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## First Phase of the Narrative Theory of Personal Identity: Wilhelm Dilthey, and Georg Misch\*

In the last decades, a number of philosophical and psychological theories have made serious attempts to discover and make use of various aspects of different types of narratives from Proust's and Thomas Mann's "novels of time" through biographies and autobiographies to interviews with members of contemporary groups or individuals in therapeutic analysis or other particular situations. Their aims were not so much to make explicit the hidden linguistic structures of narratives but rather to understand identity in a broad sense, personal, group-, national, emotional, and other types of it. The initiators and proponents of these theories rarely referred to the two German philosophers, active between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century who attributed a fundamental role to autobiography as a particular kind of narrative both in history and in philosophy. In spite of their being neglected in this way, Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch merit to be integrated in the history of the narrative identity-movement. For they emphasised much more than other theoreticians the fundamental importance of establishing narrative connections between the seemingly isolated events in life histories as the most effective instrument to establish meaningful and coherent life-units. From this perspective, it is promising to regard Dilthey and Misch as our contemporaries and to weigh up their contributions to a renewal and enrichment of the theory of narrative identity and the narrative theories of emotions. Within the framework of this paper, however, my modest aim is to persuade the benevolent reader that it is worth involving them in the general discourse on identity and narrativity.

The expression "first phase" in the title of this paper does not only mean chronological but also systematic priority. This is, however, far from being a matter of course. Dilthey and Misch did not publish works including the key words of contemporary narrative theories. Still, Dilthey opened up a path to approach through narrativity the discourse on self-understanding, self-interpretation as a positive result of his obstinately made attempts to get to grips with the problem

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of objectivity in what can be called human or historical sciences. My proposal is to interpret some cardinal passages in Dilthey's texts as starting points in a line of thought issuing in the great emphasis on autobiography in his late fragments. His pupil and son-in-law Georg Misch developed it through his life-long efforts into a monumental series of historical volumes on autobiography. At the same time, this development did not only consummate Dilthey's original concept. It also implied a gradual shift from the systematic, philosophical-gnoseological concerns of Dilthey to practical-historical ones. In my view, this latter development can fruitfully be connected to the philosophical-methodological attempts of some chief representatives of late 20<sup>th</sup> century human sciences to understand the methodological bases of their proper disciplines. Thus after a detour through narrative theory, one can regain some access to methodological questions.

My starting point is the attempt to emphasise the systematic-philosophical relevance of some important passages from Dilthey's fragmentary *Drafts for a Critique of Historical Reason*. Let us consider the following passage first. "The lived experience (*das Erleben*) is a temporal sequence in which every state is in flux before it can become a distinct object." (Dilthey 2002. 216.)

This seemingly simple sentence is a concise description of what we can certainly interpret as the *systematically* first moment when out of the unstoppable flux of life a complex, rudimentary mental phenomenon – "the lived experience" – shines forth, i.e. makes itself perceived. This *Erleben* is rudimentary and obscure because it does not yet contain "distinct objects" – and obviously, no distinct subjects either. This phenomenon is the nucleus of what Hobbes famously called the most miraculous among the phenomena of nature: "*to phainesthai*" – shining forth – itself. (Cf. *De corpore*, chapter 25; Hobbes 1996.) The sentence implies that in the first layer of the original flux of life the awareness or consciousness is – logically at least – missing. This is a flux of bodies mutually influencing each other; a flux that also includes everything that takes place in the human brain. This self-sustaining causal chain is the object of the physical-physiological viz. the neuro-sciences without, however, their having the slightest chance to tackle the nucleus of mental-spiritual life as such.<sup>1</sup> The mental-spiritual life is an autonomous layer of its own superimposed onto the equally autonomous layer of the corporeal.

The life of spirit manifests itself on the base of what is physical and represents the highest evolutionary stage on earth. The conditions under which the life of spirit emerges are developed by natural science in that it discovers a lawful order in physical phenomena. (Dilthey 2002. 217.)

<sup>1</sup> This does not exclude that they can find the bodily correlates of the mental phenomena or that the scientists proclaim that they identified the mental phenomena with some bodies.

