

WILHELM DILTHEY'S HISTORICISM AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY¹

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Abstract:

The relationship between humans and their world requires understanding. This project is not only concerned with the existential search for the meaning and purpose of human existence. However, the first question is how objective knowledge can be acquired. In addressing this, knowledge enables humans to comprehend the meaning and purpose of their existence. Examining humans and their relationship with the world has never been separated from studying existential phenomenology. However, this problem also needs to be seen from an epistemological perspective. This article attempts to offer an alternative framework for understanding humans' relationship with their world and how objective knowledge can be acquired. In addressing this, Wilhelm Dilthey's historicism philosophy becomes pertinent for contemporary discourse. Dilthey's critique of historical reasoning aims to illustrate that truth within existential and epistemological contexts is historically situated. Consequently, by critiquing history, not only is it demonstrated that objective knowledge can be pursued, but also that humans can fathom the meaning and purpose of their existence concerning their world.

Keywords:

human existence • objective knowledge • understanding • epistemology • critique of historical reason

Introduction

Humans as noble creatures are created with consciousness.³ Consciousness is a gift and curse that drives humans to constantly question everything, especially questions about the relationship between humans and their world. This presupposes that human consciousness is always directed towards something outside of itself. Humans have consistently sought answers to explain their relationship with the world around them. Consequently, humans can understand the meaning and purpose of their lives. It is no wonder that humans eventually arrive at existential questions, such as, what is life? Is there a purpose to human existence in the world? Charles Darwin, in his work titled *The Origin of Species*, believes that there will come a time when humans will be able to explain and understand the origins and history of their existence.⁴

The relationship between humans and their world has always been a topic of discussion, especially in philosophy. It can be argued that discussions concerning humans and their relationship with the world are ongoing and rarely reach definitive conclusions, much like the Heraclitean metaphor of the ever-changing nature of reality, *panta rhei kai uden menei*.⁵ This change is what always demands the opening of discussions to understand reality. The search for an adequate understanding of the relationship between humans and the world does not always involve existential questions. But it also involves the intention to find an approach that provides rational justification behind the ever-changing reality. In other words, humans need an orienting principle that everything is not inherently relative or even nihilistic.

In one of his aphorisms titled “Appearance and Thing in Itself”, Nietzsche states that the world is both terrifying and full of meaning.⁶ Now, normative concepts such as right and wrong, truth, goodness, and even selfhood have become relative and biased. The anxiety about the bias of everything needs to be viewed not from a pessimistic perspective. This situation encourages humans to return to experience. Experience serves as a history that not only contains an evocative event but also a structure of meaning in the journey of humans as historical beings.⁷ Fundamentally, the meaning within experience-history itself contains an understanding of the purpose of human life. Ultimately, questioning the relationship

between humans and their world does not always end with existential questions. The relationship of humans with their world also involves how knowledge can be approached. In this regard, through knowledge, humans can understand the meaning and purpose of their existence.

Through historical reasoning, Wilhelm Dilthey sought to demonstrate that history holds a significant position in human life, particularly in the role of uncovering knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey argued that through history, existential questions of humans can find their answers, as humans are fundamentally historical beings. Dilthey did not see history merely as a chronicle. Based on Dilthey's perspective, history is an experience that contains the meaning of the relationship between humans and their world.⁸ Knowledge is not always revelatory, especially knowledge concerning human existence and its relationship with the world. Fundamentally, knowledge exists within the historical experiences of human life.

Wilhelm Dilthey's Figure and Works

Wilhelm Dilthey was a German philosopher and historian associated with Romanticism. His thinking was heavily influenced by the academic environment prevailing in Germany at that time. The seventeenth century showed significant developments in mathematics and the methods of natural science. During Dilthey's time, there was a revolution in the conception and methods of studying history and the social-humanities sciences.⁹ It can be said that this revolution was a reaction to the invasion of natural science methods into the social-humanities disciplines.

This situation ignited Dilthey to develop a new theory and scientific method for the social-humanities disciplines. His interest and inspiration from Kant categorize Dilthey as a Neo-Kantian. Although inspired by Kant, Dilthey's thoughts and works aimed to restore Kant's thinking and that of his followers. Dilthey's effort was motivated by his argument that the methods of natural science cannot advance the social-humanities disciplines. According to Dilthey, methodologically, natural science and social-humanities disciplines cannot be categorized into the same framework.

Wilhelm Christian Ludwig Dilthey was born in Biebrich, Wiesbaden, Germany, on November 19, 1833, and passed away at the age of 77 in Seis

am Schlern. Under the influence of his father, Dilthey pursued education at Heidelberg University to study theology and graduated in 1856. During this time, there was a movement for change, particularly in the methods of historical study. This sparked Dilthey's interest in pursuing philosophy, and he completed his philosophical studies shortly after graduating from Heidelberg University in 1856. In 1883, Dilthey published one of his major works, "The Introduction to the Human Sciences". In this work, Dilthey explains the need for criticism of historical reasoning, which in turn can develop the epistemological foundation for the social-humanities sciences.¹⁰

In his works, Dilthey not only focused on the realms of philosophy and history but also paid attention to hermeneutics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. According to Anna Tumarkin, one of Dilthey's students, Dilthey's philosophical focus can be divided into three phases.¹¹ The first phase, around 1852-1876, was a period of the heyday of positivism marked by the emergence of the essay "On the Study of the History of the Sciences of Man, Society, and the State" (1875). The second phase, around the 1870s, was characterized by the publication of *The Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883). In the final phase, a few years before his death, Dilthey published an essay titled "The Development of Hermeneutics" (1900). Some of Dilthey's other works include *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, *Poetry and Experience*, and several biographies about Schleiermacher, Goethe, and Hegel.

