

# Dilthey and Cassirer on Language and the Human Sciences

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In 1923, twelve years after Wilhelm Dilthey's death, Ernst Cassirer published the essay *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften*. Because Cassirer uses the Diltheyan term for the human sciences rather than the usual Neo-Kantian term »Kulturwissenschaften,« it suggests that symbolic forms can be related back to Dilthey's project of the *Aufbau* of the historical world in the human sciences. But Dilthey is not often referred to in his writings and in this particular essay Dilthey's theory of human sciences is not mentioned at all. Cassirer does, however, address the status of *Geist* or spirit in general, and indicates an opposition between a »synopsis of spirit«<sup>1</sup> that can only be undertaken historically and a more ideal *synthetic* approach to spirit that is to capture its basic energy. One can infer from this that Dilthey's efforts to delineate the historical world on the basis of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) involves a synoptic approach. Whereas Dilthey analyzed objective spirit in terms of specific »cultural systems« and communal structures which have over time differentiated themselves in conjunction with human practices and the cognitive interests of the human sciences, Cassirer aims to analyze objective spirit in terms of more general and lasting forms that serve a symbolic function. Cassirer's more formal synthetic account of the spiritual world requires it to be conceived in terms of various symbolic forms.

In this paper I will analyze the different kinds of discourse Dilthey and Cassirer use about the human spirit to help characterize their respective views on language. It would be too simplistic, however, to

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<sup>1</sup> E. Cassirer: *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften* (1923), in: *Gesammelte Werke XVI: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (1922–1926). Hrsg. von J. Clemens. Hamburg 2003, 75.

contrast Dilthey's approach as interested in concrete structures and Cassirer's as content to point to abstract forms. Although Cassirer's symbolic forms are more general than the productive systems (*Wirkungszusammenhänge*) that Dilthey articulates on the basis of the human sciences, Cassirer makes it clear that the symbolic form of language can never completely rise above the sphere of the sensuous.<sup>2</sup>

It is well-known how important Kant was for Cassirer, but Dilthey too acknowledged some Kantian influences. In a draft for Book Four of his *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, he wrote:

I incorporate the theory of the conditions of consciousness as instituted by Kant, but critically transformed, into ... the history of science .... The life of history also encompasses the apparently fixed and dead conditions under which we think. They can never be abrogated, because we think by means of them, but they are the product of development. And with this, I bring the investigation of the human intellect into its natural relation to the earliest known stages of the human race, the development of meanings in language, and the development of mythical thought.<sup>3</sup>

Dilthey and Cassirer agree that the conditions of thought have to be supplemented with the conditions of language and myth. Concerning language both were inspired by the views of Wilhelm von Humboldt – especially his efforts to discuss the inner form of languages. But each interprets the idea of inner form somewhat differently. For Dilthey, an inner form is a lived form, for Cassirer an ideal form. To discern the inner form of a linguistic product for Dilthey is to recognize the living or dynamic tensions that hold its content and form together. An inner form is not a shape that is imposed externally on matter, but naturally grows out of it. For Cassirer, an inner form is an ideal form. It has a projective force that has its source in the spontaneity of thought. As Cassirer writes:

Like Kant, Humboldt referred content back to the receptivity of the senses and form to the pure spontaneity of thought. For both, form is what cannot be found in the object (as the thing-in-itself), but must be produced by the subject itself. But this productivity itself occurs in accordance with a universally valid rule and accordingly its ideality possesses at the same time a realizing significance. Because the individual content ... is referred to the totality of possible contents and characterized according to its place there, it

<sup>2</sup> Cassirer: *Der Begriff*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Dilthey, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Princeton University Press, 1989, 500–01.

