



# **Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology**

**New Expanded Edition**

**Hans Henrik Bruun**

SCIENCE, VALUES AND POLITICS IN  
MAX WEBER'S METHODOLOGY

# Rethinking Classical Sociology

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New Expanded Edition

HANS HENRIK BRUUN

*University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

ASHGATE

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# List of Abbreviations

## Max Weber's writings

### German titles

<i>MWG</i>	<i>Max Weber Gesamtausgabe</i> , Tübingen: Mohr
<i>GARS I/II</i>	<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I-II</i> (1920/21), Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck
<i>GASS</i>	<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik</i> (1988 (1924)), Tübingen: Mohr
<i>GAW</i>	<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre</i> (1968 (1922)), (3rd edition, ed. Johannes Winckelmann), Tübingen: Mohr
<i>GPS I</i>	<i>Gesammelte politische Schriften</i> (1921), (1st edition, ed. Marianne Weber), Tübingen: Mohr
<i>GPS</i>	<i>Gesammelte politische Schriften</i> (1971 (1921)), (3rd edition, ed. Johannes Winckelmann), Tübingen: Mohr
<i>JB</i>	<i>Jugendbriefe</i> (1936) (ed. Marianne Weber), Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck
<i>PE I</i>	<i>Die protestantische Ethik</i> (1965 (1920)), (ed. Johannes Winckelmann), München/Hamburg: Siebenstern
<i>PE II</i>	<i>Die protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken</i> (1968), (ed. Johannes Winckelmann), München/Hamburg: Siebenstern
<i>WG</i>	<i>Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie</i> (1976 (1921)), (5th edition, ed. Johannes Winckelmann), Tübingen: Mohr

### English titles (translations)

<i>BW</i>	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism</i> (2002), (eds, translation, introduction Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells), London/New York: Penguin Books
<i>ES</i>	<i>Economy and Society</i> (1968), (eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich), New York: Bedminster Press
<i>EssW</i>	<i>The Essential Weber. A Reader</i> (2004), (ed. Sam Whimster), London/New York: Routledge
<i>FMW</i>	<i>From Max Weber</i> (1948), (eds, translation, introduction H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills), London: Routledge

- LSPW* Weber. *Political Writings* (1994), (eds, introduction Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, translation Ronald Speirs), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- MSS* *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1959), (eds, translation Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch), New York: The Free Press
- ORK* *Roscher and Knies. The Logical Problems of Historical Economics* (1975), (translation, introduction Guy Oakes), New York: The Free Press
- OSt* *Critique of Stammler* (1977), (translation, introduction Guy Oakes), New York: The Free Press

### Articles

The abbreviations after the English titles are the “standard” translations to which the abbreviated references in the text refer (see Preface, pp. xviii-xix). The abbreviations after the German titles refer to the “standard” German editions and also, wherever applicable, to the volume of the *Gesamtausgabe* where the piece can be found.

### In *Äusserungen*

- Memorandum* “Memorandum”  
“Gutachten” (1913) (*Äusserungen*, pp. 147-86)

### In *GARS I*

- Protestant Ethic* “The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism” (*BW*, pp. 1-202)  
“Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus” (1904–05) (*GARS I*, pp. 17-206)
- Interm.Refl.* “Intermediate Reflection” (*FMW*, pp. 323-59)  
“Zwischenbetrachtung” (1916) (*GARS I*, pp. 536-73) (*MWG I/19*, pp. 479-522)

### In *GASS*

- Socialism* “Socialism” (*LSPW*, pp. 272-303)  
“Der Sozialismus” (1918) (*GASS*, pp. 492-518) (*MWG I/15*, pp. 599-633)

### In *GAW*

- Categories* “On Some Categories of Interpretative Sociology”  
“Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie” (1913) (*GAW*, pp. 427-74)

- Crit.Stud.* “Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences” (*MSS*, pp. 113-88)  
 “Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik” (1906) (*GAW*, pp. 215-90)
- Energ.Th.Cult.* “‘Energetic’ Theories of Culture”  
 “‘Energetische’ Kulturtheorien” (1909) (*GAW*, pp. 400-26)
- Marg.Util.* “The Theory of Marginal Utility and the ‘Fundamental Psycho-Physical Law’”  
 “Die Grenznutzlehre und das ‘psychophysische Grundgesetz’” (1908) (*GAW*, pp. 384-99)
- Objectivity* “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy” (*MSS*, pp. 49-112)  
 “Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis” (1904) (*GAW*, pp. 146-214)
- Roscher and Knies* “Roscher and Knies and the Logical Problems of Historical Economics” (*ORK*, pp. 53-281)  
 “Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie” (1903–06) (*GAW*, pp. 1-145)
- Roscher* “Roscher’s ‘Historical Method’” (*ORK*, pp. 55-91, 210-36)  
 “Roschers ‘historische Methode’” (1903) (*GAW*, pp. 3- 42)
- Knies I* “Knies and the Problem of Irrationality” (*ORK*, pp. 93-163, 236-62)  
 “Knies und das Irrationalitätsproblem” (1905) (*GAW*, pp. 42-105)
- Knies II* “Knies and the Problem of Irrationality II” (*ORK*, pp. 163-207, 262-81)  
 “Knies und das Irrationalitätsproblem II” (1906) (*GAW*, pp. 105-45)

(The three last articles are quoted together as *Roscher and Knies*, the two last ones as *Knies I-II*)

- Sc.Voc.* "Science as a Vocation" (*FMW*, pp. 129-56)  
 "Wissenschaft als Beruf" (1919) (*GAW*, pp. 582-613) (*MWG I/17*, pp. 71-111)
- Stammler* "R. Stammler's 'Refutation' of the Materialist Conception of History" (*OSt*, pp. 59-143, 174-79)  
 "R. Stammlers 'Überwindung' der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung" (1907) (*GAW*, pp. 291-359)
- Stammler Postscript* "Postscript to R. Stammler's 'Refutation' of the Materialist Conception of History" (*OSt*, pp. 145-74, 179-82)  
 "Nachtrag zu dem Aufsatz über R. Stammlers 'Überwindung' der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung" (1922) (*GAW*, pp. 360-83)
- Types Leg.Rule* "The Three Pure Types of Legitimate Rule" (*EssW*, pp. 133-45)  
 "Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft" (1922) (*GAW*, pp. 475-88)
- Value Freedom* "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics" (*MSS*, pp. 1-47)  
 "Der Sinn der 'Wertfreiheit' der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften" (1917) (*GAW*, pp. 489-540)
- In GPS*
- Const.Dem.Russia* "On the Situation of Constitutional Democracy in Russia" (*LSPW*, pp. 29-74)  
 "Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Russland" (1906) (*GPS*, pp. 33-68) (*MWG I/10*, pp. 86-279)
- Inaugural Lecture* "The Nation State and Economic Policy" (*LSPW*, pp. 1-28)  
 "Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik" (1895) (*GPS*, pp. 1-25) (*MWG I/4 (2)*, pp. 543-74)
- Parl.Gov.* "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order" (*LSPW*, pp. 130-271)

- “Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland” (1918) (*GPS*, pp. 306-443) (*MWG I/15*, pp. 432-596)
- Pol.Voc.* “The Profession and Vocation of Politics” (*LSPW*, pp. 309-69)  
 “Politik als Beruf” (1919) (*GPS*, pp. 505-60) (*MWG I/17*, pp. 157-252)
- Pres.Reich* “The President of the Reich” (*LSPW*, pp. 304-308)  
 “Der Reichspräsident” (1919) (*GPS*, pp. 498-501) (*MWG I/16*, pp. 220-24)
- Pseudo-Const.* “Russia’s Transition to Pseudo-Constitutionalism” “Russlands Übergang zum Scheinkonstitutionalismus” (1906) (*GPS*, pp. 69-111) (*MWG I/10*, pp. 293-679)
- Suffr.Dem.Germ.* “Suffrage and Democracy in Germany” (*LSPW*, pp. 80-129)  
 “Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland” (1917) (*GPS*, pp. 245-91) (*MWG I/15*, pp. 347-96)
- Two Laws* “Between Two Laws” (*LSPW*, pp. 75-79)  
 “Zwischen zwei Gesetzen” (1916) (*GPS*, pp. 142-45) (*MWG I/15*, pp. 95-98)
- Letters – published*
- MWG II/5-II/8* Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, Letters 1906–14
- Letters – archival references*
- BA Bundesarchiv (Koblenz)  
 BSB Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich)  
 GstA I Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Hauptabteilung I (Berlin)

In cases where letters have been copied from transcripts in the Max Weber Centre in Düsseldorf, the reference to the original is followed by the mention (Düss).

**Other abbreviations**

<i>Archives</i>	<i>Archives of Social Science and Social Policy</i> <i>Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik</i>
<i>Äusserungen</i>	<i>Äusserungen zur Werturteilsdiskussion im Ausschuss des Vereins für Sozialpolitik</i> (1913). Printed for private circulation. Reprinted in and quoted from Nau (ed.) (1996), pp. 147-86.
<i>Association</i>	<i>Association for Social Policy</i> <i>Verein für Sozialpolitik</i>
<i>Limits</i>	Rickert, Heinrich (1902), <i>Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung</i> , Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck (5th edition partly translated as Rickert, Heinrich (1986 (1929)), <i>The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science</i> (translation Guy Oakes), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
<i>Society</i>	<i>German Sociological Society</i> <i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie</i>

# Series Editor's Preface

It is with the third volume of our series, *Rethinking Classical Sociology*, that we come to the third of the so-called “trinity of founders”, Max Weber; and one would want to add, “last but by no means least”. There was a time when one would have said trinity of founding *fathers*, and I am pleased to be able to record with this change from exclusive to inclusive language just one index of the intellectual sea-change which has also impacted positively on the study of classical sociology and provides but one context for our endeavours to rethink the tradition. I will return to this point anon.

Our first volume treated Karl Marx with William Booth, while our second engaged with Durkheim. While there is a degree of contestation with regard to what does or should constitute the classical canon, the names of Marx, Weber and Durkheim have remained central to the pantheon and are unlikely to lose their position. Because of this, it is important to continue to subject their work and context to critical analysis. The three names are rehearsed so often in undergraduate and postgraduate classes, in textbooks and scholarly works, that is quite a sobering experience to remind sociologists that this construction is a result of a long process of development. A student beginning sociology in the 1930s would not have recognized such an organization of the discipline. This history itself is worthy of sustained analysis and in many quarters is well underway.

Classical sociology today is once again being rethought, and this rethinking includes debate about “canonical” matters: who else to include alongside Marx, Weber and Durkheim? Contributions to the analysis of modernity from a woman’s or black scholar’s perspective, which were once overlooked, have more recently been argued as deserving of a more central place in the history of the discipline, and in some traditions, notably in the United States, the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and William Dubois are no longer contested at all. Indeed, the search is now on for many other names and works. For sure, part of the motivation for such endeavour is commercial, but there are many other factors that contribute to the drive to rethink classical sociology.

In a similar, but perhaps less pronounced form, the canon is contested in so far as the very works of the classical trinity themselves to be considered as central or key to their sociological projects have been extended beyond one or two texts that have previously been seen as sufficient to grasp the sociological importance of the theorist. With regard to Max Weber, for example, no longer is attention restricted to, say, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* or to the so-called Hauptwerk, *Economy and Society*. Rather, these texts themselves have been questioned as providing the key to unlocking Weber’s project, given their textual history and unfinished nature at the same time as other examples of Weber’s writings are championed often depending

on where the central theme or question (presuming that one might be said to exist!) is taken to be. Scholars therefore have drawn attention to Weber's early writings, or the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* series, to the speeches *Science and Politics as a Vocation*, and even to the posthumous *General Economic History*.

This brings me to the subject of this third volume in our series: Weber's methodological writings. These writings, perhaps in a manner essentially different to what I have described above for other of Weber's texts, have never lost their fascination for interpreters and have remained a body of work with which every serious Weber scholar must engage. Not that the methodological writings, as Bruun points out, can necessarily provide the central theme or question to Weber's project: that chimera is being chased by many current practitioners and makes for one of the main differences between older and newer Weber research. It is probably true to say that there has not been a decade that has not made a contribution to our understanding of Weber's so-called methodological writings. Indeed, the present work is rightly respectful to the earlier contributions of, for example, a von Schelting in the 1930s or a Henrich in the 1950s. The trend continues in more recent times, with the contributions of Wolfgang Schluchter and Thomas Burger, Guy Oakes, Stephen Turner and Sven Eliaeson, as well as Gerhard Wagner: all of whose work is engaged with by Bruun. Yet when I look at the books on my shelves or recall my own postgraduate education at the University of Oxford in the mid 1980s, a series of important books on Weber's sociology in general and his methodology in particular, studied in courses on the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, led by a Steven Lukes or an Alan Ryan, were penned in the first half of the 1970s. One does not encounter the title, "Philosophy of Social Sciences", very often today, at least in UK curricula, whilst, on the other hand, there is a plethora of trusty and practical handbooks on sociological research on the market. I have a sense, that is to say, that there was something essentially and qualitatively different about the nature of Weber studies thirty years ago. From one perspective this is why Hans Henrik Bruun's new edition of his 1972 work, which I would not hesitate to call a modern classic of Weber interpretation in its own right, is so fascinating, since it manages to transmit that era of superb engagement with Weber at the same time as being alive to what has transpired in the meantime. To take just one example of that change I would mention the importance now given to translation and exegesis in Weber studies and the attention given to the editorial and bibliographic history of Weber's texts. In this new edition of Bruun's work, both the German texts (or references) and the English translation (from Bruun himself) are included. But note the difference between the editions. In the former edition of 1972 only the German was provided. Paradoxically the change in the quotation from Weber's writing serves to, first, elevate the importance of language rather than diminish it, and second, to illustrate how readers of Weber commentary now appreciate the need to understand the language, but that that appreciation is not limited to some elite set of sociologists who have the advantage of being able to read German. Rethinking Weber today requires close engagement with what he wrote and how to faithfully render that thought in terms comprehensible to a contemporary readership.

Underlying my comments above, and one of the ideas that underpins our series, is the understanding that each generation feels compelled to re-examine its sociological heritage, and this involves rethinking the classical theorists and texts that the discipline, as it is encountered on entry to the discipline and profession, places before the scholar as somehow important but as no longer requiring serious attention. As to whether the tradition is correct in its assessments of the classics can only be settled by individual scholars immersing themselves in the works concerned. The motivation to rethink the classics, however, runs deeper than this process of socialization. Rather, it stems from the fact that new social developments and social processes, together with new theoretical ideas and approaches, coupled with growing concerns about whole new sets of cultural issues, personal transformations and social problems all serve to render unsatisfactory clichéd and second-hand knowledge about the sociological classics.

It is for all of these reasons above, and for many other reasons that I do not have space to articulate, that I am especially pleased to be writing a Preface to Hans Henrik Bruun's important work. That is to say: here we are in the hands of a master thinker about Weber's methodology whose work has "survived" the vagaries of time and scholarly fashions. Weber's methodological ideas are of uppermost importance, as Bruun convinces us once again in his elegant prose and rigorous attention to detail. He makes accessible even the most complex of Weber's ideas in the context of the philosophical discussions of his own time and via a close attention to the not uncomplex trajectory and development of Weber's writing and its (at times) tortuous expression. Weber's methodological writings are of great importance not only for our attempts to understand Weber himself and the work he produced, but because the questions he raised need to be critically reflected on by social scientists and historians of all persuasions. More than this, Bruun is in the somewhat fortunate and remarkable position of being able to reflect back on a work produced more than thirty years ago, and in the process retain the central exegesis of the original book and reflect on many of the changing perspectives and scholarly opinions that have characterized Weber studies during that time. In other words, the necessary process of rethinking the classics has not been left solely for a rising generation of Weber scholars, but has been undertaken by a senior Weber scholar who has never stopped "revisiting Weber" throughout the course of a long and successful career in the Danish diplomatic service.

Professor David Chalcraft  
Cumbria, June 2006

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# Preface

The publication of a new edition of this book, which first came out more than thirty years ago, presented me with a dilemma. On the one hand, what was called for was not a new work on the subject. While books on Max Weber's methodology were still relatively scarce in 1972, there is certainly no lack of them today; and it would be presumptuous to think that I could now find a completely new and interesting approach to the subject. On the other hand, I did not want to let the book enter the academic arena of 2007 so to speak naked, in its original and unchanged form.

As a result of these considerations, the book has been provided with a long, new Introduction. The structure and substance of the original text have essentially been retained, but it has been thoroughly revised and updated in a number of respects:

Some of the general discussions – on the systematic character of Weber's writings, and on their status as “philosophy” or “science” – have been considerably expanded, and moved to the new Introduction. The Appendices to each of the five main chapters, containing detailed discussions that did not easily fit into the main text, have been removed, and the substance, where appropriate, worked into the main text or the Introduction.

A number of references to secondary works that seemed relevant in 1972, but must now be considered dated, have been removed. References have also, as a general rule, been removed in cases where the secondary literature referred to did not in itself add to the argument but only showed support for it. On the other hand, references to relevant post-1972 secondary literature have been inserted, and the text reworked on this basis, wherever appropriate. The discussion of a number of important points will, however, be found in the Introduction, so that only its results are reflected in the body of the text. The original numerical system of structuring has been replaced by ordinary headings. Finally, the whole text has been subjected to a thorough linguistic revision.

In short: while no page has been left unchanged, the reader will find that the main text is still in essence more or less the same.

The Introduction, after some preliminary considerations, including the ones mentioned above, consists of five sections, corresponding to the five main chapters of the book. In each of these sections, I try to discuss some of the points that have been of particular interest to post-1972 commentators, and to situate my own views within that discussion. Thus, while the Introduction does not pretend to be a rounded contribution by itself, the reader will, I hope, find it possible to follow its arguments without constant reference to the main text. The arguments in the Introduction will tend to be critical, for the simple reason that it has seemed to me more fruitful to discuss the views of those who disagree with my interpretations, rather than to record

with silent satisfaction the opinions of those who have been kind enough to agree with them.

In a publication of this type, cross-references are particularly necessary and useful. I have throughout used the abbreviated designations *I07* for the new Introduction and *B07* for the main text in its present form. References to the main text in its *old* form are given with the abbreviation *B72*. A list of other abbreviations used, with their references in full, is found in the section on Abbreviations.

### **A note on the translation**

In 1972, my youthful purism led me to keep the numerous foreign language quotations, above all from Weber himself, in the original. Since part of the *raison d'être* of the book was precisely that it based itself on the original texts, I felt that quoting them in English translation would only confuse the reader. I have now come round to the view that communicability must take priority over linguistic rigour, and all quotations are therefore now in English. However, I have not always been impressed by the "standard" English translations of Weber, and although I have obviously let myself be inspired by those already in existence, I have everywhere done my own translations, for which I of course take full responsibility.

This has not been an easy task. Weber's thought, at least in the field of methodology, is far from clear. His arguments do not progress in straight lines and logical chains, but on the contrary derive much of their effect from being rich in ramifications, modifications, exemplifications and digressions. The density of Weber's intellectual texture is reflected in his language, which is full of long, involved and carefully crafted sentences; he exploits to the full the diabolical possibilities afforded by German grammar. These intricate linguistic constructions pose an almost insuperable problem for the translator: If they are rendered accurately, they are apt to grow obscure; and if the translator opts for clarity, he runs the risk of destroying the intricate balance of Weber's thought. To this must be added the further difficulty that the meaning of many of Weber's concepts "shimmers" and is difficult to grasp accurately. Consequently, the translation almost automatically becomes a debatable interpretation. I have tried to strike a balance between these different considerations. In case of doubt, I have opted for faithfulness towards the original, including the plethora of small words like "aber", "doch" and "etwa", which may seem superfluous but often in fact allow a precise equilibration of the sentence. I have also faithfully preserved Weber's numerous underlinings (rendered here as italicizations) and quotation marks. (The importance of the latter should not be underestimated; as for the underlinings, the reader should realize that they are not systematical, but rhetorical; indeed, Weber is often easier to understand when read aloud, with proper emphasis on the underlined words.)

In order to retain a firm link with the original Weber texts while at the same time giving a maximum of help to the English-speaking reader, I have wherever possible given references, not only to the German original but also, to help the reader "situate"

the quotation, to the “standard” English translation (even though the latter will often diverge from my own version). In cases where the German original text has not been published (as is the case with a number of Weber’s letters and manuscript notes), the German text is printed in full in a footnote. Whenever it has seemed useful, I have added the German version of a term, in brackets, to the term in English translation. For practical reasons, the traditional German “ß” sign has everywhere been rendered by “ss”.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to all those whom I mentioned in my 1972 Preface are undiminished. But to those names, I must now gratefully add many others.

The Department of Sociology of the University of Copenhagen, which gave me deep pleasure by bestowing on me in 2003 the status of an Honorary Professor, has graciously extended the full range of its facilities to me and has become the centre of my new professional life, after thirty years spent in the field of diplomacy. I am grateful for the friendly encouragement of Margareta Bertilsson, Peter Abrahamson, Heine Andersen, and Peter Gundelach, as well as many other colleagues too numerous to mention here.

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H.H.B.  
Copenhagen, March 2006

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*To Nanna*

*Wenn Gott in seiner Rechten alle Wahrheit und in seiner Linken den einzigen immer regen Trieb nach Wahrheit, obschon mit dem Zusatze, mich immer und ewig zu irren, verschlossen hielte und spräche zu mir: wähle! Ich fiel ihm mit Demut in seine Linke und sagte: Vater gib! die reine Wahrheit ist ja doch nur für dich allein!*

If God held in his right hand all truth, and in his left hand the single persistent striving for truth, albeit with the corollary that I would always and forever remain in error; and if he said to me: choose! I would humbly grasp his left hand and say: Father, give! pure truth is indeed only for thee alone!

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Eine Duplik* (1778)

# Introduction

## Preliminary considerations

Books about Max Weber tend to come in two main varieties: “rich” or “lean”. No stringent definition of these two categories is intended, or indeed possible. Roughly speaking, the “rich” books are strong on cultural significance, broad intellectual contexts and existential implications, while the “lean” ones restrict themselves to following through a stringent argument or pattern of analysis; for prominent specimens of the “rich” variety, I would point to the works of Hennis (1988, 2000), Scaff (1989) or Eliaeson (2002), while Schelting (1934), Burger (1987 (1976)) or Merz (1990) are good examples of the “lean” one.

*Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber’s Methodology* is, and obstinately remains, a “lean” book. When it first appeared in 1972, I tried to explain how and why this was so. Parts of that explanation, I feel, are still relevant.

The horizon of the book is restricted. It does not aim at presenting a *development* of Weber’s thought, but is meant as an analytical *exposition*. Of course, the choice of subject and of approach is in itself an indication of the selective interest of the scholar, and therefore introduces an inevitable element of subjectivity. But I have tried not to go beyond this: there is no defence of Weber’s views, nor any extensive discussion of whether they should be seen as correct. And if the views of other commentators are occasionally criticized, that criticism is only intended as a correction or modification of interpretations which seem difficult to uphold when confronted with Weber’s own text.

This limitation of scope is deliberate. Today, Weber’s thought has been commented on, developed, modified and attacked so often, and in so many different ways, that Weber himself occasionally seems to vanish behind a mountain of references and commentaries. If this view was true in 1972, it is painfully obvious in 2006, where a recent Weber bibliography (English-language only!) (Sica 2004b) runs to more than 5000 items. It may therefore be appropriate to concentrate, as is done in the present book, on the original sources by themselves. In that way, one can at least try to make clear what Weber actually said, and perhaps what he actually meant.

*Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber’s Methodology* (1972) was not a book with one major thesis, but instead contained a fairly large number of more or less detailed interpretative conclusions. Nevertheless, I think that certain major themes that could already be discerned in *B72* have gained greater prominence in the discussions contained in this Introduction. Let me try to summarize some of them.

During the “methodological” phase of his production (1903–1909), Max Weber showed no particular systematical inclinations. For his own, often polemical purposes, he made extensive, but pragmatic use of conceptual elements elaborated

by other thinkers. There was something of the jackdaw in this propensity (though to say, as does one commentator,<sup>1</sup> that his writings “sometimes bordered on plagiarism” is, I think, too strong); but while the jackdaw steals whatever glitters, Weber has the special gift of giving completely new sparkle to the elements which he borrows (partly by giving them names that positively invite misunderstanding, so that their true meaning has to be wrested from them in a struggle not only with ideas but with language itself) “value freedom”, “objectivity” and “ideal type” being three outstanding examples (*B07*, pp. 42n1, 162n259, 214).

Quite often, the added value that Weber confers on these borrowed concepts and ideas is connected with a blurring of distinctions or a conflation of categories, as defined by the original authors. To cite one instance among many: much of the interest in Weber’s discussion of value relation seems to derive from his willingness to see the role of active valuations as something more than an undesirable element, to be kept definitionally apart from science.

To put the point more generally: The interest that Weber’s methodological writings has for us owes less to their (partial) conformity with the systems of others, or even to their inherent logical consistency, and more – much more – to the richly suggestive and imaginative way in which he proceeds, even when it involves making quantum leaps across logical gulfs.

One particularly interesting example of this tendency is the development of Weber’s thoughts on objectivity, from Rickert’s elaborate neo-Kantian system, by way of the ideal type and von Kries’ “objective possibility”, to the “inherent logics” of the value spheres, including that of truth, and the “tensions” between them. This development is not neat; it is certainly not carefully argued; it leaves Weber in a position which is probably no more logically defensible than the one he starts out from;<sup>2</sup> but in my view, it is definitely present,<sup>3</sup> and it has given enormous impetus to reflections on society and modernity.

The lack of systematical coherence in Weber’s methodology with its antithetical elements, dichotomies and logical inconsistencies should not be seen as an indication of intellectual indolence on Weber’s part. He remains “uncomfortable” – a key word in his vocabulary – and painfully aware of the irreducibility of these tensions. He has to live with them, and to be as clear about them as possible. Indeed, they can be seen as a major reason for the continued attractiveness of his thought.

*Is it justified to treat Weber’s methodology as a systematic whole?*

Max Weber’s production is unusually fragmented. Broadly speaking, he did not publish a single, whole-scale book between 1896 and 1920. He was certainly

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1 Eliaeson 2002, p. 3.

2 Cf. Oakes (2001, 2003).

3 Cf. Wagner 1987, p. 159: “Later, above all in his impressive speech ‘Science as a Vocation’, Weber defends a position which is ... completely divergent from Rickert’s premises”. Similarly Treiber (1997, pp. 431–32).

productive – the massive tomes of the as yet unfinished *Gesamtausgabe* testify to this – but the printed results of his work appeared as a hailstorm of articles, brochures, reviews, letters to newspapers, or interventions in debates.

Against this background, one cannot wonder that the question of the unity of Weber's work has exercised generations of scholars. The substance of his oeuvre, viewed as a whole, is so diversified that a total systematization seems to be out of the question. In spite (or perhaps even because) of this, a number of writers (prominent among them Hennis (1988), Weiss (1992), and Tenbruck (in his later writings)) have assiduously looked for the "central question" governing Weber's investigations. Others take a dim view of such endeavours; they ask, with Schluchter,<sup>4</sup> "why ... the works of a scholar actually have to be comprehensible as a unified whole, and why, moreover, in terms of one central question?" and maintain a more or less "fragmenting" view of Weber's work. Käsler goes far in this direction and almost provocatively characterizes Weber's oeuvre as "an infinite multitude of axioms, premises, suppositions, theses, hypotheses and a few theorems", a "quarry" which can be "exploited, conserved, admired and inspected in the most diverse ways".<sup>5</sup>

As Scaff<sup>6</sup> has noted, many of the "systematizers" maintain that the key to Weber's work as a whole is to be found in his methodology; and one often encounters the view that Weber's methodology in particular must, or at least can, be seen as a systematic unity. This view is often met in the early literature on Weber's methodology, with Dieter Henrich (1952) as its perhaps most radical proponent, and a number of later methodological Weber studies (e.g. Nusser (1986), Burger (1987 (1976)), Merz (1990) and Ringer (1997)) also build on systematizing assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Others, however (among them Tenbruck (1999 (1959)), Käsler (1979), Oakes (1982, 1988a), Rossi (1987), Wagner and Zipprian (1987, 1994) and Jacobsen (1999)), point to the eclectic character of Weber's methodological essays and directly or indirectly reject the notion that they constitute a systematic whole.

The final answer to the question obviously depends on the detailed analysis of the methodological texts. But the point has to be addressed already at the outset, since it has an important influence on the way in which the analysis is carried out. If we are convinced in advance that *GAW* contains a complete methodological system, our interpretation of Weber's text must be adapted to that systematic framework.

In order to avoid getting into a logical circle, this preliminary investigation should be based not on the substantive content of Weber's methodology, but on other evidence. A number of formal points are relevant in this respect; but especial weight must obviously be attached to Weber's own statements concerning his methodological ambitions and the importance of methodology in general. (In principle, of course,

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4 Schluchter 1989, p. 413n10.

5 Käsler 1979, pp. 228-29.

6 Scaff 1994, pp. 692-93.

7 The arguments with which these writers support their "systematizing" approach are often interwoven with the question of the philosophical basis of Weber's methodology. This question will be dealt with separately below (pp. 7-11).

a systematic approach may rest on presuppositions that are external to Weber's intentions and positions as they emerge from his texts,<sup>8</sup> but such presuppositions – which come in many varieties – go beyond the scope of this analysis.)

Weber's introductory remarks to *Objectivity*, the most important of his methodological essays, directly addresses the question:

We have made no attempt to present a *systematic* analysis instead of [this] review of a number of methodological viewpoints ... Our aim is not to conduct an exercise in logic, but rather to make use of results of modern logic that are already well-known; what we want is to demonstrate to the layman the significance of certain problems, not to solve them.<sup>9</sup>

This almost seems to settle the point. In his own words, Weber has “made no attempt to present a systematic analysis”. It might be objected that the passage, as it stands, only refers to *Objectivity*. But it is backed up and amplified by other important findings.

First, the passage quoted also clearly indicates that Weber does not see himself as an original thinker in the field of methodology. *GAW* is peppered with similar statements to the effect that he simply wishes to apply the general results reached by “professional” philosophers to the more concrete problems of the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Weber makes it clear that he sees methodology as having a purely ancillary function. Methodological deliberations, he says in an early essay (*Crit.Stud.*), are only fruitful for a scientific discipline when it finds itself in a state of uncertainty about its own “essence”. Otherwise, they offer no practical help to science – in fact, they may even be an impediment, just as a healthy person who sets himself the goal of walking in an anatomically correct manner may get his legs into a tangle.<sup>11</sup> Weber retains this severely “instrumental” view of methodology until the very end of his life.<sup>12</sup> Against this background, we should not expect to find large coherent

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8 Henrich (1952, p. 2), for his part, openly admits this when he says that *GAW* “manifests a theoretical unity whose consistency is all the more astonishing because it is not immediately obvious and perhaps was not even evident to Max Weber himself”. Similarly Burger (1987 (1976), pp. xv-xvii), who implicitly denies that Weber has any systematic methodological intentions, but nevertheless explicitly claims that Weber's “hodge-podge” arguments “are components of a very comprehensive epistemological and methodological theory”.

9 *MSS*, pp. 49-50/*GAW*, p. 146n1. The pronoun “we” is due to the fact that Weber in the first part of the essay speaks on behalf of all the three new editors of the *Archiv*.

10 *ORK*, pp. 53n1, 58n9; *MSS*, pp. 113, 186n42; *OSt*, pp. 60-61/*GAW*, pp. 1n1, 7n1, 215, 288n1, 292. See also a letter from Weber to his wife, 2 January 1903 (BSB, Ana 446), where he describes his work on the *Roscher* article as a “... wretched patchwork [made up] ... almost exclusively of other people's ideas” (... elende Stöpsel, die doch fast nur mit fremden Gedanken arbeitet ...”).

11 *MSS*, p. 116/*GAW*, pp. 217-18; Weber 1909, p. 618.

12 See his introductory note, 19 January 1920, to a university lecture on sociological categories: “...Method is the most sterile thing that exists ... Method *alone* creates nothing” (GSStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, quoted in Hennis 1988, p. 239n46).

discussions of methodological points in the essays collected in *GAW*, nor is it very likely that we shall come across wholehearted attempts on Weber's part to coordinate these essays to a systematic whole.<sup>13</sup>

The title of the collection of Weber's methodological essays, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* ("Collected essays on the theory of science") has been seen as relevant to the question of "systematization". The concept of "Wissenschaftslehre" (theory of science) has philosophical antecedents, going back to Fichte, and in the work of the philosopher Heinrich Rickert, who was close to Weber, it still carries strong overtones of a systematic philosophy of science.<sup>14</sup> However, the title was not formulated by Weber himself, but by his widow Marianne, who edited the collection after her husband's death; and her formulation was probably inspired by Rickert, rather than by Weber.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the expression "Wissenschaftslehre" never occurs in works by Weber published during his lifetime.<sup>16</sup> When commentators speak of Weber's "Wissenschaftslehre", the term should therefore not be taken at its face value; instead, it is often an indication of the author's own systematizing intentions.<sup>17</sup>

A number of more formal arguments should also be taken into consideration:

Weber's methodological essays were almost invariably produced for special occasions, and often take the form of critical, or even downright polemical, comments. Weber wrote *Objectivity* as a programmatic article when he, Werner Sombart and Edgar Jaffé took over as editors of the *Archives*. *Roscher* and *Knies I-II* were begun in response to an invitation to contribute to a memorial volume in honour of Heidelberg University.<sup>18</sup> *Value Freedom* is a re-worked version of a memorandum that Weber wrote for a debate within the *Association*. *Sc. Voc* and *Pol. Voc.* are based on shorthand notes of two lectures delivered by Weber to a student society in Munich. As for *Crit.Stud.*, *Stammler* (with the *Postscript*), *Marg.Util.* and *Engg.Th.Cult.*, they are all critical discussions of the works of other thinkers.

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13 Indeed, one may ask why he spends so much time, particularly in the years immediately following his nervous breakdown, writing on methodological questions. In his recent, wide-ranging biography, Joachim Radkau tries to find existential answers to this question (Radkau 2005, pp. 399-441). But however convincing such answers might be, they are not relevant to our inquiry.

14 Rickert seems to make these philosophical connotations clear when he states (1902, pp. 15, 22) that his construction of a "logic" in the form of a "Wissenschaftslehre" is meant to contribute to a "Weltanschauung", to a "complete conception of the world and of life".

15 Cf. Tenbruck 1999 (1959), p. 573. Marianne Weber prepared her dissertation on Fichte under Rickert's guidance.

16 Strictly speaking, it does appear, once (*ORK*, p. 170n71/*GAW*, p. 111n1), but in the form of a quotation of the title of a book by another author.

17 The use by Schelting (1934) and Henrich (1952) of the term in the titles of their respective works is clearly grammatical; in a similar, more recent case (Wagner and Zippryan 1994), however, the term is used as a neutral reference.

18 Marianne Weber 1975, p. 306/Marianne Weber 1926, p. 319. The essays were not finished in time and were instead published in *Schmollers Jahrbücher*.

Moreover, the greater part of the methodological essays collected in *GAW* were left unfinished in the sense that Weber, at the end of each of them, holds out the prospect of an additional essay, which he never completed, let alone published.<sup>19</sup>

Against the cumulative weight of this evidence, we admittedly have to place the fact that the *GAW* essays contain numerous cross-references, not only to discussions of central concepts like "ideal type" (*Idealtypus*)<sup>20</sup> or "value relation" (*Wertbeziehung*),<sup>21</sup> but also on a number of subsidiary points, which have apparently in Weber's view been sufficiently discussed in an earlier work.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that there are not sufficient grounds for maintaining that Weber, in writing the methodological articles reprinted in *GAW*, aimed at constructing and presenting a systematic methodology. This implies that it is not *necessary* to organize the present account in conformity with some systematic framework provided by *GAW*; if one comes across apparent inconsistencies in Weber's thought, or missing links in the chain of his argument, they should be openly addressed as such, and not simply be glossed over or explained away in order to make them conform to such a hypothetical framework of interpretation.<sup>23</sup> This negative conclusion also has positive consequences, however: it enables us to regard a possible "unevenness" or intellectual jump in Weber's thought as a fruitful problem which does not necessarily detract from his greatness as a thinker. Indeed, one may well argue that the attractiveness of Weber's ideas to a considerable extent resides in the inconsistencies and unresolved tensions which they contain.<sup>24</sup>

The position that systematization is not a *necessary* approach should not, of course, be read as an *interdict* from adopting a systematic interpretation of Weber's methodology, still less from a systematic *method of presentation*, cutting across the lines of argument of the separate essays, as long as the different substantive or formal peculiarities of Weber's formulations are duly noted and discussed.

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19 In a note to *Knies II*, Weber expresses the hope that he will later on find time to deal at greater length with some of the problems discussed in *Objectivity*. Cf. *ORK*, p. 191n95/*GAW*, p. 131n1.

20 For instance *ORK*, p. 191n95; *OSt*, p. 107n11/*GAW*, pp. 131n1, 330n1.

21 For instance *ORK*, p. 181n86; *MSS*, p. 22/*GAW*, pp. 122n1, 512.

22 When Henrich (1952, p. 6) takes these cross-references as sufficient proof of his thesis that Weber never even envisaged a revision of his methodological opinions, he seems to me to invest purely formal arguments with more weight than they can carry by themselves.

23 Similarly Wagner and Zipprian 1994, p. 25. Merz (1990, p. 26n25), who critically comments on the argument in *B72* on this point, would, I believe, have no quarrel with my position as now stated. Burger, however, from his radically "systematizing" standpoint, would probably still feel that it "[detracted] from the merits" of my book (1987 (1976), p.181n1).

24 For similar conclusions, see Oakes 1982, p. 593n1, Dux 1994, pp. 667-68 and Jacobsen 1999, p. 103.

*Weber's methodology: philosophy, science, or both?*

Above, we found that when Weber refers to his methodological work, he never uses the term “Wissenschaftslehre”, with its philosophical connotations. But we need not content ourselves with this negative conclusion, since passages from Weber’s letters clearly indicate his own terminological preferences. In 1917 and 1919, he suggests to his publisher, Siebeck, that it might be a good idea to publish what he calls his “essays on the methodology (Methodologie) of the social sciences” (1917) or “logical-methodological (methodologisch-logische) essays” (1919).<sup>25</sup> In fact, Weber uses these same terms from the beginning of his “methodological” phase after the turn of the century and until the end of his life.<sup>26</sup>

But what exactly does he mean by “logic” and “methodology”? What do these terms, as he employs them, include and exclude? In order to attempt an answer to this question, we may find it useful to conduct a brief foray into some basic tenets of neo-Kantian philosophy, in order to use them as benchmarks for the subsequent discussion.<sup>27</sup>

Neo-Kantianism shared with other philosophical tendencies in Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century the ambition to rehabilitate philosophy as a science by allotting to it a new domain, independent of the specialized scientific disciplines. For the neo-Kantians, this domain was the theory of knowledge, epistemology (Erkenntnistheorie). The two main members of the “Southwestern” school of neo-Kantianism, Wilhelm Windelband and his pupil Heinrich Rickert, both saw the question of the transcendental conditions of knowledge as primordial in this respect, and approached it from a value-philosophical standpoint. From this point of view, truth as a (theoretical) value was the transcendental foundation of all knowledge, both pre-scientific (everyday) and scientific.