The Epistemological Problems Before Dilthey

In understanding and uncovering the essence of Wilhelm Dilthey's historicism paradigm, it is necessary to begin by revisiting the history of epistemological development. Particularly, from two great thinkers before Dilthey, namely Immanuel Kant and G.W.F Hegel. The thoughts of Kant and Hegel on epistemology both background and serve as inspiration for Wilhelm Dilthey's historicist thought. Therefore, the author presents a brief exposition of the epistemology developed by Kant and Hegel. Through Kant and Hegel, the reader can, in turn, grasp the essence of Wilhelm Dilthey's historicism paradigm.

The Epistemological Dualism and Its Problems

Epistemology, as one of the branches of philosophy, aims to uncover the nature and basis of knowledge in a holistic manner. Etymologically, epistemology is a combination of two Greek words, *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (science, word, or thought).¹² The word *episteme* is a verb derived from *epistemai*, which means to place or to position.¹³ Departing from this root word, epistemology as a branch of philosophy not only concerns approaches to knowledge but also determines the boundaries of knowledge.¹⁴ Epistemology questions the role and position of the subject about reality. The relationship between humans and reality, in turn, affects the extent to which truth in knowledge is possible. In this case, it may be necessary to distinguish between knowledge and belief.

The fundamental difference between knowledge and belief lies in knowledge demanding justification for truth, whereas belief does not require it.¹⁵ The term 'belief' here does not seem to involve the context of 'faith'. The locus of this paper is directed towards contextual explanation. Therefore, in this case, 'belief' still leaves room for error. Whereas, because it is required to always have proof and truth, knowledge can be said to be unlikely to be wrong. At the very least, there is little chance of confusion or error, as knowing is equivalent to believing, though believing does not necessarily imply knowing.

Knowledge becomes an essential element in human life. It can be said that through knowledge, humans can overcome their weaknesses and sufferings. The progress of civilization today is only possible through the advancement of science. In turn, knowledge does not always concern theoretical matters. In the tradition of epistemology, knowledge related to logical justification falls within the realm of *a priori* knowledge. Meanwhile, knowledge related to the reification of objects falls within the realm of *a posteriori* knowledge.

According to Kant, *a priori* knowledge solely consists of the process of pure reason or pure rationality.¹⁶ In the realm of *a posteriori* knowledge, knowledge arises from experience. Experience can be categorized into two types: primary experience and secondary experience.¹⁷ Primary experience engages the five senses in perceiving reality, whereas secondary experience involves reflecting on that primary experience. Both types

of experience involve intentionality, meaning that human experience is always directed towards something beyond itself. However, there is still doubt regarding the type of knowledge that comes from perceptual experience and consciousness. This doubt certainly questions experiences and consciousness that are susceptible to subjectivism. Related to the justification of knowledge as the locus of epistemology, fundamental questions arise. How can justification for knowledge be deemed rational, guaranteed (its truth), and reasonable? If human consciousness is still prone to error, then how can knowledge be approached?

Kantian Epistemology

Immanuel Kant acknowledges the intuitive dependence of humans on the laws of nature. This dependence is made possible because logically, human senses agree with the laws of nature. In this regard, Kant also recognizes that there is a type of knowledge obtained from experience. However, Kant insists that true knowledge is not an activity of apprehending reality in human experience.¹⁸ For Kant, experience still leaves room for error and is not a source of universal knowledge.¹⁹ Knowledge derived from experience is a response and sensitivity of humans to reality.

According to Kant, there is a type of knowledge that is independent of experience, which he refers to as *a priori* knowledge. The term *a priori*, in Kant's understanding, denotes knowledge that precedes experience. In turn, Kant elevates "human science" from the empirical level to the *a priori* level.²⁰ Kant makes epistemology not only a branch of philosophy but also the foundation of science. Epistemology can become a fundamental science with adequate capabilities to discover the formal nature and characteristics of knowledge, whether structurally, phenomenologically, or conceptually, in every aspect of human life.²¹ Ultimately, if *a posteriori* knowledge is limited to human sensitivity to reality, *a priori* knowledge for Kant is purely a sensitivity of human intuition.²²

The difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge becomes an intriguing aspect of Kantian epistemology. In his epistemological framework, Kant seeks to position *a priori* as a synthesis.²³ Kant's effort is a response to Hume's criticism of the principle of causality or causal relation. Hume argued that the principle of causality lacks a logical and

objective foundation. For example, if the sky is cloudy (A), then it will rain (B). Based on the illustration above, event A will cause event B. For Hume, causal relationships like the illustration above cannot be deduced conclusively.²⁴

In this case, Kant agrees with Hume's argument that analytic propositions are always *a priori*, while synthetic propositions are *a posteriori*.²⁵ However, Kant again endeavours to make *a priori* into a synthesis. Hume argues that the principle of causality comes from experience, but the necessity of its connection does not originate from experience.²⁶ Kant concludes that humans have *a priori* synthesis about the apparent world. Kant argues that humans still have limitations in understanding the appearances of reality. In his work *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant demonstrates a major philosophical project in examining the principles of human cognitive abilities and limitations.²⁷ These cognitive limitations arise because, according to Kant, reality is always independent in itself, or in Kant's terms, *das Ding an Sich*.