cannot be fully determined objectively without reference to the unity of self-consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Based on this, Cassirer fashions an analogy between Kant's position that judgments are not built up from concepts but first make them possible, and Humboldt's view that sentences are not just conglomerates of words. For Dilthey too, there is an important way in which form points to an overall connectedness. But he stands apart for not wanting to idealize form as a product of mere thought. I regard his position as one that stresses the naturally formative aspects of human activities and minimizes the artificial constructive role of pure thought. This is because Dilthey developed a theory of knowledge (*Wissen*) that is more encompassing than the conceptual cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of traditional epistemology. Ordinary experience is lived and therefore rooted in a pre-given life-context (*Lebenszusammenhang*). There is always already an implicit connectedness in lived experience. Only the false atomistic assumptions of associationist theories of mind have made us think that we must actively connect separately given sensory input into some synthetic object. To be sure, the synoptic connectedness that comes with lived experience may be indeterminate. But it does provide a kind of immediate knowledge (*Wissen*) that comes with a subjective certainty (*Gewissheit*). It is then the task of particular human sciences to arrive at more determinate connectedness valid within their own domains. These sciences apply conceptual thought to produce reliable cognition (*sichere Erkenntnis*), but they also fragment experience. Achieving a more integral connectedness requires what Dilthey calls self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) which transforms the piecemeal and discursive results of cognitive inquiry into a more individuated understanding (*Verstehen*). At this third level we aim at a reflective knowledge (*Wissen*) that approximates wisdom (*Weisheit*).

This brings us back to the contrast between a historical synopsis of spirit and a more ideal synthesis. There is no doubt that Dilthey places less emphasis on the need for conceptual synthesis than Cassirer. Dilthey finds order by articulating the historical world into the structures of a plurality of cultural systems. These can never be combined into one overall homogeneous system, nor can we analyze all

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<sup>4</sup> E. Cassirer: Die Kantischen Elemente in Humboldts Sprachphilosophie (1923), in: Gesammelte Werke XVI: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften (1922–1926). Hrsg. von J. Clemens. Hamburg 2003, 128.

the constituents into ideal elements. Certainly, the natural sciences have had great success in doing this. But there is a limit to how far the human sciences can go in that direction. Cassirer, by contrast, establishes a continuum between the natural and human sciences. Accordingly, Cassirer's approach to the human sciences is what Dilthey would call »constructionist«, whereas Dilthey prides himself on a »formative« approach or an *Aufbau* that explicates the »reason of things that was active in their history.«<sup>5</sup>

## Cassirer: Language and Ideal Synthesis

Owing to the fact that Cassirer worked out a more explicit theory of language, I will begin with him. In describing the progression from mythical consciousness to that of the mathematical-physical consciousness of the world, Cassirer points to the need to take the contents of experience, »which stand undifferentiated side by side in immediate perception,«<sup>6</sup> and transform them into differentiated elements to »which a specific place is assigned ... in accordance with a concept of law.«<sup>7</sup> The philosophy of symbolic forms aims at finding the general systematic wholes through which we move from undifferentiated perceptual consciousness to myth, language, art and finally science.

The symbolic form of myth provides an initial mode of overcoming the juxtaposed impressions of sense. It produces connectedness, not through the mediation of general laws, but by positing immediate sympathetic relations among the parts of things. Anything that happens to any part of a body is assumed to affect the fate of the whole. For mythical consciousness, the parts of things are fused or interpenetrate each other. Only in language do the parts of things begin to be differentiated in accordance with their specific functions. All symbolic forms create a kind of connectedness, but they do so in increasingly differentiated ways. Myth already points to causal connections, but the causality invoked is unconditional. Science advances to a conditional kind of causality: »one thing is never simply the cause of another; its effect on this thing is produced only under very specific

<sup>5</sup> Dilthey: SW1, 78.

