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WILHELM DILTHEY'S DOCTRINE OF WORLD VIEWS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HERMENEUTICS

INTRODUCTION

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), whom José Ortega y Gasset called "the most important philosopher in the second half of the nineteenth century"¹ (1946: 131), was a man of passion, vision, and calling. The great crises of his age gripped his soul and propelled him on an intellectual and spiritual journey in quest of solutions to the problems of Western culture at his moment in history. Here is his own personal testimony to the single-minded objective of his life.

The great crisis of the sciences and European culture which we are now living through has so deeply and totally taken possession of my spirit that the desire to be of some help in it has extinguished every extraneous and personal ambition (*JD* vii; in Ermath 1978: 15).

This crisis of modernity, of mammoth proportions to Dilthey who described it as "a shaking of human society and its foundations such as has not been seen since the declining days of the Greco-Roman world" (*GS* 6: 246), could be called a *Streit der Weltanschauung*—a clash, or "protracted crisis of consciousness or 'world view'" (Ermath 1978: 15). Dilthey lived through "the *Hegelsstreit*, *Religionsstreit*, *Materialis*

¹ This is no small compliment when we realize that the competitors for this distinction include J. S. Mill, C. Darwin, H. Spencer, H. Bergson, K. Marx, F. Engels, J. Royce, F. Bradley, A. N. Whitehead, W. James, C. Peirce, F. Nietzsche, E. Husserl, etc. R. Makkreel notes that Dilthey's overall philosophical reputation has primarily been limited to Germany, Spain and Latin American, though today he seems to be receiving considerable attention in the English speaking world. Makkreel suggests that the kudo ascribed above to Dilthey by Ortega y Gasset is "undoubtedly responsible for the fact that a large and generally enthusiastic literature now exists on Dilthey in Spanish" (1975: 5, note 2). One example of which I am aware is Eugenio Imaz, *W. Dilthey: Teoría de la Concepción del Mundo*, 1954.

musstreit, Darwinismusstreit, Pessimismusstreit, and the Methodenstreit, . . . " (ibid.: 16) and thus he urgently devoted himself, as he put it, to "the task of giving security and strength to the life of the individual and society in the great crisis of the century" (GS 5: 356).

Dilthey was keenly aware of the conflict that arises when historical consciousness which relativizes all human enterprises, including the philosophic, is juxtaposed to the persistent human quest and need for universal knowledge. Steering a course between a rank relativism born of historicism and a quest for a kind of certainty dictated by Enlightenment ideals framed Dilthey's career.¹

The finitude of every historical phenomenon, . . . the relativity of every kind of human apprehension of the totality of things is the last word of the historical *Weltanschauung* (world view) And over against this both the demand of thought and the striving of philosophy for universal knowledge assert themselves. The historical *Weltanschauung* liberates the human spirit from the last chains that natural science and philosophy have not yet broken. But where are the means to overcome the anarchy of opinions which then threatens to befall us? To the solution of the long series of problems which are connected with this, I have devoted my whole life (GS 5: 9).

In response to this crisis of Western civilization, Dilthey made no insignificant contribution. His reputation rests primarily on his theories of the *Geistwissenschaften* (human sciences),² his contributions to certain special methodological problems in the

¹ Bulhof (1980: 94-95) believes that Dilthey's quest for a post-historical utopian age or millennium showed him to be a child of the *Aufklärung*. "Dilthey's ideal of a posthistorical age—an age in which the labor of history would have ceased, and man would finally relax and enjoy the world, an age in which man would dominate history and nature, and would freely shape the future as he was fit—expresses his desire for sovereignty and autonomy, his desire to be free from the power of time, and to domesticate it. The post-historical ideal betrays his confidence that such a conquest of time was possible and, indeed, achieved, because all solutions to the riddle of life are available. In this sense, he remained true to the Enlightenment conception of man as the creator of his own destiny. Dilthey's goal ultimately remained to master life by means of objective knowledge."

² Rickman pontificates regarding Dilthey's contribution in regard to the *Geisteswissenschaften* with this pronouncement: "In my view, Dilthey has produced the most coherent, comprehensive, searching and fruitful philosophy of the human studies in the history of thought. So many thinkers on this subject since his time are following in

study of history, his conceptualization and typology of world views, and his pioneering advances in the discipline of hermeneutics.¹ Among other things, these aspects of his thought dovetail into a comprehensive philosophical outlook,² though for present purposes our emphasis will be upon his contribution to the understanding of world views and their hermeneutical significance.

his wake" (1979: 164). Howard (1982: 12) notes, by the way, that John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic*, which advocated a single methodology of knowledge, was published in 1843, and translated into German in 1863, and that the phrase "moral sciences" in the heading of Book VI was rendered into German by the newly coined term, *Geisteswissenschaften*—or human sciences as it is commonly translated back into English.