Through *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant does not negate the importance of intuition in understanding the reality of apparent objects. Although Kant still firmly argues that human capabilities will never reach the essence of reality. Therefore, in his philosophical thought, Kant divides reality into two parts: phenomena and noumena. Here, Kant argues that phenomena are produced by human sensibility, while noumena are a form of understanding.²⁸ Kant associates experience with phenomena. According to Kant, experience never provides absolute proof of phenomenal objects, although it can provide knowledge of what appears to exist.²⁹ The distinction between phenomena and noumena becomes a characteristic feature of Kantian epistemology as well as his metaphysics.

The dichotomy between phenomena and noumena in Kant's thought indirectly claims the absence of truth and knowledge. This is possible due to the limitations of human cognition in understanding reality. If the truth aligns with Kant's opinion, then this corresponds to Derrida's reflection on Difference. However, Derrida's locus of thought lies in the meaning of language. Based on Derrida's thought, knowledge can only be possible as far as there is differentiation of each phenomenal object. Cognitive limitations make human knowledge only extend to the differentiation of phenomenal objects covered in experience. It seems not wrong to affirm

with Derrida that ultimately, reality is there, and truth disappears.³⁰ In other words, beyond noumena, discussions about phenomena are only about relativism and nihilism.

Hegelian Epistemology

Hegelian epistemology can be described as an epistemology with a realistic hue.³¹ In his philosophical thought, Hegel argues that reality exists as it is. Unlike Kant, reality is naturally present in humans, and this condition can only be made possible through consciousness. For Hegel, consciousness plays a crucial role in understanding reality.³² This strengthens Hegelian epistemology with a realist tint. However, Hegel realizes that reality is internally fragmented and interconnected.³³ It can be said that in his thinking, Hegel interprets that reality is not complete at all. However, this incompleteness is always connected in relationships that enable reality to become whole.

Hegel's thoughts on reality can be illustrated like a puzzle piece. When the puzzle pieces are gathered, a complete and clear picture will emerge. Similarly, with reality from the Hegelian perspective. Reality exists in human consciousness but is also fragmented. Here, Hegel shows that the purpose of human existence is the revelation of knowledge of everything. According to Hegel, humans find the meaning of life precisely in the knowledge that humans are the mode and perfection of this purpose.³⁴ In simpler terms, the journey of seeking knowledge never stops until the end of history. Hegel believes that the foundation of epistemology lies in the social and historical dimensions of humanity that will continue to unfold.³⁵

Hegelian epistemology is a reinterpretation of Kant's thought. Hegel does not agree with Kant's exclusive distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori*.³⁶ Hegel's intention in his philosophy is to show that knowledge does not always concern the cognitive capacity of humans. Like Fichte and Schelling, Hegel denies the idea of the thing-in-itself.³⁷ Hegel rejects Kantian transcendental idealism, which assumes that the characteristics of objects of knowledge seem hidden and alienated from humans. This assumes that human consciousness always grasps reality. Therefore, Hegel considers everything that exists "in themselves" to be Absolute (*das*

Absolut).³⁸ However, unlike Schelling, who understands the Absolute in a transcendental connotation, for Hegel, the Absolute is the unity of reality. In other words, the Absolute is not something too far from the grasp of human consciousness.

Hegel's understanding of *das Absolut* is related to his critique of Kant and Berkeley. According to Berkeley, nothing is real unless it is present in the consciousness of the subject.³⁹ Meanwhile, in his transcendental idealism, Kant rejects the claim that there can be objects of sense that cannot be understood—although Kant still accepts such objects, they remain dependent on the capacities and characteristics of the perceiving subject.⁴⁰ Hegel rejects the ideas of both figures because of the dependence between the object of reality and humans as conscious subjects. Berkeley and Kant seem to clarify that material objects are ideal, but their existence is not a fundamental entity. Their existence will always depend on a higher entity, which is human consciousness.

Hegel rejects the notion that human cognitive abilities are the source of the ideality of an object or existence itself. This means Hegel's rejection lies in the claims of material objects as subjective idealism. As an alternative, Hegel explores the idealism of material objects to a more radical point. In Hegel's understanding of his absolute idealism, all material objects—including humans themselves—are limited entities.⁴¹ Here, Hegel explicitly demonstrates his inconsistency regarding material objects. Hegel divides entities into two categories: finite beings and infinite beings. Material objects are classified as finite entities; thus, all are interdependent on one another.⁴² For Hegel, the infinite is the idea itself, and human existence as a finite entity is part of the infinite unity.⁴³

In one of his major works titled *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel aims to demonstrate that the fragmentation of reality leads to Absolute Knowing.⁴⁴ This knowledge not only provides an understanding of separate realities but also offers an understanding of reality, or in Hegelian terms, the Wholeness. Through art, philosophy, and religion, humans can comprehend and perceive the interconnectedness of reality or the Wholeness.⁴⁵ Consequently, in Hegel's understanding, existence is seen as a process whose endpoint is consciousness and complete knowledge of reality. Hegel believes that the Wholeness exists in change and development as a process of self-actualization.⁴⁶