<sup>6</sup> E. Cassirer: *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol. 2. Mythical Thought*. Trans. R. Manheim. New Haven 1956, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Cassirer: *Mythical Thought*, 32.

determining circumstances and above all in a rigidly delimited *moment of time*.<sup>8</sup> This delimitation makes it possible to differentiate ideal elements (momentary changes) in terms of functions that can be subordinated to universal laws. Cassirer ascribes this kind of functional differentiation to all symbolic forms that move beyond myth. Language, for instance, transforms undifferentiated sounds into articulate words that can be differentiated according to their grammatical functions. Words initially discriminate those aspects in things that relate to the goals of human action. Before language can go over into the *generalizing and subsuming* form of concept formation that logic and pure scientific theory aim at, it establishes a *qualifying* form of concept formation. Cassirer characterizes the qualifying linguistic concept as follows:

Here a thing is not named from the standpoint of the genus to which it belongs, but on the basis of some particular *property* which is apprehended in a total intuitive content. The work of the spirit does not consist in subordinating the content to another content, but in subjecting a concrete, undifferentiated whole to further specification (*weitere Besonderung*) by lifting out a determinate, characteristic aspect and focusing attention on it. The possibility of »giving a name« rests on this concentration of the mind's eye: the new imprint of thinking upon the content is the necessary condition for its designation in language.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas the logical concept subordinates particular impressions of sense to some universal, the linguistic concept specifies an overall impression. Elsewhere, Cassirer speaks of language passing through three stages: the mimetic, the analogical and the symbolic. In the mimetic stage, language »clings to the concrete phenomenon and its sensory image, attempting as it were to exhaust it in sound.«<sup>10</sup> Here language is primarily reproductive. The productivity of language begins with the analogical stage where more than just particulars are related on the basis of resemblance. Formal analogies are produced to coordinate phonetic sequences with sequences of impressions »entirely different in content.«<sup>11</sup> It is here that qualifying concepts come about, whereby parts come to stand for wholes. Finally, at the sym-

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<sup>8</sup> Cassirer: *Mythical Thought*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Cassirer: *Language*, 283–284; translation revised. See *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, in: *Gesammelte Werke XI*. Hrsg. von C. Rosenkranz. Hamburg 2001, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Cassirer: *Language*, 190.

<sup>11</sup> Cassirer: *Language*, 193.

bolic stage, language approximates logical theory by allowing for the differentiation of wholes into all their possible parts by means of classifying concepts.

Based on this short account of the roles of myth and language in the formation of experience, we can explicate four cognitive phases for Cassirer. At first we have a mere *juxtaposition* of impressions. Myth tries to impose order on them by willfully *fusing* them. Analogical language can then differentiate such indeterminate wholes by focusing on some determinate parts that allows us to *coordinate* other parts as well. Finally, the pure symbolism of logic and theory differentiates the whole of experience into all its parts so that further determination can be achieved. Total determination requires that we transform real parts into ideal elements and real wholes into systems of universal functions. The final differentiation of experience and the attainment of cognitive determinacy require that all these ideal elements be *subordinated* to universal laws. This further move from coordination to subordination demands that the parts of things be homogenized into uniform elements.

It needs to be asked whether this kind of idealization that clearly defines the aims of the natural sciences is also the ultimate telos of the human sciences. To what extent can the human sciences abstract from the distinctive parts of their subject-matter? According to Dilthey, the task of the human sciences is less to explain the cultural and social relations that are exhibited in history, than to refine our understanding of them. Explanation aims at the kind of determination and differentiation of homogeneous elements that allows phenomena to be subsumed under universal laws. Understanding by contrast is ultimately a reflective process that discerns relations among heterogeneous constituents and is able to specify their meaning on the basis of structural generality. Cassirer thought that Dilthey's explanation-understanding distinction was merely intuitive, based primarily on differences of subject-matter. In fact, Dilthey claimed that human activities can be investigated from the perspectives of both the natural sciences and the human sciences. Explanations made possible by the natural sciences are not excluded from a human science such as history, but the main task of historians is to articulate the appropriate structural frameworks in relation to which the value and meaning of historical-human life can be understood and explanations can be made relevant.