Since “logic” was traditionally understood to denote the philosophical study of the True (just as ethics was the study of the Good, and aesthetics the study of the Beautiful), it was only natural for the neo-Kantians to apply the term “logic” to the theory of knowledge as they conceived it. “Logic” in this sense could be subdivided into formal logic, methodology and epistemology.<sup>28</sup> Epistemology dealt with the constitution, by means of categories, of knowledge in general, while methodology dealt with the constitution, by means of concepts, of scientific

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25 VA Mohr/Siebeck, BSB, Ana 446, 24 May 1917 and 8 November 1919 (Düss). Against this background, it must be said that Tenbruck (1989) ventures into the realm of almost counterfactual speculation when he claims that the term “Wissenschaftslehre” in the title of *GAW* precisely reflected Weber’s own wishes (cf. Wagner and Zipprian (1994), pp. 21-22).

26 See, for instance, the title of *Roscher and Knies and the Logical Problems of Historical Economics* (1903) and *FMW*, p. 143/*GAW*, pp. 598-99 (“the rules of logic and method” (Logik und Methodik)) (1919).

27 The following account is mainly based on Schnädelbach 1984, pp. 180-85.

28 See, for instance, Windelband 1907, p. 200.

knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Windelband and (the early) Rickert grounded the *objectivity* of such knowledge in an evaluating “consciousness in general” or “normative consciousness” (Normalbewusstsein) which constituted “absolute values”, to which the values guiding the constitution of the scientific concepts, above all the value of truth, were necessarily and by definition related. In his later work, Rickert instead postulated the existence of “trans-subjective values”, which can be said to belong to the realm of metaphysics, but to which the same function was allotted.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, we have a number of disciplines which we can place on an ascending scale of generality, with formal logic at the bottom, followed by methodology, epistemology and metaphysics. They all form part of the same system, since the values on which the “lower” disciplines are based are related to the values at the “higher” level.<sup>31</sup> And since this relationship is seen as a logically necessary one, the whole of the system is regarded as logically demonstrable.

One might perhaps think that Weber's statements that in the methodological field, he borrows from philosophers (above all Rickert) but does not see himself as one, are in themselves sufficient proof that he simply takes over the whole of the neo-Kantian system, with all its implications, without subjecting it to independent scrutiny. This, however, cannot be taken for granted. Weber was certainly no philosophical dilettante. During his university years, he devoted much time and energy to reading philosophy. When, after his nervous breakdown, he reads Rickert's *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, his comments in letters to his wife and – in much more detail – in notes for later use, make it clear that he feels quite competent to discuss and criticize it.<sup>32</sup> And in his letters to Rickert, he is by no means bashful in formulating pertinent critical comments on the work of his philosopher friend.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, if we read his statements on “borrowing” closely, they mostly refer not to a lack of methodological *competence* but to a lack of independent methodological *ambition*.

Moreover, there is a definite and positive statement, from the best of sources, that Weber did *not* accept the whole of the neo-Kantian value-philosophical system as “scientific”. Rickert himself plaintively admits in his Introduction to the 5th edition

29 Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 16, 20.

30 Schnädelbach 1984, pp. 182-83, where the translation of “Normalbewusstsein” as “consciousness in general”, however, does not reproduce the duality of the German term.

31 Schnädelbach 1984, p. 185.

32 Letters to Marianne Weber, 10 and 11 April 1902 (BSB Ana 446); notes in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6.

33 Letters to Rickert of 2 and 28 April 1905 and (undated) 1915 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 25), and of 3 November 1907 (*MWG II/5*) and November 1913 (*MWG II/8*). I think Jacobsen (1999, p. 70n4) reads too much into Weber's protestations of deference towards the neo-Kantian philosophers. Weber sometimes rhetorically *expresses* modesty, but his substantive comments show that he does not *feel* modest at all. For a similar conclusion, see Oakes (1988a, p. 151n9), who, however, in the same work (1988a, p. 40n38) in my opinion over-interprets some of Weber's letters as showing convergence with Rickert. Cf. Bruun 2001, p. 140n5.

of *Limits* that “[Weber] had formed a somewhat one-sided view of the possibilities of scientific philosophy: in fact, he only believed in ‘logic’”.<sup>34</sup>

What, then, is the “logic” that Weber, according to Rickert, regarded as “scientific philosophy”? Is it coterminous with the neo-Kantian concept of logic, so that it includes both methodology and epistemology?<sup>35</sup> Or does it cover methodology (as the neo-Kantians defined it), but not epistemology?

Unfortunately, Weber does not make it easy for us to give a general answer to this question. His use of the terms is inconsistent, and certainly not based on clear definitions. As we have seen, in one of his letters to his editor he speaks of “methodological” essays, while in another – dealing with more or less the same ones – he says that they are “logical-methodological”. This latter terminology seems to indicate that the two terms are not in Weber’s view necessarily identical, and there are other instances of the two terms being employed as if they do not mean the same thing, but complement each other.<sup>36</sup> Weber’s use of the term “epistemology” is also vague.<sup>37</sup> And in one place,<sup>38</sup> he seems to get into a complete terminological jumble, where “logic”, “methodology” and “epistemology” are used more or less interchangeably.

On the other hand, although Weber does not offer a clear *definition* or delimitation of the “logic” that, according to Rickert, he “believed in” and accepted as “scientific philosophy”, he does *exemplify* it quite exhaustively.<sup>39</sup> This exemplification leaves us in no doubt that he considers the conceptual analysis of values in terms of their intrinsic meaning (*Sinn*) to fall within the sphere of “scientific philosophy” (or “rational science”).<sup>40</sup> Conversely, it also seems clear that all neo-Kantian

34 He goes on to say that he never succeeded in persuading Weber that his (Rickert’s) value-philosophical constructions qualified as “scientific philosophy”, but adds, in a patronizing little phrase, that “[Weber] was never averse to having his views corrected”. (Rickert 1929, (1902) pp. xxv-xxvi). Some of Weber’s comments in the letters just quoted also clearly indicate that Weber did not subscribe to Rickert’s value philosophy; see above, p. 8n33.

35 A negative answer to this question seems likely in view of Rickert’s inverted commas around the term “logic”, as an apparent indication that, in his view, Weber’s concept of scientific logic was not necessarily the same as his own. Schluchter (2003, p. 50) apparently comes to the same conclusion, and sees Weber’s “logic” as a “theory of concepts”, while his “methodology” should be understood as a “theory of interpretation”.

36 *ORK*, p. 199; *FMW*, p. 143/*GAW*, pp. 138, 598-99.

37 See, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 99n12, 131/*GAW*, pp. 47n1, 72, where Weber talks of the “epistemology” of history, where the neo-Kantian terminology would have required “methodology”. Weber’s lack of clarity in this respect is also noted by Weiss 1992, p. 33n91 and Schmid 2004 (who speaks of an “obscure hodge-podge”).

38 *MSS*, pp. 113-14/*GAW*, pp. 215-16.

39 For instance *MSS*, pp. 18, 20, 58-59/*GAW*, pp. 155-56, 508, 510; *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, p. 601.

40 See the detailed discussion in *B07*, Ch. 4 of “axiological value analysis”, and the following passage from a letter to Tönnies, 19 February 1909: “Our thought does not have to keep within the limits of science, but it should not pass itself off as science, unless it is either 1) analysis of facts (including abstraction and all empirically verifiable syntheses and

considerations of relations to “absolute values” must in Weber’s view fall outside the scientific sphere.<sup>41</sup> But we are still not clear about where exactly Weber would draw the line between “scientific” and “non-scientific” philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

From this state of affairs, one may draw two conclusions: First, the question of the scientific status of Weber’s “logic” and “methodology”, and of their precise relationship to the relevant neo-Kantian categories cannot be settled in advance, but must be answered, point by point, on the basis of careful substantive analysis.

And secondly, one should take Weber at his own word when he assures us that, in his methodology, he is *applying* the doctrines of other “logicians” or philosophers. In other words, his “methodology” and “logic” are basically pragmatic, not systematical.<sup>43</sup> For the purposes of self-reflection of the empirical disciplines, he makes (not uncritical) use of philosophical results which he considers scientifically valid. But he does not bother over-much with the subtleties of the philosophical framework in which these results are inscribed, terminologically or substantively; and when the system threatens to get the better of usefulness, he resolutely comes down on the side of the latter. As Weber himself puts it in a programmatic phrase:

The most significant achievements of skilled epistemologists use ‘ideal-typically’ constructed ideas of the epistemological objectives and methods of specialized disciplines, and therefore fly so high over the heads of these disciplines that they sometimes find it difficult to recognize themselves with the naked eye in these constructions. [Therefore] ... methodological discussions rooted in their own subject-matter may now and then, *in spite of, and in a certain sense because of, the fact that they are formulated in a way that is epistemologically imperfect*, be more useful for the specialized disciplines (my italics).<sup>44</sup>

Above, I have discussed to what extent Weber ascribed scientific status to the results of “methodology” or “logic”, as practised by himself or by others. This problem should not be confused with another, related one: whether one may find in Weber’s work, including his methodology, indications of his personal commitment to certain philosophical, especially ethical, standards and values. This question must certainly

hypotheses) or 2) conceptual criticism” – the latter element being explained as “laying bare what is *logically* implied or posited (mitgesetzt) in a given statement” (*MWG II/6*).

41 E.g. *ORK*, p. 99n12/*GAW*, p. 47n1: “... the epistemology of history determines and analyzes the significance (Bedeutung) of the value relation for historical knowledge, but does not in itself offer reasons for the validity of the values”. As for the neo-Kantian “consciousness in general”, we may note that Weber only refers to it once (*ORK*, p. 135n30/*GAW*, p. 75n2) and describes it as a “disparaged” (vielverlästert) concept.

42 This is also the case with the term “philosophy of history” (*B07*, pp. 139-40).

43 Cf. Turner and Factor 1994, p. 8: “Weber makes few concessions to the ‘philosophical’ or systematic expectations of his readers”.

44 *MSS*, p. 114/*GAW*, pp. 215-16. Cf. Freund 1994, p. 473: “[Weber’s] achievement was that of making explicit how [conceptual or terminological] innovations [made by others] could be methodologically fruitful for the specific procedures of the historical and social sciences, *and to foresee how one might risk going wrong if, in making use of them, one overstepped the limits of their heuristic validity*” (my italics).

be answered in the affirmative; and much of the Weber literature<sup>45</sup> is devoted to the investigation of the origin and content of such philosophical positions. In certain respects, these positions may be relevant to the argument in *B07*, particularly in the context of the discussion (Ch. 1) of value freedom and (Ch. 5) of the political ethic. But, as we shall see, Weber takes great care to underline that the content of such ethical or other normative positions cannot pretend to scientific status. They can be made the object of methodological inquiry; but properly understood, they are not part of the methodology itself.

### Value freedom

At the 1964 Congress of the *Society* on the occasion of the Max Weber centenary, Talcott Parsons stated that “The concept of value freedom may be said to be the foundation of Weber’s [methodological] position”<sup>46</sup> and this seems to be the general opinion of Weber scholars.<sup>47</sup> In one sense, this assessment is obviously valid. Value freedom was at the heart of the methodological views of Kant and the neo-Kantians, who provided Weber with the philosophical platform from which he was able to conduct his determined attacks on naïve historicism, emanationism, vulgar Marxism, and positivism. Properly understood, it is also the logical corollary of his central thesis of the value conflict. Indeed, without the principle of value freedom and the idea of a value-free science, there would be little left of Weber’s methodology. On the other hand, he does not spend much time *discussing* the principle and its premises, nor does he occupy himself over-much with the concrete aspects of its application in actual scientific practice. This is not only clear confirmation of his general lack of interest in going about his methodological business in a systematic manner; it may also be seen as a reflection of what I have called the asymmetry of his treatment of value freedom, where the “value side” of the principle is brought out much more strongly, and invested with much more importance, than the “science side” (*B07*, p. 62).

When *B72* was written, Weber’s demand for value freedom was often understood, discussed and criticized not as a theoretical principle but as a policy prescription stipulating, in Herbert Marcuse’s words, “the freeing of science for the acceptance of evaluations imposed from outside”.<sup>48</sup> The conclusion in *B72*: that Weber, in fighting for the principle of value freedom, was in fact strongly motivated by a concern for what one might call “the science freedom of values”, therefore may have seemed

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45 E.g. Henrich (1952), Hennis (1988), Schluchter (1989 and 2000).

46 Parsons 1971, p. 32.

47 Among the exceptions that I have noted are Hennis (1994, pp. 115, 118-19) and Bruhns (2005). In Hennis’s case, however, his concern turns out to be that of underlining Weber’s – undoubted – disparagement of methodological studies for their own sake.

48 Stammer 1971, p. 133. Cf. Gerhardt 2001, pp. 459-60.

somewhat novel at the time.<sup>49</sup> Today, the debate has moved on, and the importance of the “value asymmetry” of Weber’s demand is regularly underlined.<sup>50</sup>

Weber was certainly not the author of the theory of logical disjunction between “Is” and “Ought”, on which the demand for value freedom is based, and commentators agree that he seems to regard the truth of this theory as quite unproblematical.<sup>51</sup> More generally, it can be said that he did not add any new argument to the discussion of value freedom – although one may note that his formulations of the principle are not always orthodox from a strictly philosophical point of view<sup>52</sup> – but that he brought out in a particularly vivid and relevant way the relationship between the various arguments that had already been advanced.<sup>53</sup>

*Weber's criteria of scientific truth: between categorial truth and intersubjectivity*<sup>54</sup>

The question of Weber’s truth criteria is not easy to handle. As benchmarks, we can take, on the one hand, the conceptual constructions of neo-Kantian philosophy (“logic”), according to which truth is defined as conformity to a norm; and, on the other, what Arnold Brecht in his later, thorough analysis calls Scientific Method, set out as a “logical chronology” of good scientific practice, within which the “reference theory of truth” is accepted as an adequate basis for arriving at “intersubjectively transmissible knowledge”.<sup>55</sup> Strictly speaking, the two positions need not, perhaps, be incompatible: Scientific Method does rest on certain *a priori* concepts, and the neo-Kantians would no doubt without demur extend the predicate “true” to the

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49 Cf. Torrance 1974, p. 146.

50 See, for instance, Schluchter 1989, p. 7n23 (“the obstinate struggle for value freedom ... was the struggle for the freedom of clear and self-controlled and subsequently responsible value judgments” – a formulation which also points to the link with Weber’s discussion of the ethic of responsibility (*B07*, Ch. 5).

51 See, for instance, Hennis 1994, p. 115; Weiss 1992, p. 33; Jacobsen 1999, pp. 10-11 and Schnädelbach 1984, p. 162, who notes that the rejection of the “naturalist fallacy” today seems quite obvious.

52 For a concrete example, see Schnädelbach 1984, p. 164, who points out that the term “Ought”, which Weber often uses in his methodological discussions, is not, philosophically speaking, fully adequate to indicate the “value side” of the disjunction between being and values. The correct terminology would, according to the neo-Kantians, be some variant of “validity”. But from a more “pragmatic” point of view, the term “Ought” (or, sometimes, “Striving” (*Wollen*)) seems to serve Weber’s purposes better.

53 Weber himself certainly did not advance any claim to methodological originality in this respect. Cf. *MSS*, pp. 49-50/*GAW*, p. 146n1 and his letter to Brentano, 26 October 1909 (*MWG II/6*): “... evidently, I *in no way* believed that I was saying something ‘new’ [when I talked about value freedom]”.

54 *B07*, pp. 84-87. Weber’s conception of objectivity will be treated in connection with the discussion of his relationship to Heinrich Rickert (*I07*, pp. 26-32 and *B07*, Ch. 2).

55 Cf. Brecht 1959, pp. 27-29, 49-52 and (summing up) 481. Schnädelbach 1984, pp. 82-84 gives a useful overview of the reasons behind the general shift, starting in the natural sciences, from “categorial” to “experiential-methodical” truth.

results arrived at by the proper application of Scientific Method. Nevertheless, there are major differences between the two approaches, both concerning the level of analysis and as regards the thrust of the argument.<sup>56</sup> These differences clearly stand out when we look at the importance ascribed to the concept of objectivity in each of the two approaches: for the neo-Kantians, scientific truth must be firmly anchored in *objective* conceptual *categories*, while Brecht in his long discussion of Scientific Method makes only perfunctory references to objectivity, and instead consistently talks of “*intersubjective* transmissibility *qua* knowledge”.

Weber is certainly not very explicit about his views on the criteria of scientific truth,<sup>57</sup> and seems to vacillate, at least to some extent, between the two positions just outlined. But, as I have tried to show in detail in B07 (pp. 86-87), there is at least no firm evidence that he was interested in defining truth in terms of intersubjective transmissibility.<sup>58</sup> While Baier is quite justified in stating that Weber “translated the transcendental rationalism of neo-Kantianism into a methodologically disciplined rationality of science”,<sup>59</sup> it is extremely important to emphasize that Weber never even comes close to defining a practical set of “instructions for scholars” or a “logical chronology”. It is therefore unwarranted to modernize Weber by dressing up his conclusions in Brechtian terminology, as when Jonas speaks of “intersubjectively testable knowledge”.<sup>60</sup>

In B72,<sup>61</sup> I ascribed much of Weber’s apparent vacillation between the different criteria of truth to the influence of Georg Simmel, who in his *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*<sup>62</sup> had firmly anchored the truth value of propositions in the object as perceived. I have now come to believe that this was on the whole a false track (and I have rewritten that portion of the text accordingly). While it is possible to find a number of points of convergence between Simmel and Weber, in particular

56 Consequently, Brecht (1959, p. 220) certainly seems to me to go too far in maintaining that Heinrich Rickert “was a Scientific Value Relativist, without using that name”.

57 Cf. Oakes 1982, p. 608: “Weber never formulates this issue explicitly”.

58 As a matter of fact, he never even uses the terms “intersubjective” or “intersubjectivity”, and his (infrequent) use of the word “supra-individual” (überindividuell), which might have served as a linguistic stand-in for “intersubjective”, invariably turns out to refer to collective societal structures or to normative validity.

59 Baier 1969, p. 61.

60 Jonas 1969, p. 37. Similarly, Ciaffa 1998, pp. 82, 88. Eliaeson (2002, pp. 15, 38) is also treading on rather slippery ground when, in spite of his acknowledgement (p. 20) that Weber never spoke directly of “intersubjectivity”, he nevertheless uses that term in connection with descriptions of “facts” or “truth” in Weber’s methodology (pp. 15, 38). Putnam (1981, p. 177), for his part, resolutely slips up by stating that Weber “[appeals] to the fact that we can get the agreement of educated people on ‘positive science’ [but not on ethical values]”. As Lassman (2004, pp. 258-59) notes, Weber does nothing of the sort.

61 B72, pp. 49-50.

62 Simmel 1892–93, pp. 319-20.

as regards *Verstehen* and the “ideal-typical” mode of thinking,<sup>63</sup> this does not seem to include the methodological questions that we are dealing with here.<sup>64</sup> For one thing, there was a definite pragmatist component in Simmel's thinking about truth; for another, he believed in a world of “objective truth” beyond that of perception.<sup>65</sup> Neither position would commend itself to Weber. At the most, we may find an affinity between the polarities of Weber's vacillation and the dilemma in which Simmel finds himself because he regards ideas as forms created by man, but nevertheless expects them to open the road to man's knowledge of an objective world.<sup>66</sup>

One methodological position which Weber certainly shared with Simmel, however, was his insistence that there was a clear-cut distinction between the truth value of a proposition and the value of that truth (*B07*, pp. 71-73).<sup>67</sup> This distinction tended to become blurred in the argument of the neo-Kantians because, as they saw it, anyone who stated anything had thereby subscribed to the value of truth, and that “will to truth” was in itself the fundamental basis of the truth value of the statement.<sup>68</sup> Weber, while perhaps, technically speaking, saying the same thing,<sup>69</sup> puts the accent quite differently. In particular, he never generalizes the neo-Kantian argument – as he logically could, and perhaps should – but only discusses the question in relation to those who want, or do not want, to opt for *scientific* truth.<sup>70</sup> He asserted that there was in principle a free choice for or against the value of science and of scientific truth. But for those who, like himself, made a choice in favour of the sphere of truth and science, the consequences derived from the “internal logic” of that sphere were in his view crystal clear: “... if we ... *decide to* (wollen) accept the aim of scientific analysis of the empirically given reality as valuable, then the ‘norms’ of our thought will *force* (erzwingen) us to respect them ...”, as he puts it.<sup>71</sup> The “will to truth” is not the insidious neo-Kantian logical trap, but the result of the free choice of the scholar. On the other hand, this result, as Weber formulates it, is forceful indeed. Instead of the bloodless conceptual “Ought” of the neo-Kantians, with its feet in the

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63 See especially Gerhardt (2001), and also Faught (1985), Frisby (1987), and Sica (2004a).

64 I do, however, think that Weber's use of the term “interest” in places where neo-Kantians would talk about “value” (*B07*, pp. 142-46) owes much to Simmel's *Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (cf. Gerhardt 2001, p. 114).

65 Helle 1988, pp. 102-105.

66 Helle 1988, p. 102.

67 Simmel 1892-93, p. 319.

68 Cf. Rickert 1892, p. 77, who calls this the “transcendent minimum”.

69 Oakes (1982, p. 612) speaks of an “uncommonly cryptic piece of Weberian analysis”.

70 Rickert (1989 (1926), p. 79) implicitly recognizes this.

71 *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 60. For a similar phraseology (“binding (zwingend) proof”), see Weber's letter to Rickert from the end of November 1913 (*MWG II/8*).

metaphysical clouds,<sup>72</sup> the inescapable consequences of the scientist's free choice almost leap at him, once it has been made.<sup>73</sup>

These formulations also bear eloquent evidence to the fact that the question how the scholar actually attains knowledge is treated by Weber not as a problem of *method*, but as one of living up to the standards of the internal logic of the sphere of scientific inquiry, that is to say, to the *ethic* of that sphere.

#### *Value (Wert) and goal (Zweck)*<sup>74</sup>

In his discussions of the value sphere, as opposed to that of scientific inquiry, Weber quite often substitutes the term "goal" for that of "value". This should not, I think, be interpreted as indicating any lack of enthusiasm on his part for the *term* "value" as such, when used to designate an actively valuational and practical attitude. But, as already noted in *B07*, the "goal" terminology constitutes an obvious link with Weber's general sociology, which is firmly anchored in the concept of "social action", particularly action directed towards the achievement of some "valued" goal.<sup>75</sup> At first glance, Weber's careful distinction between "goal rational" and "value rational" action might lead one to believe that goals are precisely *not* to be seen as equivalent to values in this respect. However, Weber's discussion makes it clear that the "goal" towards which "goal rational" action is directed is often "value rationally" fixed – a statement which in itself underlines the link between values and goals – and that "pure" goal rationality, which consists of action solely directed towards the satisfaction of purely subjective needs in accordance with the laws of marginal utility, is "essentially ... only a limiting case".<sup>76</sup>

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72 "A fact is what I ought to think", as Rickert (1928 (1892), p. 216) delicately puts it.

73 As Scaff (1989, p. 118n99) and Schluchter (1996a, p. 99n180) perceptively note, this forcefulness is equally evident in Weber's phrase: "... scientific truth is only that which *claims* validity (gelten *will*) for all who *seek* truth" (*MSS*, p. 84/*GAW*, p. 184; similarly, *ORK*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 89, and, more generally, *ORK*, p. 182/*GAW*, p. 123). One interesting feature of these quotations is that Weber more or less consistently replaces the "transcendental 'Ought'" of the neo-Kantians with a "claim", a "will" or a "necessity".

74 *B07*, p. 241.

75 In a detailed discussion of the *Categories* essay, Schluchter (2000, see especially p. 183 with n14) clearly documents this link; for the latest development of his ideas on this subject, see Schluchter 2003.

76 *ES*, p. 26/*WG*, p. 13. There is a tendency among commentators to underplay or even ignore the element of "value-rationality" which may be present in Weber's type of "goal rationality". The latter type, and the modernity with which it is often associated, consequently tends to acquire a negative colouring that may in fact be undeserved. (See, for instance, Scaff 1989, pp. 32-33, who speaks of "cunning, if compulsive, 'needs' gratification"). Oakes (2003, pp. 38-41) tries to show that Weber's instrumental rationality/value-rationality dichotomy is defective, because the instrumental assessment of conduct ("cost-benefit" calculations) may in itself be an intrinsic value. He also manifests some indignation that Weber, in secure financial circumstances, cannot see the value element in the actions of people struggling "goal-rationally" to survive during a famine. I think that Oakes, for all his careful logic, is

*How much methodological awareness do we find in Weber's Inaugural Lecture?*<sup>77</sup>

When *B72* was written, the Inaugural Lecture was generally seen not so much as an early indication of Weber's methodological views, but rather as a blatantly nationalistic political statement. Tenbruck summed up this view when, in 1959, he characterized the Inaugural Lecture as a "violent solution" in which Weber "disregarded all methodological possibilities".<sup>78</sup> But in that same year, Wolfgang J. Mommsen formulated a much more nuanced appreciation: "It seems paradoxical, but is nevertheless extremely characteristic of Max Weber, that the foundations of his later ... theory of the value freedom of the pure sciences were laid precisely in the Inaugural Lecture, which is steeped in politics and full of value judgments".<sup>79</sup> This "methodological" line of interpretation, which I worked from and tried to develop in *B72*, has been pursued (with some caution) by Schluchter (1996a) and, more ambitiously, by Aldenhoff-Hübinger (2004).

A partial explanation of the "paradox" that Mommsen identifies can be found in the fact that, in the Inaugural Lecture, Weber was in fact conducting a battle on two, or rather three, fronts. He had to dispose of the idea that the science of economics could produce its own policy standards. But in doing so, he in principle laid open the discipline to a large number of alternative external ideals, many of which claimed to be rooted in "nature", "evolutionary ethics" or other ideals of a quasi-objective nature.<sup>80</sup> While staking his own (openly valuational) claim on behalf of the *nation* as the supreme standard of economic policy, he therefore also had to fight off the more menacing of these alternative contenders, in particular the "ethical culture" movement, which he detested because of its attempt to combine ethics and politics, an ambition that was in his view wholly pernicious.<sup>81</sup> Against this background, the "brutality" of Weber's value judgments acquires a separate methodological significance: they were meant as a strident wake-up call to all

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being unfair to Weber on this point. In particular, he does not quote Weber's statement in the same passage of *ES* that "[c]hoice between alternative and conflicting ends and results may well be determined in a value-rational manner". A purely economic cost-benefit analysis, for example, already represents a choice *against* other possible values (ecological, aesthetical, etc.). In Oakes's case of dire penury, Weber would no doubt claim that the possibility of anything but gratification of subjective needs was out of the question: we would be in his "limiting case".

<sup>77</sup> *B07*, pp. 91-96.

<sup>78</sup> Tenbruck 1999 (1959), p. 581.

<sup>79</sup> Mommsen 1959, p. 41. Prewo (1979, p. 65n5) is definitely opposed to this "proto-methodological" view of the Inaugural Lecture. He qualifies Mommsen's statement as "totally erroneous", but does not produce any supporting evidence for his view. Baier (1969, p. 60n3) makes the interesting point that the Inaugural Lecture – which was, after all, formulated in an academic setting – was re-published in *GPS*, among Weber's *political* writings.

<sup>80</sup> Nau 1996, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> In a letter to his brother (quoted *B07*, p. 91), Weber noted with grim satisfaction that in the Inaugural Lecture, he had "given the 'ethical culture' a firm kick".

those who, methodologically speaking, had been happily asleep, cushioned by the comfortable belief in the existence of consensual, *generally* valid, perhaps even scientifically provable, policy goals.

The foundations of the theory of value freedom – especially the importance of the value conflict (B07, pp. 192-205) – may well have been expressed in the Freiburg Lecture, as Mommsen asserts, but, as I have tried to set out in detail in B07, the theory was still not fully ripe.<sup>82</sup> Weber himself was quite conscious of this. In the *Memorandum*, he goes so far as to say that “on many important points, [he] can no longer associate himself with [the Inaugural Lecture]”, which was “in many respects immature”.<sup>83</sup> As far as the methodology was concerned, Weber did not yet possess the conceptual instrument of “value relation”, with its sophisticated duality of “viewpoint” and “theoretical value”, which Rickert furnished him with in 1902 (B07, Ch. 2). But the basic idea is perhaps already there: at one point in the Inaugural Lecture, Weber talks about the danger of unconsciously allowing “the starting point for our analysis and *explanation* of economic events to determine our *judgment* of those events”.<sup>84</sup> This “starting point”, as I see it, corresponds to the theoretical value applied in Rickert’s doctrine of value relation. The methodological awareness is present, but as yet overlaid by practical concerns and unsupported by “logic”.<sup>85</sup>

In this connection, one should keep in mind that Weber explicitly qualified the claim of his Inaugural Lecture to rank as “science”: in the “Preface” to the printed Lecture, he says that “... an inaugural lecture is an opportunity to present and justify openly the personal and, in this sense, ‘subjective’ standpoint from which one judges economic phenomena”.<sup>86</sup>

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82 Schluchter (1996a, pp. 50-53) seems to me to be in general accord with this conclusion. While Eliaeson (2002, p. 3) may be right in saying that there is “no obvious methodological break” in Weber’s writings between 1894 and 1919, Hennis (1994, pp. 117-18) is certainly over-generous in asserting that there is no significant development with regard to Weber’s treatment of the value judgment problem between the *Inaugural Lecture* and *Objectivity*.

83 *Memorandum*, p. 174. Schluchter, in arguing against (Hennis’s) attempts to “rehabilitate” the Inaugural Lecture as a sort of “genetic code” to the whole of Weber’s work, tends towards a very strict (too strict?) reading of this passage.

84 *LSPW*, p. 19/*GPS*, pp. 16-17.

85 Aldenhoff-Hübinger (2004) arrives at a similar conclusion, which is not in my opinion contradicted by Schluchter’s technically correct statement (1996a, p. 53) that there is “no trace” of neo-Kantianism in the Inaugural Lecture. Barbalet (2001) goes so far as to claim that the Inaugural Lecture “presents an argument about values and social science that ... is more complete than later statements of his case, and ... makes clear what is otherwise obscure in Weber’s later discussion of value freedom *and value relevance*” (2001, p. 149; my italics). There is no adequate textual foundation for this extravagant claim.

86 *LSPW*, p. 1/*GPS*, p. 1.

*Leo Strauss's critique of Weber's demand for value freedom*

Even though it is now fifty years ago that Leo Strauss (1953, 1957) subjected Weber's demand for value freedom to a searching critique, it may still be relevant to deal with some of Strauss's main points, since the views that he articulated reach right back to the origins of political and moral philosophy and have lost none of their relevance in modern debates, where neo-conservative scholars like Alan Bloom explicitly base themselves on Strauss's arguments and authority.

Strauss attacks Weber's position both on science and on values.

As far as *science* is concerned, he states – correctly – that Weber believed the value of objective truth to be scientifically indemonstrable,<sup>87</sup> and on this basis levels two charges at Weber: that he is inconsistent, and that he is superficial. The inconsistency, Strauss feels, stems from the fact that if a social scientist claims that objective knowledge is necessary for the attainment of social goals, he thereby proclaims (objective) social science as “a value from every point of view”,<sup>88</sup> that is, as an *objective* value. Consequently, Weber at the same time denies and affirms the latter. In one sense, this criticism is unjustified, since Weber certainly did not share Strauss's opinion that objective truth is a value “from every point of view”. But Strauss is admittedly poking at a logically sore point, because Weber, while building on the conceptual logic of the neo-Kantians, shows himself unwilling to accept their reasoning according to which a statement that denies the value of truth purports to be true, and is therefore logically circular.<sup>89</sup>

Strauss's main charge, however, is one of superficiality: he claims that Weber's thesis of the purely subjective value of truth implies a relativism regarding higher values which only serves to relieve social scientists of the difficulty of clarifying *why* these values are absolute values to them.<sup>90</sup> This criticism is of course psychological rather than logical. The fact that the personal attitude of a social scientist runs counter to his theoretical conclusions does not logically invalidate those conclusions. In Weber's case, moreover, the charge of indifference to higher values seems decidedly misplaced. Finally, Strauss's accusation is based on a confusion between *objective* and *absolute* values, and on the resultant misconception of the “relativist” strain in Weber's idea of value freedom.

Weber's views on *values* are discussed in Strauss (1953). Strauss's central claim is that Weber's principle of value freedom is not so much based on the logical heterogeneity of the value sphere and the sphere of scientific inquiry, but rather on

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87 Strauss 1957, pp. 347-48; see also Strauss 1953, pp. 71-72.

88 Strauss 1957, p. 348.

89 Cf. Rickert 1928 (1892), p. 309. Turner and Factor (1984, p. 41) therefore have a point when they say that “it is problematic whether this metaphysical distinction [between truth value and the value of truth] is defensible” and that, if it is not defensible, “Weber's position collapses into nihilism of the self-refuting kind”. But their point (which may also be Strauss's), is only, as far as I can see, fully valid in a systematic philosophical context and on the level of general epistemology.

90 Strauss 1957, p. 349.

“his [Weber’s] belief that there cannot be any genuine knowledge of the Ought”, and that the adoption of this view leads Weber straight into “nihilism or ... the view that every preference, however evil, base, or insane, has to be judged before the tribunal of reason to be as legitimate as any other preference”.<sup>91</sup>

To judge this claim, it is above all necessary to be quite clear about how to interpret Strauss’s expression “genuine knowledge”. If we take it to cover Weber’s concept of *objective* truth, there seems little point in raising objections to Strauss’s view, which can in that case be restated as follows: Weber denies that we can, with scientific validity, know or state anything about values *as values*, and consequently rejects the view that we can state anything about the truth of value systems *as value systems*.<sup>92</sup> From the point of view of science, any value is, as a value, as “legitimate” as any other, since “legitimacy” is in this connection a category appropriate to values, not to science. If, on the other hand, “genuine knowledge” is interpreted as referring to a category *broader* than Weber’s concept of scientific truth, Strauss’s claim is unfounded: it is squarely contradicted by Weber’s emphasis, noted above, on the value of committing oneself to absolute, subjective values. A person who has thus committed himself to some absolute value may, in Weber’s view, have “genuine knowledge” of this value in a *non-scientific sense*; in the same way, it might be accurate to speak about the existence of an absolute, and in that sense “true”, value system for such a person.

Strauss’s treatment of Weber’s ideas is so elusive because the terminology of his *account* implies that the concept of science referred to is Weber’s narrow one, while his *commentaries* and *criticism* are based on his own, wider concept of science.<sup>93</sup> If we assume that the Weberian concept is employed, the account is correct, while the criticism misses its target; if, on the other hand, we suppose that Strauss sticks to his own concept, the account is incorrect, but the criticism is justified (but only in the hypothetical sense that it would be valid against anyone who held the views which Strauss falsely credits Weber with).<sup>94</sup>

An offshoot of this confusion between different concepts of science has formed the basis of a terminological quarrel which has occasionally been the subject of more interest than it deserves. The question is whether it is correct to level the accusation at Weber’s principle of value freedom that it is rooted in or that it leads to a *relativistic* or (to use the term employed by Strauss and others) a *nihilistic* attitude.

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91 Strauss 1953, pp. 41-42.

92 Turner and Factor (1984, pp. 24-25) also discuss this point, but use the term “rationality” to designate the “science” side. By doing so, however, they seem to me to introduce a certain fuzziness into the argument, since “rationality” in Weber’s language is less precisely defined and has more evaluative overtones than “scientific truth”.

93 The latter is not identical with Weber’s concept – a fact that emerges quite clearly from Strauss’s work as a whole, and particularly from his distinction between the denial of “genuine knowledge of the Ought” and the acceptance of the idea of a logical gulf between Is and Ought.

94 Similarly Turner and Factor 1984, pp. 36-37.

In this connection, it is sufficient to observe that Weber himself emphatically rejects the term “relativism” as being the grossest of the misconceptions concerning the protagonists of the thesis of value conflict and of its corollary, the principle of value freedom. In Weber’s vocabulary, the term “relativism” implies that any value is *demonstrably* equal in worth to any other, so that the general value of committing oneself to or against a cause utterly vanishes.<sup>95</sup> An interpretation which ascribes “relativistic” views of this kind to Weber adds insult to misconception.

### **Value relation**

In the discussion of Weber’s views on value relation (*Wertbeziehung*) and, related to this, on the problems of culture and objectivity, the big issue has been and largely still remains the extent of convergence or divergence between Weber and Heinrich Rickert. This, I think, is unavoidable. Weber made no secret of his reliance on Rickert’s general approach, his basic ideas, and much of his terminology; but the contrast between Rickert’s elaborate, not to say finicking, exposition and Weber’s densely formulated, richly suggestive, but frustratingly unsystematical early methodological essays offers a constant temptation and a fertile field for commentators.

The focus on the Weber–Rickert relationship is also in a sense regrettable, however, because it “ties back” Weber to his intellectual sources, and particularly because Weber scholars attempting to make sense of Weber’s pronouncements by interpreting them along consistently Rickertian lines have tended to over-systematize him, to gloss over or even ignore logical jumps and inconsistencies in his thought, and have thereby made it more difficult to appreciate the nature and extent of his independent methodological contribution.

When preparing *B72*, my main points of reference for the Weber–Rickert relation were Schelting’s magisterial work (1934), as well as Henrich (1952) and Tenbruck (1999 (1959)). My own interpretation was probably closest to that of Schelting, although I saw certain divergences from Rickert as farther-reaching, and more important in their consequences, than did Schelting. In the last thirty-five years, the literature on Weber and Rickert, and on the wider intellectual context in which the question of their relationship must be addressed, has grown rapidly. Some authors (in particular Burger (1987 (1976)) and, largely following him, Nusser (1986) and Merz (1990)) maintain that Weber’s views on concept formation were almost identical with Rickert’s and that certain other aspects of Weber’s methodology can only be properly understood inside a Rickertian framework. A special version of this position is that of Oakes (1988a), who tries to demonstrate that Rickert’s methodological construction is logically untenable, and that Weber’s position, to the extent that it is dependent on Rickert’s, therefore shares the same defect. Other scholars, like Baier (1969)<sup>96</sup> and, in particular, Wagner (1987), Wagner and Zipprian (1989) and Jacobsen (1999) are less “Rickertian” in their conclusions.

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<sup>95</sup> *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 508.

<sup>96</sup> I regret that I was not aware of Baier’s important work when writing *B72*.