¹ Roy J. Howard (1982) notes that Dilthey is often called "the father of hermeneutics" (8) and suggest that the essence of his hermeneutical thinking can be distilled into three main elements. "The first is his distinction between the fields of the natural and human sciences; the second is his thesis of 'experience' and 'life' as the unifying elements within the field of the human sciences; and the third is his logic for the interpretation of 'life' as objectified in historical documents" (14). He goes on to summarize Dilthey's pioneering contributions to hermeneutics with this succinct and helpful statement. "He accepted Schleiermacher's insight that the problem of hermeneutics was fundamentally an epistemological one and hence belonged to philosophy rather than to philology. He also accepted Droysen's demarcation of the field of knowledge into the areas of the natural sciences, where explanation-theory was the meta-philosophical task, and of the cultural sciences, where understanding-theory was needed. Dilthey thought Kant had accomplished the former. He set himself the task of composing the latter. History, as the most conspicuous record of life and mind, was the primary discipline of the cultural sciences and the proper place to begin. Writings, as the primary objective datum for the historian, became the focus of reflection. Philosophical hermeneutics, then, would be a metatheory of the understanding of life-experiences as they are given in linguistic expression" (22).

² Hodges (1974: 320) suggests that the overall fundamental aims of Dilthey's philosophy were twofold. The first was epistemological, namely "to dig down to the roots of human knowledge, to discover on what basis it rests, whence it derives its content, its principles, and its authority." The second was metaphysical, "to enquire into what he calls the metaphysical consciousness—what it is in our nature which impels us to raise speculative questions of the kind which traditional metaphysics was supposed to answer, and which Kant and the positivists say cannot be answered. This . . . concerns not only our intellectual processes and capacities but also our value-judgments, our conscience, our hopes and aspirations. All these play a part in generating and shaping a *Weltanschauung*, and a *Weltanschauung* must assign to each of them its proper place in the picture."

Wilhelm Dilthey may rightly be called the father of the concept of world view.¹ Though the term itself was coined by Immanuel Kant (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), it was Dilthey who

raised the problem of the world views to a comprehensive theoretical statement. In this area he pioneered and mapped intellectual terrain which was later to be explored by students in many different disciplines. His doctrine or "science" of the world views (*Weltanschauungslehre*; often *Wissenschaft der Weltanschauungen*), which is frequently treated as a marginal dimension of his thought, is in reality one of its fundamental elements and requires careful analysis in its own right (Rickman 1988: 324).²

Dilthey, of course, separated *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* and called for disparate epistemologies for both. Nonetheless, he recognized the need for overall philosophical reflection on what he was fond of calling the "riddle of life"—"i.e., the problems relating to birth and death, joy and sorrow, love and hate, the power and the weakness of man and his ambiguous position within nature" (Hodges 1969: 92; cf. Bulhof 1980: 93, 100-01).

¹ The following indicates the recognition accorded to Dilthey for his contribution to world view thinking, and the overall importance of the *Weltanschauung* concept itself (Quotes from Rickman 1988: 383, notes 2 and 3). According to Karl Mannheim, Dilthey showed "great critical reserve and theoretical acumen in treating world views." And Werner Brock offers this thought about Dilthey's contribution to world view theory: "The phenomenon of *Weltanschauung*, as elaborated by Dilthey—it was he who also settled the meaning of this term—is, of course, not to be identified with the conceptions of *Weltanschauung* which occur in the widespread and often misunderstood popularisation of Dilthey's thought."

Furthermore, the need and omnipresence of world view in human experience seems well established. For example, Schopenhauer spoke of "an absolute need for the interpretation of life." And drawing directly on Schopenhauer, Albert Einstein also proffered that "Man tries to make for himself in the fashion that suits him best a simplified and intelligible picture of the world; he then tries to some extent to substitute this cosmos of his for the world of experience, and thus to overcome it. This is what the painter, the poet, the speculative philosopher, and the natural scientist do, each in his own fashion. Each makes this cosmos and its construction the pivot of his emotional life, in order to find in this way the peace and security which he cannot find in the narrow whirl pool of personal experience."

² Makkreel (1975: 346), however, feels that "when taken by itself, the *Weltanschauungslehre* creates more problems than it solves and remains in many respects the least satisfactory part of Dilthey's philosophy. Only when related to developments in his late aesthetics—particularly concerning the imaginative articulation of *Erlebnis*—can we see how the abstract classification of *Weltanschauung* types might be translated into a more fruitful hermeneutic interpretation of life."

Hence, for Dilthey, philosophy not only had the epistemological responsibility for devising theories of knowledge for the natural and social sciences, but also had to present an explanation of mankind's metaphysical consciousness, that is, "the task of coming to terms with the incessant need for ultimate reflection on being, ground, value, purpose, and their interconnection in a *Weltanschauung*" (GS 5: 416). Philosophy had traditionally been concerned with providing an overall understanding of reality and the meaning of life, but the rise of historical consciousness had demonstrated how these philosophical and metaphysical systems were historically relativized and thus were not true representations of reality; instead of leading to truth, they bred skepticism.