Epistemological Paradigm According to Dilthey's Historical Reason

Science serves a functional purpose as far as it can be applied not only at the theoretical level but also at the practical level. Consequently, science can become an adequate orientation and guide in understanding reality. In line with Nietzsche and Marx, Dilthey believed that science, especially philosophy, has no functional value unless its basis is grounded in contextual reality.⁴⁷ Through historical reasoning, Dilthey sought to establish a new basis for science, particularly for the social sciences and humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*).⁴⁸ This endeavour was initiated as a response or alternative paradigm outside the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), especially in the effort to approach and comprehend knowledge about human existence.

Dilthey pursues Kant's path in demonstrating how pure or empirical knowledge is possible.⁴⁹ He sought to prove the possibility of social sciences and humanities as scientific knowledge. In other words, building a new epistemological basis became one of Dilthey's intentions to complement Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with a critique of historical reason.⁵⁰ However, Dilthey saw the fundamental problem faced by historical reasoning as an epistemological issue. In constructing a scientific theory of the social sciences and humanities through historical reasoning, Dilthey rejected the principles of positivism. According to Dilthey, historical reasoning is not about metaphysics or mere facts.⁵¹

If research in the natural sciences is based on natural facts, then the domain of research in the social sciences and humanities encompasses not only natural facts but also data that contain meaning.⁵² Here, the term 'meaning' is understood because of human consciousness in grasping reality. In turn, this is manifested in a more rigid and concrete form. For example, the invention of the high-speed train Shinkansen, inspired by birds, or the invention of Velcro by George de Mestral, inspired by the burdock plant. Consciousness becomes a key factor in understanding reality. Consciousness is part of an experience that is not defined as a mental image.⁵³

In line with Locke and Hume, for Dilthey, consciousness must be the foundation of philosophy. This is because the questions that philosophy needs to answer cannot be found with rigid *a priori* assumptions.⁵⁴ Unlike

Kant's transcendental idealism, which suggests that reality does not present itself directly to human cognition, it implies that human knowledge of the material world is inherently limited by the conditions of perception and understanding. This notion is refuted by Dilthey, as he believes that reality, along with its characteristics, always manifests itself or, as Dilthey explicitly states, is "part of" human everyday life.⁵⁵ Here, Dilthey seeks to depart from a contextual dimension, namely, humans and their history. Dilthey assesses that in constructing the framework of theory and methods in the social sciences and humanities, the role of metaphysics must be ended.⁵⁶

In the endeavour to understand human beings and their world, the metaphysical dimension is not paramount. This is possible because contextually, humans are historical beings. Consequently, Dilthey sees that philosophy as a science needs to be seasoned with historical context. Philosophy and historical reasoning cannot be separated in understanding humanity and its world. In line with his predecessor Hegel, Dilthey insists that the manifestation of an idea or Absolute concept must unfold or reach its peak only through the journey of history.⁵⁷

The starting point of the social humanities in Dilthey's perspective is experience.⁵⁸ Experience is a fact of consciousness that does not separate the subject and the object. In Husserlian terminology, this is known as a 'pre-reflective' activity. Here, Dilthey aims to show that experience as a fact of consciousness has a relationship with understanding. This relationship is only possible with the existence of the principle of phenomenality, as believed by Dilthey.⁵⁹ In this principle of phenomenality, reality always correlates ideally with human consciousness. There is no distinction between phenomena and noumena. This is where the contrast lies between Kant's and Dilthey's thoughts on reality. Ultimately, for Dilthey, the approach to knowledge does not always concern the sensitivity of intuition. However, through consciousness and without the concept of 'hidden reality,' experience becomes the mode for humans to understand their reality.⁶⁰

The Early Skepticism and the End of Historicism

Two centuries before the publication of David Hume's *The History of England*, the skeptical attitude of thinkers towards the study of history had undergone significant changes.⁶¹ Previously, the works of historians as

projects of historical study were considered mere collections of fairy tales that lacked adequate knowledge. In other words, the study of history was deemed to have no substantial contribution to the pursuit of knowledge. The limited historical data was seen as evidence that historians and historical studies could not help uncover the truth. It can be said that at that time, the study of history had encountered epistemological issues. At least, this is what Dilthey observed, that the study of humans, through a historical approach, had fallen into epistemological confusion.

Skepticism towards the study of history reached its peak in the seventeenth century, culminating in the work of the French skeptical philosopher and historian, Pierre Bayle.⁶² In his work titled *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, Bayle criticized philosophical approaches, particularly in the study of history. Bayle saw that humanity would forever be engulfed in intellectual confusion and paradoxes. In other words, Bayle's skeptical conclusion aimed to convey that there is no true knowledge or truth. Behind Bayle's extreme thoughts undoubtedly lies the circumstances of the seventeenth century, where historical actors were deemed inadequate to be reliable witnesses.