My own position, as I would now formulate it, does not, I think, differ too much from the one that I tried to define in *B72*. But it has certainly been enriched by new evidence concerning Weber's views on Rickert's *Limits* and, I hope, clarified by a number of illuminating studies, in particular those of Oakes (1982, 1987, 1988a), Turner and Factor (1981), Turner (1986), Wagner (1987) and Wagner and Zippran (1991 (1986), 1990). Below, I shall deal in some depth with certain points of special importance to the general argument: Weber's idea of the nature of reality; the concept of culture (including the interpretation of Weber's statement about the "transcendental precondition" of the cultural sciences); and, above all, the crucial question of the basis for the objectivity of the social sciences.

### *Weber's concept of reality*

On this point, I have felt it necessary to revise the text of *B72* somewhat. I had not, I now realize, given sufficient weight to Rickert's distinction between epistemological categories and methodological concepts, and consequently attributed to him the view that immediate reality, as he discussed it in *Limits*, was totally amorphous, in contradistinction to Weber's more structured concept of reality. Burger's detailed exposition<sup>97</sup> certainly helped in clearing my thoughts on this point, and I now see the fundamental similarities between Rickert's and Weber's view of "structured" reality. This is not to say that I agree with all Burger's conclusions concerning Weber's "epistemological premises" (or otherwise).<sup>98</sup> The relative *lack* of a proper neo-Kantian epistemological dimension in Weber's thought is in my opinion a more interesting, and even a more obvious, feature of his reflections about the nature of reality.<sup>99</sup> As Merz has noted: "... contrary to Rickert, Weber often in his argument, when exploring the multiplicity of reality, limits himself to its realistic aspect. Consequently, in such cases, the logical and epistemological perspectives are left aside".<sup>100</sup> That is precisely the point. One may even go further and, on the basis of Weber's sometimes (but not always) resolutely "realistic" formulations, (*B07*,

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97 Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 59-65. See also Oakes in Rickert 1986 (1929), p. xixn24.

98 For instance, Burger asserts that Weber "subscribes to the tripartition of formless content (immediate sensations), categorially formed content (concrete facts) and methodologically formed presentation of facts (scientific concepts)". But Weber certainly never directly says so (the passages on which Burger bases his assertion (1987 (1976), p. 62) serve a different purpose in Weber's argument, and one cannot reasonably, as he does, call them "clear and unambiguous evidence"), and in a number of places in fact seems to be reasoning along different lines, as Burger himself admits.

99 Wagner (1987, pp. 144-45), who generally has little patience with Rickert and his elaborate philosophical constructions, calls his distinction between epistemological and methodological forms "tomfoolery", but says that at least it has given commentators like myself "a good conscience in not dealing thoroughly with Rickert's contradiction-filled philosophy". I will not altogether dispute that statement; but what seems to me more important was that *Weber* did not seem to bother too much with Rickert's philosophical subtleties.

100 Merz 1990, p. 233n557.

pp. 127-28) conclude that he in fact rather leaned towards an “atomistic” view of reality.<sup>101</sup>

### “Culture”

“Culture” is a central concept in both Rickert's and Weber's methodology. For the central idea, we can do no better than to take Weber's pithy description in *Objectivity*: “The concept of culture is a *value concept*. Empirical reality *is* culture for us because, and to the extent that, we relate it to value ideas”.<sup>102</sup> This, by implication, is true for the historical actor, on the object level of science; and it is equally true on the research level, for the scholar who wants to work from the perspective of the cultural (as opposed to the natural) sciences. Rickert would fully subscribe to that statement. But important questions remain to be answered about what constitutes “cultural values”, and how they are related to empirical reality on each of the two levels, and here, there are in my opinion definite divergences between Weber and Rickert.

The main conclusion of *B72* concerning the concept of culture was that Weber, unlike Rickert, seemed to allow the scholar a free choice of theoretical values, irrespective of a) their empirical or normative generality on the research level (i.e., in the historian's “community”), and unencumbered by b) considerations of necessary linkages to the values held by the historical actors, on the object level – both of these elements being essential features of Rickert's argument. I believe that this conclusion still holds. The full argument behind it, as set out in *B07*, pp. 147-56, is more or less unchanged from *B72*. But it is further supported by the so-called “Nervi fragment” which has only recently been published in an English translation, and in particular by the following passage:

*In reality, the selection [of elements of reality] depends on [the] constantly fluid and varying differences in the interest taken, by the individuals who are in each case the historian's public, in the various elements of empirical reality; thus, it is not only dependent on the degree to which that interest is general, let alone conforms to a norm.*<sup>103</sup>

While this is certainly much more “subjective” than Rickert's approach, we are still not quite clear about who is the prime mover in “selecting” the historical material – the public or the historian.<sup>104</sup> In Rickert's argument, the historian *had to* have the upper hand in this respect,<sup>105</sup> and it is probably also the most natural reading of

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101 This is Turner's position (1986, pp. 177-78 and 1990, p. 550n9, where he laconically notes: “[A] consistent Rickertian would not have made these slips”). The implications for Weber's notion of “objectivity” are discussed below, p. 158.

102 *MSS*, p. 76/*GAW*, p. 175.

103 See below, p. 43. I have altered the translation from Bruun 2001.

104 Similarly Turner and Factor 1994, p. 23.

105 Cf. Weber's letter to Gottl-Ottlilienfeld of 28 March 1906 (*MWG II/5*), in which he says that Rickert's expression “generally accepted values” (allgemein anerkannte Werthe) only refers to “positions imputed (zugemutet) to everybody”, i.e., a “demand that a position should

Weber to see him as putting the historian at the centre of the process of the selection. But instead of looking for any “generality” of the values according to which the selection takes place, Weber is interestingly “market-oriented” in insisting on the importance of what the public wants.

Moreover, in stating that the selection process takes place “not only” on the basis of general values “or even” corresponding to a norm, Weber in fact takes all the stuffing out of Rickert’s careful philosophical construction. If “general values” and “norms” are not enough to explain what goes on, they lose their methodologically necessary character. Weber carefully abstains from burning his bridges to Rickert’s theory of value relation; but he clearly has no desire to cross them.<sup>106</sup>

*Burger*, who works from the presupposition that there is a large measure of convergence between Rickert’s and Weber’s thought, tries to show that this convergence is also found concerning the concept of culture. His method of demonstration, however, is not completely convincing. The chain of his argument contains links that seem to have no, or at least insufficient, textual support in Weber’s work, but in fact to reproduce Rickert’s position.<sup>107</sup> In so doing, he sometimes creates what seem to be unnecessary difficulties for himself, for instance when, as a consequence of inserting his Weber references into a Rickertian framework, he has to struggle with no less than four meanings of the term “significant”, although he candidly admits that Weber did not distinguish between all of them,<sup>108</sup> and that, in fact, the differentiation between two of them (the ones that he mostly discusses) in practice does not matter too much.

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*be taken* (Stellungnehmen-Sollen), from the point of view of the *historian*”. (The reference is probably to Rickert 1902, p. 390.) While this is an explication of *Rickert’s* position, it also gives an interesting indication of Weber’s own, more “subjective” solution of this problem.

106 There is an illuminating note from Weber’s hand from the same period, where Rickert is put into a somewhat embarrassing proximity to Roscher and his “emanationist” ethics: “... the consistent philosophical proponents of [Roscher’s] emanationist ethics are by necessity forced into certain metaphysical constructions, and at least to make the assumption that the value of the ideality with which the individual must be integrated is an *absolute* one – this is now also Rickert’s position ...” (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, Vol. 31/6, quoted in Bruun 2001, p. 151).

107 For instance, we are told that “[when] the values embodied in [the historical phenomena] relate to a collective concern of the social group of which the investigating historian is a member, ... the phenomena to which they are attached are of general interest; they are ‘cultural’ phenomena”. No Weber reference is given, and Burger acknowledges that this kind of consideration “[is] not very explicit in Weber’s essays”; but he nevertheless builds on the passage to the point where he feels able to state that “[a] description is objective when it describes those phenomena in which, for human observers, values are embodied which relate to a cultural concern of the collectivity of which they are members” (Burger 1987 (1976), p. 80). That is certainly Rickert’s view; but Burger has not, I feel, substantiated that it is also Weber’s.

108 Burger applies a similar, and in my view similarly untenable, Rickertian distinction to the word “interest” in the central Weber passage. *MSS*, pp. 83-84/*GAW*, pp. 183-84 (Burger 1987 (1976), p. 81n34).

Nusser does not go much into the specifics of the concept of culture, but simply asserts that Weber's use of the word "cultural significance" serves to underline the important elements in the concept of value relation as such.<sup>109</sup> Merz is more thorough in dealing with the question. He concludes that Weber's "cultural values" must, like Rickert's, be interpreted as having [normative] generality as a necessary quality. But it is interesting to note that Merz is obviously not completely at ease with this conclusion. Not only does he admit that it is an "inference", since Weber never in so many words accepted Rickert's position concerning cultural values. He also states that Rickert's concept of "generality", which by the "inference" should be read into Weber's concept of cultural values, is "very vague".<sup>110</sup> Baier, who also carefully discusses Weber's concept of culture, seems to be caught in a similar predicament. On the one hand, he states that Weber's concept is an application of Rickert's thought; but on the other hand, Baier's formulations seem to reflect Weber's own apparent uncertainty as to who, and on what level, "we" are,<sup>111</sup> whose values are important for the constitution of culture (B07, p. 148), and he qualifies his general conclusion by a footnote in which he reminds us that Weber, by underlining the *subjectivity* of the cultural values, limits his agreement with Rickert to the purely empirical level.

Oakes<sup>112</sup> does not directly compare Weber's concept of culture with Rickert's; but he describes it in terms which (in contrast to Rickert's position) do not seem to involve the relation to *normatively* general values or to a necessary link between the values on the object and the research level.<sup>113</sup> He introduces a useful distinction between subjective and cultural meaning (although he correctly notes that it is not

109 Nusser 1986, p. 95.

110 Merz 1990, pp. 320-21. Merz goes further than this: in his discussion of Rickert's concept of culture, he concludes that "behind this vagueness we find, in the last resort, the principal inconsistency in [Rickert's conception of] the relationship between the historical sciences to empirical reality" (Merz 1990, p. 210).

111 Baier 1969, pp. 132-33 speaks of "those of one's own kind" (ihresgleichen).

112 Oakes 1988a, pp. 23-32, 78-84.

113 To that extent, Oakes's position seems to coincide with my own (cf. Oakes 1987, p. 444, where the Weber-Rickert comparison is more direct). He does, however, take me severely to task (1988a, 107n32) for what he calls my "grotesque" conclusion that Rickert's conflation of "empirically general" with "normatively general" values "... amount[ed] to an illegitimate deduction of 'Ought' from 'Is' ..." (B72, p. 94). In his view, my error stemmed from a failure to identify Rickert's concept of unconditional validity and to understand Rickert's attempt to demonstrate the non-empirical validity of empirical cultural values through their approximation to such unconditionally valid or objective values. Oakes is right in saying that I had – intentionally – left out of my 1972 account that part of Rickert's argument. In so doing, I had perhaps telescoped Rickert's demonstration of the objectivity of values more than was strictly warranted. (I have tried to remedy this defect in B07.) But Oakes does not take into account that since my remark only concerned Rickert's jump from empirical to normative generality of values, this jump takes place within Rickert's purely *methodological* demonstration of the *empirical* objectivity of history; and this demonstration does not in itself involve the absolute validity of cultural values (as Oakes's own description of Rickert's position (1987, p. 444 and 1988a, p. 82) in fact makes quite clear).

always easy to see which sense Weber intends), and concludes that the latter (i.e., meaning on the research level) cannot be reduced to the former (i.e., meaning on the object level). This interpretation is backed up with an illuminating reference to Weber's description of the constitution of an ideal type of "the Christianity of the Middle Ages". It might perhaps be objected that the concepts of the "cultural sciences" do not all necessarily have an ideal-typical character – certainly Rickert did not think so – but in any event, the fundamental point remains: theoretical concepts of culture are, in Weber's view, defined by "the values of the historian and his age".<sup>114</sup>

### *The "transcendental precondition"*

In the context of this discussion, Weber's statement according to which "the transcendental precondition of any *cultural science* is *not* that we find a particular, or indeed any, 'culture' *valuable*, but that we *are* cultural *beings*, endowed with the capacity and the will to take up deliberate *positions* to the world, and to bestow *meaning* on it" (B07, p. 152)<sup>115</sup> has been taken by a number of commentators as evidence of a normative anthropological element in his thought according to which man only becomes "real" by virtue of his value orientation. This interpretation has been vigorously advanced by Henrich (1952), followed by Tenbruck (1999 (1959)), Wegener (1962) and, most recently, by Schluchter (2003).

Read as a whole and in context, the passage in question functions as an extension of Weber's argument that the concept of "culture" presupposes a *value relation* but not any *positive* valuation, and should consequently be interpreted in a formal and theoretical way.<sup>116</sup> It seems most reasonable, therefore, to interpret the passage as a simple indication that a "science of culture" depends on certain methodological conditions.<sup>117</sup> Interpreted in this way, the passage is meant to emphasize that history (in the logical sense) is dependent on two conditions: 1) that the historian is a human being, and thus presumed to be able to define a value aspect, to take an interest in his subject; and 2) that the subject-matter includes human beings presumed to be capable of value orientation in the world which surrounds them. The fact that the two conditions merge into one in Weber's "we" accords well with Weber's reluctance to distinguish between the object level and the research level (B07, p. 148).

In fact, Weber's reflections on man's motivation by an orientation after values, ideas, norms, etc., may be regarded as a *hypothesis*, which admittedly serves as a firm basis for a number of scientific disciplines, in the sense that they would lose

114 MSS, p. 84/GAW, p. 184.

115 MSS, p. 81/GAW, p. 180.

116 Henrich, Wegener and Tenbruck do not quote that part ("not ...") of the statement which makes this clear.

117 This reading is supported by Weber's own explanation, in *Stammler*, of the concept of "transcendental 'form'" as the "logical precondition of experience" (OSt, p. 91/GAW, p. 317). This is the only other instance in Weber's writings where he employs the term "transcendental": he obviously did not like its neo-Kantian philosophical connotations.

their relevance if *nobody* acted according to it, but which in *concrete* research is primarily justified by its *fruitfulness* as a guide to causal analysis. This hypothetical element strongly emerges in *Stammler*, where Weber argues that it is reasonable to regard judicial norms as important motives of behaviour because “empirical human beings are normally ‘reasonable’, in the sense that they are (from an empirical point of view) able to understand and act according to goals as maxims of behaviour and to have ‘normative ideas’”.<sup>118</sup> This kind of reflection marks a complete shift from any possible ontological or anthropological interpretation of value orientation as the “essence” of humanity, towards considerations of chance and probability.

A number of other commentators (Baier (1969), Prewo (1979), Merz (1990)) explicitly support this interpretation. So does Schnädelbach in a recent article, in which he states that Weber by this means transfers Rickert's “transcendental subjectivity” into an empirical and historical dimension<sup>119</sup> and “thereby confers on the theory of value relation the degree of plausibility which it lacks in the neo-Kantian version”. Schnädelbach goes on to point out that “cultural science”, viewed in this way, is itself a cultural fact, with the interesting implication that its subject matter is therefore endowed with “meaning” in a way that we do not find in the “natural” sciences.<sup>120</sup> If the fundamental object of social science is human beings acting in a certain way because they attach some sort of meaning to their action, the problem of the social scientist therefore becomes that of “Verstehen”, and of distinguishing between the subjective meaning of the individuals and the “objective” meaning that the scholar might feel able to discern behind their actions. In a paradoxical way, the *subjective* orientations in the material of cultural science become the central *object* of the cultural scientist.

### “Objectivity” and its basis

In Rickert's view, the objectivity of the “historical” sciences depended on the objectivity of their specific concepts (*B07*, pp. 122-24). He tried to show that these concepts were necessarily formed by “theoretical value relation”, meaning “a relation to theoretical values”. Such theoretical values went beyond any subjectivity. They were logically on a higher plane than any “ordinary” value or valuation: they were not subjectively – empirically or normatively – but *objectively* and *absolutely* valid for a given community. This distinction between theoretical (objective, absolute) and practical (subjective) values was central to Rickert's construction. While there might be conflicts between “lower” values or between the corresponding valuations, there could be none at the level of absolute values. The relation of a given concept to an absolute value was a “theoretical value relation”; any concept formed by theoretical

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118 *OSt*, p. 139/GAW, p. 355.

119 Oakes (1987, p. 441) implicitly (in an article about *Rickert!*) takes the same view, and instead of a “transcendental precondition” speaks of a “universal pragmatics”.

120 Schnädelbach 2003, p. 108.

value relation was therefore objective; and any proposition (“judgment”) formed by means of such concepts was consequently *objectively true*.

Weber accepted Rickert’s account of the principles of concept formation in the “historical” sciences, and especially the way in which the “historical” concepts were based on “value relation”. This offered him precisely the kind of ammunition that he needed in his fight against “objectivism” in all its forms. He also accepted that there was a fundamental difference between “theoretical value relation” and “practical valuation”. Indeed, this difference was the necessary logical precondition of his demand for the value freedom of the social sciences.<sup>121</sup> But from the very beginning, he also had problems. In his oft-quoted postcard to his wife Marianne of 10 April 1902,<sup>122</sup> he wrote: “I have finished Rickert[’s *Limits*]. He is *very good*”, but added “I have doubts concerning [his] terminology”. For a long time, nobody thought much about these doubts; after all, they were only terminological. But in *B72*, I was able to quote from a set of notes on “Rickert’s ‘values’” (the quotation marks in the title are significant here, as is so often the case with Weber!) that Weber wrote later (probably in January 1903), and which made it clear that he was worried about the term “value”.<sup>123</sup> Any remaining uncertainty about whether these notes are in fact connected with his “terminological doubts” of April 1902 can now be finally dispelled: We find the “smoking gun” in a postcard written by Weber to Marianne on 10 April 1902 (the day before the one quoted above): “... I mostly read Rickert, who is *very good*, apart from the terminology (‘value’) ...”<sup>124</sup> In the 1903 notes, Weber also explicitly says what kind of terminology he would prefer: instead of “[related to] values”, one should rather say “worth knowing about”, “interesting” or the like. This, according to Weber, is what the “value” in “theoretical value relation” means, from a purely methodological point of view.

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121 I am not quite as convinced as Oakes (1998, p. 300) about the extent to which Weber’s demand for value freedom *depends on* Rickert. Oakes advances two arguments for dependence: that “Weber’s concept of a value judgment is defined on the basis of Rickert’s distinction between value judgments and value relevancies”; and that Weber refers the reader to Rickert in *Value Freedom*. As for the first argument – which in any event does not seem to deal directly with the demand for value freedom, but only with the concept of value judgment – the two definitions in *Value Freedom* of “evaluations” (Wertungen) and “value judgments” (Werturteile), on which Weber’s whole argument for value freedom is based, say nothing about the Rickertian distinction. As for the second argument, it is true that Weber refers the reader to Rickert in *Value Freedom*; however, the reference does not concern value freedom, but the concept of “value relation”.

122 BSB, Ana 446.

123 *B72*, p. 117; *B07*, p. 143. The whole text of Weber’s note on this subject – which I have called the “Nervi fragment” (after the Ligurian seaside resort where Weber apparently wrote it) – is quoted and extensively commented in Bruun 2001.

124 (“... Sonst lese ich meist Rickert, der – von der Terminologie (‘Werth’) abgesehen, *sehr gut ist ...*”, BSB, Ana 446). The text of this postcard has never before, as far as I know, been published. I first quoted it in an intervention at the conference in honour of Karl-Ludwig Ay (“Das Faszinosum Max Webers”) in Munich in September 2004 (see Ay and Borchardt 2006).

The remark may look terminological, but in substance it is highly explosive,<sup>125</sup> and the cloud of methodological smoke after the explosion has not yet cleared. The fundamental point is simple: Rickert needed absolute “theoretical values” as anchoring points for his concepts, in order to safeguard their objectivity. Weber, on the other hand, is from the very beginning not very comfortable with this idea:

As soon as one tries to look for something different, something *objective*, behind the *fact* that in any given instance, historical interest will be limited and graduated, one enters the domain of *norms* ... Precisely that is in fact the meaning – translated into everyday terms – of the “value metaphysics” which Rickert ends up with. Here, it must suffice to express doubts as to the possibility of grasping the *substance* of such norms, and simply to add that such doubts might be consistent with the view that the “absolute validity” of certain “values” (what we would call “interests”) could be taken as more than simply a limiting concept.<sup>126</sup>

Weber is still hedging his bets, but he is certainly not buying into the whole philosophical system that Rickert is offering in *Limits*. And the potential consequences are momentous. If the necessity of the link to absolute values is put in doubt, the whole Rickertian construction of “objective historical science” seems in danger of collapsing, unless some other source of objectivity can be found.

In this regard Weber is not very helpful. He is certainly aware of the objectivity problem of the “historical” (social) sciences. That is, after all, what his programmatic 1904 essay on *Objectivity* is supposed to be about. But that essay, like all his subsequent pronouncements on the subject, is much more explicit about the problem – how objectivity is *not* to be understood – than about the solution. Put bluntly, the *Objectivity* essay is almost all about *subjectivity*.<sup>127</sup> But this is really quite logical, because subjectivity is in Weber’s thinking the necessary precondition of objectivity – whatever that may turn out to be in practice.

Weber’s point of departure is the fundamental distinction between theoretical science and practical values (which translates into the demand for the value freedom of science). But – and this is essential – this logical dichotomy is not in his reasoning based on the absolute objectivity of the theoretical value of truth (or of any other value). Instead, it is an instance of a wider and equally fundamental theoretical conflict between different value spheres, *of which science is just one*. Weber is completely firm about the *subjectivity* of the choice that a person makes to be guided by one of those values. This also holds for the value of truth. Therefore, in a sense, the careful distinction between theoretical values and practical valuation which in Rickert’s system was guaranteed by the different nature of the two kinds

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125 One might as well say that Hegel’s philosophy of history was very good, except that the term “spirit” was unfortunate...

126 Part of the “Nervi fragment”, quoted from Bruun 2001, p. 144.

127 Cf. Wagner and Zippin 1990, pp. 562-63: “Weber simply does not view the status of the social sciences as threatened by an urgent problem of objectivity. On the contrary, he draws attention to the epochal experience of the historical relativity of value relevancies”.

of value – absolute vs. subjective – is erased. If a person finds a certain element of life theoretically “interesting”, “worth knowing about”, he more or less explicitly thereby makes a *subjective* choice in favour of the value of truth. Other choices are equally possible, and it cannot be *demonstrated* that one should choose truth rather than some other value. And if we choose some other term among those discussed by Weber in the “Nervi fragment”, like “important” or “significant”, it either has a “theoretical” meaning, or it shades over into some practical value or other, which is equally subjective.<sup>128</sup> Weber himself in practice acknowledges this, when he speaks of the positive role of valuations in scientific work (*B07*, pp. 136-38). But according to the Rickertian line of thinking, absolute objectivity is unobtainable on such terms.

Once the choice in favour of truth has been made, the value of truth asserts itself as absolute. It is on that basis, therefore, that objectivity must be found in Weber’s system, if it is to be found at all. But as the discussion above has shown, Weber is not at all clear about his truth criteria. On the one hand, he shows a remarkable unwillingness to state bluntly the categorial criteria that Rickert’s system furnishes him with. Not only do we look in vain in Weber’s work for any direct reference to the idea of absolute and objective values (except in a resolutely “subjective” context); we do not even find many indications that he wants to build on Rickert’s neat argument according to which truth-as-a-value asserts itself as binding on anybody who wants to formulate true statements. But on the other hand, Weber certainly does not wholeheartedly embrace the conception of truth-as-intersubjectively-transmissible-knowledge, produced by means of the methodical application of certain practical procedures (Arnold Brecht’s Scientific Method). We find some passages that seem to support the “categorial” side, and others that apparently indicate a more “empirical” approach. In *B72*, I may have over-emphasized the “empirical” tendency, particularly in speaking about a “reference to reality”. But I still remain convinced that what is significant and interesting about Weber’s view of objectivity and truth is not the possibility of seeing it as being in more or less complete (but in any event often implicit) conformity to Rickert’s system, whether or not including what Wagner calls his “transcendental arabesques”,<sup>129</sup> but rather the demonstrable fact that Weber’s statements on these matters are *not* systematically consistent, and that he manifests a strong tendency to argue in ways and directions which are of little or no importance to Rickert, but of much greater interest to modern social science.

I am not too worried by the circumstance that this way of thinking may on the face of it seem quite far removed from the conclusions of such eminent commentators as Burger and (to a certain extent) Oakes. We all seem to agree on the basic premise: that Weber’s work provides no clear answer to the question of the ultimate basis of

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128 The hilarious episode (*B07*, p. 100n211) at a session of the *Society* where Weber is caught up short by the moderator of the debate for having employed the “valuational” term “magnificent”, and dutifully replaces it with the “theoretical” term “interesting” is emblematic in this regard.

129 Wagner 1987, p. 138.

the objectivity of the social sciences, and in particular, to the question of the extent of his agreement with Rickert on this point. True, Burger disposes (albeit on markedly Rickertian grounds) of two of the most important passages in Weber's work that seem to point towards a different conclusion, and states that, in a third one, "there is nothing on which the assumption of a disagreement between Rickert and Weber can be based". But he nevertheless admits that "Weber never gave a ... straight answer" to the question of the absolute validity of historical knowledge (on which Rickert's philosophical construction of objectivity was ultimately based), and concludes that it seems wisest to assume that Weber did not *want* to take a position on that subject, "either because he was not quite sure, or because he thought it irrelevant".<sup>130</sup>

In his book *Weber and Rickert*, Oakes on the face of it looks more severe. In the final analysis, he says, Rickert's strategy for solving the problem of objectivity of the cultural sciences does not hold water. But Weber "is committed to the premises that generate the problem of the objectivity of the cultural sciences", and formulates these premises "in Rickertian terms and on the basis of Rickertian assumptions". Therefore, the Weberian virtue of intellectual honesty "dictates that Weber follow Rickert to the bitter end", even if he "did not grasp the significance of this problem for his own work" and in fact held positions (on value conflict and causal explanation) that Rickert rejected.<sup>131</sup> But in his review of Ringer (1997), Oakes eases up somewhat: "Ringer's speculation about Weber's pragmatic appropriation of [*Limits*] is neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by Weber's publications and correspondence. That said, such a strategy would certainly not violate Weber's general practice in his methodological work ..."<sup>132</sup>

Thus, in spite of the fact that both these authors adopt a strongly systematical approach, they both clearly acknowledge what Oakes in 1982 called Weber's

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130 Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 89, 91. In a long review of Ringer (1997), Burger essentially re-states his previous arguments, and claims that the acceptance of certain core positions of Rickert's argument "all but inevitably entail the acceptance of others, *if logical coherence is to be maintained*" (Burger 1998, p. 281). This still leaves some scope for the uncertainty that Burger had previously allowed for.

131 Oakes 1988a, pp. 145-52 (quotations on pp. 145, 150).

132 Oakes 1998, p. 302. Both Oakes (1988a, p. 150) and Burger (1998, p. 281), making use of a simile borrowed from Schopenhauer, say that the logic of Rickert's neo-Kantian methodology "is not a taxi-cab that can be stopped and rerouted if the final destination reveals itself as less attractive than expected" (Burger's formulation). I have the greatest respect for the commitment, persistence and logical acuity of these two scholars in their attempts to make sense of Weber's obscure and intricate arguments. Nevertheless, while arresting, their image is a little disquieting. I picture Rickert's logic moving, no doubt more like a tram than a cab, in pre-destined grooves, from halt to halt, until the final transcendental terminus. Oakes, when conducting Rickert's tram, realizes that Mr Weber has alighted somewhere *en route*, and shakes his head at such wayward behaviour, since the ticket was for a whole ride. On the other hand, when Burger is in the driver's seat, he does not always bother to look inside to see if Mr Weber is still aboard; and (if I may put my tongue in my cheek for a moment) I suspect him of trying to lock the doors in order to prevent his illustrious passenger from getting out.

“methodological ambivalence”, and in 1998 his “fundamental [methodological] inconsistency”. We find the same acknowledgement in the work of other central commentators. Schelting,<sup>133</sup> a little sadly, states that “it is not possible to determine whether Weber rejected [Rickert’s] concept of the validity of historical knowledge after having gained an adequate understanding of it, or whether he never gained such an adequate understanding”. Wagner for his part says that Weber “did not know what he was buying into” when he made use of Rickert’s arguments.<sup>134</sup> Turner speculates that “Weber ... draws back from the full implications of his relativism ... or ... perhaps ... fear[s] ... making absolute claims when he thinks that a relative claim ... will do”.<sup>135</sup> The psychological explanations may differ – inadequate understanding, undecidedness, substantive doubts<sup>136</sup> – but the feeling of vacillation and ambivalence remains.

It might be thought that some of the bafflement induced by this feeling could be dispelled if one adopted the position that Weber’s methodology, and in particular his concepts of reality and objectivity, had other main anchors than those provided by Rickert’s logical constructions. Prominent among those commentators whose thoughts run in this direction is Stephen Turner, who points to Weber’s strong legal background and argues that the calculation of “objective possibility”, on which Weber lavishes so much attention in *Crit.Stud.*, deals with probabilistic causal attributions which are grounded in considerations of “juridical interest” of a different kind than the neo-Kantian “historical” interest.<sup>137</sup> The same point seems to be made in Wagner and Zipprian’s closely argued conclusion concerning the non-congruence of the category of “objective possibility” with Rickert’s philosophy: “... insofar as Weber employs the theory of objective possibility, he must ... replace the transcendental conception of reality with a realist conception”.<sup>138</sup> There are even signs that Rickert himself for practical purposes might accept such a “realist” conception.<sup>139</sup> Unfortunately, the same two scholars go on to insist that behind this tempting common-sense distinction between “logical preconditions” and ordinary

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133 Schelting 1934, p. 234.

134 Wagner 1987, p. 178.

135 Turner 1990, p. 550n9.

136 The part of the Nervi fragment quoted above (p. 28) seems to show that perhaps Weber was not as unaware of the inconsistencies and problems that came with Rickert’s system as many commentators have hitherto assumed.

137 Turner and Factor 1981, 1984; Turner 1986 and, particularly relevant in this context, 1990, pp. 546-50. Similarly Treiber 1997, p. 412.

138 Wagner and Zipprian 1991 (1986), p. 286. We find an apodictic statement by Weber to much the same effect in *GASS*, p. 482: “... when we, as empirical scientists, deal with an ‘interesting’ fact, then we have left the question: *why* it *is* interesting, behind us, since our task is now solely and exclusively that of determining the facts – and nothing more than that”.

139 See the quotation in Wagner and Zipprian 1987, p. 145 from Rickert’s *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* (1904 (1892), p. 223) where Rickert, for the purposes of concrete research practices, envisages an “empirical realism” according to which “the material of scientific concept formation can be regarded as an objective reality which has a separate existence”.

empirical social-scientific work lurks a “Kantian-scholastic dilemma” between a transcendental and an objectivistic concept of reality.

Nevertheless, I find Turner's idea – even with Wagner and Zipprian's sceptical provisos – interesting and attractive, not least because it seems to support my own thesis that Weber's attempt at a solution of the problem of objectivity carried him close to a modern conception of the object of social science (*B07*, p. 146). It also helps to explain the little-noted fact that Weber never links up his substantive discussion of “objective possibility” with that of “objectivity” (which, anyway, is surprisingly meagre). His argument about each of these concepts proceeds, as far as I can see, without direct reference to the other.

### Value analysis

On the face of it, Weber's ideas on the analysis of values do not look very promising or inspiring from a methodological point of view. The actual possibility of conducting such an analysis was on the whole taken for granted by Weber's academic contemporaries, and the question therefore did not give him an opportunity to engage in those polemics which often make his work so enjoyable to read. Moreover, much of the methodological interest in Weber stems, frankly speaking, from the obscurity and complexity of his thought, which almost cries out for interpretation and systematization. And since his discussions of the *principles* of value analysis are more concentrated and more constructive than many other parts of his methodology, they have on the whole left scholars with little to comment on.

What makes Weber's reflections on the value analysis interesting is therefore not so much their method, but rather their *results*. In the context of *B07*, these results, especially concerning the logic of *value systems* and *value spheres* and the fundamental *value conflict*, provide a systematically necessary link to a number of discussions in Chapters 1, 2 and 5. And his reflections on the details of the axiological and teleological value analysis, in their various combinations, are a similarly important basis for the argument in Chapters 4 and 5.

Moreover, the value analysis undoubtedly occupies a central position in Weber's thoughts on what constitutes a complete and consistent personality, and consequently form an important nexus between his theoretical and his more existential reflections.<sup>140</sup> While this dimension is not the direct subject of *B07*, it remains the “echo chamber” through which the “lean” methodological discussions and conclusions may come to vibrate and resonate in a wider, personal context for the reader, as they did for Weber himself.

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140 As Schluchter, who has consistently and extensively explored this dimension in his work on Weber, succinctly puts it: “For Weber value analysis was not an esoteric, purely academic matter removed from praxis” (1979a, p. 84n48).

*Did Weber propound a “system”, or a “theory”, of values?*

Schluchter states that the conception of value relation, which Weber militated in favour of, “was connected, at least implicitly, to a ‘well-ordered conceptual system of “values”’, with which “Weber had no quarrel”, provided it did not include an established hierarchy of values.<sup>141</sup> On the basis of this assumption, Schluchter attempts to “reconstruct” a “speculative” Weberian value system.<sup>142</sup>

Schluchter justifies his interpretation with a reference to letters from Weber to Rickert which testify to Weber’s “lively interest” in Rickert’s attempts to develop a system of values.<sup>143</sup>

The most important of the relevant letters, from the end of November 1913,<sup>144</sup> contains a number of specific comments on Rickert’s article “On Value Systems” which had just appeared. Weber here makes it plain that he is only in favour of an *open* system with a purely formal ranking of values; and the editorial comments in *MWG I/8* make it clear that by making these stipulations, Weber has already drawn a strong demarcation line between Rickert’s and his own ideas on the subject. But Weber goes further, and says that “it can in his view be demonstrated” that Rickert’s system “is only *one* – particularly successful – system among others”; and any such system, he says, will, like any other scientific “accomplishment”, past, present or future, necessarily be superseded by others. In fact, if Weber sees Rickert’s “system” as valuable, it is “precisely *because* values are in our *empirical* work interconnected in such absolutely heterogeneous and irrational ways”. This is a telling phrase.<sup>145</sup> What it implies is that the advantage of Rickert’s “system” is much the same as that of an *ideal type*: it can function as a rational benchmark against which the irrational relations between values in real life can be measured and appraised. Any such system, like any ideal-typical concept, in Weber’s eyes has no *permanent* scientific value (*B07*, p. 234).

Against this background, I do not think it safe to assume that Weber would have “had no quarrel” with an attempt to base a theoretical construction with a lasting

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141 Schluchter 1996b, p. 229.

142 Schluchter 1991, pp. 290, 297.

143 Schluchter 1996b, p. 229.

144 *MWG I/8* (not referred to in Schluchter 1996b, probably because *MWG I/8* only came out some years later).

145 Weber seems to have no desire to get himself embroiled in what Wagner (1987, p. 158n6), in this connection, caustically calls “Rickert’s philosophical sausage machine”.

claim to permanence on a “system of values”, Rickertian or not,<sup>146</sup> and I therefore do not feel entirely comfortable with Schluchter’s “reconstruction”.<sup>147</sup>

Does Weber at least have a “theory” of value, then? Schluchter certainly thinks so. Although he notes that Weber’s treatment of value-theoretical questions is “sporadic” and consists of “hints”,<sup>148</sup> he nevertheless detects in Weber’s *Interm.Refl.* “[Weber’s] own value theory ... in fairly developed form”.<sup>149</sup> But here again, I have my doubts.

The various aspects of the axiological value analysis, as described by Weber (*B07*, pp. 167-79), can of course be said to contain the elements of a theory of value, since the analysis is based on certain presuppositions regarding the structure and mutual relationship of values. This “theory” is never spelt out, however: Weber shows no inclination to systematize his remarks on values (*B07*, p. 65).<sup>150</sup> Schluchter’s extensive systematic discussion of Weber’s “ethics of values”,<sup>151</sup> though most interesting and suggestive, must therefore remain speculative, as he himself takes care to point out.<sup>152</sup>

### *The importance of the idea of “value spheres”<sup>153</sup>*

Turner and Factor note that Weber never justifies or explains his notion of value spheres. Nevertheless, they say, that notion has a central function in making Weber’s

146 Weber’s reference to a “well-ordered conceptual system of ‘values’”, which Schluchter quotes in support of his reconstruction, is in fact negatively tinged, since Weber uses it to point out certain obvious limitations of any such value system, in that it just cannot encompass the basic dichotomy between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility. From Weber, this is a damning statement. (His quotation marks around “values” are also ominous.)

147 Formulations like the one (Schluchter 1989, p. 47) according to which “Weber was ... increasingly interested in securing his methodological standpoint in terms of a philosophy of value” certainly seem to me to give the wrong impression. Morikawa (2001, pp. 261-62), however, in my view goes too far, and on too slender evidence, in his criticism of Schluchter on this point.

148 Schluchter 1991, p. 288.

149 Schluchter 1996a, p. 59.

150 Indeed, in the whole of Weber’s work, the term “theory of value” only occurs once (*MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 507), as a reference to an insertion from 1917 into *Value Freedom* to which Schluchter (1996a, p. 75n97) attaches much (perhaps too much) importance. For a concrete example of Weber’s reluctance, see the passage *MSS*, p. 12/*GAW*, p. 501, where he refuses to discuss the question whether subjective judgments of taste are situated on a different (implicitly: a lower) level than practical, particularly ethical, valuations: “Those are problems for a philosophy of values, not for the methodology of the empirical disciplines”. (Segady (1994, pp. 497-98) certainly reads too much into my remarks in *B72* when he states that I think it possible to rank the values into a hierarchical order implicitly suggested by Weber).

151 Schluchter 1991, pp. 290-303.

152 Schluchter 1991, p. 297.

153 *B07*, pp. 193-96.

whole analysis plausible.<sup>154</sup> This is a point which I did not, perhaps, stress enough in *B72*, but which I have now come to regard as crucial.

As I see it, if Weber's remarks concerning value spheres are important, it is not because they add up to a system or a theory. What does he actually say about value spheres? They can be identified and distinguished from each other. Their number and character does not seem to be fixed once and for all, and the criteria for defining them remain unclear.<sup>155</sup> The choice in favour of any of them – including that of truth – is subjective, and cannot be forced on anyone. But once the choice has been made, one is caught up in the “inherent laws” (*Eigengesetzlichkeiten*) of that particular sphere. The concept of “inherent laws” is one that appears fairly late in Weber's writings, concurrently with his growing interest in “value spheres”. He never defines it.<sup>156</sup> It simply seems to cover the “logic” prevailing inside a value sphere. Parts of that “logic” will certainly be axiological (what acting according to a particular value “implies”); other parts may be empirical (the “given circumstances”). Taken together, they can be said to make up an “objective” element, but one that is embedded in and derived from the subjective preliminary choice. This again means that although it is certainly in Weber's view possible to give a binding *demonstration*, by means of conceptual logic, of the “objective” implications of an “inherent law”, and therefore also to show that somebody is “sinning against” it, the binding force of that demonstration remains relative to the value sphere in question. In the case of science, you can show that someone is being “intellectually dishonest” by knowingly making false statements or deductions, but that judgment only remains “objective” relative to the value sphere of truth – and you cannot prove that everybody should make a choice in favour of that sphere (*B07*, p. 72).