In place of traditional metaphysical systems that claim universal validity, Dilthey set forth his meta-philosophy of world view in which he proposed an analysis and comparison of basic attitudes toward life as these are expressed in poetry, religion, and metaphysics. He called this enterprise a "philosophy of philosophy" (*Philosophie der Philosophie*) and a "doctrine of world views" (*Weltanschauungslehre*).¹

Furthermore, the study of world views is a profoundly hermeneutical endeavor. World views themselves are hermeneutical constructs, conveying the meaning of the world. As Dilthey said in *The Essence of Philosophy*, "Thus at all times[,] interpretations of reality, *Weltanschauungen*, arise. As a sentence expresses its sense or meaning, so these [*Weltanschauungen*] would express the sense and meaning of the world" (1954: 40). Dilthey came to present world views as "a special case of methodological *Verstehen* in the human sciences, involving description, abstraction, analysis, typification, comparison, and generalization. It [a world view] attempts to reproduce or

¹ Makkreel helps us to understand the relationship of Dilthey's concept of world view and his project of the critique of historical reason. Insofar as historical *Weltanschauungen* can liberate people from dogmatism, they can also lead to a radical relativism, and hence to individual and corporate destruction. Consequently, Dilthey considered it necessary to establish certain critical norms by which knowledge could be established. Thus, "Dilthey considered it the task of his Critique of Historical Reason to explore the possibility of such standards or norms" (1975: 4).

re-evoke at the conceptual level the original content of what is "there for us" in lived experience . . ." (Rickman 1988: 327). Originally, Dilthey presented the doctrine of world views as a subdiscipline of the human sciences according to the model of the natural sciences: "the science of world views was expected to provide explanatory laws of their formation and transformation." Later on, however, he revised his approach wherein "hermeneutics, not psychology, emerges as the key to the comprehension of world views, for the regularities in the structure and development of the world views are more properly analogous to the sphere of language than that of nature" (Rickman 1988: 328). The interpretation of language to get at the meaning of a text, and the interpretation of world views to get at the meaning of reality bear close affinity. This literary model for understanding world views which Dilthey offered will be explored later on in this paper in greater detail.

Having set forth by way of introduction and in a preliminary manner Dilthey's notion of world view and its connection with hermeneutics, we will proceed to unpack important aspects of his thinking by considering four topics. First we will take a look at Dilthey's understanding of the definition and source of world views. Second, I will present his threefold typology of world view models. Third, I will investigate the problem of relativism associated with Dilthey's conception of *Weltanschauung* and how he sought to deal with this problem. Fourth, I will describe more fully the connection between world views and hermeneutics. Finally, I will present some concluding comments and offer a few critiques.

DILTHEY'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE AND SOURCE OF WORLD VIEWS

Wilhem Dilthey was certainly non-metaphysical, if not anti-metaphysical in his philosophic outlook.¹ Dilthey had shown in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* that

¹ Historical consciousness, the conflicts between metaphysical outlooks, and the representative character of metaphysical formulations had demonstrated to Dilthey "as

all pronouncements of "truth" were historically conditioned and as such were not a reflection of actual reality, but rather an expression of the human experience of it. The powerful notion of historical consciousness had made "knowledge" a symbol or interpretation of reality, a notion which not only explained why philosophical systems had changed so much during the course of human history, but also generated a need for a critique of historical reason in search of standards by which to establish a firm foundation for truth in the midst of cognitive relativity and conflict.

Another insight that the notion of historical consciousness engendered was the fact that all systems of philosophic thought are the product of lived experience. Philosophical systems do not originate out of the thin air of rational speculation untouched by the "stickiness" of human experience. Instead, they are personal, cultural, contextual, national, etc., reflecting the ambiance or *Zeitgeist* of the historical epoch which produced them. As Dilthey put it, "every true world view is an intuition which emerges from the standing-in-the-middle-of-life [*Darinnenstehen im Leben*]. . . (GS 8: 99). "Thus life creates its own world from out of every individual" (GS 8: 79). Life itself and the individual person immersed in it become the agencies of the creation of a world view. For those rooted in the objectivist tradition of the Enlightenment, this was a liability, but for Dilthey, this factor was an asset.

That life or lived experience generated world views can be seen in three ways. First, since life itself is immersed in the Heraclitian waters of ceaseless change, human beings seek to establish something permanent as a source of stability and security.

clearly as possible the relativity of all metaphysical systems." He goes on to say, "For these shimmering castles in the air of scientific imagination can no longer deceive the sober eye after the relativity of their truth-content has been recognized. And however long metaphysical systems may still continue to exert an influence upon educated people, the possibility that such systems of relative truth, standing alongside many others of the same truth-content, should be used as a foundation for the sciences is gone forever" (GS 1: 192; cf. p. 238)

"Every mental attitude strives for a point which is beyond relativity" (GS 5: 415).¹ People confront the variegated and mutable conditions of unpredictable human experience by means of the creation of a reliable world view. Second, from Dilthey's perspective, life cannot be lived without adopting a perspective toward it. Life itself requires that we respond to it, and seek to understand it from the perspective of our own *Sitz im Leben*. This common sense notion has been articulated by Rickman in these words.

Dilthey maintained that the process of living requires an over-arching orientation or interpretation: life engenders an attitude toward life (*Gesamtlebens-gefühl*) which in turn conditions our further conduct of life (GS 18: 175). A person is drawn to make sense of his own existence and surroundings by synthesizing his experience into a coherent whole. There is a tendency toward a world view ahead in the "naïve" consciousness (1988: 324).

Third, closely associated with the verity that life as such demands an orientation is the realization that life itself is a mystery or "riddle" that demands an explanation. As Hodges says,

The growth of the *Weltanschauung* is conditioned in some way or other by everything that enters into our experience; but it is dominated by our ceaseless attempt to find a solution for what Dilthey calls the "riddle of life". By this he means . . . in fine, the whole mystery of the situation of mankind in the world. From the most primitive societies upward, men busy themselves to read this riddle. What is unknown is guessed at on the analogy of the known; what is unintelligible is explained by analogy from the intelligible. Language itself is full of relics of such attempts, in the shape of personifications and metaphors; and systematic *Weltanschauungen* are deliberately worked out, where, by the same method of personification and analogy, a full interpretation of the universe is set forth (GS 8: 78-84; 5: 372-375).