On one hand, Bayle criticized historical approaches for human rational efforts that always end in confusion and paradoxes. However, on the other hand, Bayle did not provide any solution to his critique of history and knowledge. Bayle instead regarded 'revelation' as the only knowledge that never leads to confusion and paradoxes. However, indirectly, Bayle sparked a new controversy. There are certainly serious difficulties in understanding the nature of revelatory knowledge, especially from an epistemological standpoint. Due to skepticism towards various approaches to knowledge (especially through the study of history), Bayle suggested abandoning reason and turning to faith.⁶³ Ultimately, three points of critique can be found in Bayle's work, including; a historical critique of human rational efforts, a theoretical critique of human abilities and achievements, and the presentation of human history outside of providential history.

Skepticism towards historians and historicism also comes from Karl Popper. He views historicism as a movement in the academic world that is outdated and no longer relevant. Popper cynically criticizes historians' reliance on the issue of change.⁶⁴ Change itself has long been a subject of discussion, especially in speculative metaphysics. Popper observes that

historians - though opposed to those who are pro-naturalistic - share similarities with physicists. Historians employ a sociological approach as a starting point. In other words, sociology as a theoretical discipline must explain and forecast the future.⁶⁵

Popper draws a comparison between the methodologies of history and physics. Physics relies on predictions grounded in research that is supported by empirical observations and prior data, allowing it to generate novel discoveries. In contrast, historians work with sociological observations, primarily relying on chronicles as their data, which they interpret as historical facts. Popper argues that by using these chronicle records, historians attempt to establish sociology as an empirical and theoretical discipline, often aiming to make some form of prediction. He questions why historians, using their sociological methods, cannot predict events like revolutions if physics can successfully predict natural phenomena.

Popper ultimately contends that history cannot be rationally constructed or predicted by human intention. He rejects the notion that historical development can be forecasted or shaped, especially through sociological methods, which he views as a flawed attempt to predict history. For Popper, trying to control or direct history through such methods undermines the novelty that arises from social processes. According to him, historicism merely interprets the past but does not provide a valid means of planning future social structures. He considers the optimistic belief in social planning based on predictions to be utopian. While optimism may seem justified if events unfold as predicted, it becomes entirely unreasonable when historical developments deviate from such expectations.

Francis Fukuyama also provided his opinion and prediction about the end of the study of history and its project. Drawing inspiration from Hegel and Marx, Fukuyama sees the movement of history as not open-ended. History will come to an end when humanity reaches the ideal point. This means that humans have fulfilled all their fundamental needs and questions. In Hegel's view, the ideal point is the liberal state, while in Marx's view, it is the communist society.⁶⁶ In other words, if human needs are fulfilled and all questions are answered, then the end of history needs to be heralded. There will be no more progress and development, especially since knowledge of everything has been revealed.

The possibility of the end of history is supported by the argument that history is not only seen in terms of the progress of civilizations. Rather, it is also viewed in terms of the development of human consciousness.⁶⁷ This suggests that there is a change in how humans perceive the world and its reality. Unlike religion, which sees the “end of history” as closely linked to total destruction and the unity of humanity with the subject of the transcendent dimension. In the secular world, particularly according to Fukuyama, the end of history is seen as the pinnacle of civilization. Where the political, economic, and socio-cultural systems, and even the ideal knowledge about them, have reached their perfect point.

Fukuyama’s opinion, inspired by Hegel and Marx, is closely related to the utopian dimension. The idealism of Hegel and Marx, in turn, assumes that history and its historicism will never come to an end. Although, their opinions cannot be categorized as forms of skepticism. Instead, their opinions further sharpen the argument that historical reasoning and historicism are increasingly needed. Dilthey responded to the skepticism of history by considering them as pessimistic groups. Dilthey considered that historical skepticism can only be overcome by setting aside its metaphysical dimension. Although, Dilthey did not completely dismiss it and still acknowledged the importance of the metaphysical dimension. However, in this context, the metaphysical dimension cannot be used as the fundamental basis for tracing and reasoning history. History is something that, although part of the past, lies before humans to be immediately understood. In this regard, in Dilthey’s view, history is also categorized as a form of expression. Thus, history and its historicism can be made objects of understanding.

Wilhelm Dilthey’s Historicism

Immanuel Kant in his essay titled “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” (1784) suggests that writing history should not only be about recording empirical facts.⁶⁸ According to Kant, history writing should also involve an interpretation of reality to enlighten the reader. In other words, Kant desires a rational purpose behind history writing. In Kant’s philosophical thought, nature becomes an important element in the development of human consciousness and rationality.⁶⁹

Therefore, history writing is not just about chronicle records, but also about fulfilling human rationality progressively from the past to the present. This view aligns with the type of understanding also inspired by Vico, which is to understand objects and their development through time.⁷⁰ Thus, it can be said that understanding human beings and their world can be achieved through a historical approach.

The use of the term historicism in historical reasoning entails debate. It can be said that historicism is an expansion of the original term *historismus*. The main focus of historicism is a hermeneutic approach to historical texts from the past. It aims to separate history from the imagination originating from mythical and illusory myths. In turn, the term historicism has connotations and meanings that differ from *historismus*. For example, Popper uses the term historicism to refer to a social science approach that predicts the evolution or laws of history.⁷¹

The term *historismus* was first coined in the philological notes of Schlegel in 1797.⁷² The term *historismus* in the German tradition needs to be distinguished from historicism. The difference becomes apparent when *historismus* is contrasted with the term historicism as understood by Popper. *Historismus* in the German tradition focuses more on the cultural and institutional aspects of human beings such as art, language, and even religion, which are subject to continuous change.⁷³ In other words, *historismus* understands change as a concrete and singular facticity. Meanwhile, historicism is an approach to history.