One can, in fact, go a step forward and maintain that natural scientists can solely talk about “physical *phenomena*” because they apply precisely *their own* irreducible mental-spiritual faculties to apprehend bodily phenomena in physical sciences. These sciences are based on much more refined “life experiences” than the above mentioned nucleus is. In these experiences or rather experiments brought into laboratories or other artificial environments there are already distinct subjects and objects. Nevertheless, howsoever sophisticated the laboratory settings in these sciences may be, the emergence and elementary accomplishments of the life of the mind or spirit cannot be explained by physical-physiological-neurological sciences but must be accounted for on a higher level. “With lived experience we move from the world of physical phenomena into the realm of spiritual reality [...] The cognitive value of this realm is fully independent of the study of their physical conditions.” (Dilthey 2002. 217.)

“Lived experience” is, therefore, the interface in which the flux of the physical and the life of spirit are connected – a sublime version of Descartes’ pineal gland and Pufendorf’s divine creation of *ens moralia* above *ens physica*.

A step further, we can start with Dilthey reconstructing the processes of the mind. “Lived experience encompasses elementary operations of thought” (Dilthey 2002. 218). In this context, “elementary” means the moment of the go-between, as it were. It is not a particle or movement of a pre-given corporeal *substance*. Instead, it is the act of *giving*, a self-performing act of spirit, the coming into being of the kind of life superimposed onto the base of the physical; a *suprastance*, instead of a *substance*, as it were. “These operations occur when consciousness is intensified” (Dilthey 2002. 218).

This assertion obviously presupposes that there is already an original consciousness to be intensified. I interpret this presupposed first nucleus of consciousness as the one Spinoza describes in a difficult set of “axioms” as an alternative to Descartes’ “I think” (*cogito*) considered independent, and really distinct from all bodily processes. “Man thinks” [...] “We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.” (Axiom 2 & Axiom 4 of *Ethics* 2, Spinoza 1985. 448.)

The two axioms read together point out a double cognitive state. “Man thinks”: in this first layer, there is neither a distinct subject nor a distinct object. This elementary indiscriminate cognitive state is followed by a state in which one can detect the base of what is “to be intensified” into the discriminate consciousness of the I-subject and the external affecting beings, the “distinct objects”.

After this short digression on Spinoza’s axioms with hints at the development of a discriminate cognition, we can now interpret more easily not only Dilthey’s above sentence but also the following one. “A change in a mental state of affairs leads to the consciousness of difference. In that which changes an isolated state is apprehended. (*An dem, was sich ändert, wird ein Tatbestand isoliert aufgefaßt.*)” (Dilthey 2002. 218.)

If we apply to this sentence the above interpretation of Spinoza's axioms, we can consider the indiscriminate "Man thinks" an indifferent "mental state of affairs" that opens up the way to the "consciousness of difference" in which a certain *enduring, identical, affected* body, and the continuously changing multitude of the *affecting* bodies are differentiated.

Equipped with this framework gained by way of the parallel interpretation of Spinoza and Dilthey, we can return to the simple sentence in our first quotation from Dilthey. The complex phenomenon that shines forth is consciousness in general borne in the dynamic relationship between an individual person as the bearer and a series of individual beings as the intentional objects of consciousness. On the object-side, this is a passive state: *being elevated into consciousness*, whereas on the person-side, the same event is a hardly separable mixture of activity and passivity, elevating and being elevated at once.

At this junction, the path also opens up that leads to giving an account of the linguistic means that express the experienced cognitive relations in the form of judgements. "Experiencing is followed by judgements that objectify what has been experienced" (Dilthey 2002. 218).

The basic building blocks of the logical structure of reality based on judgements also originate in the same elementary accomplishments of mind-spirit: they are called "formal" and "real categories" respectively: "[...] the formal categories spring from the elementary operations of thought. [...] such concepts are unity, plurality, identity, difference, degree and relation. They are attributes of the whole of reality." (Dilthey 2002. 218.)

The formal categories of "unity" and "identity" are destined to play an important role concerning autobiographies. The present quotation ends with a fragmentary beginning of a sentence: "The real categories..." Fortunately, however, this does not imply, that we are left at a loss when trying to account for the real categories. An earlier passage sheds some light on this issue: as we have seen, formal categories apply to the whole of reality, physical and mental, whereas real categories are to be employed as instruments for analysing the life of the spirit.

Among the real categories are those that originate in the apprehension of the world of human spirit [...] the life of spirit can everywhere be characterized in terms of productive systems, force, value, etc.

Temporality is contained in life as its first categorical determination and the one that is fundamental for all the others. (Dilthey 2002. 214.)