When the above ideas are woven together, we come up with the scenario that Dilthey's recognition of historical consciousness led him to the conclusion that all philosophic systems by virtue of their baptism of the stream of historical experience are so conditioned that they are rendered futile as a final interpretation of reality, thus

¹ According to Rickman, Dilthey deployed several terms and phrases to convey this concept of stability that a world view provided including "fastness" (*Halt, Festigkeit, Lebensverhalten*), "ground" (*Boden*), and "basic mental stance" (*Grundstellung, Bewusstseinsstellung*).

putting an end to metaphysics. Furthermore, life itself—changing, mysterious, and demanding—necessitates that human beings seek a way to understand it so as to live in effectively and purposefully. The result has been the formation of world views which do not make claims to finality, but yet offer a coherent interpretation of the sum total of reality by virtue of its contact with lived experience in the context of a particular historical period. This study of world views as a "philosophy of philosophy," as a "meta-philosophy," as a *Weltanschauunglehre* became a substitute for attempting to formulate new metaphysical systems and was a critical element in Dilthey's critique of historical reason in search of reliable knowledge.

In forming his notion of world view, Dilthey posited that there were three features which were common to all world views: *Weltbild* (world-picture), *Lebenswürdigung* (evaluation of life), and ideals of *Lebensführung* (conduct of life). These three components, which correspond to the mental capacities of thinking, feeling, and willing, come together in a unified fashion under the dominance of any one of the three and form the structure of a world view.¹ As Dilthey put it, a world view ". . . is in each case a totality in which on the foundation of a perception of the world or a world picture, questions about the meaning and sense of the world are decided. From the latter in turn . . . the supreme principles of the conduct of life are derived" (GS 8: 82).² Ermarth

¹ Hodges (1969: 92) believes that Dilthey analysis of world views concerned three structurally connected elements. "The first is a belief about the nature and contents of the world of facts; the second, built on this foundation, is a system of likes and dislikes, expressed in value-judgments; and the third, resulting from the two preceding it, is a system of desires and aversions, ends, duties, practical rules and principles. This comprehensive system of ideas and habits of thought, feeling, and will, results from the joint operation of the three basic attitudes [of thinking, feeling, and desiring], and the character of the *Weltanschauung* will vary according as one or another of the three is predominant in it."

² In another place, Dilthey describes his understanding of the threefold structure of a world view as strata constructively derived from each other. "A *Weltanschauung* is determined in its structure by a psychic lawfulness according to which the apprehension of reality constitutes the basis for the evaluation of states and objects in terms of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, approval and disapproval. This

has offered one of the best overall descriptions of Dilthey's notion of world view with these comments (1978: 119).

By virtue of the selective yet synthetic nature of consciousness, each individual gradually acquires a particular but comprehensive interpretation of his life in relation to the world, which Dilthey terms "world view." This world view is a combination of reflective, conscious awareness and pre-reflective interests and practical concerns. It relates one's own inner awareness of the world at large. The world view is a meaning-structure which gives coherence to the individual's ongoing experience. It is a synthesis of the basic and recurring "lived relations" and vital coherences which the person finds himself in. It provides consistency, integration, and stability in the face of the constant influx of new experiences. The world view, like the lived experience it synthesizes, is not simply the result of cognitive thinking, but of willing and feeling as well. All the capacities of mind are brought together in a functional coherence—though Dilthey came to hold that one capacity tends to predominate, giving direction to the others.

We should isolate a few other salient features of Dilthey's conception of world views to make this presentation complete. First of all, world views are not necessarily held consciously by individuals and may not even be explicitly formulated or objectified. Like the grammar a person uses in speaking or writing, so world views are employed, but opaque to the user. Since they may not be self-evident, a herculean effort to bring them into view may be necessary (Rickman 1988: 326).

Second, world views are not only expressive of what is, but also entail a vision of what ought to be. In Dilthey's words, world views should be "creative, formative, and reformative" (GS 8: 84). They describe or interpret the world as it is, and also provide guidelines for change in accordance with its interpretation of reality.

Third, world views are not static in nature, but manifest a capacity to change and develop, to reformulate and refine themselves. Though a world view is designed to provide stability for its adherents by virtue of its nature as a conceptualized system, nonetheless, a world view is consistently bombarded by new and challenging experi

estimate of life is in turn the fundamental stratum for the determinations of the will. Our behavior regularly goes through these three levels of consciousness and the peculiar nature of psychic life asserts itself in the fact that in each case the lower stratum preserves itself (GS 8: 82-83).

ences that require re-orientation and new explanations. For Dilthey, world views contain an "inner dialectic" between that which is stable and that which is dynamic; world views may provide constancy, but not statically so.

Fourth, though world views are held by individuals, Dilthey primarily used the concept to denote the conceptions of reality that are shared and held communally during major historical epochs. World views should thus be seen, not only as the possession of an individual person, but as the personality structure of whole societies.