Meanwhile, in Walter Schultz's works such as *Philosophie in der veränderten Welt* (1972), historicism is seen as a radical destruction of supra-temporal norms and an enhancement of awareness and knowledge that humans are concrete historical beings.⁷⁴ Historicity, in a broader sense, has evolved into an approach that seeks to uncover the laws of change in social reality. In other words, historicism as an approach aims to identify changes, especially in social reality. This also explains that historicism assumes that the future of a society is fully contained within the present.⁷⁵

Dilthey was interested in a specific method for acquiring knowledge through history, such as through the legacy of writings, letters, and autobiographies.⁷⁶ Historical reasoning is not just a method, but Dilthey uses historical reasoning as an expression of the values and meanings of

human existence. In other words, for Dilthey, history can be understood as something concrete in an existential sense. Dilthey's understanding of history entails the ability to know and comprehend the history and existence of human beings in general.⁷⁷ The world of humans needs to be understood with a different approach because it is filled with expressions of human thought. Consequently, there is a need to interpret these expressions of human thought that manifest in the world, placing hermeneutics in a very important position. This can be understood simply as the study of humans leaning more towards literary and legal interpretation rather than referring to scientific approaches such as physics and chemistry.⁷⁸

Dilthey seeks to liberate the study of human beings from the invasion of positivism. Although, Dilthey is not overly naive in positioning hermeneutics as an alternative and exclusive to scientific methods. Dilthey believes that there still needs to be a combination of methods without forcing the study of human beings into the mold of scientific methods. For him, both branches of knowledge have their ways and traditions of summarising knowledge. Consequently, hermeneutics, without being exclusive, still plays an important role as a methodology for studying and understanding the unique characteristics of human beings and their world.⁷⁹

Dilthey's historicism can be said to have a romantic hue. For Dilthey, history is understood as a domain consisting of expressions of human life. In Diltheyan terms, expression is understood as something spiritual that then manifests objectively (*Ausdruck eines Geistigen*).⁸⁰ In this regard, Dilthey is inspired by the Objective Spirit *a la* Hegelian. However, Dilthey further explores the concept of Objective Spirit in his historicism. Expression (*ausdruck*) that emerges in history is initially something abstract (*geist*) before manifesting concretely. Art, law, language, and religion are Objective Spirits that have manifested concretely in life. Consequently, expression is not just a sign used to distinguish objects of reality. However, when expression has manifested concretely, it can be understood and comprehended.

Knowledge is not formed by starting with disembodied concepts, but rather with life experiences.⁸¹ This is also affirmed by Rickert (a Neo-

Kantian) that in interaction and relationship with history, humans attain a reflective awareness of the value and meaning of their existence. In contrast to the views of Mill, Buckle, and Comte who insist that the foundation and source of rationality are universal laws. Therefore, Dilthey believes that experience becomes an essential element in discovering knowledge. Dilthey seeks to preserve the type of knowledge that arises from human experience of the world because experience provides the link between reality and the understanding subject, namely humans.⁸² Dilthey seeks to rescue knowledge and experience from the positivist scientific explanation because Dilthey sees it as a threat to the cultural meaning and value that never belongs to natural science, especially positivism.

The type of knowledge constructed by Dilthey is inherently reconstructive in its social dimension. This means that absolute knowledge regarding human beings and their world never reaches a comprehensive conclusion. The historical understanding of the world is a reflexive awareness that demands constant modification. It aims to ensure that knowledge remains relevant to its time. Furthermore, this is what Gadamer later reminded us that historical consciousness is both a privilege and a burden.⁸³ On one hand, it is considered a privilege because historical consciousness is a form of full and open awareness of the present historical context and its changes. On the other hand, historical consciousness becomes a burden because it simultaneously becomes productive and destructive. It is productive and destructive in testing the validity and truth of knowledge, ensuring that knowledge remains relevant. Ultimately, existential knowledge concerning humans and their world demands not only explanation but understanding. In the context of understanding, what is crucial for Dilthey is the question of meaning. Dilthey's understanding of meaning is not *a priori* but concrete and contextual.⁸⁴ In Dilthey's understanding, history, as something concrete and contextual, becomes the most viable means for humans to understand the value and meaning of their existence. This is possible because, throughout time, humans are historical beings.

Dilthey's Historicism as a Metaphilosophical Strategy to Manage the Uniqueness of Identity

The inevitable encounters between cultures in the 21st century pave the way for local cultures at the lower layers of the hierarchy to emerge to higher levels.⁸⁵ Consequently, the imagery of reality as a form of knowledge about the world becomes more diverse. Each culture, with its unique background and situation, has a distinct and specific approach to describing reality. However, Western culture, often regarded as the cradle of philosophy, tends to classify knowledge systems from non-Western societies as cosmological or spiritual visions rather than genuine philosophical thought. This is because Western thinkers such as Descartes to Kant acknowledge that the task of philosophy is to establish the objectivity of knowledge claims made in various empirical disciplines.