## Dilthey: Language as Reflexively Articulative

I will start my account of Dilthey's theory of language with his draft for Book Six of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* that contains a section entitled »Cultural Systems: Morality and Religion, Language, Art, and Science.«<sup>12</sup> Let me cite some passages from this section, which was not published until 1982: »In language, life-relations are singled out by a process of articulation and form linguistic categories. These categories arise through a heightening of consciousness of life-relations, by a process that separates them from the initially connected whole of life ...«<sup>13</sup> In another passage Dilthey writes: »No grammatical relationship is more important than predication. ... The latter has been viewed by leading logicians as the relation of identity or agreement. But the »is« of predication certainly signifies neither identity nor its diluted form of agreement. Rather, whenever a property is attributed to a subject as its predicate, the life-concept of self-sameness (*Selbigkeit*) is involved ...«<sup>14</sup>

Dilthey claims that the »is« of identity of objects is rooted in the selfsameness that a living subject experiences over time. This sense of selfsameness is manifested as an *Innewerden* that can be understood to be a self-referring or »reflexive« awareness. The »is« of linguistic predication has its roots in the way consciousness is *reflexively* related to itself, but it also initiates the *reflective* differentiation that characterizes thought. It is important here to distinguish between the *reflexive* which is immediately self-given as content and the *reflective* which is always mediated and relational. This distinction is implicit in the following passage where Dilthey writes: »that which is contained in the life-nexus is already differentiated in language by means of intellectual processes into the two aspects of reality: contents and relations. Thus language prepares the way for thought.«<sup>15</sup>

Dilthey then turns to mythology where he finds parallel developments. Relating myth to language, he writes:

Here too we can distinguish root-forms and modifications, elements and forms. ... The forms and form-elements of mythology are first intended to give expression to life-categories and life-concepts. Selfsameness in its var-

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<sup>12</sup> Dilthey: *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Selected Works I, 448.

<sup>13</sup> Dilthey: *Introduction*, 449.

<sup>14</sup> Dilthey: *Introduction*, 449.

<sup>15</sup> Dilthey: *Introduction*, 450.

ious predication manifests itself most simply in the Vedic hymns through the relation of the god to his various, relatively independent predication. The life-category of selfsameness relative to which changes into the non-recognizable occur expresses itself in the symbol of conversion and metamorphosis. ... At the mythical level, where attention is fixed on meteorological events and their interrelations, the life-category of causality is apprehended mainly in terms of the symbols of magic. ... It is a gross injustice that now ... religion is explained by the mere need for salvation – »without« an account being given of the presuppositions of »this need«. Religion is inherent in the apprehension of the world as a life-nexus that has structure, meaning, and sense.<sup>16</sup>

We find here anticipations of several aspects of Cassirer's first two volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* on language and myth. One difference is striking, however. Whereas Cassirer sees religion developing out of myth, Dilthey regards religion as more fundamental. Religion is inseparable from our search for meaning; it has always been with us and will remain so according to Dilthey. Mythology represents a particular development of religious life. It uses representations of gods and meteorological events to come up with »a first kind of explanation«<sup>17</sup> of the world. As I see it, Dilthey regards religion as a non-eliminable aspect of our understanding of the meaning of life and myth as a pseudo-scientific and now dispensable attempt to determinately explain the world. Another way in which Dilthey contrasts religion and myth is to place religion at the level of lived experience and myth at the level of representation. Myth for Dilthey is a primitive mode of representing religious consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

Dilthey recognized the importance of language for thought, but he was reluctant to treat it as an autonomous or universal system. Each natural language is a cultural system that manifests local conditions. Commenting on Pestalozzi's effort to establish general ordering systems, Dilthey writes: »He established four of them: the number system, spatial order, fundamental musical relationships, and a lawful system of language. It is clear that numerical, spatial and musical relationships form homogeneous systems that can be developed from within; language, however, is not such a homogeneous system.«<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Dilthey: Introduction, 450.