Fifth, a key ingredient that greatly influences the composition of an individual or collective world view is that of the "moods of life" or emotions (*Lebensstimmung*) which are created by the specific nature of lived experiences. For the most part, these moods are either optimism or pessimism. When such moods are shared by a community, they become the basis for the formation of the affective aspects of the shared world view. As Makkreel points out, "Dilthey's statement that "particular *Lebensstimmungen* dominate in different individuals according to their peculiarities (cf. GS 8: 81), implies that *Weltanschauungen* are psychologically conditioned in the most relativistic manner."

Sixth, it is quite possible for world views to conflict with each other, especially when one world view considers itself as the only true understanding of reality. Clashes between world views occur in "the process by which the objective world images are made autonomous in the scientific consciousness" (GS 8: 8). Affirming their relativity without denying their validity is the way to avoid the clash of world views.

Clearly, from the above discussion, the concept of world view in Dilthey's thought is an exceedingly complex. Despite the "welter of world views," Dilthey believed that all world view species were of three genres. This leads us to a discussion of Dilthey's famous typology of world views.

DILTHEY'S WORLD VIEW TYPOLOGY

Influenced by Goethe and others, and by the typological method that was fashionable around the turn of the century, Dilthey formulated a typology of world views in which he discerned three basic forms: naturalism, the idealism of freedom (subjective idealism), and objective idealism.¹ Each type represented not just a rational scheme, but a total life attitude as organizing centers.² In their formation, all mental activities were involved, though one may dominate and lead the others. These basic world view types are coherent, stabilizing, but not closed or static, since, as mentioned earlier, they vibrate by an inner dialectic that breeds revision.

Dilthey did not ossify these world view types. He simply posited them as a means to elucidate history, as a kind of heuristic device, as provisional aids to inquiry,

¹ See his *The Essence of Philosophy*, pp. 39-66. This survey relies heavily on Rickman 1988: 329ff. See also Hodges 1969: 99ff.; Makkreel 1975: 346ff. These latter two writers highlight how this threefold typology of world views indicates the dominance of either the feeling (objective idealism), willing (subjective idealism) or thinking (naturalism) aspects of human consciousness. Several Diltheyan commentators believe that his attempt to typify world views destroys his whole project of an epistemology of history and the human sciences. Riesterer is representative when he writes: "But it is clear that any attempt at creating such a typology implies the adoption of a standpoint outside of history from which these types can be actualized and contemplated. In other words, the wholesale development of a historical typology—if taken seriously—would completely undermine the very foundations of the entire Diltheyan position Once Dilthey embarked upon this course, most scholars agree, he actually sacrificed the integrity of his original stance" (in Rickman 1988: 383, note 5).

² In discussing world view typology, I should also point out that Dilthey believed that there were three primary means by which world views were expressed: religion, art or poetry, and philosophy. In explaining Dilthey's position, Hodges says (1974: 87), "Every type of *Weltanschauung* can take either a religious, an aesthetic, or a philosophical turn. Before Dilthey proceeds to the actual classification of *Weltanschauungen*, he turns to examine the differences between religion, art, and philosophy" (GS 8: 84-87; cf. 5: 378-81). In religion, the quest is how to order human life in relation to the unseen. In art, the concern is to understand life in terms of itself, in terms of the passions and purposes of human beings and in terms of the relationships they enter into with one another and the natural world. In philosophy, the goal is to develop a system of universal concepts in an attempt to learn all that can be known exactly and logically. World views, consequently, can be conveyed religiously, aesthetically, or by means of philosophy. As Buhlof says (1980: 92), "Literary works, religions and philosophies embody, each in its own style, one of these three types. Although no world view ever embodies one type perfectly, one is usually dominant."

as a means of seeing deeper historically. All mental devices like this world view typology must be perpetually open to new ideas and reformulations. As he put it, "In these matters intellectual inquiry must, in relation to its results, constantly keep itself open to every possibility of a transformation. Every theoretical judgment is only provisional. It is and must remain only an aid to see deeper historically" (GS 7: 86; cf. 8: 99-100, 150, 160). With these thoughts in mind, we may turn our attention to the three *Weltanschauung* models.

Naturalism posits the physical or material world embraced through sense perception as prime reality.¹ Empirical facts of the natural world and their codification in natural laws are at the center of experience and understanding. The phenomenon of mind or consciousness is a consequence of physical interaction and thus another construal of tangible, material, external reality. Naturalism tends toward determinism and denies the reality of any absolute values and ends. Naturalism manifests itself as materialism in philosophy, hedonism in ethics, sensationalism in epistemology, and realism in art. After the Kantian critique of metaphysics, naturalism found novel expression in logical positivism more or less as a critical theory of knowledge.

The inner dialectic that pervades naturalism arises from the conflict between the perception of nature and the self-perception of consciousness. In other words, autonomous mind is difficult to explain solely in terms of matter alone, and consequently the inner dialectic of naturalism inclined it towards the other paradigms.

Subjective idealism (or the idealism of freedom) according to Dilthey was the creation of the Athenian spirit, and became institutionalized in Christianity as its official philosophy.² The idealism of freedom posits consciousness and the moral will as the

¹ As representatives of naturalism and positivism, Dilthey selected Protagoras, Epicurus, Democritus, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Bentham, Condillac, Comte, Destutt de Tracy, Feuerbach, Büchner, Moleschott, Mill, Spencer, Haeckel, Mach, and Avenarius.

