

An Evaluation of Dilthey's Hermeneutic Theory

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Abstract

Drawing on the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, the interpretations of Rudolf A. Makkreel, Herbert Arthur Hodges, and Theodore Plantinga, as well as Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, this article examines the development of Dilthey's hermeneutical theory from its early to later phase. Initially, Dilthey sought to establish the methodological autonomy of the human sciences by grounding them in descriptive psychology and treating lived experience (*Erlebnis*) as an immediate basis of understanding. Accordingly, understanding relied on introspection, imagination, and re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*). However, the limitations of introspection, its incompatibility with the dynamic nature of life, and criticisms from psychologists and Neo-Kantians led him to revise this position, resulting in a decisive turn from psychology to hermeneutics. In his later philosophy, hermeneutics expanded beyond textual interpretation to encompass all objective expressions of human life. Understanding thus became the reconstruction of the author's inner life and lived experience rather than the recovery of intention alone. Dilthey further sought to secure the objectivity of the human sciences through the hermeneutic circle and the dialectical relation between part and whole. Nevertheless, his theory has been criticized for internal inconsistencies, the limited applicability of the hermeneutic circle, and its inability to fully resolve relativism, ultimately defending only a form of intersubjective objectivity.

Keywords: Dilthey's Hermeneutics; Humanities; Intersubjective Objectivity; Historical Knowledge.

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