<sup>17</sup> Dilthey, Introduction, 142.

<sup>18</sup> W. Dilthey: Einleitung in der Geisteswissenschaften. GS I, 140.

<sup>19</sup> W. Dilthey: Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie, GS V, 182; Selected Works. Vol. II (forthcoming).



This indicates that Dilthey would have had reservations about a theory of symbolic forms.

What then sets Dilthey's theory of language apart? The first thing to observe is that Dilthey contextualizes language. His hermeneutic approach to the human sciences places language among other modes of human objectification. Life already produces objective manifestations of itself – language is a special mode of such manifestation. Dilthey in fact distinguishes between mere manifestations (*Äusserungen*) of life and its expressions (*Ausdrücke*). Language is an expressive mode of manifestation. Accordingly, the function of language is not differentiated on the basis of a universal theory of symbolization, but as a part of a genetic account of how the meaning of life gets articulated. We will see that this articulation occurs at three levels: first, life produces simple manifestations of itself that provide the medium whereby human awareness orients itself; then life gets clarified through conscious acts of explication; and finally, what is apprehended in experience can be discursively expressed in language.

Dilthey attaches great importance to the intermediate operations of explication at the level of consciousness. They include such elementary functions as comparing phenomena, noting similarities and contrasts, equating and differentiating. He writes that

»insofar as equating and differentiating merely find what is given ... they are analogous to perception itself; but insofar as they create logical, relational concepts such as identity, difference, degree, and affinity that are implicit in perception, but not given in it, they belong to thought.«<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes, Dilthey calls these elementary operations a kind of silent thought that emerges with perception. The explication involved here does not merely analyze the given; it also gathers it together, which is a condition that makes possible the intuition of time. Dilthey gives the following example: »When the strokes of a clock follow each other repeatedly, there is a succession of these impressions, but the apprehension of this succession is only possible in a gathering together. This grasping together produces the logical relationship of a whole to its parts.«<sup>21</sup> Gathering and grasping together are pre-discursive operations of synopsis that precede discursive synthesis. Synoptic

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<sup>20</sup> Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, Selected Works, vol. III, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 145.

grasping discerns and explicates the commonality of an unfolding present.

Note that at the level of explicating we are dealing with direct perceptual impressions. The next stage of consciousness is less direct, and introduces what Dilthey calls a representational awareness. We move from direct presentation (*Darstellung*) to a process of representation (*Vorstellung*) that is not restricted to the present. Through representation we can expand the scope of consciousness to encompass the past and the future. But Dilthey is not content to remain at this representational level, which reproduces past impressions and imagines future ones in mental terms that could be at the level of silent or pre-discursive thought. There is a more important sense of representation that only discursive thought can capture and is logical. Discursive thought replaces the idea of being a representation (*Vorstellung*) with that of being representative (*Vertretung*).

Discursive thought makes use of expressions, especially linguistic ones, in order to move from subjective thought processes to their objective logical results. Whereas mental representations can expand the content given in present impressions, representative discursive expressions allow formal relations to be objectified. This is how Dilthey introduces the objectively representative nature of discursivity in his *Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*:

Here there is the relation of *expression* to *what is expressed* by which, on the basis of the movements of speech organs and of the representations of their products, *linguistic forms* arise. Their function arises from the relation to what is expressed in them. As constituents of a sentence, linguistic forms have a meaning, whereas the sentence itself has a sense. The direction of apprehension proceeds from word and sentence to the object expressed by them. This also leads to the relation between the grammatical sentence or an expression by means of other signs and the judgment established by all modes of discursive thought.<sup>22</sup>

Elementary operations of thought, such as discerning commonality and acts of mental representation, are at the level of apprehending particular states of objects. Discursive thought opens up the semantical level of forming judgments about the world. Through the relation of expression to what is expressed, namely, meaning, we can make sense of the world. By forming *representatives for*, rather than *repre-*