² Dilthey designates Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Corneille, Bayle, Voltaire, Jacobi, Kant, Schiller, Fichte, the Scottish moralists, Fries, Herbart,

prime reality, as the original force, as capable of creation apart from physical causality (ergo the Christian conception of creation *ex nihilo*), as superior to natural phenomenon, as independent of it, and as able to shape or change material or natural conditions. Mind and spirit possesses moral agency (both human and divine) and emphasizes the powers of personal creativity and the creative personality. This paradigm conceives of the world dualistically, especially in the binary oppositions of "mind" and "matter," the "ideal" and the "real," and the "ought" and the "is". The subjective idealistic gestalt manifests itself in religion as personal theism, in art as epic and drama, in philosophy as transcendentalism and voluntarism.

The inner dialectic of this *Weltanschauung* expresses itself in the fact that mind or spirit is not sufficient independently since it furnishes only a tenuous basis for the real world. It is thus compelled to accommodate a resistant reality that is conveyed by empirical experience. As naturalism tends to reduce mind to natural reality, so subjective idealism tends to reduce natural reality to mind. Hence, the inner dialectic emerges out of this pensive opposition in both models.

Objective idealism seemingly attempts to integrate naturalism and subjective idealism by viewing the mind and empirical reality as an integrated, intuited whole.¹

Maine de Biran, Cousin and the French Spiritualists, William Hamilton, Ranke, Guizot, Carlyle, Treitschke, Renouvier, Lachelier, Nietzsche, Bergson, and William James as subjective idealists.

¹ Dilthey places Heraclitus, Parmenides, the Stoics, Nicholas Cusa, Ibn Rushd, Bruno, Spinoza, Leibniz, Shaftesbury, Herder, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Sigwart, Bradley, and Green in the category of objective idealists. Makkreel and Rodi (1989: 43) believe that at one point in his thinking, Dilthey "identifies his own perspective with a world view that he would later call "objective idealism" which he claimed Hegel and Schelling also subscribed to." On the contrary, Rickman (1988: 334) says that though Dilthey is generally classed as an objective idealist for various reasons, this is not necessarily the case. He states, "If Dilthey is to be snared in his own typology, then he can be regarded as representing a combination

Aesthetics and contemplation are the generative attitudes of this outlook which, in Dilthey's estimate, constituted the major strand in traditional metaphysics. The human subject is carefully integrated into the whole of the universe which itself is to be appreciated as a work of art apprehended in its unity. As a monistic system, particulars are sublimated into the whole, and thus resist an atomistic analysis, even though individual entities possess value and reflect the whole macrocosm. In terms of ethics, objective idealism as a monistic construct is beyond tragedy, pessimism, irony, and judgment. Its basic mood is one of awe and affirmation. In religion, objective idealism comes to expression in various forms of Indian and Chinese pantheism and panentheism in which the traditional differentiation between man, God and creation are fused into one. In art, Goethe's work is the best example of this model. In philosophy and epistemology, objective idealism fosters an "intellectual intuitionism" that seeks to grasp the whole of the universe which is perceived as an organic individual whose parts reflect the whole and the whole in the parts.

The inner dialectic produced by this model derives from the tension created in the mind's attempt to grasp reality as an integrated whole and what it can actually grasp in particular. Despite its exhortations to the contrary, the whole remains an elusive ideal. As naturalism tends to reduce mind to natural reality, and as subjective idealism tends to reduce natural reality to mind, so objective idealism binds mind and matter together into a whole which is never fully comprehended.

From this brief overview of the Diltheyan typology of world views, it is easy to see how many observers could assert that Dilthey found no rescue for his culture from the grip of relativism in his *Weltanschauungslehre*. As Rickman says, "It has become almost

of all three—with the major constituents being objective and subjective idealism, but with a considerable dose of naturalism. But such a characterization has only limited value at best, since Dilthey the catechist of the world views is beyond any one of them."

habitual to portray the theory of world views as the ultimate signal of Dilthey's grudging but somehow inevitable capitulation to relativism and skepticism" (1988: 334). We must now turn our attention briefly to this disputed but important aspect of his doctrine of world views.

THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM IN DILTHEY'S *WELTANSCHAUUNGLEHRE*

For Dilthey, the major problem of Western culture was the discovery of a means by which to establish a firm foundation for knowledge—especially in the area of the *Geisteswissenschaften*—which had been relativized by the fact of historical consciousness. His *Weltanschauunglehre* was an answer to this dilemma, and by it he felt he had succeeded in this project. Bulhof describes his alleged epistemological victory as follows (1980: 92).

Dilthey claimed to have overcome the moral scepticism caused by historical relativism by having restored reason to a new form of sovereignty over life. In accepting the philosophy of world views, reason is no longer fooled by life, so to speak, it no longer lets itself down by the realization of its limitations and impurity. Reason's present realization and acceptance of its conditionedness frees it to play with past philosophies and to use them for its own advantage.