A central difficulty in this respect is that the premise on which the “inherent law” is based is not always obvious. Even in the case of the sphere of scientific inquiry, Weber is not, as I have tried to show in *B07*, quite clear about the nature of the criteria of truth. Turner and Factor<sup>157</sup> pose this thorny question in more general terms: The notion of “inherent” laws smacks of deriving values from “the nature of things”, something that Weber was vehemently opposed to. But in that case, whence do the “laws” derive? Empirical generality (“conventional” or consensual definition) would not be an acceptable criterion for Weber, either.<sup>158</sup> As for his personal definition or preference, it would not be binding on anybody else.

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<sup>154</sup> Turner and Factor 1984, pp. 45-46.

<sup>155</sup> See Weber's remark to Rickert that more than one “system” of values is possible, and Schluchter (1991, p. 289), who says that the value spheres have as their basis nothing more solid than “empirical plausibilities”. Oakes (2003, p. 29) calls Weber's analysis “surprisingly casual”.

<sup>156</sup> Oakes (2003, pp. 30-34) submits the concept of “inherent laws” to an intensive and stringent analysis.

<sup>157</sup> Turner and Factor 1984, pp. 53-54.

<sup>158</sup> Although he comes dangerously close to the “conventional” solution in a letter to R. Wilbrandt of 2 April 1913: “The parallel [between economics and] *medicine* is so questionable

Weber does not propose any way out of the dilemma. What he leaves us with is therefore *systematically* less than satisfactory, but it nevertheless – and perhaps even *because of* this deficiency – makes a great deal of sense.<sup>159</sup> Weber's position in fact allows him to balance on the knife's edge between objectivism and relativism. The individual's choice of value sphere is always subjective and always provisional; hence, no objectivism. But the inherent laws of that sphere can be identified and made the basis for an evaluation of the individual's behaviour: hence, no relativism, at least for as long as the individual chooses to remain within that sphere.<sup>160</sup>

But how are we to guard against relativism creeping back into the equation, if the individual moves from one value sphere to the other, refusing to be judged by the "inherent law" of one sphere because he has just "positioned" himself in another one? Here, Weber furnishes an interesting, if implicit, answer by constantly underlining the importance of *committing* oneself to the cause that one has chosen, whatever it might be. In his pithy phrase: "Nothing is worth anything to a man, as a human being, if he *cannot* do it with *passion*".<sup>161</sup> One's *cause* should be one's *vocation* (Beruf). In *Value Freedom*, we interestingly find this notion of professional vocation coupled directly to that of "inherent laws": "In any *profession*, the *task* as such has its claims and must be performed in accordance with its own inherent laws".<sup>162</sup> As Lassman and Velody put it: "A significant part of [Weber's] defence [against the charge of relativism], successful or not, rests upon the appeal to the notion of the 'vocation' as an immunization strategy against the dangers of such a destructive relativism".

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because [in medicine] it is at least possible to construct a *conventional* concept of 'health' which is more or less unequivocal, while *we* [economists] *cannot* do so" (*MWG II/8*).

159 Oakes (2001, 2003), on the other hand, claims that Weber's analysis of the value spheres and their "inherent laws" has "self-destructive defects", particularly in placing the value sphere of truth on the same level as the other value spheres. As I read his closely reasoned logical argument, it seems to make essentially the same point as what I (above, p. 14) called the "logical trap" of the neo-Kantians: in asserting anything, you already acknowledge the absolute value of truth. Although his logic seems impeccable, I am not so sure about the extent to which Oakes's demonstration has practical relevance.

160 Similarly Schluchter 1989, p. 47. Turner and Factor (1994, p. 142) make the same point in a more down-to-earth and "sociological" fashion, when, referring to the sphere of law, they talk about "... the possibility of 'objectivity', in an internal sense, within a discipline and for an audience which shares the pre-given sense of significance ...". Schluchter (1979a, pp. 73-74) seems to be reasoning along similar lines when he puts in parallel the "ethics" of consistency in the service of a given value, and "personality" as the consequence of a behavioral typification. See also Baier 1969, p. 148n1 for a philosophical formulation of the same idea.

161 *FMW*, p. 135/*GAW*, p. 589.

162 *MSS*, p. 5/*GAW*, p. 494.

*The value conflict: scientific theory or subjective preference?*<sup>163</sup>

What is the status of Weber's idea of the fundamental value conflict? The question is not academic, since much of his methodological thought is bound up with this idea. At the same time, it requires careful analysis of the relevant texts, because Weber's formulations in this regard are often strongly tinged with existential passion.

In *B72*, I concluded that Weber's idea of the value conflict was not an inference, of a particularly dramatic kind, from his subjective *Weltanschauung*, but was seen by him as logically demonstrable. This has been the general view of commentators. Only rarely do we meet with divergent opinions. One instance is Runciman, who apparently believes that the principal argument which Weber, or supporters of his view, might put forward would be "the indisputable variety of political and ethical beliefs and the lack of any universally accepted criterion for distinguishing between them".<sup>164</sup> This is a mistake. Runciman's argument is much the same as that which Schmoller tried to direct at Weber in the "quarrel about value judgments" (*B07*, p. 88), and to which he got a firm and negative rejoinder. Lassman and Velody, for their part, claim that "on reflection, it is clear that the famous thesis of the unending conflict of values is itself a philosophical thesis and is not a simple 'factual' assertion. It is an argument that in the knowledge that there is a pluralism of values there is a knowledge that is worth having" – ultimately, a thesis about human nature.<sup>165</sup> It is difficult to see why the fact that a certain kind of knowledge is worth having should make it less true; as for the ontological construction which the authors put on Weber's theory, it is already sufficiently contradicted by his remarks on the empirical prevalence of "intermingled" value attitudes.<sup>166</sup>

*The tensions between the value spheres: the existential dimension*

As we have seen, the idea of mutually exclusive value spheres is present in Weber's thought at least as early as the 1895 Inaugural Lecture. It can be said to receive its methodological baptism with the formulation of the principle of scientific value freedom, in the *Roscher* and *Objectivity* essays in 1903–04, and its full sociological incarnation in the *Interm.Refl.* from 1917. Concomitantly, Weber from the very beginning insists on the greatest possible clarity concerning the actual value sphere that is being invoked or implied. He continually demands "clear and thorough distinctions", not only between different values, but also between concepts and between alternative modes of thought.<sup>167</sup>

What is striking, however, is that Weber at the same time underlines that, provided the *logical* distinction between them has been made clear, different spheres

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163 *B07*, pp. 198–200.

164 Runciman 1969, pp. 156–60 (quotation from p. 160).

165 Lassman and Velody 1989, p. 203.

166 *MSS*, pp. 17–18/*GAW*, p. 507.

167 For examples, see *MSS*, pp. 2, 8–9, 59–60/*GAW*, pp. 156–57, 490, 497–98.

of values or modes of thought may *in practice* be found close together. Indeed, he puts this point with such force that one is almost led to conclude that he has a positive prejudice in favour of this kind of “tense coexistence” of the different logical spheres. I have (B72, p. 74) quoted his view in the 1913 *Memorandum*,<sup>168</sup> formulated with rhetorical insistence, according to which a scholar may talk about heterogeneous problems “in one and the same book, on one and the same page, or even in the principal and subordinate clause of one and the same sentence”, if only he makes clear the distinction between them. In fact, the same thought, and even the same figure of speech, can be found much earlier: In a letter to Gottl of 28 March 1906, Weber writes: “... from a *logical* perspective, fundamentally different aims of knowledge (Erkenntniszwecke), which can only be differentiated *logically*, may be coupled in *one and the same* sentence of a scientific work”;<sup>169</sup> and exactly the same expression crops up again in 1909, in a book review by Weber, in which he says that true “nomothetic” and “idiographic” statements may, in spite of their logically different character, be part not only of the same scholarly work, but “even of *one and the same* sentence”.<sup>170</sup>

This is strong evidence in support of the view that the basic idea behind these formulations, the tense but necessary coexistence of fundamentally different value spheres, is not just a point of logic, but a fundamental existential fact for Weber. As Heinrich Rickert put it in a commemorative article:

... [for Weber] there was nothing for it but to distinguish sharply between the theoretical man ... and the practical man ... not only conceptually, but in the *reality of his own person* ... Such dualism was both a moral and a theoretical necessity for him, and he carried it out in practice to an astonishingly high degree... [The audience felt] that they were listening to a man who was forcibly suppressing something within himself ...<sup>171</sup>

This brings out both Weber's need and ability, as a person, to *distinguish between* and *separate* the different value spheres, and the *tensions* that the forced coexistence of these values created within his personality. Not only the academic texts but also Weber's private letters provide us with definite indications that these tensions need not – indeed sometimes could not – be resolved. One had to be *conscious* of them, and *live with* them. The conclusion of his letter to Emil Lask of 8 June 1913 is eloquent testimony to this way of thinking:

... guilt can become a source of strength, or not, depending on how one deals with it. It would be a terrible thing if only the “integer vitae”, and not its opposite (properly dealt with), could make us into complete human beings. In that case, I at least would have had to forego such full humanity.<sup>172</sup>

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168 *Memorandum*, p. 165; the phrase remains unaltered in *Value Freedom* (1917).

169 MWG II/5.

170 Weber 1909, p. 619.

171 Rickert (1989 (1926)), pp. 84-85.

172 MWG II/8.

As Schluchter puts it: “Even ethical failure in the face of irresolvable conflicts can sustain a claim to complete humanity”.<sup>173</sup> But since the conflicts between the value spheres *are* in Weber’s view fundamentally irresolvable, he may well feel that the *only* appropriate response of the “complete human being” is to face this fact and to choose to live with the tensions and with the possible guilt that they may entail.<sup>174</sup>

### *Weber and Nietzsche*

This seems an appropriate place to touch on the question of the importance of Nietzsche for Weber’s methodology.

There is not much primary evidence to go on. In Weber’s work, references to Nietzsche are scarce, and when they do occur, they are not always positive (he more than once characterizes Nietzsche as a “philistine”,<sup>175</sup> and openly distances himself from his concept of “aristocracy”<sup>176</sup>). In their turn, the positive comments – less than a handful – concentrate on Nietzsche’s theory of “ressentiment”. From a methodological point of view, the only direct and positive references are to be found in *Sc.Voc.*, where Weber approvingly quotes Nietzsche’s “devastating criticism of those ‘last humans’ who believe that they have ‘invented happiness’” and says that Nietzsche “has again opened our eyes to the fact that something can be beautiful although (and even: in that) it is not good”.<sup>177</sup> The first of these points is part of Weber’s argument against those who mistakenly believe that scientific advances will in themselves bring happiness to humankind; the second one is a graphic exemplification of the value conflict. There are certainly also a number of hidden quotations and terminological echoes from Nietzsche in Weber’s texts,<sup>178</sup> of which the term “intellectual honesty” (intellektuelle Rechtschaffenheit) is perhaps the most relevant one in our context.

All in all, this is not much. Small wonder, therefore, that Staught speaks of Nietzsche as “the Great Hidden One” in Weber’s work.<sup>179</sup> The authors (they are quite numerous) who want to demonstrate a close relationship between Weber and

173 Schluchter 1996a, p. 59n40.

174 See Weber’s letter to Count Keyserling of 12 December 1912 in which he says that he can only regard “the need for a purely rational ‘order’ and (value) ‘hierarchy’” as “a symptom of [people’s] deep-seated weakness and perplexity whenever [they are] faced with a genuine existential problem (Lebensproblem)” (*MWG II/7*).

175 See *GARS II*, p. 174 and Weber’s often quoted handwritten comment in the margin of Simmel’s “Schopenhauer and Nietzsche”: “On this point, [N], too, was a German philistine (Spiesser)” (Quoted from Schluchter 1996a, p. 58n36, translation altered). Similarly in a letter to Else Jaffé of 13 September 1907: “... [Nietzsche’s] dyed-in-the-wool moralistic teachings ...” (*MWG II/5*).

176 *LSPW*, pp. 122-23/*GPS*, p. 285.

177 *FMW*, pp. 143, 148/*GAW*, pp. 598, 604.

178 See, for instance, Eden 1983, p.41n18 and 19, who does, however, rather overstrain his sources.

179 Staught 1994, p. 181.

Nietzsche have therefore had to make use of constructions and suppositions, and to appeal to “elective affinities” between the two thinkers – techniques which have in turn exposed these scholars to the more or less tempered scorn of those among their colleagues who do not share their convictions.<sup>180</sup>

Echoes and affinities apart, how great is the actual *influence* of Nietzsche on Weber's methodological work? The question may seem vast, but is in fact well circumscribed. The methodological points raised in the direct references to Nietzsche quoted above: the value conflict, the inherent “meaninglessness” of science, and the demand for intellectual honesty, seem to be the relevant ones to investigate. Nor is it too difficult to find the grounds for a reasonable answer.

One possible way is to make use of what one might call the “Oakes triad”:<sup>181</sup> a) did Weber appropriate the ideas in question from Nietzsche? (genetic dependence); b) can the ideas in question, as used by Weber, only be understood by understanding the corresponding ones in Nietzsche? (hermeneutic dependence); c) does the validity of the ideas, as used by Weber, depend on the validity of Nietzsche's similar ideas? (logical dependence).

As for genetic dependence, “intellectual honesty” looks like a straight, but unacknowledged, terminological loan. It seems probable (but cannot be proved) that Weber's general theory of the value conflict was genetically dependent on Nietzsche. The “polytheism of values”, in its logically stringent form, is a direct consequence of the fact that God is dead, in Nietzsche's famous phrase, and certainly, to quote Scaff,<sup>182</sup> “the feeling of the ‘chaos’ of value and existential conflict ... was the point at which Nietzsche's presence can be felt”. With regard to the idea that science is unable to provide happiness, Weber's genetic dependence on Nietzsche is less obvious: his argument is a long one, and a number of parallel elements are developed without this special link.

But when we turn to heuristic, and especially to logical, dependence, the conclusions are in my opinion quite different. The value conflict, the inability of science to provide man's life with meaning, let alone happiness, and the demand for intellectual honesty are all ideas which stand securely on their own feet in Weber's work, and make perfect sense without being tied to Nietzsche's explication. And logically, they are not only independent of Nietzsche, but basically in opposition to him, since all three of them can be shown to derive logically from the theory of the basic dichotomy between “Is” and “Ought”, which Nietzsche certainly did not share.

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180 Prominent “Nietzscheans” are, for instance, Fleischmann (1964), Baier (1982), Eden (1983), Hennis (1988), Stauth (1994), Owen (1994) and Szokolczai (1998). Among the “sceptics”, Schluchter (1989, 1996a) is perhaps the most radical; Scaff (1984), Lassman and Velody (1989), Krech and Wagner (1994) and Jacobsen (1999) also draw “sceptical” conclusions.

181 An “analytical razor” described and applied in Oakes (1988b).

182 Scaff 1984, p. 206.

This way of reasoning, which seems to me conclusive,<sup>183</sup> corresponds closely to the quite widely held position according to which Nietzsche may have furnished Weber with important *problems*, while Weber's *answers* were not Nietzschean.<sup>184</sup>

## The ideal type

When we look at the ideal type today, we are faced with something of a paradox. On the one hand, we find leading commentators saying that the ideal type has been regarded by many as “the crowning achievement” or “the only original contribution” of Weber in the field of methodology.<sup>185</sup> What has come to be known as *the* “Weber thesis” is formulated in the *Protestant Ethic*, where the ideal-typical method is applied with both vigour and subtlety. And in many academic disciplines, “ideal types” are part of the (loose) standard vocabulary. On the other hand, one of the commentators goes on to inquire “whether [the ideal type] has now become obsolete”;<sup>186</sup> and for a number of sociologists, that inquiry is already concluded, with a negative result: in the case of the ideal type, they say, Weber's originality was that of an “outsider”,<sup>187</sup> and “sociological theory ... makes no use of ideal types”.<sup>188</sup>

One reason behind this paradoxical situation can, I think, be found in the peculiar position of the ideal type within the corpus of Weber's work. Weber carries out his most thorough *methodological* discussion of the concept in 1904, in the last third of the *Objectivity* essay. But the *Protestant Ethic* is published only a few months later, and many (most?) scholars have only been interested in – perhaps even only acquainted with – the concept of the ideal type as mediated through this particular empirical application. Weber continues to work with ideal-typical concepts, particularly in the *Interm.Refl.* and in the opening chapters of *ES* (where we also find a fairly lengthy discussion of the concept as such). But commentators have tended to veer away from the specifically “ideal-typical” aspects of these later works, concentrating instead, in the *Interm.Refl.*, on the substance of the “value spheres”, with their philosophical and existential dimensions, and, in *ES*, on the question of rationality, especially “goal rationality”, with its obvious links to modernity. All these centrifugal forces

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183 Cf. Lassman and Velody 1989, p. 175; Schluchter 1989, p. 30; Chazel 1998, p. 427; Eliaeson 2002, p. 115. One would, I think, reach much the same conclusion by applying Weber's own method of asking to what extent there would be an “objective possibility” that the ideas in question would have their place in Weber's work, if Nietzsche's inspiration had been lacking. For the concept of “objective possibility”, see above all Turner and Factor 1981.

184 Cf. Scaff 1984, p. 196; Lassman and Velody 1989, p. 175 and, quite recently and decisively, Fleury 2005.

185 Burger 1987 (1976), p. 113; Schluchter 2003, p. 54.

186 Burger 1987 (1976), p. 154.

187 Prewo 1979, p. 85.

188 Gerhardt 2001, p. 11.

lead away from the fundamental discussion of the ideal type in *Objectivity*, which is so to speak left behind, high and dry.

*Individual or general types, or both?*

To make matters worse, the “1904 version” of the ideal type seems so different from its “1920 version”, as discussed in *ES*.<sup>189</sup> Where the “1904 version” is individualizing and fleshed out, the “1920 version” is generalizing and lean. The terminology reflects this substantive change of emphasis: in Weber’s work, the term “ideal type” progressively disappears and “thins out” into much more frequent, but much less distinctive and specific, references simply to “types”.<sup>190</sup>

The scholarly debate about whether these two apparently different kinds of ideal type can be accommodated under a single conceptual umbrella is not yet closed; and the discussion is further complicated by disagreements concerning the intellectual sources of Weber’s ideal type concept: was he still working within the framework provided by Rickert, or did he go beyond it (perhaps even break with it)? and if so, was he motivated by other authors?

Schelting (1922, 1934), whose general standpoint is close to Rickert’s, tries to make sense of what he sees as Weber’s confusing discussions of the ideal type concept by interpreting it, in two respects, in a very restrictive fashion.

First, he wishes to reserve the term “ideal type” for empirically (above all teleologically and causally) oriented concepts, and is consequently critical of Weber’s extension of the term to cover the axiological types as well.<sup>191</sup> He apparently feels that the axiological types serve no particular purpose in the causal analysis. But on the one hand, he seems to ignore the existence, in purely axiological ideal types, of a latent description of behaviour (which is made manifest, for instance, in the construction of the ideal type of the “society of artisans”); and on the other hand, he pays no attention to the fact that the fixed goal of a causal ideal type may always be regarded as the practical correlate of a particular value (*B07*, pp. 220-25).

In the second place, Schelting<sup>192</sup> maintains that only concepts of an “abstract-general character” can in principle lay claim to being ideal types; concepts which, although they conform to the ideal-typical principles of unreality, unambiguousness, etc., are constructed ad hoc in order to serve as aids to the causal analysis of one particular historical situation, seem to him to lie outside the sphere of ideal types.

<sup>189</sup> Admittedly, Weber occasionally in his later works refers back to his discussion in *Objectivity* of the ideal type. But only occasionally (five times altogether, of which only once after 1909). Moreover, in one instance (*ORK*, p. 91n95/*GAW*, p. 131n1) he characterizes his treatment of the idea in *Objectivity* as “sketchy” and “partly misleading”.

<sup>190</sup> In round figures, there are 180 references to the “ideal type” (and its terminological variants) in Weber’s work. Of these, almost one half are to be found in the *Objectivity* essay alone, while only one third occur after 1913. On the other hand, out of 400 references to the term “type” by itself, three fourths occur after 1913.

<sup>191</sup> Schelting 1934, pp. 332-33, 356-60.

<sup>192</sup> Schelting 1934, pp. 330, 335.

However, he is forced to admit that Weber occasionally, “curiously”, as for instance in a passage from *Knies II*,<sup>193</sup> does not respect this restriction;<sup>194</sup> and he does not quote any passages from Weber’s work to support his own view.

Schelting’s interpretation is probably based on his fear that the individual ideal types, as defined by Weber, lie too close to the historian’s intellectual constructions of “objectively possible” courses of events; such constructions, Schelting points out, are *not* ideal types, since they do not involve any proper *intensification* of the points of view selected.<sup>195</sup> However, Schelting’s criticism on this point seems unfounded, since Weber’s *ad hoc* individual ideal types are everywhere carefully labelled as objective types of teleological rationality. Moreover, the goals included in these types are often quite general ones (victory in a battle, maximum satisfaction of needs, etc.) or may be traced back to such general goals, so that the only unique element of the type is represented by the *conditions* under which the ideal type is meant to be applied; and such unique conditions must also be taken into account in the case of causal analysis aided by *general* ideal types.<sup>196</sup>

*Burger*,<sup>197</sup> unlike Schelting, tries to make theoretical sense of Weber’s pronouncements concerning the ideal type. Burger’s construction, in telescoped form, is as follows: History is concerned with phenomena that embody cultural values. The “carriers” of the embodying of such values were humans who tried to implement their values. However, the ideas that motivated these people might be more or less present in the minds of the different actors. How, then, was it possible to frame general concepts to cover these phenomena, since such concepts would be covering elements (the inner states of the actors) that were not present to the same extent in each relevant instance? The ideal type, according to Burger, is Weber’s attempt to answer this question “within the premises of Rickert’s theory of concept formation” and “*with the means provided by Rickert’s theory itself*”.<sup>198</sup>

I have difficulties with Burger’s construction, on a number of counts.

First, the question that the ideal type is, in his view, designed to answer is one that follows from Rickert’s views on “cultural significance”. As I have tried to show (*B07*, pp. 147-56 and above, pp. 22-25), Weber did not share these views, and Rickert’s problem therefore was not Weber’s problem.

Moreover, we have direct evidence, from Weber’s own pen, which contradicts Burger’s claim that Weber’s treatment in *Objectivity* of the ideal type is elaborated with the means provided by Rickert’s theory of concept formation. In a letter to G.

193 *ORK*, p. 189/*GAW*, p. 130. Schelting might have referred to similar “curious” ideal types elsewhere in Weber’s work, for instance *MSS*, p. 42/*GAW*, p. 534 and *ES*, pp. 21-22/*WG*, pp. 10-11.

194 Schelting 1934, p. 330.

195 Schelting 1934, p. 331.

196 Schelting 1934, pp. 332-33, 356-60.

197 Burger 1987 (1976).

198 Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 116-18 (quotations from pp. 117 and 118).

von Below of 17 July 1904 (B72, p. 206, B07, p. 211),<sup>199</sup> Weber writes that the last third of *Objectivity* – the part, he says, to which he attaches the most importance – is *not* an application of “my friend Rickert’s thoughts”. Nor do we find the customary friendly references to Rickert’s work in those parts of Weber’s writings which deal with the ideal type. And when Weber – writing to Rickert! – justifies his construction of this concept in *Objectivity*, he does so *not* by pointing to the problem that Burger sees as the necessary key to any interpretation, but by claiming that a category like the ideal type “is necessary in order to distinguish between ‘valuation’ and ‘value relation’” (B07, pp. 212-13). Since this distinction was, in Rickert’s estimation, the most important idea that Weber found in his (Rickert’s) methodology, it seems odd, to say the least, that Rickert in his *Limits* only cursorily touches on the ideal type – the concept which Weber found *necessary* to safeguard the distinction – and simply qualifies it as a concept that historians “may have recourse to” and which “needs further logical clarification”.<sup>200</sup>

Burger rejects Schelting’s solution of distinguishing between different *kinds of* ideal types: individual and general. He does admit, however, that “from the very outset Weber consciously attributed a common ideal-typical feature to things with otherwise divergent characteristics” and that, for instance, Weber applies the term “ideal type” indiscriminately to definitions of general concepts and empirical statements, “two things which are usually treated as entirely distinct”. Burger, who has to solve this problem within the framework of Rickert’s methodology, tries to do so by stating that “for Rickert and Weber definitions of concepts *are* statements about empirical reality”. Again, this may be true for Rickert, but can hardly apply to Weber’s ideal type, which is *logically* defined by Weber by virtue of the fact that it “removes itself from empirical reality which can only be *compared to*, related to it”.<sup>201</sup> Burger’s reasoning leads him to the conclusion that “since he had no appropriate conceptual forms available for what he wants to say, *Weber has to change the reality to which the concepts refer*”.<sup>202</sup> The second half of that sentence may in a certain sense be correct (if oddly put); but the first half seems to me to go against the whole corpus of Weber’s discussions of the concept of the ideal type. A more straightforward conclusion would be, I think, that the problem which Burger has spent so much ingenuity in trying to solve was inherent in Rickert’s logic, but not in Weber’s.

Gerhardt’s interpretation (2001) differs radically from Burger’s. In her opinion, other influences than Rickert’s, above all that of “Simmel’s reflections concerning the ‘specific procedure of exaggeration followed by reduction’” in sociological

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199 See also Bruun 2001 for an overview of Weber’s own statements about the relationship between his and Rickert’s ideas.

200 *Limits*, pp. 326, 441; Rickert 1986 (1929), p. 78. Cf. Jacobsen 1999, pp. 94-95 who concludes that “it is evident that Rickert has not understood Weber’s intentions”.

201 *MSS*, p. 100/GAW, p. 202.

202 Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 115-24; quotations from pp. 119, 120, 123.

concept formation, have to be taken into account.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, Gerhardt apparently does not, like Burger (or Schelting), see any significant tension between Weber's early "individualizing" and later "generalizing" ideal types. Instead, she introduces a wholly new distinction: The method of the *Protestant Ethic*, she claims, was based on Rickert's doctrine of the "historical individual"; but this was the only work where Weber made use of this concept. In all his subsequent historical analyses of economy and society, he chose a different methodological path, and formed ideal-typical concepts.<sup>204</sup>

Gerhardt's approach has the distinct advantage of releasing the ideal type from the Procrustean bed of a strict Rickertian interpretation. It also usefully underlines the fact that Weber's central concepts in the *Protestant Ethic*, and the way in which they are combined, have a distinctly "individual" "feel" about them, more so than many of the ideal types discussed in *Objectivity*, and those applied and compared by Weber in his later empirical work.<sup>205</sup> But in my view, Gerhardt's thesis nevertheless runs into difficulties:

We are asked to accept that there were two "programmes of study" (Erkenntnisprogramme) in Weber's work, parallel but unrelated, in the sense that the *Protestant Ethic* had a connection to Rickert, but not to the ideal type, while the *Objectivity* essay, and everything that followed, was connected to the ideal type, but not to Rickert.<sup>206</sup> But on formal grounds alone, I am not sure this is credible. *Objectivity* was published (and, as far as we can reasonably judge, written) *earlier* than the *Protestant Ethic*. Why would Weber in *Objectivity* sketch out a conceptual procedure in great detail, and then, six months later, not follow it, but do something methodologically *different*? Why would he make (implicit, but unmistakable) references<sup>207</sup> to the themes of the *Protestant Ethic* writings in his exemplifications of the ideal type, a concept on which that work was, we are told by Gerhardt, not (to be) based? Why would Weber in his 1907 rebuttal of Rachfahl's criticism of the *Protestant Ethic* talk of "capitalism" and the "'spirit' of capitalism" as "historical ideal types", but not as "historical individuals"?<sup>208</sup> And why, if the "historical individual" method of the *Protestant Ethic* was supposedly never again used by Weber, did he write to Paul Siebeck in 1915 that his essays on the "Economic Ethic of the World Religions" was the "general application of the method of the *Protestant Ethic*"?<sup>209</sup> Without satisfactory answers to questions such as these, it is difficult to accept Gerhardt's

203 Gerhardt 2001, p. 234.

204 Gerhardt 2001, pp. 246-47.

205 Webster (1987, p. 517), following John Watkins, calls the *Protestant Ethic* concepts "holistic". While this terminology has unfortunate overtones of essentialism, it does bring out the "holistic" quality of "indivisibility" that Rickert (and Weber) saw as the criterion of the "historical individual" (*B07*, pp. 118, 129).

206 Cf. Gerhardt 2004, pp. 10-11.

207 *MSS*, pp. 91, 93-94/*GAW*, pp. 191-92, 194-95.

208 *BW*, p. 263/*PE II*, p. 170.

209 "... die allgemeine Durchführung der Methode in dem Aufsatz [über die Protestantische Ethik]". Letter of 22 June 1915, VA Mohr/Siebeck, Ana 446, BSB (Düss).

distinction between the parallel but unrelated “study programmes”. And it is equally difficult to evaluate the actual importance of the – undoubted – influence of Simmel on Weber with regard to the ideal type.

An interesting side effect of Gerhardt's reasoning is that it more or less explicitly questions the relevance of *Objectivity* as an account of the procedure followed in the *Protestant Ethic*. That relevance has otherwise, I believe, on the whole been taken for granted by commentators. At least, there seems to be a distinct lack of scholarly interest in the relationship.<sup>210</sup> I shall not attempt to fill the gap. But I am not certain, for instance, how well Weber's statement in the *Protestant Ethic* that the elements of the ideal type (if Gerhardt will allow me to use that term) of the “spirit” of capitalism must be “composed” together, so that the concept can only be shown in its complete form at the end of the study,<sup>211</sup> sits with his insistence in *Objectivity* on the necessity of “sharply defined” concepts, both for scholarly description and for heuristic purposes.<sup>212</sup>

My own answer to the question of how to reconcile the different versions of the ideal type that Weber offers at various times, in his methodological as well as in his empirical writings (*B07*, Ch. 4), does not claim systematic completeness. It rests on the premise that there is a close connection between Weber's ideas about axiological and teleological value analysis and his concept of the ideal type. In Oakes's felicitous phrase, “ideal types are defined by the logical and empirical relations of commitments”.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, I believe that Weber *started from* the concept of value relation,<sup>214</sup> as he found it in Rickert's writings, but that the “methodological ambivalence” (to use Oakes's term) that he manifested, faced with Rickert's general methodological argument, carried over into his reflections concerning the ideal type.

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210 Without, I admit, having conducted extensive bibliographical research, I am not acquainted with any major study of the question of whether the *Objectivity* programmatic discussions of the ideal type are precisely and faithfully reflected in Weber's empirical studies on the *Protestant Ethic*. For interesting shorter discussions, see Turner 1986, pp. 200-204 and Treiber 1997 (who also includes *Stammler* in the analysis). Turner (1986) and Agevall (1999) discuss the application in the *Protestant Ethic* of Weber's conclusions concerning “objective possibility”; but this is a separate subject.

211 *BW*, pp. 8-9/*PE I*, p. 39.

212 *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 190. Wagner and Zipprian (1991 (1986), p. 283n13) see Weber's insistence on the necessity of “composing” the ideal type of the “spirit of capitalism” as an indication that he was aware of the inadequacy of Rickert's conception of the historical individual.

213 Oakes 1998, p. 296.

214 While, among others, Schnädelbach (1984, p. 134), Eliaeson (2002, p. 4n8) and Prewo seem to share this assumption (“...obviously, all the qualities of the theoretical value relation must fully influence the construction of an ideal type and can consequently be studied in that type” – Prewo 1979, p. 114), Gerhardt (2001, p. 271) manifests gentle scepticism in this regard.

As we have seen, the very definition of the Rickertian historical concept was based on Rickert's way of distinguishing between (objective) theoretical and (subjective) practical values. This basis for the distinction was incompatible with Weber's notion of "objectivity". But Weber was certainly not interested in relinquishing the distinction as such. It is surely in this light that we should see his remark to Rickert that the ideal type is necessary to distinguish between "valuation" and "value relation". His argument rests, I think, on the character of his concept of culture, as compared to Rickert's.

The objectivity of Rickert's historical concepts was secured by a double methodological anchor: they were necessarily related to absolute, theoretical, transhistorical – and, therefore, objective – values; and moreover, they were with equal necessity restricted to the actual values of the cultural reality which formed the historical object of the scholarly research. As we have seen, Weber did not want the first anchor. But as I have tried to show, he did not want the second anchor either. His concept of culture and of cultural values was certainly not entirely clear; but, at least, it did not in my opinion include a *binding* relation to the values on the object level of history. What "we"<sup>215</sup> find interesting in a given culture depends on the value ideas of the scholar and of the epoch in which he lives. One may discuss who has the upper hand,<sup>216</sup> the scholar or his "times" (in a certain sense, his public). But the angle remains subjective. The cable to the object of research is cut (and indeed had to be cut) in order for Weber not to get entangled in any sort of "objectivist" construction. The road was therefore open to the construction of "fictional" concepts, based on the subjective views of the scholar (and/or of the age in which he lives) as to what was important or significant in the culture that he is interested in studying. This kind of thinking went beyond the basis provided by Rickert, who could not and did not have any sympathy with "fictionalism".<sup>217</sup>

While much of the alleged lack of clarity and consistency in Weber's discussions of the ideal type can in my opinion be satisfactorily explained if one works on this basis, and keeps in mind the definite change over time in Weber's interest in and use of the various possible kinds of ideal types, a probing logician will no doubt still be able to find systematic deficiencies in his construction of the concept.<sup>218</sup> I do not think this should worry us too much. There may well be more advantage in reflecting on the inconsistencies of the concept than in trying to iron them out.

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215 Cf. *MSS*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 253. Again, the quotation marks are highly significant.

216 Cf. Bruun 2001, pp. 147-48, 155n42.

217 Cf. Rickert 1929 (1902), p. 67In1, Jacobsen 1999, p. 67 and Turner 1986, p. 199.

218 I find myself in agreement with much of what Burger has to say in this respect (Burger 1987 (1976), pp. 131-33). In particular, he may well ask how individual concepts differ from individual ideal types (although he in my view goes too far when he tries to solve this puzzle by stating that *all* Weber's individual ideal types "are used to characterize many phenomena and not just one").

## Politics and science

If *Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology* is a “lean” book, its treatment of “the complementary relation of values and scientific inquiry: politics and science”, will perhaps strike many readers as its “leanest” chapter. Weber’s political writings are usually polemical, dramatic, rhetorically highly charged, awash with sweeping statements of faith and dire prognostications. Of all that, little remains in Chapter 5. The reason is simple: This chapter does not (like Mommsen (1974 (1959))) deal with Weber as a politician; it does not even (like Beetham (1974) or Breiner (1996)) attempt to formulate his political theory on the basis of his political writings. It simply tries to relate his views on politics as a value sphere to his general ideas about science and values. In one sense, that kind of discussion cannot help being “lean”; but at the same time, it leads into complex and challenging areas at the borderline between politics and ethics.

This approach, and the resulting conclusions, were relatively new when the book first came out in 1972. They were based on certain independent intellectual constructions on my part (*B07*, pp. 240-42). I have tried to show that, even in the absence of full textual support, these constructions were plausible; and I have been pleased to note that, in the secondary literature, they have not been directly challenged, and here and there even echoed by other commentators.<sup>219</sup>

At the same time, not everybody agreed that the “lean” interpretations of *B72* were appropriate to the “rich” material. This was, in particular, the case with Weber’s concept of power. In *B72*, I expressed disagreement with those radical interpretations of Weber’s concept of power which more or less identified it with “force of arms” or “violence”.<sup>220</sup> Against this view, I pointed to the fact that the concept, as defined by Weber himself, was amorphous and included a large number of apparently “peaceful” elements; I also argued that, for a number of reasons, the “violent” aspects would be more apparent in international relations than in domestic politics. In the second edition of his classical work on Max Weber and German politics, Mommsen took issue with these views, by arguing that “it is the limiting case that shows the true nature of reality”,<sup>221</sup> and that Weber himself had stressed that external policy was conditioned by domestic factors. The second of these arguments does not, I feel, contradict the observation that naked force is usually more often employed between nations than within them. As for the first one, it seems to me legal

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219 In particular Breiner (1996, pp. 81, 172), who states that [for Weber] “political action is inseparable from ‘power’ in the instrumental sense of trying to get some agent to carry out one’s designs” – a formulation very close to my own (*B07*, p. 241). Similarly Jacobsen (1999, p. 37), according to whom a “politics of weakness” was in Weber’s eyes a contradiction in terms. (Contrary to what Ferber (1970, p. 55) says, Weber’s identification of power as the specific means of politics was not, however, a “definitional decision”, that is, an essentially *arbitrary* choice).

220 This was the case with Aron (1971, pp. 92-93), Ferber (1970, p. 56) and Mommsen (1959, p. 45).

221 Mommsen 1974 (1959), pp. 475-76.

rather than sociological, and I still feel comfortable with my original conclusion (B07, p. 248) that, in Weber's eyes, "physical violence is the backbone of political power, but not necessarily its visage".<sup>222</sup>

Another, more general, question is of course whether the "lean" conclusions concerning Weber's views on the nature of politics can remain undisturbed by his admittedly passionate political utterances. Logically, however, there should be no necessary contradiction or unavoidable interference between those two fundamentally different levels of discourse, provided we are always told whether we are being addressed on one or the other of the two. This, as I have shown (B07, pp. 100-01) is the essence of Weber's injunction concerning the respect in practice for the principle of value freedom and, in my view, central to an understanding of the nexus between his methodology and his personality. Weber himself usually leaves the reader in no doubt about the status that he claims for his remarks. But I have tried to indicate and discuss, in the text of (for instance B07 pp. 237, 269), certain points where the separation of the two levels becomes problematic.

### *The political ethic*

It might seem obvious that Weber saw the ethic of responsibility as the appropriate one for the politician. However, a closer study of the way in which Weber exemplifies and discusses the two concepts and their interrelationship makes it clear that this is not necessarily the case: his views are complicated and apparently contradictory. The central part of the argument in Chapter 5 tries to set out the elements of Weber's thought on these matters as clearly as possible and to deal faithfully with the apparent contradictions (B07, pp. 259-74). My conclusion was, and remains, that Weber defined a type of ethic *over and above* those of conviction and responsibility, and that this ethic was in his view the one that a person who had the true vocation of politics should be able to apply to his action *in the last resort*. Weber does not give this ethic a name, but, for reasons which I tried to explain, I called it the "responsible ethic of conviction" (B07, pp. 270-74).

How well has this thesis stood the test of time? The answer to this question must, I think, above all come from a discussion of the work of Wolfgang Schluchter, who has for the last thirty years devoted much effort to dealing with the question of Weber's views on the ethic of conviction, the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of politics. His conclusions have, I think, been remarkably penetrating, clear and consistent; more recently, he has fitted them into the context of his "speculative" systematic typology of ethics.