Meanwhile, to some extent, philosophy outside the West is more flexible and less bound by empirical methods and disciplines. One fundamental difference between Western and non-Western philosophy is that Western philosophy strives to be independent of religion (as seen in Descartes's efforts), whereas non-Western philosophy intersects with religion. Buddhist philosophy as a philosophy is highly coherent, yet at the same time, it differs from Western logical thinking. For instance, one key difference is that Buddhist philosophy does not adhere to the principle of identity. Instead, it emphasizes that reality is not something that can be fully grasped through conceptual knowledge but must be directly experienced.

The issue arises when interactions between cultures entail complexity, history, and different understandings towards reality. What is required to compare cultures objectively is the acknowledgment of the equal worth of all cultures.⁸⁶ Each culture possesses unique perspectives and understandings in interpreting its relationship with the world. Globalization has provided a platform for intercultural interaction to enrich knowledge. Essentially, intercultural interaction leads to positive and transformative outcomes.

Hegel perceives reality as always becoming, yet fragmented and interconnected. In this context, cultural contestation seems to be a mode for revealing reality and knowledge. Therefore, Hegel refers to the disclosure of knowledge as the Wholeness. Cultural globalization needs to be seen

not as a purely asymmetrical interaction. It is not an interaction between cultures from subordinate (non-Western) cultures towards dominant (Western) culture. Collaboration among knowledge is still possible in anthropology, but mutual exchange of ideas is very difficult to occur. The very possibility has been obscured by the calm, one-way imperialism of anthropology's gaze.⁸⁷ In the case of cultural globalization, knowledge in this sense never belongs exclusively to one group. This assumes that products in each culture such as artifacts, art, ideas or concepts, practices, and even beliefs are a form of knowledge. Ultimately, knowledge is always polylogical, not monological.

As attempted by Dilthey, Husserl questions the imperialistic empirical-formalism rationality that can no longer be sustained, particularly when applied to the social and human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). In other words, the presence of historical rationality and consciousness becomes a suitable alternative for criticizing empirical-formal rationality, although, in turn, historical rationality and consciousness are associated with relativism and nihilism. However, it is also important to note that historical rationality and consciousness as an interpretive approach lead to the recognition of the philosophical value of historical diversity and knowledge. Criticism of historical rationality seems not to be viewed as relativism or even nihilism. However, the negative connotations of historical reasoning need to be seen as a new alternative or pluralism. In turn, historicism becomes a meta-philosophical framework for understanding rationalism and knowledge not only in static connotations but also in plural and dynamic contexts. Especially in the endeavour to unveil knowledge beyond the traditions of Western philosophical thought.

His vision is intended as a response to Dilthey's observation of the dominance of science over life. Dilthey believes that science lacks an appropriate approach, especially when it comes to values and the meaning of human existence. This belief further strengthens the argument for the urgent need to establish a new form of inquiry, particularly in providing answers to existential questions and broadening knowledge about the meaning of human existence in their world. Examining Dilthey's project, we can see that this opens opportunities for particular thoughts beyond natural sciences and Western modes of thinking. It opens possibilities for knowledge and the unique styles of thought from around the world to surface.

In turn, the emergence of knowledge outside Western thinking enriches understanding as well as human approaches to viewing reality and the meaning of their existence. Essentially, the ultimate goal of Dilthey's "critique of historical reason" grand project is the defence of particularities.⁸⁸ This also applies to knowledge that emerges from various perspectives and cultures. The diversity of thought and knowledge from various parts of the world needs attention. Considering the uniqueness of each particular thought and knowledge contributes to enriching human understanding of its existence in the world.

There is a logical consequence that arises from understanding pluralities, especially concerning the understanding of worldviews. For example, when Western philosophy views non-Western philosophical thought merely as a cosmological vision. This implies an epistemological problem concerning validity and universal truth. Consequently, if one upholds the concept of pluralism, the belief in universal validity that has been upheld so far can be said to be merely an illusion. Although this viewpoint opens the possibility of relativism, Gadamer demonstrates that this needs to be seen in a positive light.

As previously mentioned, historical consciousness is simultaneously destructive and productive. It is destructive because it challenges the belief in the universality of normative ideas regarding values and knowledge. It is productive because it opens opportunities for the richness of knowledge and provides a means for comparing the uniqueness of knowledge from different eras, beliefs, and cultures. Ultimately, Diltheyan historicism becomes an appropriate meta-philosophical framework for observing continuity while enriching the understanding of human worldviews and existence from particular, unique, and various perspectives.

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Endnotes:

- 1 This article was presented by the author in one of the sessions of the international conference *Re-Imagining Identity: The Particular and Beyond*, organised and hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy, Parahyangan Catholic University, on 8-9 March 2024, at "Bumi Silih Asih", 18 Moch. Ramdhan, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.
- 2 Email: henrikusageng14@gmail.com.
- 3 Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 292.