While clearly recognizing the relativity of all thought systems, Dilthey suggested that insofar as each system, each world view, grew out of lived experience and was vitally connected with life, it had an encounter with and an understanding of reality that gave it an epistemological awareness of at least one corner of the universe. As reason itself, in some transcendental or "etic" (outside) way, surveyed the systems and their claims to truth, an avenue is opened to obtain bits of truth about the universe from these systems of thought.¹ Dilthey explains his method of overcoming relativism by means of

¹ Hodges explains Dilthey's position with clarity (1969: 104-05): "Though no *Weltanschauung* is true in a sense which would make the others untrue, it does not follow that none of them are true in any degree at all. On the contrary, each one of them, while false as a theory, is true as a record of vision. It gives testimony of how the world can appear to a certain type of mind in certain conditions, and how such minds in such conditions can confront their world." The question here is, how can something

his world view doctrine. As he said, "It is the task of the world view doctrine. . . in opposition to all relativism to present the relation of the human mind to the mystery of the world and life" (GS 5: 406). His position is developed in greater detail with these words quoted *in extensio*.

Every *Weltanschauung* is historically conditioned, and therefore limited, relative. A dreadful anarchy of thought seems to result from this. But the same historical consciousness, which has given rise to this absolute doubt, can also set limits to it. First of all: the *Weltanschauungen* have separated from one another according to an inner law. . . . These types of *Weltanschauung* maintain themselves side by side in the course of centuries. And then the second, the liberating thought: the *Weltanschauungen* are grounded in the nature of the universe and the relation of the finite knowing mind to it. So each of them expresses one side of the universe within the limits of our thought. Each is herein true. But each is one-sided. It is not granted to us to see these sides all at once. The pure light of truth can be seen by us only in variously broken rays (GS 7: 222).

For Dilthey, the sovereignty of the mind as it surveyed systems of thought was the key component in the equation and quest for truth. "The last word of the mind," he wrote, "which has traversed through all of the world views is not the relativity of them all, but the sovereignty of the mind in relation to each single one of them, and also the positive consciousness of how, in the different forms of mental attitudes, the one reality of the world exists for us" (GS 5: 406).

Is the one reality of the world really apprehended by means of the mind's alleged sovereignty? The tone of Dilthey's writings would strongly suggest that the mind in no way can escape its historical condition to grasp even the broken rays of truth in any kind of objective, assurance producing way. I believe it is only by sleight of hand that Dilthey has mitigated the sovereignty of historicism—the idolatry of history—and transferred it

which is false as a theory still be a true record of vision? And if it is only true as a recorded vision, but not as a theory, then what good is it as an alleged glimpse of reality?

somehow to the mind of man to grant him the capacity of knowing truth with certainty. He is still entrapped in the quicksands of time and history.¹

Assuming for the sake of exposition, however, that Dilthey is right in that each world view does convey the truth of a slice of life, how did he express this hermeneutical function of world views? One primary model he employed came from the realm of aesthetics.

WORLD VIEWS AND HEREMENEUTICS

To understand Dilthey's hermeneutical conception of world views, we would do well to recall what Dilthey's has to say about the nature and purpose of philosophy in general. For Dilthey, the horizons of philosophy were very broad. He conceived of it in an atypical fashion from traditional academic philosophy. He believed that philosophy was present whenever a person lifted him or herself up above mere activity and reflected upon it. Philosophy resulted from a thoughtful experience of life itself producing interpretations of reality in the form of world views (Bulhof 1980: 86).

Dilthey's conception of world views led him to the notion of the philosopher as the interpreter of reality which itself was presented as the text to be interpreted. As a literary text is understood and actualized by the interpreter's reading, so too reality, like a text, is also understood and actualized by the philosopher's interpretation. Here are Dilthey's words explicating this parallel (1954: 66).

. . . every serious poem discloses a feature of life, never before seen in this light, and poetry thus reveals to us the various sides of life in ever new products. No

¹ Hodges does not believe that Dilthey is successful in overcoming relativism, and his criticism of Dilthey at this point is illuminating. He says, "Dilthey's philosophy is open in its own way to the criticism which Kierkegaard brought against that of Hegel—viz., that it is full of syntheses where life is full of choices" (1969: 105). On the other hand, see Rickman (1988: 334ff) for an attempt at defending Dilthey's quest to overcome relativism by means of his world view conceptions. Similarly, Karl Mannheim has suggested, rightly in Rickman's view, that "Dilthey's position is really a "relationism," not a relativism.

work of art contains the whole view, and yet we approach it by means of them all. Likewise in the typical *Weltanschauungen* of philosophy a world confronts us, as it appears when a powerful philosophical personality makes one of the general attitudes toward the world dominate over the others, and its categories over theirs. So from the vast labor of the metaphysical mind the historical consciousness remains, repeating this labor in itself and thus coming to know the unfathomable depth of the world. . . . [Hence], It is the task of the theory of *Weltanschauungen* so to analyze the historical development of the religious attitude, poetry, and metaphysics, in opposition to relativism, as to present systematically the relation of the human mind to the riddle of the world and of life.

Every interpretation of every literary text, no matter who is doing the interpretation or how partisan it might be, contains something of the text and its meaning. No one interpretation has the *last* word on it, but it does have *some* word on it. When all of the available meanings of a text are in, then perhaps the meaning of the whole may be grasped. Similarly, according to the philosophy of world views, the world is confronted through lived experience, and understood at least partially by its interpreter. It is not a complete or final interpretation, but it is an interpretation nonetheless that contains elements of understanding never before seen and appreciated. Hence, just as literary interpretations of texts are gathered together to supply a text's meaning, so too the collective *Weltanschauung* with their diverse interpretations of reality can inform us, as Dilthey put it, about "the unfathomable depth of the world." Bulhof explains Dilthey's aesthetic/hermeneutic model well.