Unfortunately, although Schluchter's first major discussion of the question already came out in 1971, I did not become aware of it until after the publication of B72. He, on the other hand, has generously referred to my conclusions in a number of his later works. The written dialogue between us has therefore until now been one-sided, and I am glad of this chance to redress the balance a little.

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222 Cf. Beetham 1974, p. 43 and Jacobsen 1999, p. 54.

Schluchter's main premises and conclusions, as I understand them, are as follows:<sup>223</sup>

For the purposes of the discussion of "ethics", Schluchter divides Weber's work into three phases. He finds the two key themes of the first phase (which in effect ends with Weber's nervous breakdown at the turn of the century) in the 1895 Inaugural Lecture: First, that the science of economics cannot be an ethical science; and secondly, that eudaemonism – the search for individual happiness or for the greatest happiness of the greatest number – cannot be the basis of a true ethic. In the second phase (c1905–1915), Weber, influenced, among other things, by the Russian revolution of 1905, contrasts "panmoralism" – which is, to all intents and purposes, the attitude that we later find him describing as the "ethic of conviction" – with an "ethic of success" (Erfolgsethik). The latter contains in rudimentary form the elements of what Weber later comes to call the "ethic of responsibility"; but Schluchter points out that in this early variant, it is under-determined and not explicitly set off from conviction-less "realpolitik" and "power politics". The third phase, from 1915 to the end of Weber's life, is in Schluchter's view characterized by the full definition of, and distinction between, the two "ethics" (although he admits that the *term* "ethic of responsibility" only appears late, in *Pol.Voc.* (1919)). The ethic of conviction remains bound only to the convictional value of a given action (the purity of the will), whereas the ethic of responsibility demands that not only the convictional, but also the success value of the action (its foreseeable consequences) should be taken into account.

The ethic of responsibility makes possible a "politics of responsibility", which is now also terminologically distinguished from pure power politics: "Weber recognized three kinds of politics: the politics of conviction, the politics of responsibility, and power politics. Only the first two are constituted in terms of an ethical value relation, whereas only the last two are constituted in terms of a relation to reality".<sup>224</sup>

Weber is seemingly inconsistent in that, at one point,<sup>225</sup> he states that the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility are in eternal conflict, while in *Pol.Voc.*, he says that the two ethics are not absolutely contradictory but can be complementary to each other.<sup>226</sup> However, on the basis of his carefully constructed typology of ethics, Schluchter feels able to deal with the problem in the following manner: The ethic of responsibility is based on a "bridging principle of balance" according to which all foreseeable consequences of the convictional value have to be consistently thought out before action is taken. Now,

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<sup>223</sup> Schluchter 1996a, pp. 50-62. I certainly cannot do full justice to his argument, which I have abridged considerably, not least in order to keep the focus on the discussion of the ethic of politics.

<sup>224</sup> Schluchter 1996a, p. 61n47. "Value relation" as employed by Schluchter in this (translated) text should not be confused with Rickert's concept of "value relation" (Wertbeziehung). Schluchter's "ethical value relation" implies the *acceptance* of an ethical value.

<sup>225</sup> *MSS*, p. 16/*GAW*, p. 505.

<sup>226</sup> *LSPW*, pp. 367-68/*GPS*, p. 559.

a follower of the ... maxim of the ethic of responsibility can face circumstances in which, after careful balancing of the options, he or she finds no balance between convictional value and success value; here, convictional value has to be realized even when all the demands related to success are violated. Thus, it can be said that the moral actor acted like an adherent of an ethic of conviction. Naturally, strictly speaking, this can still be understood as a consistent application of the bridging principle of an ethic of responsibility, the principle of balance.<sup>227</sup>

Thus, Weber's apparent inconsistency is resolved. The ethic of responsibility is not always in opposition to, nor is it just a "complement" to, the ethic of conviction: it is a "widening and deepening" of the latter ethic.

To a large extent, my own analysis is in accord with that of Schluchter. In particular, we seem to agree on the central assumption that in Weber's eyes, an "ethic" must necessarily have a ("convictional") value as its point of reference. (Schluchter establishes this assumption by emphasizing Weber's rejection, as early as in the Inaugural Lecture, of all kinds of eudaemonism as the basis for a true ethic; in my view, a better starting point may be that, in Weber's discussion of value freedom, the terms "value" and "goal" are often interchangeable, a point which is subsequently at the base of my discussion of Weber's value analysis.)

Following the same line of reasoning, I can also accept Schluchter's way of defining the ethic of conviction as the complete antithesis to "realpolitik" or "power politics",<sup>228</sup> which concentrates solely on adapting the end to the means (*B07*, pp. 264-66) and I have no quarrel with the triad of types of politics, and their explication, which he constructs on this basis.<sup>229</sup> Finally, I believe that the situation in which the

227 Schluchter 1996a, p. 95. Similarly Schluchter 1979a, p. 87.

228 Gane (1997, pp. 553) strangely reaches the opposite conclusion, on the basis of what seems an inadequate interpretation of the character of the two ethics.

229 Above, p. 50. I cannot, however, accept Schluchter's implied argument that we can "read off" the triad from Weber's handwritten speaking notes for *Pol. Voc.* In these notes, Weber originally wrote "politics of power" (*Machtpolitik*) as a contrast to "politics of conviction" (*Gesinnungspolitik*), but then changed the former term to "politics of responsibility" (*Verantwortungspolitik*). In my opinion, no substantive conclusion can be drawn from this correction. A look at the notes shows that Weber first *rejects* the idea of "power politics" (*Machtpolitik*), but then, to face up to the "diabolical" character of "power", introduces the idea of "responsibility" (*Verantwortung*), and continues by writing down the contrasting pair of concepts. Putting "politics of power" instead of "politics of responsibility" as the category opposed to the "politics of conviction" makes nonsense of what Weber has just discussed; on the other hand, "power" is easily explainable as a slip of the pen, since Weber has just (twice, underlined) been writing the word "power", which is at the base of his general argument. This "technical" explanation is supported by the disposition of the words on the page of notes, which clearly shows that the correction was made instantaneously, in the flow of writing, and certainly not as a substitution of one concept for another after careful reflection. (In any event, as noted in *B07* (p. 271n156), Weber in the printed version of *Pol. Voc.* substitutes "ethic of responsibility" for "politics of responsibility". Interestingly, the latter term never occurs in a printed Weber text.)

“opposition” of the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility can, according to Schluchter, be made logically compatible with their “complementarity” is in effect identical with that on which I base my definition of the “responsible ethic of conviction” (and I am gratified to note that in the passage just quoted Schluchter, too, treats the “convictional” aspect of the situation as being, somehow, the primary one).

Nevertheless, some differences remain between us.

Generally speaking, I think that Schluchter, in trying to “resolve” what he sees as a logical contradiction between the two positions found in Weber’s work – the “opposition” and the “complementarity” positions – ends up by doing an injustice to them both.

First of all, I believe that Schluchter, in his discussion of the three “phases” in Weber’s thought, does not sufficiently underline the fact that until the very end of the third phase, Weber’s interest is almost entirely focused on the “ethic of conviction” aspect of the dichotomy.<sup>230</sup> Only in 1919, and only in the lecture on “Politics as a Vocation”, does Weber at all employ the term “ethic of responsibility”. (The “ethic of success” of the second phase not only, as Schluchter notes, lacks essential elements of the full ethic of responsibility; it is also a purely negative foil for the discussion of the *conviction* politicians, the “panmoralists”.) The discussion of the “ethic of responsibility” is therefore only found in direct connection with the discussion of the specific character of the political sphere. This, I think, is highly significant. In Weber’s eyes, what distinguishes the ethic of responsibility from the ethic of conviction is above all the reference to the state of the “world”, to those teleological considerations on which the politician is necessarily dependent when he wants to achieve his political goals. As I have tried to show (*B07*, pp. 260–63), the “success value” is an integral part of the inherent ethic of the political sphere, alongside with the “conviction value”. Schluchter is of course aware of all this,<sup>231</sup> but he does not, in my opinion, in his discussion with sufficient clarity bring out the specific importance of the “ethic of responsibility” to the political sphere.<sup>232</sup>

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230 The remarks that he does make in this sense (Schluchter 1996a, p. 62) have the character of an aside. His reference to *B72* in connection with a discussion of Weber’s “devaluation” of the ethic of conviction (1979a, p. 87n57) should not be interpreted to mean that the book supports the idea of “devaluation”, as Schluchter develops it.

231 Cf. Schluchter 1996a, p. 60.

232 It is therefore, I think, misleading when Schluchter maintains (1996a, pp. 13–14) that “the conceptual distinction in connection with politics is not useful versus harmful, nor is it true versus false or beautiful versus ugly, nor is it even good versus evil; it is honorable versus disgraceful”. The *conceptual* distinction – in the dichotomized terms that Schluchter employs in his implicit characterization of the other value spheres – must be: effective (in reaching the chosen goal) versus ineffective. Shame is no more than a possible psychological consequence of political failure. In fact, because of the inescapable tension between the world of fact and the world of values, the appropriate feeling for the politician, from a conceptual and definitional point of view, would in my view be guilt – *whether or not he fails*. (Cf. Burger (1993, p. 818, paraphrasing Scaff 1989): “Weber ... posits the inescapability of guilt” and

Although, on the face of it, our conclusions seem very similar, I therefore think that my own construction goes further than Schluchter's, because it follows the inherent logic of the political sphere. Let me briefly recapitulate the argument from *B07*:

Its basic premise is that a politician who fully lives up to the ethic of responsibility will, in reflecting on his future action, be aware of three sets of facts:

First, the value conflict: any course of action towards a political goal may ineradicably be in axiological conflict with other values held by the politician himself or by other human beings in the world in which he acts. The other value spheres stand in a relationship of constant tension to that of politics, and the politician *has to act*, and therefore constantly risks actualizing these tensions. Quietism is not an option for him.

Secondly, the paradox of consequences: The axiological and the teleological system are not congruent. Therefore, once the politician acts, as he has to in order to achieve his goal, he may find that he has started a causal process that will (partly, mainly or solely) be contrary to his intentions.

And thirdly, "Schopenhauer's cab". As Weber (quoting Schopenhauer) has reminded us,<sup>233</sup> causality is not a cab that we (having mounted it) can stop when we want to. The consequences of political actions move on and on, inexorably. The ethic of responsibility, in accordance with good legal tradition, will perhaps only hold the politician responsible for the *foreseeable* consequences of his actions. But if he has *clarity of vision* – a necessary quality, in Weber's view, for the good politician – he will also be aware that there are consequences, perhaps of the direst kind, that he *cannot* foresee, but for which, since he has set them in motion, he will nevertheless in a moral sense feel responsible.<sup>234</sup>

Each of these sets of facts is what Weber has a grim predilection for calling "uncomfortable" (unbequem). And together, they may at some point become unbearable for the politician. At that point, as Weber describes it in his famous passage from *Pol.Voc.*, he may find that he can only, like Luther in Worms, say:

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"Weber ... advocated an ethical attitude that, unlike a guilt-escaping ethics of conviction, adopted a guilt-conceding ethics of responsibility").

<sup>233</sup> *ORK*, p. 135/*GAW*, p. 77.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Nielsen 1996, p. 386: "It is Weber's extreme sensitivity to the unintended and the unforeseen in history which makes him link ethical and political questions to science. The 'philosophy' argues ... for an ethic of responsibility which accepts the burden of consequences. The historical sociology reveals the darker clouds enveloping such an ethic: we simply cannot see the full fate of our ultimate strivings ..."

“Here I stand; I can do no other”. Conviction takes over from responsibility.<sup>235</sup> This is what I have called the responsible ethic of conviction.<sup>236</sup>

In my view, this attitude is not just what Schluchter calls a “deepening” of the ethic of responsibility. There is more to it than the “balancing” of ends and means which, according to Schluchter, would still, “strictly speaking”, amount to a justifying application of the “bridging principle” of that ethic of responsibility. The application of the responsible ethic of conviction amounts to a fundamentally new choice: the person who had decided to work within the sphere of politics (where, according to its inherent laws, responsibility for the results of one’s actions is incumbent upon everyone who acts within it) now in principle takes a quantum leap away from it, into *another* value sphere. And if that person possesses sufficient clarity of vision, he will not perform this quantum leap with a good conscience. On the contrary, it will be supremely uncomfortable for him, since he must now in fact feel passively responsible – experience guilt – in a *double* sense: Not only is he still responsible for the results of his political actions; he now also becomes responsible for the political consequences of his “convictional” choice. This probably goes beyond what Schluchter would see as the ultimate sense of the relationship between two ethics,<sup>237</sup> although the difference of opinion may in the last resort be one of emphasis rather than of principle.<sup>238</sup>

As I see it, the most important feature of the politician’s “responsible ethic of conviction” is its fundamentally *reflexive* quality: The genuinely human being, the only one who, in Weber’s own words, can truly claim politics as his vocation, must be

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235 *LSPW*, pp. 367-68/*GPS*, p. 559. Weber’s reference to the Luther episode clearly shows the essential tie of this attitude to the ethic of conviction. Although he does not quote them, Weber knows full well the words that Luther continued by saying: “God help me. Amen”. One can hardly think of a clearer echo of this than Weber’s description of the maxim of the followers of the ethic of conviction: “The Christian does what is right, and leaves the results to God”.

236 In an early work (1979a, p. 56n160), Schluchter argues that my “notion of ‘responsible ethic of conviction’ is redundant insofar as the ethic of responsibility always implies conviction”. I do not think this remark does full justice to my position as set out in B72 and above.

237 In a sense, my position – and part of the argument on which it is based – may on this point be closer to that of Mommsen (Cf. Mommsen 1974 (1959), pp. 471-72 with n68 and n70 and 1989, p. 536; in responding to Mommsen, Schluchter 1979a, p. 53, has had to admit that his position involved “argu[ing] in Weber’s own terms against him”).

238 Breiner (1996, pp. 193-94) gives no less than three different possible interpretations of the Weber passage. Two of them seem to conclude that Weber is talking about the necessity of *maintaining* the political goal in spite of the strains imposed by the value conflict and the paradox of consequences, while the third one is based on the idea that the political actor “should not pursue ideals that seek to realize a self-determining freedom beyond the logic of the power struggle and domination in the state in order not to discredit such ideals for the future”. I find all these readings interesting, but not wholly convincing. In particular, they do not seem to bring out sufficiently the importance of the inherent tension between the political value sphere and other values, and the deep existential resonance of Weber’s statements.

able to include himself and his own position among the realities that he needs a clear perception of; and he must be able and willing to draw the appropriate conclusions from this dispassionate and critical examination, both passively and actively.

Interestingly, Lassman and Velody draw a similar conclusion in their discussion of Weber's view of the situation of the *scholar*. As they put it: "The radical element in Weber's account [of the demand for value freedom] is to direct this analysis upon itself so that the observer is included within the observation ... The presuppositions [of science] are open to critical scrutiny".<sup>239</sup>

Thus, the reflexivity is a common condition of both positions: The scholar's commitment to seeking objective truth is as absolute as the commitment with which the politician seeks to impose his political goals. And at the same time, both the scholar and the politician can only fully live up to their vocational commitment if they remain constantly and uncomfortably aware that their value sphere, and the inherent laws (*Eigengesetzlichkeiten*) that govern it, are in eternal and fundamental conflict with other value spheres and their inherent laws; and that, at some point, one may need to perform a quantum leap away from one's chosen vocation, in favour of some other value which in principle claims the same absolute commitment, and the same respect for a totally different set of "inherent laws".

This knowledge lies at the heart of Max Weber's thought. Its immense theoretical and existential implications in the last resort all spring from the essential tension between the subjectivity of the values and the objectivity of the different sets of inherent laws within their respective value spheres. This tension "cannot be resolved, but has to be endured".<sup>240</sup> At the end of *B72*, I tried to formulate this insight in the conclusion that "to Max Weber, values and science are two closed spheres containing the key to each other". I believe that this conclusion still stands.

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239 Lassman and Velody 1989, p. 178

240 Schluchter 1996b, p. 8.

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## Chapter 1

# Values as a Problem of Scientific Inquiry: Value Freedom

One of the fundamental problems arising out of the relation of values to scientific inquiry is whether the definition of “scientific inquiry” excludes certain value elements from the predicate “scientific”, and, if so, what these value elements are and in what connections they are excluded. More succinctly, the question can be formulated as follows: Is the sphere of scientific inquiry defined in such a manner that we can point to a sphere of value elements separated from it by virtue of this definition?

It is quite obvious, indeed a commonplace to anyone familiar with the methodology of the social sciences, that this question can be answered in the affirmative in the case of Max Weber. At least in certain connections, Weber demands a complete separation of the value sphere from that of scientific inquiry; in these connections, values are, in his view, illegitimate elements in the process of scientific inquiry. This principle or demand (both terms will be used in the following) Weber calls the demand for the *value freedom* (Wertfreiheit<sup>1</sup>) of scientific inquiry.

Weber was certainly not the first to formulate a principle of this kind. In Germany, Georg Simmel, Heinrich Rickert and Georg Jellinek had, each in his own field (ethics, philosophy and political science, respectively), advanced similar ideas before Weber’s first complete formulation of the demand in 1904.<sup>2</sup> The logical assumptions underlying it have an even longer history, since in their essentials they

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1 It is paradoxical that Weber uses the term “value freedom”, since it evokes precisely those associations which he tries to rid it of when discussing the substance of the concept. He certainly did not hold the view that a “value-free” science was free from all value elements, and hints at this tension between term and substance by putting inverted commas around the word “value freedom” in the title of *Value Freedom*. Other central Weberian methodological concepts, such as “objectivity” (Objektivität) and “ideal type” (Idealtypus), are characterized by the same paradox, and in the case of “objectivity”, Weber puts the same “scare quotes” around the word “Objectivity” in the title of *Objectivity*. Both the paradox and the typography are in fact typical of Weber. The “misleading” terminology can be seen as an expression of his preference for stressing the “uncomfortable” aspects of a given concept; and he uses inverted commas to put such “uncomfortable” terms symbolically at arm’s length and emphasize their complexity (107, p. 27; cf. Swedberg 2005, pp. 219-20 on “Quote marks and italics in Weber’s texts”).

2 Brecht 1959, pp. 215-21 and Schnädelbach 1984, p. 10; see also Loos 1970, pp. 38-42.

reach back to Aristotelian logic, and may be found in their relevant form in Hume ("Hume's Law"), Kant and J.S. Mill.<sup>3</sup> Although the paternity of the principle of value freedom must therefore be attributed to others, Weber was the first to extend the principle to all the social sciences, to think out its premises thoroughly and in all their ramifications, to apply it in a number of different fields, and to demonstrate its scope and consequences: in short, to discuss exhaustively what he himself called "the meaning of value freedom"; and his treatment of the various aspects of the principle of value freedom is broadly accepted as valid even today. Against this background, the claim that Max Weber was the true author of the principle of value freedom, as this principle is currently understood and discussed, does not seem unwarranted.<sup>4</sup>

### The external context of Weber's demand for value freedom

Why was it that Weber, rather than some other scholar, came to explore the principle of value freedom in all its details? Although the answer to this question is of no particular importance from the point of view of the theoretical discussion of the principle, a brief account of the circumstances under which the principle came to be formulated may nevertheless be useful.

The first fairly complete formulation of the principle of value freedom, its premises and consequences, was given by Weber in 1904 in *Objectivity*. The immediate cause was that a new team of editors was taking over the periodical *Archives of Social Science and Social Policy* (*Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*). This event in itself was peaceful enough; but Weber's declaration, on their behalf, that the periodical, "as a representative of an empirical specialized discipline",<sup>5</sup> would observe the principle of value freedom, was calculated to underline the distance that separated him from the "historical" school of economics under the leadership of Gustav Schmoller. In *Knies I-II*, Weber's criticism of the philosopher Wundt was partly based on the principles of value freedom, as set out in *Objectivity*. In the following years, Weber levelled similar critiques at the jurist Rudolf Stammler (in *Stammler*) and the "energeticist" biologist, Professor Ostwald (in *Energ.Th.Cult.*). In parallel, the question of value freedom was raised by Weber in the stronghold of historico-ethical economics, the *Social Policy Association* (*Verein für Sozialpolitik*), in particular during its 1909 congress in Vienna, where he made vigorous interventions, backed up by Werner Sombart.

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3 Brecht 1959, pp. 200-215; see also Loos 1970, pp. 36-38. On the pronounced anti-naturalism of Fr. Albert Lange, who was probably a formative influence on Weber in this respect, see Jacobsen 1999, p. 10, who also argues against the influence of Kant on Weber.

4 107, pp. 11-12. Weber was probably also the first to use the term "value freedom" to cover the concept (as defined by him), but it is interesting to note how little he seems to care for it. He only employs it in *Value Freedom*, and even there very sparingly. The adjective "wertfrei" occurs a little more frequently, but mostly in that same article.

5 MSS, p. 52/GAW, p. 149.

The general reaction within the *Association* to these interventions was by no means positive.<sup>6</sup> This was a major reason behind Weber's interest in the creation of the *German Sociological Society* (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie*) in 1909, and for his insistence on having the principle of value freedom written into the statutes of the *Society*. This measure, however, aggravated the problem instead of solving it. The study of sociological questions was still in its infancy, and the members of the *Society* belonged to many different scientific traditions, some of which were far from being value-free. Already at the first congress of the *Society*, in 1910, a strong anti-value-freedom group had emerged under the leadership of Rudolf Goldscheid. Weber consequently felt impelled to intervene in a large number of the debates, but did not meet with the success that he had hoped for. At the second congress in 1912, the differences of opinion grew critical: in Weber's view, almost all the speakers offended against the officially established principle of value-freedom, and the discussions became, in the words of one observer, "a veritable chase after prescriptive demands that the speakers had, or were alleged to have, formulated".<sup>7</sup> Weber grew ever more tired of the role as methodological Don Quixote<sup>8</sup> which he found himself playing; he had already withdrawn from the executive committee of the *Society*, and when in 1913 Goldscheid was elected (co)president, Weber left it altogether.<sup>9</sup>

Simultaneously, the discussion in the *Association* of the principle of value freedom – a discussion often referred to as the "quarrel about value judgments" (*Werturteilsstreit*) – came to a head. On Weber's initiative,<sup>10</sup> the *Association* decided to place various aspects of the question of value freedom in the science of economics on the agenda for an enlarged meeting of the main committee (from which, unlike the ordinary congresses, the public was excluded). Prospective participants were

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6 Cf. Boese 1939, pp. 135-37, who quotes disapproving letters to Schmoller after the 1909 Congress from, among others, Philippovich, Fuchs and Knapp. At a subsequent meeting in Leipzig of the executive committee of the *Association*, Weber's views on value freedom did not meet with much approval, either (see his letter of 13 October 1909 to Marianne Weber (*MWG II/6*)).

7 Wiese 1959, pp. 12-13. Only excerpts from Weber's contributions are known, since it was decided – probably because of the internal crisis of the *Society* – not to publish the complete protocol of the debates.

8 The expression is Weber's own (letter to Robert Michels, 9 November 1912 (*MWG II/7*)).

9 Wiese 1959, pp. 11-13; Bendix and Roth 1971, pp. 39-42; Marianne Weber 1975, pp. 422-25/Marianne Weber 1926, pp. 427-30. The relevant Weber letters (27 October 1910 to the *Society*, 9 March 1912 to Robert Michels, 9 November 1912 to Robert Michels, 22 October 1912 to Hermann Beck, 17 January 1914 to Hermann Beck, 20 January 1914 to Werner Sombart, 22 January 1914 to Edgar Jaffé) are quoted in full in *MWG II/6*, *MWG II/7* and *MWG II/8*. Although Weber assures his correspondents of his respect for Goldscheid's "idealism", he describes him in terms ("sticky insect"; "slimy entity") that speak their own eloquent language.

10 Cf. *Verhandlungen* 1912, p. 163, and Boese 1939, p. 145, who is unnecessarily coy in speaking only of a "suggestion from certain quarters".

requested to send in advance a short summary of their views on four aspects of the question: "1. the position of moral value judgments within the science of economics, 2. the relation of "developmental trends" to practical valuations, 3. the designation of goals for economic and social policy, 4. the relation of the general principles of methodology to the special tasks of academic teaching".<sup>11</sup> Weber's contribution, the *Memorandum*, was far more comprehensive than those of the other contributors, and put his own views on value freedom in their most systematic form as yet (although the subjects singled out for discussion did lead him to concentrate on particular aspects of the question<sup>12</sup>). The small volume (*Äusserungen*) containing the printed contributions to the symposium was never put on sale, and probably only existed in some two hundred copies.<sup>13</sup> Apparently, the *Association* was anxious to ensure that the details of the methodological brawl should not become widely known. This concern was manifested even more clearly at the meeting itself, on January 4th and 5th, 1914, where it was decided, on Schmoller's proposal, to keep no record of the debates. Consequently, we only possess fragmentary accounts of the discussions, including Weber's contributions to them. But one gets the impression that the proceedings soon grew heated, and correspondingly less fruitful, and that Weber in particular defended his position with great intensity. The debate came to a dramatic conclusion. In Boese's words:

As ... the body of opinion wholly or partly hostile [to Weber] continued to increase, (in essence, only Sombart declared himself in complete agreement with him), Max Weber rose once more and delivered himself of a forceful statement which, in fairly blunt terms, gave his opponents to understand that they did not see his point; he then left the meeting in anger.<sup>14</sup>

This stormy session was followed by a period of relative calm. Weber's only subsequent contribution to the discussion of value freedom was the publication in 1917 of the *Value Freedom* article, which was in fact a revised and enlarged version

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<sup>11</sup> Boese 1939, p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> There is no need to analyse in detail the influence which the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Memorandum* may have had on Weber's arguments in that essay. One does notice, however, that the wording of the *Memorandum* is often more cautious and precise than might have been expected, in view of the vigour with which Weber had launched the discussions within the *Association*. This may be due to a wish on Weber's part to avoid, if possible, an open break with Schmoller. As Lindenlaub (1967) and Nau (1996) point out, Weber and Schmoller were certainly not, in substance, total adversaries. But Schmoller had cautiously embraced the idea of objective ethical values, and, moreover, his pronounced preference for peace, quiet and "the middle way" was far removed from Weber's wish to push discussions to extremes.

<sup>13</sup> Boese 1939, p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> Boese 1939, p. 147. According to contemporary observers, Weber's "forceful" last statement ran as follows: "It is impossible to argue with idiots", followed by a crash, as the door slammed shut behind the departing scholar. Boese's version should be read in the light of his manifest pro-Schmoller bias.

of the *Memorandum*. In the two lectures *Sc.Voc.* and *Pol.Voc.* (1917/19), aspects of the problem are still discussed, but in a different setting. Here, the existential aspects are much more prominent than the academic ones, and in *Pol.Voc.*, the sphere of practical politics is the focus of interest.

As the discussion of the external context of Weber's demand for value freedom has made clear, he formulated the demand in relation to numerous different branches of the social sciences: pure and applied economics, sociology (in a number of varieties), law and political science. In fact, he extended it to cover the social sciences in general, but at the same time took great care to discuss in detail how it could and should be applied in each of the fields mentioned. But, paradoxically, this important reason for the *scope* and *depth* of Weber's discussion was one of the main causes of its *fragmentary character*. He treats the demand for value freedom in sections, so to speak, according to the context of the discussion, bringing the central principle to bear now in one direction, now in another; thus, various aspects of the problem are highlighted, depending on the concrete argument. In the present account, however, where Weber's basic position is of greater importance than his various immediate reasons for stating it with regard to this or that particular discipline, I have chosen a more systematic approach, in order to ensure that the general view of the problem be kept clear: after a short initial exposition of the *general* principle of value freedom, as formulated by Weber, the discussion will concentrate on his treatment of the various groups of problems that the principle gives rise to.

### The principle and its premises in their most general form

The fact that Weber mostly discusses the principle of value freedom with regard to some particular discipline, and often in a polemical context, probably explains why his formulations of the principle are usually limited in scope. In fact, general statements of the demand for value freedom are quite rare. Most of them are found in *Objectivity*<sup>15</sup> and in the published report of the 1909 congress of the *Association*;<sup>16</sup> but *Crit.Stud.* and *Value Freedom*, as well as some of Weber's interventions in other debates in the *Association* and the *Society*, contain similar general formulations of the principle of value freedom.<sup>17</sup>

When the principle of value freedom is formulated as "the complete separation, in certain relations, of the sphere of values and the sphere of scientific inquiry", this has implications which, as we shall see, turn out to be of considerable importance:

Formally, the demand that two spheres, A and B, are to be kept separate may be expressed in three different ways: 1): "A must be kept free from elements of B"; 2): "B must be kept free from elements of A"; 3): "A and B must be kept free from elements of each other". We may call the last formulation the *symmetrical*, and the two first ones the two *asymmetrical* demands. The symmetrical demand for

15 E.g. *MSS*, pp. 49-50, 52, 54-55 /*GAW*, pp. 146n1, 149, 151-52.

16 E.g. *GASS*, pp. 417-20.

17 E.g. *MSS*, p. 123/*GAW* p. 225; *GASS*, pp. 402, 476-77.

value freedom would thus be couched in roughly the following terms: "Scientific inquiry and values must be kept separate", while the two asymmetrical formulations would run: "Scientific inquiry must be kept free from value elements" and "the value sphere must be kept free from scientific elements".<sup>18</sup>

Close textual analysis shows that, whenever Weber is stating the principle of value freedom in general terms, he tends to express it in either of the two asymmetrical forms, whereas the symmetrical formulation is very rarely met with.<sup>19</sup>

It is also surprisingly rare to find general statements in Weber's works asserting that scientific inquiry should be kept free from value elements, that is, expressing, in a strict sense, the principle of the *value freedom of science*. The only passage which quite clearly reflects this asymmetrical aspect is Weber's famous passionate outburst at the 1909 congress: "To mix up prescriptive demands with scientific questions is the work of the Devil".<sup>20</sup>

The other asymmetrical formulation, which, properly speaking, does not demand the value freedom of scientific inquiry, but the *freedom of the value sphere from allegations of scientific demonstrability*, appears far more frequently. As a paradigm of this type, we can take the continuation of Weber's intervention at the 1909 congress quoted above: "... an empirical science can only be based on how things are, and it tells us *nothing* about how they ought to be";<sup>21</sup> *Objectivity*, in particular, also contains many of these "asymmetrical" formulations.<sup>22</sup>

In themselves, these findings are clearly formal and rudimentary. But it is worth noting that the asymmetrical dominance reappears continuously as a fundamental feature of Weber's discussion of the problems of value freedom.

18 This double aspect is graphically brought out by Troeltsch 1961 (1922), p. 569: "What befits a clear-headed thinker is: to conduct value-free, purely causal research ... and to take up a science-free valuational position, cleansed of all rationalizations of its validity and all metaphysics, as well as of all religion or speculation".

19 Among the relatively few passages that belong in the "symmetrical" category is the introductory footnote to *Objectivity* (MSS, pp. 49-50/GAW, p. 146n1), where it is said that the three editors of the *Archives* (Jaffé, Sombart and Weber) hold similar views on a number of fundamental points, particularly concerning "the demand ... for a strict *distinction between empirical knowledge and value judgments* ..." Cf. also MSS, p. 11/GAW, p. 500.

20 GASS, p. 417. Weber sourly adds: "... which the *Association* has, however, quite often carried out in generous measure".

21 GASS, p. 417.

22 For instance MSS, pp. 52, 54-55/GAW, pp. 149, 151-52. At the Sociological Congress in Heidelberg in 1964 (Stammer 1971, p. 102), Carl J. Friedrich seems to advance a thesis diametrically opposed to the one outlined above, asserting that Weber, even in his scientific work, was "directly concerned with developing and proving value judgments". The grounds for this assertion are not quite clear; but there are indications (cf. Friedrich 1963, pp. 65-68) that Friedrich believed that Weber tried to adduce scientific proof of the value of parliamentary democracy and of bureaucracy. If this was indeed Friedrich's opinion, it must be described as a simple misunderstanding. Weber did not even regard the values in question as necessarily positive, still less as scientifically demonstrable.

Weber advances only one *argument* for his demand for value freedom: the fact that the sphere of scientific inquiry and the value sphere are logically absolutely different.<sup>23</sup> He regards this difference as fundamental, as “the most basic of all dichotomies: that between ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’”.<sup>24</sup> The two categories belong, in his view, to separate theoretical “provinces”,<sup>25</sup> on separate logical “planes”:<sup>26</sup> “... the validity of a practical imperative as a norm [belongs on] a level of the problem which is entirely different from ... that of the truth value of an empirical statement of fact ...”<sup>27</sup>

One gets the impression that this position – which is repeated again and again – was accepted by Weber as self-evident, almost as a logical commonplace. One indication of this is that he nowhere discusses the logical and philosophical foundations of the argument more thoroughly; another is the nonchalant air of a statement like the following: “... because of the simple fact that the question of ‘what is’ is entirely different from the question of ‘what ought to be’”.<sup>28</sup> One practical instance of Weber’s apparent belief in the self-evidence of the argument is the speed with which he denies, in a few introductory sentences to *Pol.Voc.*, that there is any connection between questions about what policy to pursue and questions about what politics *is*.<sup>29</sup>

In Weber’s fundamental statements of the principle of value freedom, and in his arguments supporting it, he uses a considerable variety of terms to designate the two spheres: scientific inquiry and values. This terminological variation does not seem to indicate any wavering in Weber’s mind about the fundamental and absolute character of the logical difference between the two spheres; but it does warrant a preliminary discussion of his views on the exact definition and designation of these spheres.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the analysis of the *terms* used by Weber to designate the two spheres might add to our knowledge of how he defined their respective *characteristics*. The need for such an analysis, however, is not the same in the two cases. Weber’s discussion of the question of values as a problem in scientific inquiry takes the form of an analysis of the characteristics of the sphere of *science*, and this analysis is in itself so close that a study of the terms chosen to designate the concept of science adds little to our knowledge. On the other hand, Weber treats the *value* sphere in itself so briefly<sup>30</sup> that an examination of the various designations used

23 A hypothetical second argument, based on the fact that values change with time, is criticized by Weber; see below, pp. 87-88.

24 *ORK*, p. 187n93/*GAW*, p. 127n1.

25 *GASS*, p. 450.

26 *GASS*, p. 418.

27 *MSS*, p. 12/*GAW*, p. 501.

28 *MSS*, p.11/*GAW*, p. 500; similarly *MSS*, pp. 2-3, 110, 159; *OSt*, p. 171 /*GAW*, pp. 212, 261, 381, 491.

29 *LSPW*, p. 309/*GPS*, p. 493.

30 This does not mean that Weber is less *concerned with* the value sphere; but even when his analysis is wholly concentrated on it (as in the case of the problems treated in Ch. 5), he largely seems to regard the question of the definition of its content as trivial.

for it may be able to shed more light on his view of its characteristics. Consequently, the discussion below of the sphere of science will not be based on semantic analysis, and will on the whole be limited to a short exposition of what Weber regarded as the fundamental qualities of scientific inquiry and of its results; the value sphere, on the other hand, will be given more exhaustive treatment, which will to a large extent concentrate on the various terms used by Weber.

## The logical premises of the principle

### *The definition of the logical spheres*

*The sphere of scientific inquiry* The terms most frequently used by Weber to designate the sphere of scientific inquiry and its content are the following: "science" (Wissenschaft<sup>31</sup>); "empirical science" (Erfahrungswissenschaft, empirische Wissenschaft<sup>32</sup>); "empirical truth" (Erfahrungswahrheit<sup>33</sup>) and "statement of (empirical) fact" ((empirische) Tatsachenfeststellung<sup>34</sup>). They are, taken by themselves, relatively opaque; and the explication found in certain passages of *Objectivity*, to the effect that the aim of scientific inquiry is "the intellectual ordering of empirical reality",<sup>35</sup> does not help much (apart from underlining Weber's affinity to Kantian conceptual thinking). If we limit ourselves to this kind of data, the only conclusion we can draw is the commonsensical one that Weber's concept of "scientific inquiry" apparently designates a perception of empirical reality laying claim to some kind of truth.

The concept of truth, however, is by no means unambiguous, but on the contrary raises a number of questions concerning the concrete criteria of the "truth" referred to, its sphere of validity, etc., in short, the *material* definition of the sphere of scientific inquiry. On this point, Weber's discussion of the principle of value freedom is peculiar in that it almost completely concentrates on the *separation* between the sphere of scientific inquiry and the value sphere. His arguments justifying the principle do not go beyond a simple statement of logical fact; and his exposition and discussion of the corresponding practical demand tend to remain negative, simply postulating an unbridgeable gap between, "Is" (Sein) and "Ought" (Sollen).<sup>36</sup>

One complicating factor which may be noted at this point is Weber's occasional use of the adjective "*objective*" to qualify his concept of scientific truth: "... [scientific descriptions] claim *validity* as supra-individual 'objective truth' ...".<sup>37</sup> This implies

31 E.g. *MSS*, p. 110, *FMW*, p. 154/*GAW*, pp. 212, 611; *GASS*, pp. 402, 417.

32 E.g. *MSS*, pp. 18, 52, 54/*GAW*, pp. 149, 151, 508; *GASS*, p. 418.

33 E.g. *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 261.

34 For instance *OST*, p. 84, *MSS*, p. 12, *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, pp. 311, 501, 601; *GASS*, p. 419.

35 *MSS*, pp. 53, 63/*GAW*, pp. 150, 160; see also *MSS*, pp. 58, 110/*GAW*, pp. 155, 213.

36 Nor, we may add, is the problem of the criteria of truth treated by Weber in the course of his positive discussion of the implications and possibilities of science. See below, pp. 84-87.

37 *ORK*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 89.

that scientific truth is situated on a plane that lies beyond the individual and his subjective will and preferences.<sup>38</sup> *Objective* truth is essentially different from mere subjective conviction, although the latter may have the status of *absolute* truth in the eyes of the individual concerned. This qualification may seem quite obvious, particularly to a modern reader.<sup>39</sup> But it does raise certain problems even in relation to a wholly formal and negative discussion of the principle of value freedom.<sup>40</sup> And it is a reminder of the close connection between the discussion of scientific status and that of categorial objectivity, as defined by neo-Kantian value philosophy.<sup>41</sup>

*The value sphere* Although the diversity of Weber's formulations concerning values should of course not be taken as quite fortuitous, nothing indicates that he wished to work out a systematic analytical classification of the concepts involved.<sup>42</sup> I have consequently felt justified in grouping below the various terms found in Weber's work without regard to any supposedly intended such classification on his part.

Considering that Weber himself calls his principle a demand for "value freedom" and that he several times uses the same terminology in derivatives like "value-free", it is remarkable that, in his more detailed discussions of this demand, he mainly relies not on the term "value", but on other terms: apart from one passage where "the 'validity' (Geltung) [of] 'values'" is opposed to "the validity [of] empirical truth",<sup>43</sup> we only find the term "value" as a part of the compound "value sphere", where it denotes an undefined, general concept.<sup>44</sup> When the *term* "value" occasionally appears elsewhere,

38 Weber exemplifies this by saying that an empirical or theoretical scientific assertion should aim at being valid even for a Chinese. Cf. *MSS*, pp. 58-59/*GAW*, pp. 155-56, and the discussion of this passage below, p. 87.