If we imagine a being in a timeless eternal now it will hardly have anything to communicate in a narrative form. But in reverse analogy, it is obvious that *temporality* is not only fundamental for every other real category but also a basic category for the human being as a being in time the identity of which is construed in and through the various narratives designed by herself or others about herself or

others; this latter is necessary, not the least because the finite consciousness that have been awakened through the above steps cannot exist in solitude without communicating its contents. A necessary condition of its coming into existence is that the being that is to become conscious is perceiving itself as the identical subject opposed to the unstoppable flux of objects affecting it in many ways. It perceives itself as the faculty of connecting a plurality of states already in the sense of its being the unique subject of a series of joint affections, mostly passive, rarely active. But more importantly, it is a more and more *active* pole generating connections in at least two senses. The first sense is the basic level experience of plurality without making any judgements, the second is the transformation of the basic indiscriminate feelings in judgments in which the perceiving subject “objectifies” (*vergegenständlicht*) the *felt* reality into objects and properties that can be predicated of them. This insight can be made the point of departure for a special hermeneutical logic of life as it is exemplified in works of Georg Misch and Joseph König (cf. Misch 1994; König 1937).

But from the point of view of this paper, it is not the most important feature of Dilthey’s account of the emergence of consciousness amidst the stream of life. From this point of view, it is more important to remark, on the one hand that the distinguished role temporality receives in Dilthey could very well be used as the point of departure for both Heidegger in *Being and Time* to connect Husserl’s analyses with Dilthey’s and von Wartenburg’s, and Misch’s assessment to Heidegger’s attempt in Misch 1931/1967. On the other hand, it is important to connect Dilthey’s formal category of identity with the overarching real category of temporality in order to discover the particular meaning of the traditional hermeneutical relationship between the parts and the whole that it solely acquires in the sciences that have human life as their proper object, the sciences of mind or spirit.

[The formal category of the relation between whole and part] first acquires its own meaning in the realm of the human sciences from the nature of life and the understanding appropriate to it, namely, that of a nexus in which the parts are interconnected (Dilthey 2002. 219).

In Dilthey’s view summarised in this short quotation, human life has as its essential ingredient self-understanding, self-interpretation that fulfils its task through the connection of the parts in time to create wholes in form of coherent, meaningful temporal sequences. Meaning itself originates in such particular wholes.

Thus essential to life is that it grasps itself by way of connecting its moments as cohering parts of a whole. Yet, this whole cannot become identical with the by definition unperceivable original whole in and as the flux of life. Therefore, the connections within the whole are not naturally given but construed on the basis of a narratable coherence of the moments in time that are constituted *as* parts only when they are connected and so related to the meaning establishing whole.

*The hermeneutical circle in form of the dialectic of parts and wholes appears as the basic structure of the finite human life of mind-spirit.*

Departing from this first result, the analysis can be continued in two directions.

The one is to draw the outlines of the theory of emotions to be based on the hermeneutical theory of the “elementary operations” of consciousness and the dialectic of parts and wholes in narratives. It seems that at least the most important human emotions are to be construed in a hermeneutic-holistic manner as consisting of parts that cannot be conceived *as parts* before relating them to the whole and *vice versa*. Relying on certain insights from Wittgenstein, P. Goldie applied this view to show in which way his version of a narrative theory of emotions could be built up (cf. Goldie 2014). I myself have tried to proceed further in this direction in recent texts of mine in which I termed the meaning establishing coherence of the parts a *narrabile* (cf. Boros 2017). The *narrabile* is in continual change, and so can and must be narrated again and again at least for ourselves to support our claim to be an identical person by way of a reassuringly meaningful narrative. In a forthcoming article I am planning to unfold this germ even further.

The other direction is to unfold the implications of the circular character of the constitution of a meaningful life. This is the way I will follow now to arrive in the end to what can be regarded as the deepening and, at the same time, extension of the scope of the dialectic-holistic understanding of human life of the mind-spirit by way of analyses of autobiographies that Dilthey and Misch considered to be the most authentic expressions of it.

One of the reasons for this choice is that already Dilthey himself seems to have had the intention to go in this direction according to the remnants of his attempts to develop the critique of historical reason. The following sentence is one of several witnesses. “Let us consider autobiographies, which are the most direct expression of reflection (*Besinnung*) about life” (Dilthey 2002. 219).