According to the philosophy of world views, human experiences—being conscious experiences—are lived interpretations of reality; they are as such valid because reality—the "text"—is present in them. Similarly, the articulation of experiences in personal statements or collective world views are accepted as valid in this philosophy. The manifold ways in which human existence has been—and is—lived, are seen as so many lived interpretations of reality. Dilthey's hermeneutic perspective makes us see the meaning of human existence as its being a lived interpretation of reality; man's specific value—his nobility—is his ever-present relationship to reality—ever present because human life cannot be lived without such a relationship [sic]: man exists in the interpretive relationship to reality. . . .

Hence, in Dilthey's understanding, philosophers and formulators of world views stand in the face of reality in a quest to ascertain its meaning in the same way a reader or literary critic stands before a literary text in an attempt to discover its significance.

Earlier on in Dilthey's thought, the doctrine of world views, as a subdiscipline of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, were studied on the basis of an analogy with the categories of the natural sciences. Later on, however, Dilthey jettisoned this model asserting that "certain regularities can also be found operating in the area of world views, just as in every other area of mental life. But a total resolution into regularities is impossible" (*BNL* 191/107 in Rickman 1988: 328). The hermeneutical approach gradually emerged in Dilthey's thinking as the key that would unlock the door of world view analysis, since they were more analogous to the realm of language than the world of nature. Rickman explains the hermeneutical essence of world views as an interpretive discipline (1988: 328).

The science of world views is an interpretive discipline which penetrates down to the level of basic assumptions and uncovers the sources of creation, development, and diffusion. It attempts to grasp the conditions and structures of certain typical ways of interpreting reality from different stand points of life. It is a methodical "interpretation of interpretation," that is, a kind of meta-interpretation or general hermeneutic of life attitudes. Dilthey stressed that it is not a science of strictly causal laws, but a science of vital relations and structures; nevertheless, it is capable of valid generalizations and conceptual knowledge. It is not psychology, much less a "psychology of philosophy," for it studies not only the single mind but the general complex of common attitudes in history, culture, and society.

Hence, for Dilthey, world views were a vital part of his entire hermeneutic project and should be understood as such.

CONCLUSION AND CRITIQUES

The work of Wilhelm Dilthey as the first world view theoretician and pioneer is helpful and illuminating. His efforts have raised consciousness about this important aspect of human and philosophical studies. Students in many disciplines—especially

philosophy,¹ theology,² and anthropology³—have capitalized on this concept to great benefit. Dilthey's endeavors in this area have laid the groundwork and prepared the way for subsequent thinkers including Karl Jaspers (*Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 1919), Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Warheit und Methodie*, 1960), and Clifford Greetz (*The Interpretations of Cultures*, 1973) among others.

Nonetheless, his contribution is not without its critics (for example, Hodges 1969: 105ff; Bulhof 1980: 108f., etc.). It is possible, for example, to question (1) his threefold typology of world views: do the three proposed categories effectively cover all possible world view types? (2) Does the typology itself, as some have alleged, destroy his entire epistemological project of ascertaining the principles of knowledge of the human sciences by positing an ahistorical, "etic" model of historical inquiry? (3) What is the exact relationship of world views to philosophical systems? In some cases it seems as

¹ See Albert Wolters, "On the Idea of World View and Its Relation to Philosophy," and Jacob Klapwijk, "On Worldviews and Philosophy," in Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen and Richard J. Mouw, editors. *Stained Glass: World Views and Social Science*. New York: University Press of America, 1989, pp. 14-40, 41-55.

² See James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1887, 1989. Orr spends a considerable amount of time discussing the concept of *Weltanschauung*, demonstrating that Christianity is a full fledge world view, or as he put it, "To speak, therefore, of a Christian view of the world" implies that Christianity also has its highest point of view, and its view of life connected therewith, and that this, when developed constitutes an ordered whole" (3). Note also Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, who in his book, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931, p. 171), asserted: "Calvinism did not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a *life*-system, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a *life*- and world-view, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life."

³ As Alan Dundes has said ("Thinking Ahead: A Folkloristic Reflection of the Future Orientation in American Worldview," *Anthropological Quarterly* 42 [April 1969]: 53), "The study of worldview has intrigued anthropologists for some time. Malinowski's statement is typical: "What interests me really in the study of the native is his outlook on things, his *Weltanschauung* Every human culture gives its members a definite vision of the world" (*Argonauts of the western pacific*, New York: E. P. Dutton, p. 517).

if Dilthey thought that world views were foundational to, and yielded philosophy; in other places it seems he virtually identified world views and philosophical systems; in yet other locations he suggests that philosophical systems lead to or produce world views. There may be inconsistencies in Dilthey's use of the concept here. (4) Dilthey's *Weltanschauunglehre*, in my opinion, does not overcome the problems of relativity and skepticism. As soon as the concept of historical consciousness is elevated to absolute sovereignty, there is no way for any philosophy or meta-philosophy to escape it, and neither does Dilthey's. If this is the case, then I suppose that humanity is shut up in a nihilistic epistemological box where the possibility of any kind of epistemological certainty is eliminated. These concerns notwithstanding, I am still pleased to recognize Wilhelm Dilthey as the father, not only of hermeneutics, but also of the concept of *Weltanschauung*.

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