formation of hypotheses in the sciences and the use of practical imagination in worldly life (*GS* 6: 145-147/*SW* V: 75-76): the singular orients the imagination and reflection even as it remains ineffable and never fully articulated or conceptualized. This defiance and withdrawal that calls forth the incomplete transcendence of imagination are due to the overdetermination, excess, and texture of a life. Art provides a model for how to relate to that which can never be related, the non-relatedness that is immanent in experience itself. This model retains its importance for the human sciences, as they too inherently face the challenges of interpretation, and of the individual and the singular.

The initial question of this paper regarding the adequacy of charging Dilthey with “aestheticism” on the basis of a claim to universal propositional truth becomes a different question concerning the fittingness of contemporary hermeneutics. If the latter is at issue, then the truth of dialogue and discourse is inadequate to the force of testimony and responsiveness to the unique, which when addressed to a person is the question “*who?*” This can be seen, for instance, in Dilthey’s concern with the biographical as essential to comprehending human life in its upsurge of meaning and in its self-interpretation, i.e., *as a life*. Autobiographical understanding is the individual’s self-understanding and interpretation in the context of her social life-world: it would be meaningless for that individual, as individuated, if it were only a story about the community, society, and tradition. Likewise, it would be empty without relations to others: the life-world is more than an order of friends and community, it is where the stranger appears and appeals to her recognition, to be addressed as a *who* calling forth narratives and interpretations that involve a response and an exteriority and tension that challenges what an I or a we can simply create and impose. Self-understandings—interpretations in the form of action and event descriptions, as narratives that differentiate between agents—are as important to processes of interpretation as appealing to collective customs, norms, values, and traditions. The “always already” contains its own potential destructuring in the anarchy of the new and the “not

yet.” The stranger calls the structure of my prejudices into question and this question occasionally may find a response. The artist can attempt to copy and reproduce reality; yet reality and the artist are transformed in the work and play of responding to it. Like life itself, which it engages in myriad ways, art as *metamorphosis* is more than *mimesis*. It is the self-transcendence of finitude in imagination.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to Dilthey’s works are to the pagination of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (cited as *GS*) and the translations of the *Selected Works* (*SW*).

² Gadamer classically develops this claim in *Truth and Method*; Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (for example, 176-177).

³ For instance, Heidegger develops such criticisms in *GA* 27, 350-351.

⁴ See E. S. Nelson, 297-312.

⁵ Compare Rüttsche, 15.

⁶ *GS* 6: 139/*SW* V: 68; also compare Makkreel, 120.

⁷ See in addition the discussion in Makkreel, 15 and 78.

⁸ It must be noted that Dilthey is committed to the priority of practice rather than theory without abandoning reflection on practice, which is also always a reflection of practice (*GS* 5: 42; *GS* 18: 1).

⁹ Ricoeur suggests the difference between *who* and *what* in Dilthey but leaves its significance unexplained. Rather than the *who*—and the possible singularity that is opened up by the question of “who?”—as that which reduces “truth” and the “what” to psychological explanation, as Ricoeur argues, Dilthey’s interpretive psychology focuses on the singularity of the “who,” one which resists being understood as a thingly essentialistic essence or a “what” (52).

¹⁰ See Matthias Jung’s discussion of this central point (9-14, 274-275).

¹¹ Compare the young Dilthey’s discussion of past and future (*GS* 6: 7, 10).

¹² Jean Grondin supplies a good account of Gadamer’s criticisms of Dilthey (see Grondin, section 3 of chapter 4, especially 84-90).

¹³ There are a variety of ways in which Gadamer asserted the universality of hermeneutics through the fact of language. This universality is sometimes understood in terms of the linguisticity thesis that everything is understood as and through language (“Being that is understood is language,” V.2: 445). Language is primarily understood as the “living speech of dialogue” and as mediation that is “binding” on the basis of prior deep common accord (Gadamer, V.2: 115). Language is further understood as a determinate and determining “whole of meaning” (V.2: 445). This view emphasizes the continuity and determinateness of language before current dialogue even occurs. Hermeneutics operates accordingly to Hegelian metaphors of fusion, unity, and integration (Gadamer, V.2: 257).

¹⁴ In the case of Heidegger, compare Bernasconi, xxi.

¹⁵ The notion of systematic totality is incompatible with what Dilthey described as the unfathomable richness and excess of differences (*Unterschiede*) in *GS* 5: 235.

¹⁶ Life is not only the ground of knowledge but is itself unknowable. Life confronts me as always mine, such that the subject is always already differentiated (*GS* 19: 346-47). Life is further an exposure to facticity, singularity, and contingency (*GS* 19: 348).

¹⁷ Gadamer claims that Dilthey is a thinker of *Abstände*, of distance, interval, and difference in history and historical understanding (V.2: 34). He counterposes mediation to a distance that would mean the impossibility of mediation: “*Daß ich Sprache als der Weise der Vermittlung ansehe, in der Kontinuität der Geschichte über alle Abstände und Diskontinuitäten zustandekommt, scheint mir durch die angedeuteten phänomene wohlbegründet*” (V.2: 143-144). Everydayness is reduced to the reproduction of the life-world; the moment of uncanniness emphasized by Heidegger, an uncanniness that is the possibility of individuation, is forgotten.

¹⁸ Matthias Jung points out this double character of immanence to criticize its ambiguity (21). I read Dilthey not as being terrified of the consequences of radical immanence but as indicating the importance of the limits and interruptions of immanence, that is, a finitude found in relation to life insofar as it is experienced as unfathomable or as incapable of being integrated by experience itself.

¹⁹ See *GS* 1: 40/*SW* I: 91; also compare *GS* 6: 218/*SW* V: 218.

²⁰ The hermeneutical circle occurs in the relation of the whole and the singular, as a relation of meaning and facticity rather than explanation. Neither the singular nor the context can be taken as completely determined by the other or reducible through teleological, functional, or efficient causal explanation. The hermeneutical “circle” can be seen in the “as” character of understanding, and as such should not be confused with the speculative circle that subsumes the determined “part” under a determinate whole. For neither Dilthey nor Heidegger does “whole” mean “totality”; it places totality into question (for Heidegger, see *GA* 65: 41/29).

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