A superficial reading of this sentence is enough to let the reader suspect that no randomly chosen autobiographies will meet this high standard which can be reversed and transformed to become a requirement: real autobiographies can only be considered those that are the most direct expression of reflection (*Besinnung*) about life. Indeed, Dilthey enumerates the most eloquent and most elaborated autobiographies in European literature: Augustine, Rousseau, and Goethe are his paradigmatic examples. Characteristically, they will come to the fore again when we will investigate how Misch consummated Dilthey’s commencement.

To render the first superficial reading more profound we have to show up how Dilthey introduces in the context of autobiographies those categories of the “critique of historical reason” that are particularly apt to grasp what takes place when the understanding of finite human life of mind-spirit appropriately experiences, conceives itself in order to formulate in *autobiographical* narratives its findings and constructions. Viewed from the project of the critique of histor-

ical reason as part of a theory of knowledge the commencements of which are outlined in the first part of this paper, what takes place in this case is radically different from what happens when natural scientists report on the results of experiments in their labs or other artificial environments. Natural scientists are absolutely not interested in constructing their complex mental-cognitive operations from those elementary ones onward the description of which constitutes one of the main target of the Diltheyan philosopher. Nor are they attracted by the task to reflect upon the conditions of possibility of having “objects” at their disposal. By contrast, the Diltheyan philosopher turns back the direction of the cognitive attention from the “given” external objects to be grasped to the extremely complex operations of the more or less conscious mind that make it possible first of all to grasp objects conceptually. Even if it can be seen as a somewhat polarised picture, nevertheless, one can tentatively maintain that in natural sciences, there are clear-cut roles: the impartial spectator follows the intentionally triggered interactions between well-defined entities that are basically separated from herself, their environment, and each other. Consequently, the appropriate style of account will be the shortest possible report on those causal influences that she as scientist observed in this artificial situation.

Contrary to this, the entities which the life of mind-spirit is bothered with are much less well-defined, separated ones influencing each-other as the impartial spectator deliberately provokes them to do. The spectator is also far from being impartial because she reflects upon herself *as* reflecting upon herself and her environment. Thus the entities to be observed are incessantly shaping themselves and the “spectator” herself according to the dialectical-hermeneutical relationship of the parts-whole circles. The main categories Dilthey advises us to use when conceiving these processes are *meaning, value, sense, and purpose*.

In this respect, there is a certain ambiguity in Dilthey’s text that is mirrored in my own above formulation about the individual who narrates its *findings and constructions* respectively. Because in order to find something, it must be *given in advance*, whereas *construction* is precisely needed where what we are looking for is *not pre-given*. The ambiguity in Dilthey’s text lies in his answer to the question concerning the activity and passivity in our relationship with what he terms “meaning” or “sense” (*Bedeutung, Sinn*). On the one hand, in the closing passage of his section that has the title “The life-nexus”, he employs an almost “dogmatic” formulation.

Each life has its own sense. It consists in a meaning-context in which every remembered present possesses an intrinsic value, and yet, through the nexus of memory, it is also related to the sense of the whole. This sense of individual human existence is unique and cannot be fathomed by conceptual cognition; yet, in its way, like a Leibnizian monad, it represents the historical universe. (Dilthey 2002. 221.)

L. Tengelyi's strict refusal of the idea of "life as it writes itself"<sup>2</sup> must have originated in this or similar passages that are as many witnesses of the lasting influence of Leibniz's interpretation of the traditional concept of a monad. And to highlight the result of the promised more profound reading of the above sentence, it is more than evident that only those autobiographies can be regarded as paradigmatic that were written by individuals whose lives "represent the historical universe" extensively and intensively at the same time. This parallel expectation of a monadic individual and its adequate autobiography became the absolute point of orientation for Dilthey and Misch when fashioning their idea of the *philosophically analysable* individual and autobiography: the appropriate subjects were distinguished authors of world-literature, world-historical individuals of their own rights. When analysing Misch's work, we will see how this point of orientation shifts gradually and receives a historically more extended sense – without, however, giving up the basic parallel expectation itself.