39 Cf. Schnädelbach 1984, pp. 163-64: "The claim to objectivity ... is, in the post-metaphysical interpretation of science ... simply one of the fundamental claims on which scientific status rests" (translation modified).

40 See for the discussion of the relationship truth value – value of truth below, pp. 71-72, and for the question whether psychological, biological or historical knowledge may relativize truth value, below, p. 83.

41 See below, pp. 84-86.

42 See *I07*, pp. 32-34, and also a letter of 15 July 1907 (*MWG II/5*) to Robert Liefmann, where Weber takes a severely practical view of the concept of value: "... when tackling the problem of values ... one above all has to ask the question: what are the phenomena in [empirical] reality that we wish to elucidate by forming the concept of 'value'? ... How does it help our knowledge of reality? ... Only in *that* way ... is it possible to say what value 'is', or more correctly: what can be understood by it". Cf. Schluchter 1991, p. 289 ("Weber never, even indirectly, discusses the concept of value") and Loos, *Wertlehre*, 1970, p. 46.

43 *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 261. Of course, the term "value", as well as the various other terms discussed below ("valuation" (Wertung), "Ought" (Sollen), etc.), is met with far more frequently in *GAW* than in this one passage; but the present discussion has been deliberately restricted to Weber's direct and fundamental formulation of the principle of value freedom and of its logical premises.

44 For instance *MSS*, pp. 32, 44/*GAW*, pp. 523, 537. Schnädelbach (2003) patiently tries to make sense of the "confusion" that he finds in Weber's terminology concerning values.

in the discussion of the concrete implications of the principle of value freedom, it carries the meaning of "importance", not "value".<sup>45</sup>

Among the terms used by Weber to denote the value element that the principle of value freedom aims at eradicating from science, "valuation" (Wertung), "value judgment" (Werturteil) and their linguistic satellites ("valuing" (Werthen), "evaluating" (Bewerten) and "formulating a value judgment" (Wertbeurteilung)) hold a prominent place.<sup>46</sup> This seems to indicate that Weber deliberately wants to carry through the discussion of value freedom by means of precisely these terms. They are carefully defined and conspicuously placed in the text. *Value Freedom* opens with the definition of "valuation",<sup>47</sup> and this definition is immediately followed by an explicit, although indirect, indication to the effect that the term "value freedom" in the title of the essay should be understood as "freedom from valuations" (Wertungsfreiheit) (this again to be interpreted in the light of the definition of "valuation").<sup>48</sup> The definition of "value judgment" which follows ten pages later<sup>49</sup> is also given a key position, as an introduction to the positive discussion of value freedom. Finally, in the essay as a whole, Weber, in describing the typical characteristics of the value sphere, mentions just those contained in the definitions of "valuation" and "value judgment".

What are these characteristics? Right at the outset of *Value Freedom*,<sup>50</sup> we find the following description of what Weber means by "valuations":

In what follows, except where a different sense is either explicitly stated or obvious from the context, the term "valuations" is to be understood as: "practical" evaluations of a phenomenon that is capable of being influenced by our actions, as being reprehensible or worthy of approval.

A little later,<sup>51</sup> roughly the same qualities are enumerated in his definition of "value judgment":

The term "value judgment" has given rise to endless misunderstanding and to controversy, above all of a terminological (and therefore utterly sterile) nature, and this has obviously contributed nothing at all to the substance of the matter. As was said at the beginning of this article, it is perfectly clear that, as far as our discipline is concerned, the issue is that of

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Some of this confusion certainly rubs off on Weber's discussion of the conflict between different value spheres (see below, pp. 193-97 and *I07*, pp. 35-36).

45 For instance *OSt*, p. 127/*GAW*, p. 345.

46 "Valuation", for instance *MSS*, pp. 1-3, 18, 47, 59/*GAW*, pp. 155, 489-91, 508, 540; *GASS*, p. 431. "Value judgment", for instance *ORK*, p. 117, *MSS*, pp. 6, 10, 49, 52, *OSt*, p. 85, *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, pp. 61, 146n1, 149, 313, 425, 495, 499, 602; *GASS*, pp. 421, 476.

47 *MSS*, p. 1/*GAW*, p. 489.

48 See also *MSS*, p. 24/*GAW*, p. 515, where Weber speaks of a science that is "free from valuations", and *MSS*, pp. 46-47/*GAW*, pp. 539-40, where the "sphere of valuations" (Wertungssphäre) is contrasted with the "sphere of what is" (Seinssphäre).

49 *MSS*, pp. 10-11/*GAW*, p. 499.

50 *MSS*, p. 1/*GAW*, p. 489.

51 *MSS*, p. 10/*GAW*, p. 499.

*practical* evaluations of social facts as being practically desirable or undesirable, whether on ethical or on cultural grounds or for some other reason.

These definitions have at least two things in common: the stress laid on the “practical” aspect of the concepts defined; and the view of their logical structure as dualistic, with a positive and a negative element: “reprehensible” – “worthy of approval”; “desirable” – “undesirable”. By emphasizing in this way the practical (as opposed to the theoretical) and evaluative elements in value judgments,<sup>52</sup> Weber characterizes the sphere of valuation as being opposed to that of empirical science, and thus underpins his assertion of the logical gap between the two. But the wording of the definition, apart from indicating this “external” distinction, also suggests that a particular “internal” aspect of the concept of value as such has seemed important to Weber: that of action.

This is already implicit in the two common features mentioned above. As regards the dualistic structure of value judgments, it may not be the only logically conceivable one; but it is particularly suitable as a basis for the formulation of practical *goals* (one strives to attain a good, or to eliminate an evil).<sup>53</sup> The term “practical” also carries definite overtones of action.

This implicit active aspect is made surprisingly explicit in the introductory definition in *Value Freedom*,<sup>54</sup> where, as we have seen, it is assumed that “practical valuations” can only have as their object “a phenomenon that is capable of being influenced by our actions”. Common sense tells us that this assertion cannot be maintained as a general criterion, since it is obvious that we can evaluate a phenomenon without being able to influence it. The most acceptable interpretation seems to be that Weber, for the purposes of his argument, deliberately *restricts* the definition to cases where valuational elements are more or less directly used as a basis for, or related to, human action.<sup>55</sup>

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52 Unless the context requires it, no distinction will be made below between valuations and value judgments. (The terminological distinction seems difficult to uphold even in the philosophical literature: Schnädelbach 1984, p. 181 carefully explains the neo-Kantian distinction between (theoretical) “judgments” (*Urteile*) and practical “evaluations” (*Beurteilungen*); but on the very next page, he groups both these terms together as expressing practical “valuation”.)

53 It is open to discussion whether Weber himself regarded the dualistic structure as a logical necessity. Dieter Henrich (1952, p. 26) claims that he did. However, one of the passages quoted by Henrich himself (*ORK*, p. 182/*GAW*, p. 123) seems to indicate the possibility of a more complex logical structure, since Weber there describes a “value” as “something the ‘validity’ of which is accepted, rejected or, *in the most diverse combinations* [*italics mine*], made the object of a value *judgment* ‘by’ us”.

54 *MSS*, p. 1/*GAW*, p. 489.

55 Weber’s explicit modification (“except where a different sense is either explicitly stated or obvious from the context”) makes it clear that he does not regard the “practical” restriction as *logically* necessary. Hennis (1988, pp. 51-52; 1994, p. 113) therefore seems to go too far when he assigns to this restriction the value of a *principle*.

One of the most ineradicable misunderstandings current among Weber's critics was the belief that "value freedom", as he defined it, implied the impossibility of making values an *object* of scientific study: in other words, that the object level as well as the research level had to be kept free from value elements. Weber therefore saw it as a major task to underline the distinction between the object level and the research level, and to demonstrate not only the *feasibility* of a value-free treatment of values as an object of study, but also that such a study of values on the object level *presupposed* value freedom (as defined by him) on the research level. If we examine Weber's definitions of "valuations" in this wider perspective, the stress laid on the "active" aspect of value judgments seems to echo his definition of the subject matter of sociology, in which "action" (*Handeln*) is similarly made a key concept.<sup>56</sup> To a social science whose subject is man as a social *actor*, the elimination of "action-related" valuations from its research level becomes a particularly vital concern.<sup>57</sup>

The practical aspect emphasized here reappears in other of Weber's terms denoting the value sphere. This is obviously the case with the term "practical aspiration".<sup>58</sup> In the same way, we occasionally<sup>59</sup> find expressions like "should *do*", "should *contribute to*", "should *act*", where Weber's underlining emphasizes the – logically subordinate – "active" aspect.

Finally, it should be noted in this connection that while Weber never directly uses the term "goal"/"purpose" (*Zweck*) to indicate the fundamental properties of the value sphere as opposed to the sphere of scientific inquiry, he constantly employs it in close connection with his discussions of the concept of value; and in his concrete descriptions or exemplifications of this methodological problem, he often replaces the "valuational" terms discussed above with the term "goal" or "purpose" (*I07*, p. 15). This transition from more philosophical terms to a wholly "formal" indication of value ("formal" in the sense that any situation or phenomenon must automatically be regarded as somehow "valuable"<sup>60</sup> if it is set as a goal for action) is a further indication of the strong emphasis on the concept of practical action which we find in some of Weber's discussions of values.<sup>61</sup>

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56 See his definition of "sociology" in the introduction to *ES* (*ES*, p. 4/*WG*, p. 1).

57 This concern is clearly brought out, for instance, in a letter from Weber to Heinrich Rickert, 26 April 1920 (*GStA I*, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 25): "Of course, what we are faced with as our *objects* of observation are *individuals* who formulate value judgments – but *we* are not compelled to *emit* value judgments!" ("Wertende Menschen als *Objekte* der Betrachtung haben wir natürlich vor uns, – aber *wir* sind *nicht* genötigt, zu werten").

58 For instance *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157; *GASS*, p. 420.

59 *MSS*, p. 19; *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, pp. 509, 602.

60 Naturally, this term may cover *negative* as well as *positive* evaluations; in other words, a "goal" may consist in the *removal* of something.

61 Schelting 1934, p. 22n4, maintains that "goal" analysis can be substituted for "value" analysis, since Weber did not in principle discriminate between these two analytical approaches. See also Turner and Factor 1984, p. 35, who note that by Weber's time, the word "value" had become "a portmanteau term for any sort of ... *good or aim*" (my italics) and Schluchter 2003, p. 64.

Yet another term often employed by Weber to describe the value pole of the values–science dualism is “ideal” (in one instance,<sup>62</sup> “idea” is used with an identical meaning). This term does not in itself imply any thought of action, nor does Weber’s use of it suggest such an implication. On closer examination, however, we often find an “active” aspect found to be present in the more indirect way that “ideals” are described by Weber as being the basis of or the motive for practical action, goals, etc.<sup>63</sup> In other words, Weber sees the value sphere as containing a number of steps or levels, the “static” higher ones serving as a theoretical basis for the “active” lower ones (goals, valuations, etc.).

The idea of such a subdivision is not in itself very original, but its implications are of interest in the present context:

As mentioned above, a number of the terms employed by Weber to denote the concept of value exhibit a practical aspect, which even seems to dominate some of his concrete discussions. The more Weber stresses this aspect, the more the value element of the concepts recedes: in his treatment of the value sphere, Weber seems more concerned with the fact that something is actually striven for than with the precise nature of the value elements which might be at the root of such a striving.<sup>64</sup> This shift of emphasis is carried to the extreme when the term “goal” is employed, as described above.

This subdivision of the value sphere allows us to see the concrete, practical aspect, represented by the lower steps, as supplemented by another, more static and general one, which is closer to a substantive definition of value. The first aspect reflects the element of striving for goals, the second one represents the *basis* for these practical goals.

This conception of an ordering of values does not lead Weber to perform any concrete delimitation of the values which can, or ought to, function as ideals, i.e., as the valuational basis for action. The terms which he applies to this higher order of values cover a wide spectrum, from emotional or affectual attitudes right across to religiously coloured terms; thus, Weber seems to respect in practice his own explicit refusal in theory to venture into the field of philosophical reflections on the exact implications of the concept of value.<sup>65</sup> The element which distinguishes this “static” aspect from the “active” one is rather to be found in the emphasis laid on the *subjective* character of the concepts exhibiting the former aspect: by setting himself a goal or expressing a value judgment, the individual, whether consciously or unconsciously, with logical necessity commits his personality and stakes it on

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62 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

63 E.g. *MSS*, pp. 44, 52, 54, 59/*GAW*, pp. 149, 151, 156, 537.

64 See, for instance, Weber’s refusal (quoted above, p. 34n150) to discuss the relationship between wholly subjective value judgments and ethical ones, and the cursory reference, *MSS*, p. 10/*GAW*, p. 499, to “ethical or cultural grounds, or ... some other reason” as a possible basis for value judgments.

65 He does, however, from time to time make some general distinctions (see, for instance, *MSS*, p. 58/*GAW*, p. 155, where he distinguishes between the ethical and the more emotional value bases and consequently seems to talk of *three* logical spheres).

some ideal; in essence, the setting of any goal for oneself can be seen, in Weber's words, as "involving [one's] whole subjectivity".<sup>66</sup>

*The logical gulf between the demand for value freedom and the premises of the demand*

As we have seen, Weber bases his demand for the value freedom of scientific inquiry, i.e., the demand that the value sphere and the sphere of scientific inquiry *should* be kept separate, on the sole argument that the two spheres *are in fact* logically different. The principle which, in one of its asymmetrical forms, states that it is logically illegitimate to derive "Ought" from "Is", seemingly rests on precisely that kind of illegitimate conclusion.

Theoretically, it is not difficult to resolve this paradox through an interpretation whereby the "Is" premise ("the value sphere and the sphere of scientific inquiry are logically heterogeneous") is supplemented by a tacit "Ought" premise ("it is desirable (preferable, etc.) that this logical heterogeneity should be respected in practice"). According to this interpretation, the "Ought" conclusion (the demand for value freedom) is derived from a combination of "Is" and "Ought" premises, a procedure which is quite legitimate in formal logic.

In principle, this interpretation only amounts to a shifting of the question, so that it now runs: "Why is it desirable (valuable, preferable) that this logical heterogeneity should be respected in practice?". But in fact, this transposition often psychologically amounts to a final solution of the problem: to most scientists and scholars, including those working in the field of philosophy, the value of scientific inquiry and of its results, i.e., of *truth*, is an *a priori* whose logically uncertain status never worries them or even enters their mind. Insofar as the question of the basis of this value is raised at all, it is usually met by some kind of reflexive argument tending to prove that truth is an objective value for scholars and scientists.

Weber's analysis of this problem is interesting: not only does he explicitly subscribe to the "Ought" premise tacitly introduced above, but he also in the course of the discussion emphasizes that the value of truth and of the pursuit of truth is fundamentally indemonstrable and in this sense relative.<sup>67</sup>

A further point of interest in Weber's discussion of the logical premises of the demand for value freedom is the following: The claim that scientific truth is a value is a sufficient basis for the "Ought" premise introduced above (at least if we assume that the two spheres are mutually exclusive). Therefore, if we accept the value of scientific inquiry and of its results, we can formulate a complete, symmetrical demand for the value freedom of scientific inquiry without having to take any stand, positive or negative, concerning the value of the value sphere. Nevertheless, Weber several times commits himself to a view of the value sphere which is emphatically

<sup>66</sup> GASS, p. 449.

<sup>67</sup> Breiner 1996, pp. 57-58 goes into the question of the "logical gulf", but does not seem to realize that Weber himself is well aware of it.

positive – in fact more positive than that which he expresses concerning the sphere of scientific inquiry. In other words, he regards the commitment to certain values, and action motivated by such a commitment, as definitely valuable in itself.

*The logical status of the sphere of scientific inquiry* As we have seen, Weber describes scientific truth as objective. On the other hand, he must maintain that this quality of objective truth does not in itself prove the practical value of scientific inquiry. Put in general terms: a scientific discipline aiming at or making use of empirical or theoretical evidence cannot itself, logically speaking, prove the value of this aim or use. As early as *Knies I*, Weber writes: "... the 'value' ... [of the purpose of scientific analysis is] ... something that can in no way be established by science as such",<sup>68</sup> and he retains this view unaltered, reaffirming it as late as *Sc. Voc.* (where the discussion of this kind of problem naturally has a central place):

Any scientific activity is based on the presupposition that its results will be *important* in the sense of "being worth knowing". But obviously, all our problems lie here, since this presupposition in its turn cannot be proved by scientific means.<sup>69</sup>

A number of scientific disciplines are regarded by Weber as having a "technical" character; they serve "clinical, technical, economic, political or other 'practical' interests",<sup>70</sup> i.e., they seek to obtain results which may serve as *means* to some practical end. As far as these disciplines are concerned, Weber derives the value of their results from the value of the end towards which they are seen to be useful, while he regards the latter value as scientifically indemonstrable.<sup>71</sup> There is an implicit reference here to the practical aspect of Weber's general discussion of the value sphere: the ability of a scientific discipline to produce true statements, i.e., correct descriptions of facts, is valuable if, and only if, it contributes to the rational attainment of a goal. The end, conceived as a value, invests the correct means of attaining it with a corresponding value.<sup>72</sup>

When we come to "pure" scientific activity, which is pursued only "for its own sake",<sup>73</sup> its value cannot be derived from practical ends, since scientific inquiry is

68 *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 60.

69 *FMW*, p. 143/*GAW*, p. 599. Analogous formulations *FMW*, pp. 145, 153, 355/*GAW*, pp. 600, 610; *FMW*, p. 355/*GARS I*, p. 569.

70 *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 60.

71 *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 60; see also *FMW*, pp. 143-44/*GAW*, p. 599-600.

72 In *FMW*, pp. 144-45/*GAW*, pp. 599-600. Weber discusses the case of a number of other disciplines. Although some of these (e.g. law, economics, sociology) are of practical *importance*, in the sense that their results may be put to practical use, Weber does not draw a parallel to the technical sciences in the narrower sense given above. The reason for this omission may be found in the circumstance that Weber in this discussion concentrates on another aspect: the value of the *object* of these sciences (which is also scientifically indemonstrable).

73 E.g. *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 61 and *FMW*, p. 144/*GAW*, p. 599. The latter passage seems to suggest that any scientific discipline can acquire this "pure" character, if the scholar

here seen as an end in itself. Consequently, Weber takes great pains to emphasize the relative character of the value of scientific truth and of the activity directed towards obtaining this kind of truth:

The *objective* validity of all empirical knowledge rests, and rests exclusively, upon the fact that the given reality is ordered according to categories which ... are based on the presupposition of the *value* of that truth which empirical knowledge alone is able to give us. With the means available to our science, we have nothing to offer a person to whom this truth is of no value – and belief in the value of scientific truth is the product of certain cultures, and is not given to us by nature. He will, however, search in vain for another truth to take the place of science with respect to those features which *it* alone can provide: concepts and judgments that allow ... [empirical] reality to be *ordered intellectually* in a valid manner.<sup>74</sup>

What science – in this case, logic – can do is only to set out what are the results that empirical science can produce, and possibly has a monopoly of producing; but it cannot force anyone to accept the *value* of such results. As shown in the passage quoted, Weber does not even restrict the predicate “truth” to denoting the correct results of the empirical or logical disciplines.<sup>75</sup>

The direct consequences of this “relative” conclusion are in Weber’s view purely theoretical. In *Sc. Voc.*, he writes: “As far as I am concerned, I already by my own work answer the question [whether it is worthwhile to have science as one’s ‘vocation’, and whether science itself has a ‘vocation’ which is objectively valuable] in the affirmative”;<sup>76</sup> and this passage might even suggest that Weber sees the question of the value of scientific inquiry as being, in practice, one of simple definition. According to this definition, we are entitled to assume that whoever engages in scientific inquiry thereby implicitly acknowledges the value of scientific activity as such.<sup>77</sup> But since engaging in scientific activity easily acquires a kind of unconscious self-evidence, Weber makes a point of demonstrating its implications, which are logically necessary, and consequently binding upon scholars and scientists in their

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or scientist in question is motivated solely by the pure search for scientific truth, and does not think of the practical results. Weber’s concern here is obviously to reserve the term “vocation” (*Beruf*) for the scientific inquiry inspired by such “pure” motives.

74 *MSS*, pp. 110-11/*GAW*, pp. 212-13; see also *ORK*, pp. 116-17/*GAW*, p. 61 and *FMW*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 609.

75 In *GASS*, p. 482, Weber shows a similar tolerance with regard to the term “scientific inquiry”. But it should be noted that the tolerance is *terminological* only. As Weber puts it: the results of other possible forms of “scientific inquiry” “do not belong in the arena (*Forum*) of a science purely concerned with facts (*reine Tatsachenwissenschaft*)”.

76 *FMW*, p. 152/*GAW*, pp. 608-609.

77 See also *GASS*, p. 449, where Weber responds to a radical position advanced by Professor Schulze-Gävernitz, which almost amounts to the claim that logic is an *objective* value to scholars and scientists. Instead of entering into the substance of the problem, Weber reduces Schulze-Gävernitz’s fundamental attack to a simple question of definition, by saying that “the belief in the value of science is a precondition for all our work”.

capacity as such: the activity of scientific inquiry implies the *choice* of a particular value.<sup>78</sup> As it is put concisely in a key sentence from *Objectivity*: "... scientific truth is only that which *claims* validity for all who *seek* truth".<sup>79</sup>

*The logical status of the value sphere* It would theoretically have been possible for Weber to put the case for his demand for value freedom solely in terms of the arguments set out above concerning the value of scientific inquiry. In that case, valuations would have been regarded solely as factors of disturbance in the scientific process, undesirable subjective elements which should be eliminated or neutralized as far as possible.

In fact, Weber's attitude is quite different. He makes it quite clear that his demand for value freedom does *not* imply any disparagement of the role of values generally. As he says in *Objectivity*: "A *lack of inner conviction* is in no way intrinsically related to *scientific objectivity*".<sup>80</sup>

This negative formulation is supplemented by a number of passages in which Weber defines his view of the value sphere in a more positive way: He sees the value sphere as invested with a "specific dignity",<sup>81</sup> comparable to that ascribed to the sphere of scientific inquiry.<sup>82</sup> While Weber sees the "dignity" of the latter as based on its monopoly of producing results which are scientifically (empirically or logically) true, the analogous status of the value sphere is based, in his view, on the fundamental importance of values for the human personality:<sup>83</sup> "Certainly, the dignity of the 'personality' stems from the fact that there are certain values to which it relates its own life; – even if these values may in some cases be located exclusively *within* the sphere of its own individuality ..."<sup>84</sup>

Thus, as Weber sees it, not only the value-free search for truth, but also the (logically diametrically opposed) commitment to indemonstrable values is a positive (but not an objective) value in human life. And just as the value of scientific truth functions as a premise for a demand for value freedom of the form: "scholars and scientists must keep their scientific inquiry free from valuations", so the value of "ultimate values" (letzte Werte) becomes a premise for the complementary conclusion: human beings – among them scientists and scholars – must choose and defend their personal value orientation in life without hiding behind the assertion that the correctness of such an

78 Cf. *FMW*, pp. 144-45/*GAW*, p. 600.

79 *MSS*, p. 84/*GAW*, p. 184; similar formulations *OSI*, pp. 128, 131/*GAW*, pp. 347, 349.

80 *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157.

81 *MSS*, p. 52/*GAW*, p. 148.

82 Cf. *MSS*, p. 12/*GAW*, p. 501, where the formulation is quite symmetrical: "... the specific dignity of *both* of the two [levels] ..." In *MSS*, p. 3/*GAW*, p. 491, Weber even indirectly suggests that the demand for value freedom might be based solely on the regard for the "dignity" of the *value* sphere. *GASS*, p. 419 seems to express a similar point of view.

83 Admittedly, Weber never explicitly uses this argument to support or prove the "dignity" of the value sphere. But in his discussion of the principle of value freedom, the "dignity" and the "personality" line of thought run quite parallel to each other.

84 *MSS*, p. 55/*GAW*, p. 152.

orientation can be proved or disproved by scientific means. A passage from Weber's speech at the 1909 congress of the *Association* brings this out clearly:

If I constantly ... object so very vehemently when "what ought to be" is mixed up with "what is", it is not because I hold matters of "what ought to be" in low esteem, quite to the contrary: it is because I find it unbearable when problems of world-shaking importance, of the greatest ideal significance, in a sense the most exalted problems that may move the human heart, are transformed into a technical and economic question of "productivity" and made the object of discussions within a specialized discipline ...<sup>85</sup>

Weber's extremely positive attitude to the "dignity" of the value sphere goes even further than the stress placed, in the passage quoted, on the fundamental importance of the "highest" level of values as a basis for commitments of a deeply personal kind: We find him calling directly for this commitment to be translated into practice. Sometimes, these requests are indirect, as when Weber speaks of "standing up for one's own ideals",<sup>86</sup> or of "practical aspiration".<sup>87</sup> But occasionally, the appeal is overt, and formulated as a demand on any person who wishes to be recognized as a human being in the full sense of the word. Most significantly, this appeal forms the very conclusion of Weber's remarks on *science* as a vocation:

... we should draw the lesson that nothing is gained by just yearning and waiting, and we should act differently. We should go to our work and meet the "demands of the day" both in human and in professional terms. But those demands are plain and simple, if each of us finds and obeys the demon that holds the threads of *his* life.<sup>88</sup>

As in the discussion of the value of scientific inquiry, we here find the two Weberian aspects of the concept of value: the "committed" and the "active" one. And through both of them runs Weber's firm view of practical commitment as an *ethical* necessity for everybody, including scholars and scientists.<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting that Weber, who, in his discussion of scientific inquiry, is at pains to emphasize the *relative character* of the value of scientific truth and, consequently,

85 GASS, p. 419; similar formulations MSS, p. 3/GAW, p. 491 and GASS, pp. 449-50, and in a letter to Rickert of 24 July 1911 (MWG II/7).

86 MSS, p. 58/GAW, p. 155.

87 MSS, p. 60/GAW, p. 157.

88 FMW, p. 156/GAW, p. 613. "Demon" in this passage is most probably inspired by Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (for references, see Treiber 1998, p.73n8) or directly by Goethe's "Urworte, Orphische" (see Scaff 1984, p. 209) and has certainly nothing "diabolical" about it.

89 Gouldner 1964, p. 201, mistakenly maintains that Weber denied the right of *university teachers* to believe in and commit themselves to values. The "opposite view" to Weber's which Gouldner formulates ("... that professors are, like all others, entitled and perhaps obligated to express their values") is in fact identical with Weber's own position ("In the press, in public meetings, in associations, in essays – in short, in any form that is also available to any other citizen – he [the professor] may (and should) do what his god or his demon calls upon him to do" (MSS, p. 5/GAW, p. 493)).

of scientific inquiry, completely abstains from such verbal and material safeguards in the parallel discussions of the value sphere. The “value of values” is maintained emphatically, at times with striking intensity, but he nowhere explicitly notes its – logically inescapable – relative character. On the other hand, Weber nowhere claims that “value of values” can be *demonstrated* as valid; instead, he formulates it and supports it with the whole weight of his committed personality.

### The principle in its more specific form

As we have seen, the principle of value freedom contains a demand for the separation of empirical science and value judgments (based on fundamental ideals) or, in its two asymmetrical formulations, the demands 1) that scientific inquiry should be kept free of such valuations, and 2) valuations should not be provided with allegations of scientific demonstrability. If we take the sphere of scientific inquiry as our focal point, the first of these asymmetrical demands emphasizes the *possibilities* of scientific activity, when it is conducted without being disturbed by practical value judgments, while the second asymmetrical demand stresses the fact that science has *limits* which it cannot, and therefore should not pretend to be able to, overstep.

When we turn to the more concrete formulations of the principle of value freedom, we find that they, too, can analytically be divided into two groups: the first one comprises the passages where Weber emphasizes the demand that science, in order to safeguard its capacity of producing true results, should be kept free of valuations in their various forms; while the central point in the passages belonging to the second group is the stress put on the limitations of science relative to practical value judgments. This analytical distinction has a practical correlate, since the first category can be said to relate to the collection of data, the formulation of preliminary hypotheses, etc., while the second one covers generalizations and the formulation of theories on the basis of the data collected.<sup>90</sup> The two groups will therefore be referred to as the demand for the value freedom of the *scientific process* and the demand for the value freedom of the *scientific results*, and be treated separately in the following.<sup>91</sup>

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90 In GASS, p. 421, Weber explicitly formulates a similar distinction: “I am of the opinion that a true natural scientist would positively shudder if he was told that it was expected of him to introduce such practical value judgments into his work, or to pass them off as the results of his work”.

91 Ciaffa (1998, pp. 14, 69-72) claims that there is a logical disjunction between these two aspects of the value freedom principle; but he candidly admits that this disjunction has no clear basis in Weber’s own writings. In the final analysis, Ciaffa’s thesis seems to rest on a rather too hazy distinction between the “process” aspect of value freedom and the “value relation” on which conceptualization in the social sciences is based according to Weber (following Rickert). “Value relation” will be exhaustively discussed in Ch. 2.

*The demand for the value freedom of the scientific process*

When dealing with the value freedom of the scientific process, Weber concentrates his attacks on the risk of introducing valuational elements into the *concepts* employed. This focus of interest is no doubt rooted in the neo-Kantian theory of scientific inquiry, according to which the *concept* is the central methodological category. The battle for the value freedom of the scientific process must therefore appear to Weber to be mainly one for the value freedom of the *concepts*.

In *Roscher*, Weber discusses a large number of “emanationist” theories, i.e., theories according to which actual behaviour is seen as “emanating” from some concept (“personality”, “spirit”, “people”, etc.). Most prominent among the authors treated is Roscher himself, whose views are discussed throughout the essay; but other writers, for instance Lamprecht and Gierke, with their “organic” theories of the state, also come in for treatment.<sup>92</sup> Weber does not, however, go beyond a fairly neutral account of the views of the authors discussed: the actual criticism, based on Weber’s own positive theory, remains implicit, here as elsewhere in *Roscher*. Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that Weber rejects any kind of “emanationism”, both as a consequence of his view that concepts should be regarded as *means*, not as *ends*, of scientific inquiry<sup>93</sup>, and – particularly in the case of concepts denoting *collectivities* – because of the individualist bent of his methodological orientation.

Hegel’s philosophy must have seemed to Weber to be at the very heart of the problem of “emanationism”, and we find an illuminating passage to this effect in a Weber letter from 1909: “Two ways are open to us: Hegel or – *our way* of treating things”.<sup>94</sup> But although Hegel is mentioned quite often in *Roscher*, Weber characteristically treats him with far more respect and circumspection than he reserves for other authors. (Generally speaking, there is a clearly discernible tendency in Weber’s work towards attacking the lesser prophets, the “epigones”, while borrowing from the major ones. Thus, Hegel, Marx and Dilthey, who all had an important – positive or negative – influence on Weber are rarely mentioned and discussed in his works. Instead, Roscher and Knies (for Hegel), the Marxian epigones and Stammler (for Marx) and Wundt, Croce and others (for Dilthey) have to bear the brunt of the attack.<sup>95</sup>)

One of the concepts frequently discussed in the later essays is that of “progress”. In *Knies I*, Weber deals with the psychologist and philosopher Wundt, who had postulated the existence of a law of “growing psychic energy” of the same kind as the law of the conservation of physical energy, with the implication of continuous

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92 *ORK*, pp. 75n60, 85n83/GAW, pp. 25n5, 35n1. In a contemporary letter to Karl Vossler, 17 December 1904 (copy in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30, Vol. 4), Weber voices his suspicion that Vossler’s concept of “the spirit of language” contains emanationist elements.

93 See below, pp. 128–29.

94 Letter to F. Eulenburg (after 12 July 1909; *MWG II/6*). The echo of Kant’s “The critical road alone is still open” (in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, B884) is evident, the more so since the context makes it clear that “our way” refers to the neo-Kantian approach.

95 Cf. Turner and Factor 1994b, p. 8, who put this fact in a larger context.

spiritual progress through time. Weber demonstrates conclusively that such an idea of “growth” or “progress” does not correspond to anything in the empirical world, being simply a rephrasing in “scientific” terms of the central thesis in Wundt’s philosophy of history.<sup>96</sup> Strictly speaking, Wundt’s procedure is not only an interference from, but a *substitution of*, camouflaged value judgments for scientific conclusions, and as such constitutes an extreme example of the category of concepts attacked by Weber.<sup>97</sup>

A few pages later,<sup>98</sup> Weber again turns his attention to the so-called “law” of “growing psychic energy”, but this time treats it from a slightly different angle: he outlines a possible line of defence for the “law”, to the effect that it expresses itself, in part, in the growing ability to acknowledge the validity of logically binding propositions. Since this growing ability may, in principle as well as in fact, be observed empirically, the “law” ought to be regarded as “established” in this sense. Weber, however, does not accept this hypothetical argument. He observes that it is necessary, in order to describe the growing ability to reason logically as “progress”, to assume *a priori* the value of such logical (true) reasoning; accordingly, the argument outlined is still loaded with valuations in disguise. In this case, Weber’s criticism is no longer levelled at a pseudo-scientific concept of progress, which clothes indemonstrable philosophical propositions in the guise of apparently exact laws, but instead at those scholars who might employ the concept without being conscious of, or at least without properly stressing, its essentially valuational frame of reference.<sup>99</sup>

In a discussion in *Value Freedom*,<sup>100</sup> the concept is once again examined closely. In this connection, Weber contrasts the – in his view – value-free term “increased psychic differentiation”, defined as “quantitative increase in the number of possible forms of behaviour”, with the valuationally loaded concept “increased psychic scope”, and points out that the interpretation of this latter concept involves the consideration of a number of different value standards, a complex process the result of which is by no means given in advance. Weber’s point here is the same as in his second argument against Wundt: the use of terms like “scope” tends to obscure the valuational frame of reference. On the strength of this criticism, Weber proceeds to

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96 *ORK*, pp. 109-11, 117/*GAW*, pp. 55-56, 61.

97 Weber directs a similar criticism at the concept of “the social point of view” which plays a certain role in a work by the French “energeticist” E. Solvay (*Energ.Th.Cult.*, *GAW*, p. 402n1). On the parallel discussion in *Objectivity* concerning the legitimacy of speaking of “a” social science, without any further differentiation of aspects, see below, pp. 161-64.

98 *ORK*, pp. 115-16/*GAW*, p. 60.

99 In manuscript notes from 1903 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31, Vol. 6), Weber goes even further and describes the concept of evolution as such as a “valuational concept” (Werth-Begriff).

100 *MSS*, pp. 27-36/*GAW*, pp. 518-27. This discussion is considerably expanded from that of the *Memorandum*, particularly through the introduction of examples from the sociology of art and of music. The most relevant passages in the present context (*MSS*, pp. 27-29, 33/*GAW*, pp. 518-20, 524) are, however, virtually the same as in the earlier version.

discuss the possibility of elaborating a value-free, "technical" concept of progress to be used in the sociology of art and of music, and in history.

Weber's only other<sup>101</sup> detailed discussion of the danger inherent in value-laden concepts is found in his speech at the 1909 congress of the *Association* in Vienna. At this gathering, one of the subjects under debate was that of "economic productivity". While most of the speakers acknowledged that this concept was both vague and complex, they still, in Weber's view, used it too much as a matter of course.

Weber's intervention was directly occasioned by some remarks by Professor Liefmann. Liefmann had tried to construct a value-free, economically "correct" concept of productivity by means of the concept of "national prosperity", which he defined as the greatest possible income for all members of a given group; and one of his examples of behaviour conducive to the "national prosperity", and consequently to productivity, was the destruction of goods in cases where selling these goods on the market would have resulted in a lower total revenue.<sup>102</sup>

Against this construction, Weber advances the same arguments as against the concepts of "growing psychic energy" and "progress": the concept of "national prosperity" is quite indefinite in itself; and any attempt to define it more closely raises problems not only of economics, but also – and perhaps to an even greater extent – of *ethics*.<sup>103</sup> And if we try, as Liefmann does, to exclude this ethical element and to construct a purely economic definition, this definition will, on the one hand, not be ethically indifferent (since it will have ethically relevant consequences); and on the other hand, it does not even dispose of all the economic problems involved, since its apparent self-evidence hides certain well-defined economic value judgments.<sup>104</sup>

Weber criticizes other vague conceptualizations, like "race",<sup>105</sup> "agricultural interests",<sup>106</sup> and (implicitly) "class".<sup>107</sup> But these critical discussions are not based on the allegation that *valuational* elements are introduced into the concept in question, and they will therefore be left out of the present account.

Apart from the conceptual criticism referred to above, Weber now and then deals with the question of the influence of value judgments on other parts of the scientific process. For instance, he points out that the personal ideals or wishes of the individuals engaging in research may affect their estimation of the relative weight of various causal factors, and consequently influence their formulation and

101 Weber also conducts numerous attacks against academic colleagues who try to clothe propositions originating in some philosophy of history in scientific garb; but in these cases, he does not focus on the analysis of the concepts involved. Particular aspects of "emanationist" lines of thought will be dealt with below.

102 *Verhandlungen* (1910), pp. 577-80.

103 I take this to be the meaning of the passage: "The concept of 'national prosperity' obviously implies all conceivable kinds of ethics" (*GASS*, p. 416).

104 *GASS*, pp. 416-17.

105 *GASS*, p. 459.

106 *MSS*, pp. 108-10/*GAW*, pp. 210-12.

107 *MSS*, p. 110/*GAW*, p. 212; cf. *ES*, pp. 927-29/*WG*, pp. 531-32.

acceptance of research hypotheses.<sup>108</sup> Another example of this kind is his warning against investing research methods and scientific approaches with the dignity of a philosophy of life.<sup>109</sup>

We can divide Weber's formulations of the demand for the value freedom of the scientific process, as they were discussed above, into two main categories: The first category comprises concepts which are too general to be operational without further specification, and which moreover have the peculiarity that all propositions in which they are employed are in the last resort empirically indemonstrable. Since such propositions are fundamentally incapable of verification or falsification, they cannot pretend to any scientific status, but are to be regarded as speculative constructions in borrowed scientific plumes. Examples of such constructions are, in Weber's view, the various "emanationist" theories and the law of "growing psychic energy".<sup>110</sup>

The second category comprises concepts that share with the first category the characteristic of being too general to be immediately operational. These concepts, however, may be defined in such a way as to allow empirical testing of the propositions referring to them. Accordingly, they do not fall completely outside the realm of science, but they are imperfect, warped instruments of scientific inquiry, since their form makes them pretend to a generality of application which they cannot in fact lay claim to. They represent a variant of the well-known single-factor theories, in the sense that a proposition whose validity only holds inside a particular field is formulated so as to seem valid for a larger area of facts, that is to say, for situations with a greater number of variable conditions. Instances of this intrusion of value judgments are the concepts of "progress" and "national prosperity" discussed by Weber.