- 4 Richard Leakey, *The Origin of Humankind*, trans. Andya Primanda and Redaksi KPG (Jakarta: KPG, 2019) 2.
- 5 Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995) 95.
- 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human* (I), trans. Gary Handwerk (California: Stanford University Press, 1997) 27.
- 7 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004) 56-57.
- 8 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Eds. Rudolf E. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989) 438-440.
- 9 Herbert Arthur Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1952) 5.
- 10 Bambach, *op. cit.*, 130.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 J. Sudarminta, *Epistemologi Dasar: Pengantar Filsafat Pengetahuan* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2002) 18.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Paul K. Moser, *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 3.
- 15 Sven Bernecker and David Pritchard, *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 208.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Sudarminta, *op. cit.*, 32.
- 18 Kenneth R. Westphal, *Kant's Critical Epistemology: Why Epistemology Must Consider Judgment First* (New York: Routledge, 2021) 35.
- 19 Helmut Holzhey and Vilem Mudroch, *Historical Dictionary of Kant and Kantianism* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press: 2005) 52.
- 20 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979) 138.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 139.
- 22 Holzhey and Mudroch, *op. cit.*, 52.
- 23 Sudarminta, *op. cit.*, 104.
- 24 Holzhey and Mudroch, *op. cit.*, 52.
- 25 David Hume classified propositions into two types: logical-analytic truths and factual or synthetic truths. Hume explained that mathematical calculations belong to the first type. In short, the truth of these propositions is a certainty. Whereas the second type, the truth of propositions cannot yet be considered a certainty. In short, the opposite of every fact is still possible to occur. Propositions of the first type can be said to be *a priori*. Whereas propositions of the second type are classified as *a posteriori*. Sudarminta, *op. cit.*, 105. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 18.
- 26 Sudarminta, *op. cit.* 104.
- 27 Lucas Thorpe, *The Kant Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 5.
- 28 Holzhey and Mudroch, *op. cit.*, 49.
- 29 Vittorio Mathieu, *Kant and Contemporary Epistemology*, ed. Paolo Parini (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1994) 163.
- 30 Bambang Sugiharto, *Postmodernisme* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1996) 37.

- 31 Kenneth R. Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003) 51.
- 32 Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary* (New York: Continuum, 2010) 2.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 35 Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology*, *op. cit.*, 51.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 37 Magee, *op. cit.*, 129.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 104.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 Magee, *op. cit.*, 3.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 46 Beiser, *op. cit.*, 107.
- 47 H. P. Rickman, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Pioneer of Human Studies* (London: Paul Elek Ltd., 1979) 2.
- 48 Dilthey divided the disciplines of science into two categories, *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (human studies). The term *Geisteswissenschaften* originally referred to the study of morals, but after the term "moral science" fell out of use, *Geisteswissenschaften* became more commonly translated as the study of humans. Although *Wissenschaften* has a broader meaning than the word "science," philology and history can be categorized as *Wissenschaften*. However, *Geist* is a German word that lacks an exact equivalent in English. Particularly in Dilthey's era, the term *Geist* was polysemous because its usage was popularized by another German philosopher, Hegel. *Ibid.*, 59.
- 49 Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 177.
- 50 Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 214.
- 51 Hvattum, *loc. cit.*
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 Rickman, *op. cit.*, 110.
- 54 Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Introduction to the Human Sciences*, *op. cit.*, xviv.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Bambach, *op. cit.*, 135.
- 57 Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, ed., Rudolf E. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (New York: Princeton University Press, 2002) 123.
- 58 In German terms, there are two words to interpret experience, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. The word *Erlebnis* refers to the broader and more general term for experience. However, here Dilthey uses the word *Erlebnis* in a more specific connotation rooted in the verb *Erleben* (to experience, especially in the case of individuals). Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 107. Wilhelm

- Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, *loc. cit.*
- 59 Bambach, *op. cit.*, 153.
- 60 Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Introduction to the Human Sciences*, *op. cit.*, 359.
- 61 Karl R. Popper, *Physics, Logic and History*, ed. Wolfgang Yourgrau & Allen D. Breck (New York: Plenum Press, 1970) 209.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 217.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 219.
- 64 Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957) 159-160.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 66 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Three Press, 1992) xii.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 68 Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1996) 66.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 72 Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism: The History and the Meaning of the Term", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, No. 1 (Jan 1995) 130.
- 73 Raymond Boudon and Francois Bourricard, *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, trans. Peter Hamilton (London: Routledge, 1989) 198.
- 74 Bambach, *op. cit.*, 4.
- 75 Boudon and Bourricard, *op. cit.*, 196.
- 76 Rickman, *op. cit.*, 123.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 124.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and Kenneth L. Heiges (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1977) 123.
- 81 Sophie Marcotte-Chenard, "The Critique of Historical Reason and the Challenge of Historicism", *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 61, Issue 3 (December 2022) 565.
- 82 Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, *op. cit.*, 213.
- 83 Marcotte-Chenard, *art. cit.*, 570.
- 84 Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, *op. cit.*, 252.
- 85 Toni Svetlj, "Philosophy of Interculturality: Philosophy of Humanism for Our Time", *Social Identities* 24, No. 3 (2018) 396.
- 86 Ulrich Libbrecht, 'Comparative Philosophy: A Methodological Approach', *Worldview and Cultures: Philosophical Reflection from an Intercultural Perspective*, ed. Nicole Note, et al. (Berlin: Springer Science+Business, 2009) 32.
- 87 Anne Salmond, "Self and Other in Contemporary Anthropology", *Counterworks: Managing Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. Richard Fardon (London: Routledge, 1995) 24.
- 88 Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, *op. cit.*, 310.