The other tendency of the ambiguity in Dilthey appears in passages in which he stresses the activity of the individual in question when instead of passively accepting senses of longer life-units or the whole life she actively shapes and reshapes them again and again not presupposing a pre-given monadic eternal sense or meaning. This tendency promises to be more adequate for a "post-modern" understanding of individuality, identity, and sense or meaning of life – including perhaps that of L. Tengelyi's understanding. What the English translation terms "reflection" is *Besinnung* in the original. This can certainly be rendered by "reflection". Yet, the original word can well be understood as referring to an active attitude toward the "sense" (*Sinn*), which could be rendered by "providing with a sense", similarly to the German words *Bedeutung*, *Gestaltung*, *Entwicklung* in contexts such as the one referred to in our following quotation – immediately preceding the former one:

The sense of life lies in *giving shape to things* (in German simply: *in der Gestaltung*) and in development (*in der Entwicklung*); on its basis, the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of the moments of life is determined (*bestimmt sich*) in a distinctive way; it is both the experienced, intrinsic value (*erlebter Eigenwert*) of the moment and its productive force (*wirkende Kraft*) (Dilthey 2002. 221).

In this quotation, the use of the expression "productive force" of the moments of life – Dilthey's term is *wirkende Kraft* – suggests another analogy to Leibniz who deliberately employs the usually physical expression "force" in the context of the phenomena of the mind, and he attributes to the force inherent in the mental a more distinctive status than to the physical force usually taken to be the original.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tengelyi 1998. 24–26.



That the ambiguity concerning the respective roles that life itself and the individual author of an autobiography are supposed to play is a real one can be seen in Section 4 of the *Project* that is titled straightforwardly “Autobiography”. Dilthey explains the situation as follows:

Thus the initial tasks involved in apprehending and explicating a historical nexus are already *half solved by life itself*. [...] A coherence is formed within life itself, albeit from different standpoints and with constant shifts. The work of historical narrative is *already half done by life itself*. (Dilthey 2002. 221, 222.)

Dilthey relies on life when maintaining life’s own half-works in autobiographies to provide the human historical sciences with the basis of objectivity he believes they are in need of. He does not seem to be bothered particularly with what happens in the respective other halves provided by the individual authors. A pre-Freudian thinker as he was, Dilthey does not seem to have doubts that a rich, profound and extensive autobiography of a self-conscious historical individual warrants both the paradigmatic greatness of the author’s individuality and that she is the lady in her soul’s house, and so she is not influenced by unconscious forces of her soul to the effect that the truth of the content of the narrative is not to be called in question. Questions of sincerity or distortion, counterfeit, conscious or unconscious do not seem to appear on Dilthey’s horizon as disturbing factors to be taken seriously. He embraces as an imperative for all historical research aiming at objectivity that it has to start with the historical reports conveyed by the extant autobiographies of the great historical individuals.

This imperative is the real guiding principle for the life-long enterprise of Dilthey’s most talented pupil who happened to become his son-in-law: Georg Misch. Misch begun working on the history of autobiographies in the years when Dilthey composed his *Critique of Historical Reason*. One can see in Misch’s historical texts the unfolding of Dilthey’s basic *philosophical* idea as an archetype in the context of real *historical research*.<sup>3</sup>

The first concise manuscript version of his history of autobiography was conceived and written as a prize essay for the Prussian Academy of Sciences that appreciated his efforts and elected him as the winner of the competition. The first printed volume appeared shortly afterwards (1907) whereas the last one was published by his friends posthumously (1969), based on the original concise

<sup>3</sup> After we have learned the strong philosophical presuppositions behind the parallel expectations of a real autobiography and a great historical individual, there are some reasons to suspect that the presuppositions guide the enterprise also in the sense of prohibiting the acknowledgment of some texts as autobiographies and vice versa. This is a complex issue the treatment of which will require a separate investigation. Some hints are given in the present paper as well when the shift in Misch’s perspective on history is mentioned.

version – i.e. unfinished if compared to the extensively reworked texts of the earlier volumes.

There can be no reasonable doubt concerning Misch's complete agreement with Dilthey's view on autobiography including the concept of *life describing itself* – at least halfway, as we have seen. He intended to transplant Dilthey's above mentioned general imperative into the body of descriptive research by way of collecting and describing with great precision each and every autobiography from ancient antiquity through the 18<sup>th</sup> century *as* the foundation of all historical research. Misch shared Dilthey's reliance on life as a quasi-author collaborating with those great individuals whose greatness is certified precisely by their complete and well-articulated autobiographies. So much so that he maintained as late as ten years after World War 2 the legitimacy of the claim to autobiographies' providing us with a distinctive access to objective historical truth. In the series of radio-talks called "*Funk-Universität*" in the framework of the RIAS (*Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor*), in a broadcasting on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August 1954, he talked about *The Problem of Truth in the Autobiography*.<sup>4</sup> Already the first sentence of this talk evidently shows how completely he shares Dilthey's view: "If we pose the question of truth, the autobiography must evidently be preferred to the biography."<sup>5</sup>

The second sentence also argues for this view in a way that makes evident the Diltheyan roots of the statement. "For if there is a will it seems easier to achieve self-knowledge than to make a just judgement about another person, or at least self-knowledge can penetrate deeper."<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, however, it displays involuntarily the inadequacy of this very view with respect to such obvious historical facts as that the radio sender was not far from the Citadel in Spandau in which the imprisoned Albert Speer was about to complete his autobiographies with the titles *Inside the Third Reich* and *Spandau: The Secret Diaries* whose truthfulness has been strongly disputed, to say the least.