<sup>22</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 146–147.

sentations of, what is given in experience, we are able to shift »from apprehending the states of objects to making judgments about them.«<sup>23</sup> A judgment does not directly compare particular states, but asserts an objective state of affairs. It is representative by expressing states of affairs in terms of »logical constituents that satisfy the demands of knowledge through constancy, clarity, distinctness, and through fixed connections with *linguistic signs*.«<sup>24</sup> By moving from elementary explication to discursive thought we replace the amorphous immediate context of phenomena with a more determinate judgmental context. By asserting a judgment that such and such is the case, I can potentially define each part of the assertion in terms of its place in a meaning framework. Thus Dilthey writes: »When the discursive logical system is analyzed, then one comes upon kinds of relations that regularly recur independently of change of content and that coexist at every point in the nexus of thought.«<sup>25</sup> Objective claims become possible because changeable private mental contexts are replaced with more enduring public contexts. In one of two important passages that anticipate some of the claims about idealization made by Cassirer, Dilthey writes:

Knowledge constitutes a hierarchy of functions: the given is explicated in elementary functions of thought, it is reproduced in mental representations (*Vorstellungen*), and it is logically represented (*vertreten*) in discursive thought – the given is thus subjected to various kinds of re-presentation (*Repräsentierung*). The explication of the given through elementary operations of thought, its reproduction in the remembered representation, and its being logically represented in discursive thought can all be subsumed under the encompassing concept of *re-presentation*.<sup>26</sup>

We see here the transition from subjective representation to a discursive ›being represented‹ that is objective. The final concept of *Repräsentierung* could seem a mere covering term for mental and discursive acts of representing. But a subsequent passage suggests that *Repräsentierung* adds a linguistic dimension that goes beyond subjective *Vorstellung* and objective *Vertretung* by further specifying relations. This is how Dilthey elaborates his position:

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<sup>23</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 147.

<sup>25</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 148.

<sup>26</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 149.

What is singular is subjected to the ends of apprehending reality by its relation to some whole and by being subordinated to what is universal. The mutability of what is intuitively given is transformed into a relation between concepts and universally valid re-presentation (*Repräsentierung*); abstraction and analysis either raise the concrete into homogeneous sequences necessary for the *assertion* of regularities or allow the *articulation* of the concrete to be conceived by means of classification.<sup>27</sup>

One direction in which the abstraction and analysis of *Repräsentierung* can proceed is to generate the homogeneous sequences of elements that make possible the universal determination that Cassirer attributed to the power of ideal synthesis and formal symbolization. But the abstraction and analysis of *Repräsentierung* can also allow for the structural articulation of the concrete. We can conclude from this that the final mode of linguistic *Repräsentierung* enables the human sciences to function at times like the natural sciences and generate homogeneous systems that have universal import. But since the human sciences do not merely represent the world through thought, they must also express and articulate the way we experience ourselves as embedded in the world through practices. Although the human and the natural sciences share many methods, some methods will differ given their distinctive tasks. But even they can be traced back to common linguistic and symbolical operations.

The initial task of the human sciences is to orient us to the world. This precedes the more idealizing functions that apply to universal systems. Dilthey follows Hegel by calling the original framework through which we make sense of things »objective spirit.« But he differs from Hegel by considering objective spirit as a sphere of commonality merely valid for elementary understanding. This sphere of commonality is not yet a sphere of universality. It is always historically conditioned both in time and place.