The particular danger of the concepts of the second group is that the scholar in question will usually not be conscious of the fact that he is proceeding from a specialized value aspect as if it were generally applicable. This often prevents him from conducting a sufficiently thorough causal analysis;<sup>111</sup> and in a practical (political) context, an insufficient awareness of the valuational element present in a concept may in fact diminish one's ability to realize the ideals implicit in the valuations in question. Weber himself gives a striking example of this paradox in his

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108 MSS, pp. 54-55/GAW, p. 151.

109 See a manuscript note by Weber from 1903: "Raising the historical *method* to the level of a historical 'world view' is an error of the same kind as [talking about] a 'world view of natural science'. One should not become a slave to one's own method and one's own concepts" ("Steigerung der hist[orischen] *Methode* zu e[iner] histor[ischen] *Weltanschauung* derselbe Fehler wie die 'naturwiss[enschaftliche] W[elt]a[nschauung]'). Man darf sich nicht zum Sklaven seiner Methode u[nd] seiner Begriffe machen" (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31, Vol. 6)).

110 In unpublished notes and letters, Weber openly characterizes both Roscher's and Wundt's constructions of this kind as "metaphysics". (Note from 1903 in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31, Vol. 6 (concerning Roscher); letter to Willy Hellpach of 10 October 1905 in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 17 (concerning Wundt).)

111 MSS, p. 33/GAW, p. 524; see also *FMW*, p. 146/GAW, p. 602.

speech at the 1909 congress of the *Association*. The *Association* had been founded by businessmen and scholars concerned with social questions. Because of their wish to see more state activity in the social field, some members of the *Association* came to be known as “lecture hall socialists” (Kathedersozialisten) (though in fact many of them held quite conservative political views). These “lecture hall socialists” turned against the laissez-faire of classic liberalism, and instead tried to establish more general principles of social justice to guide economic policy, especially with regard to the conditions of the workers. But, as Weber demonstrated in his speech, the general concepts established in this manner were by no means free of valuational bias, which in the case of the concept of “economic productivity” expressed itself in the exclusive concern with the “capital” aspect of production;<sup>112</sup> consequently, the concrete norms deduced from these general concepts were, in the eyes of many workers, no less inimical to the working class than the laissez-faire system which the *Association* was founded to combat.<sup>113</sup>

### *The demand for the value freedom of the scientific results*

The main thrust of Weber's position on the value freedom of the results of scientific inquiry is clearly brought out, for instance, in the following passage from *Knies I*: “There is simply no bridge which spans the gap which separates the *exclusively* ‘empirical’ analysis of given reality, conducted with the tools of causal explanation, from the confirmation or refutation of the ‘validity’ of *any* value judgment”.<sup>114</sup> But the formulations are so varied that it is worthwhile to discuss them a little more closely and to deal with certain problems which they raise.

The distinction between the two aspects of the value sphere, the committed, “passive” one, and the motivating, “active” one, is reflected in Weber's more concrete demands for value freedom: he formulates some passages in general and fundamental terms, simply pointing out the boundary between demonstrable science and indemonstrable values, while in other cases he gives himself a looser rein, touching on practically all the aspects of the tension between theory and practice.<sup>115</sup>

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112 “The interests that have here been taken as a basis are exclusively those of the entrepreneurs” (*GASS*, p. 417). See also Weber 1909, pp. 616-17.

113 Nau 1996, pp. 35-37, discusses this line of reasoning in detail.

114 *ORK*, p. 117/*GAW*, p. 61. The focus of this passage is on the *empirical* sciences; but it should be noted that Weber frequently (*ORK*, p. 99n12; *MSS*, pp. 7-8, 44/*GAW*, pp. 47n1, 496, 537; *GASS*, pp. 401-402) expresses the same idea in relation to disciplines like epistemology and law, which certainly do not belong to the group of empirical sciences proceeding by causal analysis.

115 Examples of “passive” formulations are Weber's assertions of the impossibility of demonstrating “values” or “ideals” (see, for instance, *ORK*, p. 99n12; *MSS*, pp. 55, 121-22; *FMW*, p. 148; *LSPW*, p. 18/*GAW*, pp. 47n1, 151-52, 223, 604; *GASS*, p. 488; *GPS*, p. 16); “active” formulations are found, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 52 (“practical prescriptions”) and 55 (“concrete norms”)/*GAW*, p. 149, 152; see also *Sc.Voc.*, where Weber quotes with approval a statement by Tolstoy to the effect that science can give no answer to the question: “What

Within the category of “active” formulations, one group consists of passages where Weber maintains the impossibility of making scientifically correct choices between different values. This point of view is derived from Weber’s theory of the fundamental conflict of values with each other, rather than from the principle of value freedom as discussed above; but it has been included here, since the passages in question may also be interpreted as special forms of the demand for value freedom.<sup>116</sup>

Two variants of the demand for the value freedom of the results of scientific inquiry merit separate treatment because of their connection with questions treated later in this work.

For one thing, Weber repeatedly<sup>117</sup> emphasizes that the demonstration of the *empirical* existence of *cultural values* (that is to say, values actually held in a given culture or society) is logically quite a different operation from that of establishing *ethical* duties, and that consequently the first one cannot legitimately be used as a basis for the second one:

Only positive religions – more precisely: *sects* bound by dogmas – are able to confer upon the content of *cultural values* the dignity of unconditionally valid *ethical* imperatives. Outside such sects, the dignity of cultural ideals that an individual *wishes to* realize is different in principle from the dignity of ethical duties which he *should* fulfil.<sup>118</sup>

This view, which is strengthened and elaborated by means of other theoretical arguments,<sup>119</sup> is important for the interpretation of Weber’s version of the theory of “value relation” (*Wertbeziehung*) formulated by Heinrich Rickert, which will be discussed at length below (Ch. 2).

A discussion which is particularly relevant to the confrontation between positivism and historicism, which will be treated below (Ch. 2) is that of “lines of development” in history, economics, etc. Older economists had – sometimes on what Weber saw as rather uncritical religious grounds<sup>120</sup> – believed that the discovery of such lines of development could open the way for the definition of “objective” economic goals.<sup>121</sup> Weber regarded theories of this sort as no less illegitimate than any other attempt to

should we do? How should we live?” (*FMW*, pp. 143, 152-53/*GAW*, pp. 598, 609). In letters to Robert Michels (1 February 1907, 16 August 1908 (*MWG II/5*)) Weber insists that it is impossible to “prove” scientifically that social democracy is reprehensible or that one should betray one’s nation or be true to one’s class.

<sup>116</sup> See below, pp. 201-03.

<sup>117</sup> *MSS*, pp. 15, 52, 57/*GAW*, pp. 148, 154, 504; letter to F. Toennies, 19 February 1909 (*MWG II/6*).

<sup>118</sup> *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 154.

<sup>119</sup> Weber links up the discussion with a rejection of the view that it is possible to deduce *normative* cultural values from ethical norms. This conflict between the sphere of ethical values and the sphere of normative cultural values will be treated in a larger context below, pp. 193-94.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *ORK*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 41.

<sup>121</sup> *MSS*, pp. 51-52/*GAW*, p. 148.

demonstrate the truth of valuations by means of empirical statements. In *Roscher*, he criticizes Roscher's naïve belief in the special role of "lines of development" in the economic disciplines,<sup>122</sup> and in *Value Freedom*,<sup>123</sup> he couches this criticism in general terms:

There is still a widespread belief that guidance for the formulation of practical valuations ought to be, must be, or at least may be derived from "developmental trends". From such "developmental trends", however, clear as they may be, unambiguous imperatives for action can be obtained only in regard to the means which are deemed appropriate given a certain end, but not in regard to the end itself.<sup>124</sup>

While such passages treat the problem of "lines of development" as a special case (of polemical or institutional interest) of a general complex of problems in the theory of scientific inquiry, Weber occasionally adopts a somewhat different and more directly political approach. Whereas the older school of historical economics believed that lines of development pointed unambiguously to particular economic goals, Weber felt that post-Bismarckian political life in Germany was characterized by the adaptation of ends to means, of political goals to short-term lines of development. This tendency did not, in his view, spring from the naïve belief in the unity of ends and means held by Roscher, but rather from a faith in the priority of means *over* ends, of external over internal factors. This kind of "realist" politics was strongly attacked by Weber<sup>125</sup> on the basis of his fundamental conception of the essence of political life.<sup>126</sup>

Of particular interest in this connection are a couple of pages of the *Inaugural Lecture*,<sup>127</sup> where Weber criticizes the belief in "development" not on the basis of logical and methodological positions (he only arrived at those later), but simply because it excludes the possibility of taking an alternative view of economically determined phenomena. The belief in "lines of development" as objective goals results in a sort of passive determinism which often amounts to an uncritical acceptance of the right of the strongest – in this case, of the economically strongest.

One line of argument which is in principle nothing more than a special application of the fundamental postulate concerning the gap between empirical truth and indemonstrable values or valuations, but which nevertheless presents particular difficulties, is Weber's rejection of what we would call a "sociology of knowledge", i.e. the view that the question of the truth or falsity of a judgment is affected by *empirical* knowledge concerning the causes and effects of this judgment.

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122 *ORK*, pp. 87n91, 89n94/*GAW*, pp. 38n3, 40n1.

123 As mentioned above, the problem was the third of the four subjects mentioned in the questionnaire of the *Association* in 1912; it does not, however, receive very thorough treatment in the *Memorandum* or in *Value Freedom*.

124 *MSS*, p. 22/*GAW*, p. 512.

125 *MSS*, pp. 23-25/*GAW*, pp. 513-15.

126 See below, pp. 240-42, 264-66.

127 *Inaugural Lecture*, p. 20/*GPS*, pp. 17-18.

By and large, Weber limits his discussion of this problem to the disciplines which do not study observable phenomena (in the broad sense of the word), i.e., to what we might term the theoretical sciences.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, he rejects<sup>129</sup> the view that knowledge, however complete, of the psychological, anatomical or biochemical conditions necessary to our perceiving a judgment to be objectively “true”, in any way affects the logical status of the judgment as true or false. A similar discussion<sup>130</sup> deals with the hypothetical case of biology being able to demonstrate that the development of the faculty of formulating logically and mathematically correct judgments is conditional on the practical utility afforded by the possession of this faculty. (For instance, persons possessing the faculty in question might be more “fit” for survival in the struggle for existence, and genetic transmission would eventually make the faculty empirically dominant in society.) Here again, Weber denies that knowledge or demonstration of the fact that “in the last resort, it is *usually* only that which is ‘useful’ to us which is accepted as ‘valid’ truth”<sup>131</sup> would have *any* legitimate effect on the classification of a judgment as true or false. In a third, related, line of argument, Weber emphasizes the logical distinction between the empirical fact that certain views are actually held by, or potentially present within, a group of persons, and the classification of such views as correct or incorrect.<sup>132</sup>

The difficulty inherent in Weber’s rejection of the sociology of knowledge is that he clearly assimilates the distinction between empirical causation (or simply existence) and logical correctness to the gap between empirical knowledge and practical valuations. Thus, he draws a direct parallel between the relation of “realistic” ethics (that is, the research into the empirical causes and consequences of ethical demands) to normative ethics, and the relation between a similarly “realistic” science of astronomy or mathematics (which would be some kind of *history* of astronomy or mathematics, concentrating particularly on external circumstances causing, furthering or preventing the development of these sciences, and on the empirical consequences of such developments (or the lack of them)) to the same disciplines in their “normal” form.<sup>133</sup> A few pages later,<sup>134</sup> we find a similar parallel; and in *Crit.Stud.*, Weber sums up the result of another such discussion (of the science

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128 At certain times (*ORK*, pp. 111-12; *OSt*, p.148; *MSS*, pp. 13, 19-20/*GAW*, pp. 57, 362, 502, 509), Weber does more or less explicitly include the empirical disciplines in his discussions of this question; but even these passages focus on the non-empirical, theoretical aspects of the empirical disciplines.

129 *ORK*, pp. 111-12, 114-15; *MSS*, pp. 122-23; *OSt*, p. 148/*GAW*, pp. 57, 59, 225, 362.

130 *ORK*, pp. 112-15/*GAW*, pp. 57-59.

131 *ORK*, p. 113/*GAW*, p. 58. In a review of a book by Adolf Wagner, Weber (1909, p. 619) is also scathing about “pragmatism” – “this anti-philosophical philosophy”, as he calls it.

132 *MSS*, pp. 13-14, 19-20/*GAW*, pp. 503, 509.

133 *MSS*, pp. 13-14/*GAW*, pp. 502-503.

134 *MSS*, pp. 19-20/*GAW*, p. 509.

of mathematics in its relationship to ethics and aesthetics) in the general conclusion: "Causal analysis can provide absolutely no value judgments".<sup>135</sup>

Theoretical disciplines (logic, mathematics, etc.) accordingly seem to occupy a double role in Weber's view: on the one hand, they yield *true* results; but on the other hand, this quality of truth cannot be derived from any true empirical observation or proposition. Truth in the theoretical sciences is different from values, then, in that it is objectively binding; but it is similar to values in that it is empirically indemonstrable.

Weber's argument for this view comes out clearly in the following passage:

From the viewpoint of any *empirical* psychological observation and causal analysis, the claim that the multiplication table is "valid" is simply transcendental, and meaningless as an object of investigation: from the point of view of empirical psychology, it is one of the unverifiable logical preconditions of the psychometric observations of that discipline.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, while Weber rejects the idea of an empirical demonstration of valuations and values because what is to be demonstrated is logically heterogeneous from the chain of demonstration, he rejects the idea of an empirical demonstration of logical truths because what is to be demonstrated is already immanent in the chain of demonstration. For the same reason, the idea of a falsification or relativation of the kind implied by the sociology of knowledge is an absurdity. In the first case, the demonstration leads to a logical gap; in the second, to a logical circle.

To Weber's postulate of the undemonstrability of the *value* of scientific inquiry is therefore added the claim that logical *truth* (and consequently empirical truth as well, insofar as the latter is dependent on the former<sup>137</sup>) is in itself based on norms which cannot be falsified and therefore cannot be verified either (since a logical circle implies an endless begging of the question).

Weber might have taken over the view of truth as being based on an indemonstrable norm from Kant himself; but probably his direct source was the neo-Kantian school, above all Windelband and Rickert. The neo-Kantian philosophers regarded truth as being defined, in the same way as goodness and beauty, by conformity to a particular *norm* (*I07*, pp. 12-15).<sup>138</sup> This norm was essentially different from, for instance, what Arnold Brecht<sup>139</sup> calls Scientific Method: the latter is built up on the assumption that knowledge arrived at in accordance with it has the *factual*, material quality of being "intersubjectively transmissible" *qua* knowledge. The value of the method is assessed on the basis of its results.

The neo-Kantian truth is quite formal and indemonstrable; its objective validity "presents itself in the empirical consciousness as a direct, completely unexplainable

135 *MSS*, p. 123/*GAW*, p. 225.

136 *ORK*, p. 114/*GAW*, p. 59.

137 *MSS*, p. 143/*GAW*, pp. 598-99.

138 See, for instance, Windelband 1914a (1884), p. 219.

139 Brecht 1959.

evidence, which can only be accepted".<sup>140</sup> This norm is *absolute*; it may be violated, like any other norm; but its possible lack of *empirical* validity (frequent logical errors, etc.) does not detract from its normative character,<sup>141</sup> just as unethical conduct does not weaken the demands of ethics. In the same way, no explanation, however thorough, of *why* a person accepts, in theory and practice, the norm of truth (i.e., why he wants to, and is able to, think in a logically correct manner) can introduce any relative element into its claim of absolute validity.<sup>142</sup>

So far, Weber's lines of thought seem to run quite parallel to those of the neo-Kantians; still, it is noteworthy that Weber hardly ever quotes the neo-Kantian definition of truth, as conformity to a certain norm,<sup>143</sup> but mostly only emphasizes its negative corollary, viz., that the status of a proposition as true is unaffected by the empirical circumstances surrounding its formulation.

We may see this as an indication that Weber perhaps did not completely endorse the views of the neo-Kantians on this point. And this hypothesis becomes still more plausible if we let the neo-Kantian argument run its full course. The neo-Kantians further argue that the normative character of truth makes it a *value*, albeit only a *theoretical* value, not a practical one related to action. Consequently, a person who strives to think correctly, to formulate true propositions, who, in short, acts in accordance with the norm, in so doing acknowledges the theoretical *value* of this norm.<sup>144</sup> Aiming to formulate true propositions implies the acceptance of truth as being objective; and this in turn implies the acceptance of the theoretical *value* of truth as being objective. Such an intimate connection between the truth value of a proposition and the value – even the theoretical value – of truth did not commend itself to Weber, who was firmly committed to the view that the value of science and of scientific truth cannot be demonstrated by scientific means; and we cannot wonder that he nowhere explicitly endorses this ramification of the neo-Kantian theory. Weber certainly accepts that the sphere of scientific inquiry is in principle governed by the theoretical value of truth. This acceptance is evident when he speaks of the *validity* of truth – a phraseology that directly echoes the idea of truth-as-a-value, since it was the neo-Kantian view that “the existent is, values have validity”.<sup>145</sup> But at the same time, he consistently stresses the *subjective* character of the value of science: one

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140 Windelband 1914a (1884), p. 226.

141 Windelband 1914a (1884), p. 216.

142 Windelband 1914a (1884), pp. 227-32.

143 He comes closest to it when he (once only) speaks of the “the norms of our thought” (*MSS*, p. 84/*GAW*, p. 184 and – with “norms” in quotation marks! – *ORK*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 60). In *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 261, he even leaves the question open whether philosophical analysis would in the last resort conclude that empirical knowledge is tied to norms.

144 Rickert 1892, pp. 57-58.

145 Schnädelbach 1984, p. 163.

can, without logical contradiction, refuse to accept this value.<sup>146</sup> A central passage<sup>147</sup> shows how uneasily these two elements combine: Weber speaks of “that truth which empirical knowledge alone is able to give us”, and states that the *objectivity* of this truth resides in the precondition of the acceptance of its value. For persons who – quite legitimately – reject that value, the truth of empirical knowledge is therefore not objective. This looks like the “categorical” approach in its Weberian, “subjective” version. However, he immediately shifts the level of analysis by saying that those who reject the value of truth “will search in vain for another truth to take the place of science with respect to those features which *it* alone can provide: concepts and judgments that allow ... [empirical] reality to be *ordered intellectually* in a valid manner”. Here, the subjectivity disappears: truth (the “valid ordering of reality”) is categorical, and the prerogative of the sphere of science as we know it. Thus, we may conclude that Weber clearly had reservations about the full-fledged neo-Kantian “objective value” theory of truth. However, these reservations were never expressed systematically, but only appear as the “seamy side” of his resolutely “subjective” formulations on the value of truth.<sup>148</sup>

Weber's lack of consistency and clarity concerning the *conceptual* approach to the question of truth is unfortunately mirrored by the paucity and obscurity of our textual sources when it comes to the question of his attitude to a *material* criterion of truth. In his methodological works, we do have a plenitude of references to “facts” (Tatsachen) that are empirically “given”,<sup>149</sup> but we do not find a proper methodological discussion of whether these facts are true by virtue of a certain relation to reality.<sup>150</sup> The closest we get to such a discussion is the following passage from *Crit.Stud.*:

The aim of an [imputation of causes] is that this imputation should in principle be “objectively” *valid* as empirical truth, with the same unconditional character as any other piece of empirical knowledge; and the question whether this aim has been attained – *a question which is not of a logical, but of a factual nature* – is decided solely on the basis of the sufficiency of the data (my italics).<sup>151</sup>

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146 See, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 116-17/*GAW*, pp. 60-61; *MSS*, pp. 110-11/*GAW*, p. 213 and *GASS*, p. 418. Similarly Loos 1970, p. 16 (who even belittles the importance of Weber's use of the word “validity”).

147 *MSS*, pp. 110-11/*GAW*, pp. 212-13.

148 The “seamy side” metaphor is borrowed from Brecht, who characterizes value relativism as “the ‘seamy side’ of Scientific Method” (Brecht 1959, p. 118).

149 See, for instance, *ORK*, p. 114; *MSS*, pp. 90, 135/*GAW*, pp. 58, 190, 237.

150 True, in the *Categories* essay (*GAW*, p. 457), we find a passage according to which the empirical disciplines “... whenever they concern themselves with the actual relations between their *objects* (and not with their own logical preconditions) ... must necessarily work on the basis of ‘naive realism’”. But this is meant to address the specific question of how the empirical sciences should deal with cases where the rules of normative sciences are not being respected on the object level.

151 *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 261. (See *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 262, where Weber underlines that “in discussions of logic, we always base ourselves on the supposition that the ‘source

Here, the implication clearly seems to be that Weber sees the quality of truth – and, for that matter, the “objectivity” of that truth – as dependent on the character and availability of the relevant *factual* data; but the formulation is too brief and casual to sustain a firm conclusion.

Weber seems to show little interest in the idea of intersubjective transmissibility-as-knowledge (as Brecht would put it) as a criterion of truth (*IO7*, p. 13). Only at one point – albeit in a passage that is often quoted as one of Weber’s most central methodological statements – he seems to put the question in terms of intersubjectivity:

It is and always will be true that a methodically correct proof in the field of social science, in order to have reached its goal, must also be accepted as valid by a Chinese – or, to put it more correctly: that goal must at any rate be *striven for*, although it may not be completely attainable because the data are lacking ...<sup>152</sup>

This passage has frequently been interpreted to mean that the acceptance by the Chinese is a *condition* of the correctness of the empirical statement. But on closer inspection, Weber’s formulation is equivocal. It could also be taken to mean that if an empirical statement is correctly formulated, even a Chinese will be compelled to accept it as valid, and the “Chinese test” can therefore be seen either as a *condition* or as a *confirmation* of the truth of an empirical statement. What seemed, at first glance, like a reference to intersubjectivity-as-knowledge can equally plausibly be interpreted as referring to more “categorical” ways of defining truth.<sup>153</sup>

At this point, we can conclude that Weber seems to be vacillating between different conceptions and criteria of truth, borrowing both from the categorical reasoning of the neo-Kantians and from a more empirically oriented approach, while refusing to follow either to its logical conclusion (*IO7*, pp. 12-15). But it is striking that although Weber in his methodological works shows no great interest in the material criteria of truth,<sup>154</sup> he only fully relies on the neo-Kantians when he is repudiating the conclusions of the sociology of knowledge.

There is a connection between Weber’s rejection of the conclusions of the sociology of knowledge and his treatment of an argument occasionally brought up in support of the demand for value freedom. This argument is based on “the empirically demonstrable fact that the ultimate ends [i.e. the ‘highest’ values of the value sphere] undergo historical changes and are subject to dispute”.<sup>155</sup> In Weber’s

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material’ is unchanged”). The phraseology is remarkably similar to that which Weber employs in the passage quoted immediately below (*MSS*, pp. 58-59/*GAW*, pp. 155-56), but which lacks the direct reference to the factual character of the criterion. Both passages can, I think, be traced back to an interesting draft note (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6) on “subjectivity” and “objectivity”, which will be discussed below (p. 159).

152 *MSS*, pp. 58-59/*GAW*, pp. 155-56.

153 On the “Chinese test”, see also Turner 1998, pp. 269, 273-74.

154 See below, p. 104.

155 *MSS*, p. 55/*GAW*, p. 152.

opinion, of course, this historical change has no bearing on the question of the more or less objective validity of the values involved; and he consequently counters the argument with the remark that “even knowledge of the most certain propositions of the theoretical sciences (for example, the exact natural or mathematical sciences) of our time is a product of culture”<sup>156</sup> – from which it follows that the demonstration of the historical change in the structure of the value sphere is itself equally dependent on historically changing factors, and that such a demonstration cannot attain its goal of relativizing certain values without relativizing itself as well.

As part of his criticism of Gustav Schmoller,<sup>157</sup> Weber in *Value Freedom*<sup>158</sup> rejects a similar argument, but here uses a slightly different approach. Schmoller<sup>159</sup> had implicitly imputed to Weber the view that the more or less subjective character of values had its basis not in logical considerations, but in the number of people who shared these values at a particular time.<sup>160</sup> Schmoller tried to rebut this imputed position by maintaining that values were slowly but surely growing more objective (in this quantitative sense), and that the basis for maintaining a principle of value freedom was therefore slowly crumbling; on the contrary, he saw the education of the public in the direction of more “objective” value judgments as an important task allotted to science.

The first of Schmoller's premises – that values are only subjective in the sense that they change through time and that they possess less than general acceptance – is denied by Weber, who points to the fact that “proposition concerning empirical facts” are often far less generally accepted than answers to certain questions about values. As for Schmoller's second premise – the belief in a progressive conventional agreement concerning the highest values – Weber rejects it as “contrasting sharply with my own impression, which is the opposite [of Schmoller's]”.<sup>161</sup>

While Weber's arguments in *Objectivity* rested on the demonstration of a logical circle in the argument of the opponent, he is on more dangerous ground here: instead of emphasizing the *essentially* subjective character of valuations of all sorts, and pointing to the existence of a *logical* gap between “Is” and “Ought”, he seems to merge the two spheres into one by demonstrating the “subjectivity” (in Schmoller's sense of the term) of *science* as well as of *values*. The discussion consequently centres around the question whether “objectivation” is to be conceived as a necessarily progressing, or at any rate as a theoretically possible, process; and here again, Weber wards off Schmoller's arguments by means of *empirical* statements: in fact, the demand for

156 MSS, p. 55/GAW, p. 152.

157 Schmoller 1949 (1911).

158 MSS, pp. 12-13/GAW, pp. 501-502.

159 Schmoller 1949, pp. 78, 80-81.

160 “... I [would] agree with him [Weber] ... , if I shared his opinion that all value judgments are absolutely subjective, ... but in addition to the subjective value judgments, there are objective ones, shared not only by scattered individuals and scholars, but by great communities, peoples, epochs, even the whole cultural world” (Schmoller 1949 (1911), p. 78).

161 MSS, p. 13/GAW, p. 502.

value freedom here seems to stand or fall with the answer to the question whether everybody might conceivably, in time, come to hold the same values.

Weber to a certain extent dissociates himself from this “dangerous” line of reasoning by continuing: “But anyway, that is irrelevant to our problem”,<sup>162</sup> and then turns the discussion back into the right channel. But the passage remains an example of Weber’s occasional tendency to make use of the kind of sociology of knowledge which he generally criticizes as being logically unsatisfactory.<sup>163</sup>

A problem discussed exhaustively by Weber, particularly in the *Stammler* essay, concerns the logical difference between a normative rule and an empirical regularity. For the purposes of his controversy with Stammler, Weber wants especially to emphasize that an empirical regularity does not in itself permit us to infer the existence of a *formal* norm – while the sociology of law usually starts from the opposite assumption: that the *consequences* of formal norms and injunctions bear no necessary relation to their *content*. In both cases, however, it seems to me that the problem is chiefly derived from the existence of the formal norm as an actual, *concrete* injunction, that is, as an empirical probability that certain sanctions will be brought into play if the norm is not respected; the value structure of the injunction seems to play a secondary role in this connection.

### *The relationship between the two demands*

To a person actually engaging in scientific activity, the distinction applied to the demand for value freedom, according to the phase of the scientific process that the demand refers to, must obviously seem artificial and abstract. Concepts and conclusions are interdependent to a much larger degree than the distinction would

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<sup>162</sup> *MSS*, p. 13/*GAW*, p. 502.

<sup>163</sup> What makes the introduction of any other than a strictly logical and theoretical argument into the discussion of the principle of value freedom particularly dangerous for Weber, is that he himself has pointed to the specifically *modern* character of the demand for and the possibility of a value-free, rational science (see, for instance, *EssW*, pp. 101-12/*GARS I*, pp. 1-16). This leads Karl Löwith (1960 (1932)), for instance, to suppose that Weber saw the progressive “disenchantment of the world” not only as a development permitting a growing *awareness* of the logical distinction between “Is” and “Ought”, but also as the only *basis* for claiming this distinction to be true; according to this interpretation, the demand for value freedom must be regarded as valid only for a particular period, and consequently loses its absolute logical basis. This argument does not seem conclusive. Against it may be marshalled Weber’s general rejection of the sociology of knowledge, which certainly also applies to the present case, as is evident, for instance, from a passage like *FMW*, p. 328/*GARS I*, pp. 541-42: “The rationalization and the conscious sublimation of the relations of human beings to the different spheres of possession of (external and inner, religious and worldly) goods forced [them] to become *conscious* of the existence and consequences of the *inherent laws* of each of these spheres; this, in its turn, led to the realization that there were tensions between [these inner laws], tensions which had remained hidden to man, as long as his relation to the external world was still in its original, unreflecting state”.

seem to suggest. The process of scientific inquiry regularly takes as its point of departure a working hypothesis, which is of course of considerable importance for the further course of the scientific process, including the definition of the concepts, but which may – provided it is verified – only appear in the finished work in the form of a conclusion;<sup>164</sup> on the other hand, the influence of valuational elements on the concepts or on the causal analysis may evidently determine the more or less valuational character of the conclusions.<sup>165</sup>

Weber himself, as we have seen, in his formulations seems less concerned with this essential unity of the scientific process, so that the “process” aspect and the “results” aspect are usually treated separately; this reflects the double concern on which his demand for value freedom is based: the “dignity” of the sphere of scientific inquiry and the “dignity” of the sphere of values.

Not only does Weber maintain the distinction between the two aspects; it is also strikingly evident that one of them – the demand for the value freedom of the scientific *results* – appears much more frequently than the other one. This would seem to indicate that Weber is more concerned with defending the value sphere against the unfounded claims of science than with protecting the scientific process from valuational distortions. One might attempt to reduce the importance of this uneven distribution by pointing out that Weber devotes much attention to *positive* discussions of the problems of scientific inquiry,<sup>166</sup> and that his huge systematic-empirical works with their profusion of concepts and definitions can be seen as a practical correlate to these methodological discussions. With regard to the *Memorandum* in particular, it might further be argued that “the designation of goals for economic and social policy” was precisely one of the four questions which the *Association* had singled out for special treatment. Still, one gets the clear impression when reading Weber's essays and interventions on this question that a particular kind of problem was uppermost in his mind, and it seems justified to conclude that the uneven distribution of emphasis between the “process” and the “results” aspect can be taken to indicate an important tendency in Weber's methodology.

A first attempt to relate this imbalance to already established traits in Weber's discussion of value freedom might be made by pointing to the markedly *active* character of a number of Weber's demands for the value freedom of the scientific results. Weber's special emphasis on the latter might, according to this interpretation, reflect a wish to formulate the demand for value freedom in relation to a calculation of ends and means, and thereby in the last instance to the political decision-making process and its problems. It is certainly true that many of the passages directly concern the actions of individuals, and the choices which must be made on the basis of a given fund of knowledge; but the point of these passages is invariably a negative

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164 Brecht 1959, p. 29.

165 See, for instance, the case mentioned above, p. 70, where a vague concept employed by Professor Liefmann afforded the basis for a conclusion in the form of a practical imperative.

166 For instance in *Crit.Stud.*, and in the discussion of the ideal type (see below, Ch. 4).

one: that science is only able to supply knowledge as a *foundation for choice*, but that it can never legitimately claim to be able to determine the *actual choice* to be made. If Weber had wished to relate the demand for value freedom as closely as possible to the concern with the rationality of political action, this would rather have led him to stress the *positive* role of science as a supplier of correct knowledge, a role above all safeguarded by the value freedom of the scientific *process*.

A closer examination of Weber's Inaugural Lecture, which was delivered in May 1895 on the occasion of Weber's taking up his duties as professor of economics at Freiburg University, opens up interesting perspectives. Its harsh mixture of scientific analysis and political commitment – the latter being moreover of an extremely radical tenor<sup>167</sup> – made a strong, but by no means wholly positive, impression on the audience; and Weber referred to the opposition with which it had met as being the main reason why he had it printed in slightly extended form.<sup>168</sup> Since the methodological importance of the lecture is intimately connected with its concrete historical and political content, a short account of its main lines of argument may be useful.

The Inaugural Lecture opens with an analysis of certain characteristic relations between the economic, social and national structures in the country districts of the German province of West Prussia, with their mixed German and Polish population. In brief, Weber arrives at the following conclusions: the Polish population group is steadily growing relatively to the German one; this development is the result of German migrations away from the economically *most* prosperous areas, in conjunction with an increase of the Polish population in the economically *least* prosperous areas. This double tendency in its turn partly reflects the greater adaptability of the Polish population group to inferior *economic* conditions (lower agricultural prices), and partly the growing dissatisfaction of the German population group with the traditionalist *social* structures (tenancy system).<sup>169</sup> In other words, the free play of economic<sup>170</sup> forces in this field leads to the supplanting of the (in Weber's view)

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167 Weber himself, in a letter to his brother Alfred, 17 May 1895 (GStAI, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 4) speaks of "the brutality of my views".

168 *LSPW*, p. 1/*GPS*, p. 1. Weber's statement that he omitted *LSPW*, pp. 17-20/*GPS*, pp. 16-18 "for reasons of time and in view of the audience" probably means that he decided *in advance* not to include the remarks in question in his public lecture, and thus did not simply leave them out in response to a sudden impulse during the actual lecture. The phrasing of the pages left out clearly marks them as an insertion; and the argument of the main text is carried on immediately after the end of the three inserted pages.

169 *LSPW*, pp. 3-11/*GPS*, pp. 2-10.

170 The social factors remain secondary in this connection; they may explain the German migration and consequently explain why Weber views German culture as being socially "superior" (freedom-loving, motivated by ideals); but the evolution from tenancy relationships with German peasants to seasonal contracts with Russian and Polish day-labourers must be regarded as the result of *economic* factors.

economically and socially “superior” German culture by the “inferior” Polish one.<sup>171</sup> What Weber sees as the *inferior* culture is thus economically the *stronger* one.

Weber does not draw *theoretical* conclusions from this demonstration of a sort of “Gresham’s law” for national cultures; instead, he turns to the *practical* aspect of the question and asks: “... what can and should be done in this situation?”<sup>172</sup> Rather than the concrete measures as such, however, what chiefly interests him seems to be the *basis* for these measures: what criteria should guide the elaboration of a policy for the situation described?

The view was widely held that the ideals that were to serve as guides for economic policy could, and should, be supplied by *the science of economics by itself*. A “national economic policy”, according to this view, should have independent, “economic” goals. Weber examines this claim<sup>173</sup> and comes to the conclusion that it is the result of an “optical illusion”.<sup>174</sup> The ideals usually presented as “independent” economic ones on examination turn out to be nothing more than a motley collection of ethical and utilitarian values: “The truth is that the ideals we introduce into the subject matter of our science are *not* peculiar to that science and produced by it; rather they are *the old, general types of human ideals*”.<sup>175</sup> If these general ideals are not introduced, the value judgments which can be inferred from the “economic point of view” as such are simply reflections of disguised class interests; the most that the science of economics itself can offer is a technical ideal, in the form of rationality with respect to an *externally* given end or goal.<sup>176</sup> An exclusively economic, “scientifically” defined policy goal *does not exist*. And against the related position – that adequate insight into the laws of economic development can offer sufficiently secure foundations for the elaboration of objective goals of economic policy – Weber demonstrates that such a procedure only serves the purpose of evading the burden of decision, either in the sense that “economic development” is made to justify *any* policy, or by way of legitimating the right of the economically strongest power.<sup>177</sup>

Consequently, any criteria for the setting of goals for economic policy must be supplied from *outside*, not from *inside* the science of economics. Among the various external ideals and goals, one might, for instance, choose the “old, general” ideals of traditional economic policy, i.e., ethical and utilitarian criteria, separately or combined in some fashion. Weber’s solution is a different one, however, and one which is implicit in his presentation of the problem. Empirical analysis had shown that national interests were affected negatively by the free and untrammelled development of a particular economic tendency; and the reaction was, as we have seen, a demand for action. This demand already implies the values according to which

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171 LSPW, p. 11/GPS, p. 9.

172 LSPW, p. 11/GPS, p. 10.

173 LSPW, pp. 17-20/GPS, pp. 15-18. This is the part omitted from the actual lecture.

174 LSPW, p. 18/GPS, p. 16.

175 LSPW, p. 19/GPS, p. 16.

176 LSPW, p. 19/GPS, p. 16.

177 LSPW, pp. 19-20/GPS, pp. 17-18; see above, p. 82.

it is to be satisfied: “What makes us feel that we have a right to make this demand is the circumstance that our state is a *nation state*”.<sup>178</sup> In other words: practical problems are value problems; and the values in relation to which the problem is defined are at the same time the guideline for its solution. In this case, the problem is a national one; consequently, the criteria for its solution are also national.

Taken by itself, however, this argument begs the question, which now runs: “With what *justification* does Weber call for action? What are his reasons for choosing the national rather than the ethical or utilitarian point of view as the starting point of the analysis and as the supreme criterion of economic policy?” The answer to this question falls in two parts:

First, the introduction of the national aspect into the empirical analysis permitted an amplification of its findings. In the traditional utilitarian view Weber’s findings might be conceived, without negative overtones, simply as a *development*; but in an analysis guided by the national viewpoint, this development takes on the aspect of a bitter *struggle*. True, this struggle is not waged with fire and sword, but remains a “silent and bleak struggle for everyday economic existence”;<sup>179</sup> but here, too, some are victors and others vanquished. And the fact that the economic welfare of the individual is increasingly becoming linked to an *international* economic system – a development which might be regarded as, for instance, an ethically positive trait – does not neutralize the struggle for national existence, but may even deepen it, since international economic interests that run counter to national ones may now find support within the nation itself.<sup>180</sup>

But the acknowledgement of the importance of adopting a national *viewpoint* in conducting economic *analysis* is not in itself, in Weber’s view, identical with the commitment to a national *value* as *practically* supreme. He takes this second step by attempting to show that economic policy has fundamentally always implied, and must always imply, the acceptance of the maintenance and furthering of the national culture as a major premise.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the high standard of human character which in his view should be a fundamental aim of economic policy cannot be defined arbitrarily, and more especially must include a national and cultural reference: “As an explanatory and analytical science, political economy is *international*, but as soon as it makes *value judgments*, it is tied to the particular strain of humankind we find within our own nature”.<sup>182</sup> What the economic policy of today can and ought to strive for is the safeguarding of national and cultural *continuity*, and with it, the *identity* of future generations.

Having thus established the conservation of the national essence as the major goal of economic policy, Weber draws his conclusion and formulates it pithily. Economic policy must subordinate itself to the long-term interests of the nation, in this case

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178 LSPW, p. 13/GPS, p. 11.

179 LSPW, p. 14/GPS, p. 12.

180 LSPW, pp. 15-16/GPS, pp. 13-14.

181 LSPW, p. 15/GPS, pp. 12-13.

182 LSPW, p. 15/GPS, p. 13.

of the nation-state; it must serve the enlightened reason of state: "... the science of political economy is a *political science*".<sup>183</sup>

It is easy to understand why the Inaugural Lecture, with its extreme political statements and emotional consecration of the principle of nationalism,<sup>184</sup> has seemed to many commentators to present a glaring contrast with Weber's later methodology, particularly with his principle of value freedom and with the "value asceticism" which this principle seemed to them to imply. Nevertheless, it seems to me more fruitful to view the Inaugural Lecture as embodying, in rudimentary form, all the important elements of Weber's methodology.