Yet, Misch is not as naïve as ignoring the authors' virtually ineradicable tendency to deception; but he believes this is only relevant in the political autobiographies.

<sup>4</sup> The typescript is kept in the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin (ZVN 104). It bears the title *Das Problem der Wahrheit in der Biographie*. This must, however, be a typing mistake; already the first sentence is unmistakably about the *autobiography*. The typewriter must have mistaken this broadcast with the next one in the series which is indeed about the biography: "Das Problem der Wahrheit in der Biographie" von J. Romein.

<sup>5</sup> "Wenn die Wahrheitsfrage gestellt wird, hat die Autobiographie augenscheinlich einen großen Vorzug vor der Biographie."

<sup>6</sup> Denn Selbsterkenntnis ist, so scheint es, wenn der Wille dazu da ist, leichter erreichbar als die gerechte Beurteilung eines anderen und vermag jedenfalls tiefer zu dringen.

For political autobiographies and even more the courtly-political memoirs are usually murky sources; they do not originate in the will to truth but in the need of self-justification. Contrary to this, the poets and some philosophers have predilection for autobiographical writing, and this is well-founded.<sup>7</sup>

In the main part of the short text, Misch wishes to elucidate the sense in which Augustin's *Confessions* can be understood as an example of the truth of an autobiography. First he informs the audience based upon convincing philological evidences that Augustin described his conversion immediately afterwards as a result of Platonic influence much more than the grace-based influence of the Gospel's and St. Paul's teaching. In spite of this fact, however, he insists on the truth of the Church Father's mature story that unambiguously reverses the order of influences:

This procedure does not happen by chance but it corresponds to a general law of development of higher order autobiographies. For the development of such autobiographies, it is decisive that their authors have understood their results in their life-experience. How should the autobiography be able to testify something else than the awareness of the individuals of themselves, which they have accomplished by that time? But it is precisely by virtue of the springing from the present life-understanding of the authors binding together the past that the autobiography gains the force to shape and reshape the historical facts that lies in the sense of the experienced life. This force by virtue of which they are capable of elevate themselves to the level of poetry, and to arrive to the norm that we usually term through Goethe's double concept of 'Truth and Poetry' – without ceasing to be bound by historical evidence.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, it is tempting to understand the last sentence as implying a deeply felt identification with the history of German spirit (*Geistesgeschichte*) that could be made explicit by way of completing it as "wir [Deutschen]" instead of having

<sup>7</sup> "Denn politische Autobiographien und gar höfisch-politische Memoiren sind in der Regel recht trübe Quellen, da sie nicht aus dem Wahrheitswillen sondern aus dem Bedürfnis der Selbstrechtfertigung hervorzugehen pflegen. Dagegen haben die Dichter und auch manche Philosophen eine Vorliebe für das autobiographische Schrifttum, die gleichfalls wohlbegründet ist."

<sup>8</sup> "Dieser Fortgang ist nicht Zufälliges, sondern entspricht einem allgemeinen Bildungsgesetz der Autobiographie höherer Art, demzufolge für ihre Ausbildung ein übergreifendes, von den Autobiographen in ihrer Lebenserfahrung errungenes Verständnis ihrer Ergebnisse maßgebend ist. Wie sollte die Autobiographie auch von etwas anderem zeugen können als von dem jeweils vollendetem Bewußtsein der Individuen über sich selbst? Aber gerade durch dieses Quellen aus dem gegenwärtigen Lebensverständnis des Autors, das die Vergangenheit in sich zusammenhält, gewinnt die Autobiographie die Kraft zu einer Gestaltung und Umgestaltung der historischen Fakta, die im Sinne des durchlebten Lebens liegt: die Kraft, mit der sie ohne von der für die historischen Werke unaufgebbaren Bindung an den Stoff zu lassen, sich zu dem Niveau der Dichtung zu erheben und also die Norm zu erreichen vermag, die wir [fast hört man mit: »wir Deutschen«...] durch den Goetheschen Doppelbegriff 'Wahrheit und Dichtung' zu bezeichnen gewohnt sind."