Among the components of objective spirit are the natural language and social conventions that we are born into and grow up with. There is always something local about the commonality that serves as the context of elementary understanding. The initial intelligibility (*Verständnis*) provided by objective spirit makes possible communication, but does not yet produce genuine understanding (*Verstehen*). Objective spirit frames the reflexive awareness that orients lived experience, but this local context of communication merely produces

<sup>27</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 149.

the intelligibility of the self-evident (*das Selbstverständliche*) or what Heidegger would call pre-understanding. Dilthey seeks a higher mode of understanding that can make things evident with the aid of cognitive analysis. For such higher understanding, more general contexts must be brought into play. Each of the human sciences relates what is already intelligible within the sphere of commonality to some universal system that considers only certain factors. Thus a historical event already familiar on the basis of firsthand reports and newspaper accounts can also be analyzed in political, economic, and sociological terms. All the sciences attempt to replace the tradition-based terminology of common natural languages with the more technical symbolism made possible by abstract analysis, but for the human sciences there always comes a point when that kind of universal representation must be referred back to more concrete life situations. The ultimate task of the human sciences is to allow the various ways of representing historical life to contribute to the recognition of individuality. This would involve a shift from higher or cognitive understanding to a third level of reflective understanding. It is important to realize that even our own individuality cannot be directly understood. The reflexive awareness provided by our lived experience constitutes an essential entry point into the grasping of life, but it does not produce a reflective understanding of life until it takes into account how it objectifies itself. The challenge for hermeneutics is to explicate lived experience in terms of its expressions and to find the proper meaning contexts that allow us to define their understanding. This is a circular process: the move from lived experience to expression is progressive, the process of understanding is regressive.

Whereas Cassirer saw the focused understanding made possible by qualifying concept formation as a merely suggestive mode of symbolization, Dilthey places this kind of understanding at the heart of the human sciences. One of the contributions of historical understanding is to be able to show how some particular events can bring a whole movement into focus or how an individual life can give a unity to a period. To be able to discern how more general forces intersect in a specific phenomenon is a skill that human scientists share with artists. It is also a way of limiting the extent to which the human sciences can transform the reality of lived experience into the symbolism of universal systems.

The understanding of human experience requires not just a process of mental representing and logical representation, but also some

form of either discursive or articulative expression. Dilthey is emphatic about how an expression of lived experience can disclose »more of the nexus of psychic life than any introspection. ... It draws from depths not illuminated by consciousness.«<sup>28</sup> We see this already in everyday discourse and exclamations, but more so in the power of poetic language to enhance and complete lived experience. The significance of articulative expression becomes especially evident when Dilthey examines musical symbolism. The creation of a musical composition does not begin with inner mental representations of things that are then expressed musically, but involves a direct participation in a musical medium from the start. Dilthey writes: »There is no duality of lived experience and music, no double world, no carryover from the one to the other. Genius is simply living in the tonal sphere as if it alone existed; all fate and suffering is forgotten in this tonal world, but in such a way that they are all still there.«<sup>29</sup> Living in the world of tones is to be able to articulate experience through an objective medium. Here the inner-outer distinction is subverted, but not in a way that undermines the basis for preserving a sense of self.

Discursive and articulative modes of expression open up self-understanding through a process of objectification, whether the medium for it is comprised of ordinary languages, abstract signs, musical tones or visual lines. The public medium to which elementary understanding orients itself is what we have called objective spirit and this provided the commonality of one's native language. The symbolic representation needed for higher understanding allows us to relate to more universal contexts with homogeneous constituents, as Cassirer indicates, but discursive and articulative modes of expression have the capacity to also return us to more basic local contexts.

The task of both higher and reflective understanding, as defined by Dilthey's hermeneutics, is to bring the appropriate contexts to bear in defining the meaning of things and interpreting the historical significance of human achievements. This makes hermeneutics a consummatory discipline rather than the preliminary classificatory endeavor that it is for Cassirer. For Cassirer hermeneutics analyzes the basic forms that can be found in the achievements of human culture, but it is subsidiary to the kind of functional explanations that a theory

<sup>28</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 227.

<sup>29</sup> Dilthey, *Formation*, 242.

of symbolic forms makes possible. Given Cassirer's greater stress on the formal syntactical features of language, it is not surprising that his theory is less focused on what they can contribute to historical understanding than Dilthey's structural semantical approach which was geared to the human sciences from the start.