In his late speculation, which is commonly known as “life philosophy,” Wilhelm Dilthey shifted his interest from the middle phenomenological and descriptive analysis of the individual mind to the interpretation of the historical world in which we live and act. In this case, the historical world is the spiritual one formed by human beings historically and the one in which we innerly experience and act upon. In addition, this world is clearly distinguished from the mere nature that exists outside of our minds. According to Dilthey, the subject that forms history is always “the mind, which lives, acts, bears the power of forming, and reacts sensitively to all the influences” (VII, 254). In other words, the fact that the individual grasps, feels the world, and actively works on this world is the key to interpreting the historical world. Dilthey’s subject of analysis is the structure of the mind’s total ability to become a universal relational form to the world. Each individual in their process of growth gradually develops the mind’s ability of thinking, feeling, and willing, each of which forms the conceptual, self, and practical knowledge in the world. Dilthey referred to the individual mind’s total ability as the “psychic acquired nexus” (das erworbene Zusammenhang). This nexus develops purposively in each individual history of growth. However, it is also formed by the common historical context, for example, the social community as family, political or legal organization, culture, and age. These common realms in the historical world always surround and influence the individual beyond their own life and the history of the individual is brought up only under the background of communal or all of humankind’s history. Therefore, each individual’s psychic acquired nexus “demonstrates both general and more individual characteristics” (V, 225–26).

In his late argument of history, Dilthey focuses his attention much more on the productive nexus in the historical world, which operates beyond the individual. According to Mul, “Although this world is produced by human beings, in its complex nexus it stands opposite the individual as a nexus that precedes him and affects him continuously and deeplyly” (2004, 261). The social and cultural communities (or the political and economic organizations) are common spiritual realms that consist of the individual and, at the same time, form the purposive nexus independent of the individual mind’s purposive nexus. In this case, Dilthey believes that the productive nexus of the communal organization and the purposive nexus of the individual mind is continuous: “It is indeed in this psychic structure that the character of purposiveness is originally given and when we attribute this to an organism or to the world, this concept is only borrowed from the inner lived experience” (V, 210).

Furthermore, according to Dilthey, the individual action is, on one hand, dependent on the communal motivation, which is not necessarily awakened by the individual. Each individual, as one unity of life, possesses a complete closed psychic system. However, at the same time, such a system is open for interaction with the common broader unity of life in the historical world (VII, 154). The passion or feeling that induces individual action works on the historical world and influences the power of forming. However, each of these is also restricted within the individual inner side and the purpose can differ (VII, 257). The purpose of the individual act can function as the common purpose beyond the individual. Thus, Dilthey finds that the particularity of the productive nexus of the historical world (with regard to the purpose of the self) can become the common historical purpose.

Although the temporality and finiteness are isolated by Dilthey in his categorial analysis of life, Dilthey fails to connect these characteristics to the historicity of acting man. Action is supported by the common historical foundation of how to act and the individual mind’s psychic acquired nexus is utilized in each situation. In this case, the action includes the character of the peculiar event, which occurs only once in an individual’s history. Thus, the individual action appears to be regarded as the point of contact between the historicity of the individual and the history of the human past.

Each state of the historical world are formed and altered by their links with the movement of the individual’s mind. The world in which we have lived reveals itself each time in concrete individual actions. Therefore, the point of contact between an individual’s and humankind’s history can be found in finite actions that must remain focused on the future.

References:
Dilthey, W., Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften ; G. S. III Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958
…Die geistige Welt ; G.S. V. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957
Mul, J., The tragedy of finitude ; Yale University Press, 2004
Jung, M., Dilthey zur Einführung ; Junius Verlag, 1996
Johach, H., Handelnder Mensch und objective Geist ; Verlag Anton Haim, 1974