simply “wir”. Who else’s association could be meant by the first person plural when stating that “we usually term [it] through Goethe’s [...] ‘Truth and Poetry’”? This presupposition leads to the deeply problematic inner life-narrative of Misch himself, which has not at all been atypical for Jewish intellectuals with a profound German cultural-national identity who survived the period of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Howsoever it may be, there is a philosophically interesting parallel between the facts that *against all that had happened* in the tragic catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Misch insisted on a – *sit venia verbo* – Apollonian philosophical understanding of autobiography that was an understanding deeply rooted in German cultural and spiritual history. Also in this sense, he followed Dilthey who wrote a series of important works on German cultural-spiritual history on the one hand, and, on the other, declared his view about the special categories that play a role in autobiographies as follows: “The category of purpose, or of the good, which considers life as it is directed toward the future, presupposes that of value.” (Dilthey 2002. 223, emphasis added)

Even if negative values also can occur in autobiographies, the *par excellence* category of value meant by Dilthey is the positive, the good. According to the well-known Aristotelian schema, the purpose is interchangeable with the good. But the question can hardly be avoided, how this supremacy of the good could remain intact even in an age for which Walter Benjamin maintained that novels such as Döblin’s *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* testified to the disappearance of distinguished positive values attached to positive heroes representing a nation or their own education with the aim of acquiring and embodying those values through their virtuous behaviour. Not to mention the gods of Brecht vainly looking for a good person in Szechwan...

In this context, it can be instructive to recall that Misch appropriated Dilthey’s view implying the concept of autobiography as the *life describing itself halfway* together with his *reliance on life* as a quasi-author collaborating with great individuals, the authors of those autobiographies. Their greatness is warranted precisely by their complete and well-articulated autobiographies that mirror those human values which can be found at least explained in the most profound works of German literary spirit, autobiographical or fictional-educational. My reason for recalling this now is to emphasise that not only did Misch suffer from a particular type of split-mindedness as a German-Jewish intellectual but also as a philosopher and a historian at the same time and in the same mind. For he was a philosopher of Dilthey’s denomination concerning the distinctive treatment of the great personalities. He goes as far as constructing the whole edifice of his history of autobiography on the thesis of the gradual development of the self-conscious individual. The introduction of the first volume to the *History of Autobiography* allows no doubt as for this principle of construction:

Biography [...] became a definite literary form among the Greeks [...] its basis was this same conception of *bios*. [...] It was essentially concerned with the unchanging ego of the fully matured human being [...] This original reality of a man's character, which in truth gives consistency to his life, should not, however, be separated from the shape life takes [...] We meet here with the essential connection of the ethical with the aesthetic that is expressed in the term *kalokagathon*. This [...] classical Greek conception of personality was at work not only in the formation of biography but also in other literary forms available for the description of individual life [...] (Misch 1950. 62–63.)

Although Misch clearly recognizes that this – Apollonian – concept of an ideal human being *was* an abstraction, separated from the way the individual human beings *became* necessarily imperfect embodiments of the ideal, the principle of his own work – following Dilthey and Burckhardt – originated in the late reflex of this same concept:

[...] some Renaissance writers mastered one of the crucial problems of biography – that of seeing at the same time [...] the broad conception of an individual, and [...] the characteristics of which it is built up. And it is in the field of autobiography that this achievement is found. [...] Indeed, in face of the formless flow of the narrative of later books of confessions, it must be said that the classical attitude, demanding from the autobiographer both form and style, has permanent validity. Was that not Goethe's own rule? [...] [The causes] are contained in the very general obedience to historic law which has determined the development of Western autobiography. [...] For autobiography there is laid down by the very nature of its subject matter a law of development [...] (Misch 1950. 64–65.)

[...] in ancient European literature autobiography [originated] through the individual's reflective awareness of his personality. [...] however late, it became the organ for the expression of individuality. If we are to build our history on firm foundation, it must proceed from the beginnings of consciousness of personality, which was a present from the Greeks to the European world. (Misch 1950. 69.)

So the firm law of autobiography is that it followed the development of the self-awareness of individual personality. But what happens, if or when this self-conscious personality disappears? In such a situation, the autobiography will either disappear itself or have its meaning profoundly transformed. The shared conviction of Dilthey and Misch was that precisely this happened after Goethe.

One of the reasons, however, why I have mentioned the split-mindedness of Misch can be summarised briefly without going into much details: in later volumes of his *History of Autobiography* he seems to have immersed in professional historical-philological research, and to some extent, this let him dissociate

himself from the preconceptions of Dilthey's and Burkhardt's. Today historians of ideas with much micro-philological precision specialised in the respective historical periods that Misch investigated appreciate unanimously his methods and works *as that of an outstanding historian*.

The other reason to mention the split-mindedness is philosophical. For more than one prominent representatives of philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century invested much effort into analyses of the philosophical, anthropological, artistic, and other implications of the disappearance of the self-conscious Goethe-type individual having basically the good as its purpose. One of them was Heidegger especially in *Being and Time*. And Misch was aware of both the importance and the shortcomings of Heidegger's work from the perspective of the original Dilthey-an philosophical motives. But he must have been aware of the shortcomings of the original Diltheyan philosophical perspective at least indirectly by way of his historical findings without being able to transform it in a way that would have issued in an elimination of the shortcomings of Heidegger's work replacing it with another synthesis of Husserl's and Dilthey's respective thought that would have done justice to both master thinkers.

The last issue to be tackled in this paper is a historical-methodological one that I would only mention briefly.

Our earlier quotations already insinuated the shared conviction of Dilthey and Misch that the series of autobiographies to be taken seriously from a philosophical-historical point of view came to an end with Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. They were obviously convinced that this is the greatest ever autobiography written by the greatest ever personality who fully obeyed the historic law of autobiography.

Misch was aware, however, of the fact that at least works that belonged to the formal genre of autobiographies were also written – and abundantly, for that matter – in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Facing this lively interest in this genre, how could he react if unable to follow either Heidegger's or Plessner's way? He believed that those writings, a side-shoot of the original genre that called for *philosophical* interpretations can only awaken some *sociological* interest. He must have been convinced that the authentic personality creates a narrative framework within which her innermost individuality confers meaning to the past, authenticates her presently felt values and projects her good purposes onto the future. This is the categorical structure of *her* unified consciously told narrative that unanimously supports her claim to authenticity in a deep historical and philosophical sense.

Contrary to this, the new type of human personality is characterised by having a number of sociologically defined roles to play, and she is, at best, only struggling for an identical narrative warranting her stable personal identity – far from even posing the question of authenticity.

As opposed to the Dilthey-Misch type of historians supported by their philosophies of life, today historians and literary scientists do not reckon with deeds

and events narrated in higher order autobiographies of unique individuals as the chief sources of historical knowledge. If they choose an at least quasi-substantial factor to have a mooring within the flux of historical life it is in no way the great personality as such whom they elect to render coherent and meaningful the aggregate of the disparate facts. It is either the working of impersonal structures or the appearance of the similarly impersonal events (*Ereignis* – what strikes the eye). They rely on micro-historical or contract-theoretical (Lejeune) reconstructions of the ways of life of people whose lives were basically determined by playing their appropriate roles without any authentic decisions from their innermost essence about meaningfulness, values, or purposes. Also the methodological use of *long durée* processes have come to the fore. As a consequence of these changes, the new forms that the main methodological problem in the historical sciences put on, and that were circumvented by renowned scholars in volume 5 of *Poetik und Hermeneutik* – (*Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*; cf. the studies in Koselleck 1973.) is as follows: what are the roles like that the classical (world-) historical individual can be attributed in the process of constructing history – *res enarratae* – as history of *salient events*. “Event” is meant here a particular event elevated from the flow of life and made almost a closed whole by a *personal* actor – this is the equivalent of the German word *Ereignis*. Or how did – if at all – “diachronic structures” develop from the socialising-socialised individuals or the global structures far below the scale of *personal* human lives; how can/must they be regarded as the main objects of a historical representation. Some historians distinguish two genre to be used when writing historical texts. They maintain that the former is connected to the genre of *narration* (*Erzählung*) whereas the latter is attached to that of *description* (*Beschreibung*). One of the leading scholars of that generation, historian Reinhard Koselleck considers them – structure and event, description and narration – not excluding but conditioning, completing each other, in a way that can, in fact, easily be transformed into a hermeneutic circle, and thus connected to the methodological efforts of Dilthey and Misch.

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