Thus, we find Weber acknowledging the importance of the *ever-changing nature of approaches and aspects*, for heuristic as well as for other scientific purposes;<sup>185</sup> we find him stressing the element of *conflict*<sup>186</sup> and emphasizing (particularly in the last part of the lecture) the concept of *responsibility*.<sup>187</sup>

In what way is the Inaugural Lecture relevant to the problem of value freedom? Here, we can distinguish between two levels of questions. On the one hand, one may ask whether Weber, by his "politicization" of the subject, his passionate defence of a particular ultimate value and his extreme phraseology, *in practice* violates the principle of value freedom which he formulates some ten years later in *Objectivity*. On the other hand, one can look for early traces of this principle in the *text* of the *Inaugural Lecture*.

It is beyond doubt that the *intention* of the methodologically relevant passages in the Inaugural Lecture differs sharply from that of the later methodological essays. In the Inaugural Lecture, the point of importance to Weber is to defend an ideal which may serve as a goal for concrete political measures in a given situation: he sets himself a *political problem* which demands a *political solution*.

This general political intention is reflected in the methodologically relevant discussions; here, too, arguments and conclusions are based on *political* premises. We might say that there is a lack of methodological (at least of a critical methodological) *awareness* or even "discomfort".<sup>188</sup> However, this does not in itself imply that the results obtained without such awareness can be discarded offhand; the only *necessary* consequence is that a theoretical dimension remains closed to the scholar in question. In the present case, Weber's methodologically "innocent" point of view in the Inaugural Lecture does not automatically lead him to violate the rules of methodology, but only to focus mainly<sup>189</sup> on problems at the concrete, empirical

183 *LSPW*, p. 16/*GPS*, p. 14.

184 See particularly the last phrases, *LSPW*, p. 28/*GPS*, p. 25, culminating in a eulogy of "the earnest grandeur of national sentiment".

185 See below, pp. 136-41.

186 See below, pp. 192-93.

187 See below, pp. 260-63.

188 Pfister 1928, p. 114.

189 Not exclusively: Weber's emphasis on the heuristic and problem-defining function of the valuational aspect that the scholar adopts already constitutes an explicit methodological element (*IO7*, pp. 16-17).

level. In fact, Weber here advances in concrete form many of those views that he later formulates, consolidates, and defends in a theoretical and abstract context.

The demand for the value freedom of the scientific process, i.e., the demand that scientific inquiry should be kept free from unconscious value judgments, is already suggested in the Inaugural Lecture. The criticism of the vague, “independent” economic ideals, of the illusion that it is possible altogether to avoid value elements and valuations, can actually be regarded as a forerunner of his later criticism of spuriously “value-free” concepts like “progress” and “national prosperity”. Thus, the wish to clarify and confirm the practical political ideal, the *value* sphere, as an independent category, may result in an extension and consolidation of the sphere of *scientific inquiry*.

Still, this embryonic conceptual criticism in the Inaugural Lecture remains isolated and almost casual. A much more prominent role is played by the other asymmetrical demand for value freedom: the rejection of the view that science can provide us with ideals elaborated inside its own sphere, or, generally speaking, that it is possible to arrive at “Ought” conclusions from “Is” premises. Weber’s argument is clear, but stated in concrete, rather than abstract and paradigmatic, terms. The *conclusion* is postulated to be valid for the science of economics only; and the *grounds* given by Weber for his position also belong to economic science: a study of economic literature, he says, shows that the value judgments found in this discipline are either derived from “foreign” ideals, or give no guidance for the practical action that he demands.<sup>190</sup> This shows the limited theoretical scope of the practical conclusion drawn by Weber. His rejection of laissez-faire as a value standard for the solution of the problem was derived from practical considerations, since it was precisely the prevalence of laissez-faire that *created* the problem. As a position of methodological principle, however, Weber’s rejection is insufficient, in the sense that the decision to “leave events to take their course” is just as valuational, and logically dependent on some kind of ideal, as practical action. To formulate the rejection of this particular derivation of an “Ought” from an “Is” theoretically and in terms that were generally valid, Weber would need to base himself explicitly on the *logical* axiom of the heterogeneity of the two spheres, as he did after the turn of the century.

Thus, the principle of value freedom is in the Inaugural Lecture mainly formulated and argued in *concrete* terms and *asymmetrically*, the stress being laid on the value freedom of scientific *results*. If we compare it with the fully developed principle as it is formulated for the first time in *Objectivity* and maintained in the later essays, we find that the principle has in the meantime been provided with a complete logical foundation, and has in this sense been *generalized*, inasmuch as it is no longer restricted to the special problems of a single discipline. It is difficult accurately to identify the factors which may have brought about this generalization. One important clue, though, seems to be present in the Inaugural Lecture itself. Weber here rejects the view that economic policy can be purely “economic” (in the sense of “*correct* according to the science of economics”); on the contrary: the

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190 LSPW, pp. 18-19/GPS, p. 16.

science of economic policy is a *political science*. This latter concept is hammered out: again and again, we find expressions like “political power”, “political leadership”, “political maturity”.<sup>191</sup> As a correlate to the negative critique of a concept used by a particular discipline, Weber defines a positive and much more general category: the *political sphere*.

Thus, even before the awakening of Weber's “methodological conscience”,<sup>192</sup> the “value aspect” of the demand for value freedom is strongly represented in his work, while the “science aspect” is still at a rudimentary stage. The later formulation of the symmetrical demand must accordingly have been in the nature of a completion rather than of an amplification: to a complex of thought whose centre of gravity lies in certain considerations of the essence of the *political sphere*, are added, under the influence of developments in the logical and epistemological field, other lines of thought concerning the distinctive character and independence of *science*. While the “science aspect” is added on at a late stage, problematical, weak, and defined negatively, the “value aspect” receives its definitive form almost from the beginning, remaining ever afterwards unshaken, clearly and strongly elaborated and positively defined. This, as I see it, is one of the main reasons for the asymmetrical dominance in Weber's principle of value freedom.

#### *The field of application of the demand for value freedom*

Because of the fragmentary character of Weber's methodological work, it is not easy to establish at first glance how far-reaching he meant his conclusions, among them the principle of value freedom, to be. A closer examination of the passages in question is necessary.

The titles of the two important essays, *Objectivity* and *Value Freedom*,<sup>193</sup> give indications of the framework of the discussions that they contain, and indicate the scientific disciplines for which the conclusions are presumed to hold.

The title of *Objectivity* speaks of “social science and social policy”. This formulation clearly contains a reference to the new name given, at the same time, to the periodical where the article appeared and of which Weber was co-editor: “*Archives of Social Science and Social Policy*”,<sup>194</sup> and is probably a little more restrictive than one might suppose at first glance, since Weber himself indicates that “social science” should be interpreted as: “the historical and theoretical treatment of the same problems that ‘social policy’ in the widest sense of the word has the task of solving in practice”.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, this characterization is in its turn linked to the study of phenomena relevant to or caused by *economic* factors. Still, the “social

191 See, for instance, *LSPW*, pp. 20-21, 25-26/*GPS*, pp. 18-19, 22-23.

192 Pfister 1928, p. 114.

193 *MSS*, pp. 49 and 1/*GAW*, pp. 146 and 489, respectively.

194 “Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik”. Its former name was “Archives of social legislation and statistics” (“Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik”).

195 *MSS*, p. 67/*GAW*, p. 165.

science”, defined in this fashion, covers several fields of study which would today be covered by other disciplines;<sup>196</sup> and the actual discussions of the principle of value freedom in *Objectivity* are occasionally still more generally worded.<sup>197</sup>

In the *Memorandum*, Weber starts off by delimiting the field of application of his remarks as “*empirical* disciplines, such as sociology (including ‘politics’), political economy (including ‘economic policy’), and history (of all kinds – so that, for instance, the history of law, of religion and of culture are expressly included), which are of professional interest to us”.<sup>198</sup> In *Value Freedom*, this introduction has been omitted, and the article instead carries a programmatic title describing its field of interest as “the sociological and economic sciences”.<sup>199</sup>

In the light of these definitions, it seems justified to assume that the principle of value freedom propounded in the essays referred to (above all in *Value Freedom*) is postulated as being valid at least for all the empirical social sciences.

A slightly more awkward problem concerns the hypothetical validity of the principle for the empirical non-social sciences (below referred to for convenience as the “natural sciences”) and for the non-empirical sciences.

As far as the natural sciences are concerned, they are covered by the introductory passages of the *Memorandum*, as well as by the term “empirical science” which is used freely in the relevant articles. The fact that the natural sciences are not mentioned explicitly can be explained by Weber’s exclusive interest (in these essays) in the social sciences. An additional reason may have been that the problem of value freedom and of the logical implications of this principle did not seem, at the time, to constitute any major difficulty for the natural sciences. (If we assume, as was done above, that the demand for value freedom acquires a special weight because the element which is seen as illegitimate on the research level is precisely that which is treated on the object level, a demand analogous to the demand for value freedom would in the natural sciences deal instead with the elimination of physical, chemical and other “natural” disturbances from the scientific process, since the object of the latter is singled out for study because of its physical (chemical, etc.) interest. The practical fulfilment of a demand of this kind would seem easier to achieve, because the variables to be held constant are normally measurable to the same degree as the object under study, and can be rendered “objective” without

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196 See, for instance, the discussion of the concepts of “church” and “sect” (*MSS*, pp. 93-94/*GAW*, p. 194), of “Christianity” (*MSS*, p. 96/*GAW*, p. 197) and of “state” (*MSS*, p. 99/*GAW*, pp. 200-201).

197 See, for instance, expressions like “an empirical science” (*MSS*, pp. 52, 54/*GAW*, pp. 149, 151), and “the social sciences” (*MSS*, p. 63/*GAW*, p. 160).

198 *Memorandum*, p. 147.

199 The fact that the historical disciplines are not mentioned in the title of *Value Freedom* is no doubt due to Weber’s “sociological turn”, which is also evident in the more prominent position given to “sociology” in that title. Considering the specific mention of “all kinds of history” in the title of the *Memorandum* (which does not in substance differ much from *Value Freedom*), there is no reason to suppose that Weber did not wish to see history covered by his discussion of the question of value freedom.

inner resistance on the part of the scientists concerned. That the demand may still give rise to fundamental difficulties is shown, for instance, by the discussion of the uncertainty principle in physics. But Weber probably would not have seen any particular difficulty in extending the demand for value freedom to embrace the natural sciences explicitly.)

Weber does not discuss separately the question of value freedom in disciplines that do not, like the empirical ones, deal with observable phenomena, and which we might call the theoretical sciences. On the other hand, he obviously acknowledges a logical, i.e., a conceptual and theoretical, truth of the same strength and validity as the empirical one;<sup>200</sup> and the principle of value freedom would consequently seem to apply as much to the theoretical as to the empirical disciplines.

Weber apparently works from the assumption that the theoretical sciences will also be normative ones; as examples of such normative theoretical sciences,<sup>201</sup> he mentions mathematics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, and jurisprudence. The normative element in these disciplines will usually consist in their starting from certain indemonstrable axioms. This by itself need not diminish the relevance of the demand for value freedom, since the normative sciences also, insofar as they wish to qualify as "sciences", as producers of "true" statements,<sup>202</sup> depend on correct (value-free) knowledge.<sup>203</sup>

This rather slight problem has been taken up here because the introduction to the *Memorandum* (quoted above) classifies "politics" under empirical sociology and "economic policy" under political economy. In contradistinction to ethics, law, etc., politics does *not*, in Weber's view – for reasons which will become clear later on – belong to the category of the "normative sciences". Consequently, it seems particularly unfortunate and dangerous that Weber, in the passage quoted, leaves the line dividing science and politics to be held only by a couple of inverted commas, and it becomes all the more necessary to point out that the terms "politics" and "economic policy" should in this connection be interpreted as "political science" and "the science of economic policies".

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200 See below, p. 178.

201 Including those that proceed by way of "dogmatic analysis of concepts" (*OSt*, p. 97; *MSS*, p. 43; *ES*, p. 4/*GAW*, pp. 322, 536, 542.

202 Supplemented by an indication of the axiomatic system for which the "true" statements in question are alleged to hold. See, for instance, *OSt*, pp. 128, 131/*GAW*, pp. 347, 349, where Weber deals with "juristic truth", that is to say, correct deductions from, or subsumptions under, normative rules of law.

203 In this connection, it is interesting to note that Carl Menger, who was a central figure in the "quarrel about methods", and whose methodological views were in many respects close to Weber's, held that objectivity in the realm of social policy went beyond the mere statement of "what was, what is and how it came about" and in fact mainly consisted in pointing out the appropriate means to a given, well-defined end – formulating "'Ought' statements that could pretend to scientific validity" (Menger 1883, p. 7).

## The implementation of the principle

The demand for value freedom must be taken to imply an injunction to observe in *practice* the theoretical (logical) distinction between the value sphere and the sphere of scientific inquiry. The question is now what exactly Weber understands by “observe in practice”.

As we have seen, the statement that a logical gap exists between “Is” and “Ought” was, in Weber’s view, a logically binding one, while the *value* of maintaining this gap in practice was derived from the acceptance of the value of scientific inquiry and/or of personal commitment to values. This acceptance, however, could be assumed to exist in the case of persons claiming some kind of scientific status for their activity and for its results. For such persons, in their capacity as “scientists”, the acknowledgement of the desirability, or value, of the distinction between empirical truth and practical valuations is thus a logical necessity.

Weber’s practical demand for the observance of the principle of value freedom closely reflects this theoretical foundation, in respect both of its content and of its scope of application. As regards scope, it is clear that, in Weber’s eyes, the demand can only be addressed to the scientist or scholar in his capacity as such, and that consequently, the principle is only logically binding in fields for which the value of scientific inquiry can be shown to be the *only* ideal and goal. When this condition does not hold,<sup>204</sup> as for instance in the case of university teaching, the demand for the observance of the principle of value freedom cannot be maintained, as will be shown in more detail below.

### *The implementation of the principle in fields where the value of scientific inquiry is the only ideal*

Within areas where the value of scientific inquiry is the only value basis (that is, in all sorts of scientific writings, apart from works which are also meant to serve pedagogical ends), the demand for value freedom merely reflects the acknowledgement of the logical gap, a simple deduction from Weber’s axiomatic definition, according to which science can only and may only aim at formulating *true* propositions, and therefore ought to avoid intermingling “Is” and “Ought” (or, even worse, disguising one sphere under the name of the other) – procedures that would not be compatible with the aim of providing correct knowledge. Weber sees this demand as being implicit in the definition of scientific activity; and in this light, it is understandable that he uses the value-laden expression “intellectual honesty” (*intellektuelle Rechtschaffenheit*)<sup>205</sup> to designate the basis for respecting the demand (*I07*, pp. 34-36. What we are dealing with is not a demand based on some indemonstrable value:

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204 As mentioned above, Weber carefully emphasizes that *logical* impossibility, not only actual empirical disagreement on the question, is what counts in this respect. See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 2-3/*GAW*, p. 491.

205 See, for instance, *MSS*, p. 2/*GAW*, pp. 490-91, where the obligation to observe the distinction in practice is assumed to arise directly out of the theoretical acceptance of it (“what

the observance of the principle of value freedom is a precondition for the legitimate use of the term "scientific inquiry" to denote the activity of a scientist or scholar.

In Weber's eyes, this "intellectual integrity" implies *two* duties: "clarity, and sharp separation of the [two] essentially different problem spheres".<sup>206</sup> The demand for "clarity" can be interpreted along the lines of the following passage from *Objectivity*: "... at all times to ensure that the reader is, as well as oneself, completely aware *what* the standards are by which reality is judged and from which a [certain] value judgment is derived ..." <sup>207</sup> The demand for "sharp separation" can be amplified through a quotation from the same passage in *Objectivity*: "... at all times to make it clear to the reader (and, we repeat, above all to oneself!) *when* and *where* the reflections of the scientist stop, and the valuating human being begins to speak ..." <sup>208</sup> The parallel to the demands for the value freedom of the scientific process and of the scientific results respectively, and beyond them to the two asymmetrical demands for value freedom in general, is quite clear.

The principle of value freedom, therefore, does not in any way debar an author from introducing private value judgments into a work purporting to have a scientific character, just as the principle does not deny the right of scientists and scholars to commit themselves to indemonstrable values of all kinds *outside* their scientific role. A scholar who admits that the spheres of science and values are absolutely heterogeneous has the right, if he wishes, to make statements about each of the two spheres "in one and the same book, on one and the same page, or even in the principal and subordinate clause of one and the same sentence".<sup>209</sup> But any value judgment, any "Ought" in the resulting mosaic of logically heterogeneous statements, must be regarded as a non-scientific insertion: it is legitimate, perhaps even desirable, but in any case, it is something totally apart from the world of *science*.<sup>210</sup> And precisely because such insertions are non-scientific and accordingly address themselves to another aspect of the reader's personality,<sup>211</sup> because the author, so to speak,

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intellectual honesty commands, once the disjunction between the two spheres is conceded"). For similar passages, see *OSt*, p. 150; *MSS*, pp. 8-9; *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, pp. 90, 497, 601.

206 *MSS*, p. 9/*GAW*, p. 497.

207 *MSS*, p. 59/*GAW*, p. 156.

208 *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157. Similarly, *MSS*, pp. 2, 10/*GAW*, pp. 490, 498.

209 *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, pp. 509-10.

210 *ORK*, pp. 149-50; *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, pp. 90, 157.

211 Cf. *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157: "... *where* the arguments are addressed to our intellect, and *where* they are directed to our feelings". Leo Strauss (1953, p. 52) interprets Weber's position as *prohibiting* all value judgments in scientific works, and contemptuously remarks that "the whole procedure reminds one of a childish game in which you lose if you pronounce certain words, to which you are constantly incited by your playmates". This criticism is based on a misconception. Weber does not prohibit or even attack the use of value judgments as such, but only their being employed in a context where the basic ideal involved has not been expressly declared as a non-scientific valuational premise, and where the value judgments consequently usurp a scientific status for their valuational elements. However, it must be admitted that the hunt for value judgments in scientific works and lectures sometimes assumes

introduces a double dialogue between author and reader in their two different aspects – the theoretically contemplating and the actively evaluating one – it is a compelling necessity to make the changes of aspect quite plain by observing in practice the two injunctions defined above (107, pp. 37-39).

Weber's discussion of what he terms "pseudo-value freedom" merits special attention. "Pseudo-value freedom", as he defines the term, means that someone pays lip-service to the principle of value freedom, claims to observe it in practice, but nevertheless *suggests* practical value judgments of some kind, while pretending to "let the facts speak for themselves".<sup>212</sup> It is obvious that such a procedure, which is directly contrary to the demand for "clarity", does not meet with Weber's approval. But a comparison of *Value Freedom* with the *Inaugural Lecture*, in which a similar difficulty seems to be discussed,<sup>213</sup> prompts two questions.

The first question is whether Weber assumed that the pseudo-value-free procedure was prompted by any deliberate  *motive*. *Value Freedom* hints darkly at "pseudo-value-free and tendentious elements who moreover, within our own discipline, are supported by the obstinate and deliberate partisanship of strong interest groups",<sup>214</sup> a passage which almost amounts to an accusation of bad faith on the part of the scholars concerned. In the *Inaugural Lecture*, Weber presents the problem in much more general terms: If we, mistakenly, believe that it is possible to *avoid* formulating value judgments altogether, this would simply have the effect of permitting uncontrolled subjective points of view, perhaps the normative force of the status quo, to take the place of deliberate value judgments. Put in this way, the problem lacks all overtones of hidden motives and strong and tenacious interests conspiring against science; what is presented is a general problem of scientific inquiry.

The idea of "pseudo-value freedom" being deliberately assumed for personal gain and advantage must be regarded as an extreme case, whose importance to Weber is mainly polemical. When he emphasizes the duty of the scholar to strive to be conscious of his *own* standards of value,<sup>215</sup> this clearly implies the possibility

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almost comical proportions. See, for instance, the following episode from the Congress of the *Society* in 1910: [Weber:] "How is the development of art (to take an example) affected by the class evolution of the modern proletariat, by its attempt to portray itself as being, in itself, a cultural community – for that was of course what was magnificent about this movement ... (The President [Sombart] tries to interrupt the speaker) ... I frankly admit that the word 'magnificent', which I just used, contains a value judgment, and I take it back. What I want to say is: that is what makes this movement *interesting* to us ..." (GASS, p. 452). (107, pp. 18-20).

212 *MSS*, pp. 6, 9/*GAW*, pp. 495, 498.

213 *LSPW*, pp. 19-20/*GPS*, pp. 16-17.

214 *MSS*, p. 6/*GAW*, p. 495. In the *Memorandum* (pp. 153-54), the hints are even darker and more ominous: for instance, Weber here declares that the pseudo-value-free scholars "[make their whole living] by advocating their own value judgments". The passage quoted above (p. 80n112) from Weber's speech at the 1909 congress of the *Association* springs to mind here: "The interests that have here been taken as a basis are exclusively those of the entrepreneurs" (GASS, p. 417). Weber makes a similar point in Weber 1909, p. 618.

215 *MSS*, pp. 2, 59/*GAW*, pp. 156, 490.

of an *unconscious*, and in this sense an “innocent”, lack of value freedom in this respect. Thus, it does not seem impossible to reconcile the Inaugural Lecture with later discussions of the problem: Pseudo-value freedom can be the result of deliberate bad faith, but may just as well follow from naïve methodological haziness on the part of the scholar.

This interpretation, however, immediately raises a new problem: whereas, in *Objectivity* and later essays, Weber calls for clarity concerning the value standard applied in the cases where scholars cannot or do not want to stick to empirical fact, in the Inaugural Lecture he apparently suggests that it is *impossible* to carry on scientific inquiry and communicate its results to others without resorting to value judgments: he speaks of “... the [illusion] that we are able to *refrain entirely* from making conscious value judgments of our own”.<sup>216</sup> This could be taken to mean that Weber in 1895 altogether denied the possibility of a value-free science and that in consequence *Objectivity* marks a complete change in his views on this central point. A closer reading of the Lecture shows, however, that this is not the case. One should remember that Weber is speaking about a problem of economic *policy*.<sup>217</sup> The point of his whole lecture is that economists who try to deal scientifically with economic policy should not believe that the *goals* of that policy can be defined scientifically. That belief is an illusion. They have to posit one or more policy goals which are extraneous to the sphere of science (which is why Weber asserts that the science of economic policy is a *political science*). And they have to be *conscious* of these goals. For if they conduct policy analyses without making the policy goals clear, they risk importing *unconscious* and undeclared goals into the scientific process, and consequently to be guilty of “pseudo value-freedom”.

The principle of value freedom, when formulated by Weber as a practical demand, is presented in a sharp and absolute form. This absolute and fundamental character of the demands might be taken to imply that the *obligations* they define, lucidity and sharp distinctions, can also be totally *fulfilled* by the conscientious scholar. This assumption, however, is extremely doubtful.

That the observance of the injunction is at any rate neither self-evident nor a simple detail is shown by Weber's admission, in several instances,<sup>218</sup> that it is in practice extremely difficult to separate value judgments from scientific results. The context in which these admissions are sometimes placed is interesting, in that Weber here insists that the fundamental character of the demands that the principle of value freedom imposes on scholars is in no way lessened by any difficulty encountered in

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216 *LSPW*, p. 19/*GPS*, p. 16. As early as 1897, however (in a letter to L. Brentano, 1 January 1897 (BA Koblenz, NI. Lujo Brentano, Nr. 67 (Düss.))), Weber has grown a little more careful, and simply states that it seems *empirically* impossible to avoid mixing up value judgments and scientific statements.

217 This “policy” approach is openly acknowledged and defended by Weber in the Preface to the *Inaugural Lecture*: “Essentially, an inaugural lecture is an opportunity to present and justify openly the personal and, in this sense, ‘subjective’ standpoint from which one *judges* economic phenomena” (*LSPW*, p. 1/*GPS*, p. 1).

218 *ORK*, p. 149; *MSS*, pp. 9, 54-55/*GAW*, pp. 90, 151, 497.

observing them.<sup>219</sup> In one instance, he apparently goes so far as to say that even the demonstration of the *impossibility* of fulfilling the demands would not weaken his insistence on them:

I shall not discuss ... whether it is “difficult” to separate empirical statements of fact from value-judgments. It is difficult. All of us, the undersigned advocate of this demand as well as anyone else, offend against it time and again. But at least the adherents of so-called “ethical” economics should be aware that the moral law, too, is unrealisable, but is nevertheless regarded as “ineluctable”.<sup>220</sup>

In other words, the observation of the principle of value freedom in practice should be regarded as an *ideal*, to be striven for even if one knows that it is unattainable.

In spite of the absolute wording of the passage just quoted (“... the moral law, too, is unrealisable ...”), it may be going too far to ascribe to Weber the view that it is fundamentally *impossible* to carry out the principle of value freedom in practice.<sup>221</sup> But it is justified, and indeed important, to emphasize the abstract and theoretical quality of Weber’s attitude. In his view, the observance of the principle of value freedom seems to be above all the *personal* problem of the scholar. In this connection, one can point to the comparison of the ideal of value freedom with “the moral law”, and to the fact that the violation of the latter is ascribed to “human weakness”.<sup>222</sup> Ethical categories like guilt and responsibility seem far more prominent in Weber’s thought than considerations of technical and methodological possibilities.<sup>223</sup> It may not be inappropriate to see this as an echo of the neo-Kantian formalization of the truth norm, which puts the latter alongside the norms of aesthetics and ethics (107, p. 7).<sup>224</sup> But Weber’s formulations are also further vivid proof of his intense commitment to the ethic of scholarship.

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219 *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, p. 602. *ORK*, p. 149 and *MSS*, pp. 54-55/*GAW*, pp. 90, 151, which contain similarly worded passages, may only concern the *theoretical* principle of value freedom and not its observance in practice.

220 *MSS*, p. 9/*GAW*, p. 497. Concerning the question of impossibility as a basis for criticism, see below, pp. 181-85.

221 In an exasperated letter to Robert Michels of 9 November 1912 (*MWG II/7*), Weber imputes the “impossibility” argument to the *opponents* of value freedom within the *Society* (“a principle which it is supposedly (angeblich) ‘impossible to put into practice’”).

222 *MSS*, p. 55/*GAW*, p. 151.

223 In a letter to Michels of 16 August 1908 (*MWG II/5*), Weber admits that, in scientific works, the “factual account” has a tendency to be mixed up with “evaluation”. But, he adds, with a characteristic biblical choice of words: “You must *seek one thing* only”. The author must concentrate on his *responsibility*, as a scholar, for giving a value-free account.

224 Cf. the following characteristic passage from Wilhelm Windelband: “[The mature cultural being] takes responsibility not only for his aspirations and actions, but also for what he thinks and feels; he reproaches himself with a logical error, no less than with a moral failing” (Windelband 1914a (1884), p. 216). In the second (1904) edition of Rickert’s *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, “conscience” (Gewissen) is even seen as a constitutive philosophical value (“It expresses itself in the feeling of necessity of judgment, and guides our knowledge in the

While the ethical side of the demand is constantly stressed, practical reflections concerning the concrete methods of scientific inquiry are almost entirely lacking in Weber's work. He does say that "one has to work hard to acquire the ability" to distinguish in practice between value judgments and factual (causal) analysis,<sup>225</sup> with the implication that it is possible to *develop* the faculty of distinguishing between "Is" and "Ought". But the only help that Weber offers in this respect is the occasional enumeration of factors that may result in a lack of value freedom, and to which it is therefore profitable to turn one's attention if one wishes to eliminate practical value judgments. Among these factors, he mentions the importance of evaluative elements to scientific analysis, the importance of scientific analysis for the evaluation of phenomena (in this case, of a work of art)<sup>226</sup> and – as a typical instance of the more critical and soul-searching character of *Value Freedom* – the interests of material wealth and prestige tempting the scholar to introduce value judgments into his analysis.<sup>227</sup>

*The implementation of the principle in fields where other ideals are held besides the value of scientific inquiry*

The account given above was limited to fields where the search for truth is, according to Weber, by definition the only value premise. However, Weber expressly excludes the area of (higher) education from this category, and consequently in the *Memorandum* regrets that the questionnaire of the *Association* on the principle of value freedom includes consideration of the special problems of university teaching in this respect, so that these problems are discussed alongside the true questions of value freedom.<sup>228</sup> He does not believe that there is only one correct answer to the question whether it is legitimate for university teachers to express value judgments during their lectures:

... the question whether practical value-judgments are *at all* admissible in academic teaching (even subject to [the] proviso [that the demand for clarity and sharp separation of the two spheres be observed]), or not, is one of practical university policy. It can therefore

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same way that the conscience of one's duty guides one's volition and action" (Rickert 1904 (1892), p. 231)). One might be led to think that this is the idea expressed in the passage *Ost*, p. 128/*GAW*, p. 347: "From the standpoint of the scholarly conscience of the person who *wants to establish 'juristic truth', the 'validity' of a legal maxim in the 'ideal' sense is constituted by a rigorous logical relationship between concepts*". However, in *Objectivity*, Weber makes it perfectly clear that he sees appeals to "conscience" as belonging to the ethical, not the scientific sphere (*MSS*, p. 58/*GAW*, p. 155; similarly in *Sc. Voc.* (*FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, p. 602)).

225 *ORK*, p. 149/*GAW*, p. 90.

226 *ORK*, p. 149/*GAW*, p. 90.

227 *MSS*, p. 9/*GAW*, pp. 497-98.

228 *Memorandum*, p. 148: "I find it regrettable that this problem has been included in the discussion". Against this background, it is somewhat curious that Weber in *Value Freedom* retains his discussion of the problems of value freedom in university teaching, since he no longer has a prescribed set of subjects to prevent him from concentrating on the main themes.

only, in the last analysis, be settled with reference to the tasks which each individual, on the basis of *his* value judgments, wishes to assign to the universities.<sup>229</sup>

Weber admits that many professors want university teaching to influence the personality as well as (or rather than) the intellect of the students, and consequently regard “lecture room valuations” as a necessary and legitimate instrument for the realization of this ideal. Other scholars, however, see the task of the university exclusively as “*specialized* training by persons who have *specialist* qualifications”<sup>230</sup> and accordingly view “lecture room valuations” as undesirable and illegitimate. Weber openly declares for the latter school of thought<sup>231</sup> but, in doing so, emphasizes the fact that the question is in the last resort one involving indemonstrable value attitudes.<sup>232</sup>

Weber does not, however, content himself with a naked statement of the two value positions and of their equal status. Instead, he tries to show that the partisans of “lecture room valuations”, to the extent that they are motivated by a particular regard for the “dignity” of the *value* sphere, have the same fundamental value premises as those from which he derives his “limited” definition of the function of the university, but that they adhere to these premises less consistently than he does.

This attempt to argue from what *might* at least be the position of the opponent reflects Weber’s fundamental interest in keeping the distinction between the two spheres, of values and of scientific inquiry, as clear-cut as possible. Though it is impossible to *prove* that universities should only offer intellectual education, it is a fact that university education is *organized* along non-political and technical lines: the imparting of knowledge is unilateral, a monologue against which no criticism is

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229 *MSS*, pp. 2-3/*GAW*, p. 491. It is unfortunately not uncommon for commentators to mix up the question of university teaching with the discussion of the general principle of value freedom. For a recent example, see Ringer 1997, pp. 131ff. I do not think Josephson (2004, p. 205) is right in claiming, on the basis of the passage quoted, that “Weber maintains that he recommends a *value-free science* primarily for reasons of university politics” (my italics).

230 *MSS*, p. 3/*GAW*, p. 491.

231 *MSS*, p. 3/*GAW*, p. 491. Weber’s first public endorsement of this position seems to date back to a meeting in 1909 of the main committee of the *Association* in Leipzig. See his letter to his wife, 13 October 1909 (*MWG II/6*): “Then, I wanted to wring even more out of them – the recognition [of the view] that in university teaching, one may not force “value judgments” on one’s students – but that was too difficult for that lot, and nobody lifted a hand to applaud”.

232 *MSS*, pp. 1, 2-3, 6/*GAW*, pp. 489, 491, 495. See also Weber’s letter to Meinecke of 29 June 1909 (*MWG II/6*), where he criticizes a professor for the “pathos” of his lectures, but continues: “But one may have different attitudes towards this kind of teaching and value its pedagogical effects more highly than I, for instance, do”. Weber’s principled tolerance and restraint are remarkable when one considers his strong general distaste for such lecturing (see, for instance, his letter to Rickert, November 1915 (*Düss*): “... indecent serving-up of ‘intimacies’ and ‘experiences’ as mayonnaise for the public ...”; “... *the* professional error, of style and taste, in the field of science ...”).

possible.<sup>233</sup> A university teacher who introduces value judgments into his lectures, even when they are clearly distinguishable from the main body of empirical knowledge, and their valuational character openly admitted (i.e., even when the principle of value freedom is observed in practice), still, but in a deeper sense, violates the demand for a distinction between the value sphere and the sphere of scientific inquiry. He exploits an institutional position of strength justified by the laws of one sphere – that of scientific inquiry – to propagate opinions belonging to the other sphere – the sphere of values.<sup>234</sup> One cannot prove that this kind of exploitation is wrong; but Weber brands it as “irresponsible”.<sup>235</sup> By expressing “lecture room valuations”, the university teacher acts irresponsibly because his position shields him from being held responsible for the value judgments expressed.

Weber provides a characteristically cogent discussion of the case of those university teachers who are not *able to* acknowledge fully the logical heterogeneity of “Is” and “Ought”, nor to respect it in practice. A complete distinction between the two spheres cannot, almost by definition, be expected in this case; at the most one might hope that the methodologically “innocent” teachers would leave out the most flagrant value judgments, whereas the more covert ones would have to be tolerated. Weber firmly rejects this position.<sup>236</sup> An approximation of this kind would, according to him, simply disguise the value element inevitably present (since the teachers in question would lack both the ability and the wish to fulfil the demand for value freedom completely), and lead to “pseudo-value freedom”. More particularly, this solution would mean that the “political” value judgments (in the *narrow* sense of the term: the openly partisan, party-political valuations) would be the first to disappear. The equally “political” ones (in the *broader* sense of the term) present in the premises or concepts of other disciplines would be allowed to remain, since they would be more difficult to spot – a discrepancy whose basis was as unacceptable to Weber as its consequences.<sup>237</sup> The suggested “attempt” to practise value freedom would lead not to an increase, but to a diminution of lucidity and clear distinctions. Weber instead advances the opposite argument:<sup>238</sup> since the teacher cannot promote clarity and convey sharp distinctions through “value asceticism”, he must try to do so by *commitment to values*:

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233 *MSS*, pp. 4-5; *FMW*, pp. 146, 150/*GAW*, pp. 492-93, 602, 606-607.

234 In his letter to L. Brentano of 1 January 1897, Weber sees the apparent empirical unavoidability of “lecture-room valuations” as an argument in favour of trying to have a number of *different* “schools of thought” represented among the academic teachers, in order that the influence exercised from the chair may not go wholly in one particular direction. The whole question is discussed thoroughly in Josephson (2004).

235 *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, p. 602.

236 *MSS*, pp. 1-2/*GAW*, p. 490.

237 *MSS*, pp. 1-2/*GAW*, p. 490.

238 This argument is derived from the demand for the distinction between science and practical valuations; but it is still, and correctly, described as a subjective demand, since the university teachers in question do not accept the value of scientific inquiry as the only value standard for their professional activity.

... precisely because of the intensity of [the lecturer's] emotional tone, the hearer is at least put in a position where *he* is able to evaluate the extent to which the subjectivity of the lecturer's value-judgment may have resulted in a possible distortion of his statements; thus, the hearer is enabled to do for himself what the lecturer was temperamentally incapable of doing.<sup>239</sup>

In Weber's view, the ultimate value remains the same: the possibility for the audience to distinguish between scientific discourse and value judgments.

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239 *MSS*, p. 2/*GAW*, p. 490. In a letter to Rickert of 5 September 1913 (*MWG II/8*), Weber, with a generous measure of irony, carries the argument even further. Both the students and the professors, he says, want university lectures to contain "prophecy". All right, let them get it! "... *I* shall therefore, to the best of my ability, contribute to letting whopping great, massive 'eschatological' prophecies into the lecture rooms, so that the universities, for their chastisement, will 'learn to experience Jesus Christ'".

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## Chapter 2

# Values as a Precondition of Scientific Inquiry: Value Relation

As mentioned at the beginning of Ch. 1, the problem of the value freedom of scientific inquiry can be interpreted as a problem of the definition of the latter concept. As Weber sees it, this definition excludes certain value elements (practical valuations and value judgments) from scientific proof, and denies that research carried out with the help of concepts containing such value elements can claim the predicate “scientific”. In itself, such a definition only amounts to a formal distinction, a language convention: the predicate “scientific” will be reserved for research which is “value-free” in the sense stated. To this formal definition, however, Weber adds a material description: the results of value-free scientific inquiry (thus defined), he maintains, have the status of truth, i.e., they are objectively valid for all individuals, irrespective of the will or valuations of these individuals.

Evidently, it does not make much sense to demand value freedom in scientific inquiry unless one is certain that the value-free science that one demands may then lay claim to objective validity. Why eradicate subjective practical valuations from scientific inquiry if what is left is still, in principle, equally subjective? Thus, from a logical point of view the solution of the problem of objectivity is prior to the question of value freedom.<sup>1</sup>

This logical relationship finds a nice chronological parallel in the sequence of essays in which Weber discusses the two problems together or separately: whereas the various aspects of the problem of value freedom occupy Weber from 1904 until as late as 1917, his explicit treatment of the question of objectivity is in the main confined to *Objectivity*. The premises on which the argument of that essay relied also serve as the basis for a number of critical discussions of the views of other scholars in *Knies I-II*, and their influence is still fairly evident in *Crit.Stud.*; but after 1906, Weber seems to lose interest in this problem. In fact, the key words of the two main essays, *Objectivity* (1904) and *Value Freedom* (1917 (1913)) are succinct indications of the focus of Weber’s methodological interest at the time of their publication. His defence of the objectivity of the social sciences can be regarded as a necessary prelude to the formulation of the demand for value freedom, a rearguard action securing the advance of the avantgarde methodological principle of value freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Pietro Rossi makes a similar distinction between “external” and “internal” preconditions of objectivity (Stammer (ed.) 1971, p. 72).

What were the onslaughts on the objectivity of the social sciences<sup>2</sup> which Weber found it necessary to repel in order to make certain that the demand for value freedom remained meaningful? Weber himself gives a clear answer to this question in *Objectivity*:

Hitherto, when making a distinction in principle between “value judgments” and “empirical knowledge”, we have presupposed that an unconditionally valid form of knowledge, i.e. of intellectual ordering of empirical reality, actually exists in the field of the social sciences. This assumption now becomes a problem, insofar as we have to discuss what objective “validity” of that truth which we want to obtain *can* mean in our field. That this problem is genuine, and not just the fruit of empty speculations on our part, will be apparent to anyone who has observed the conflict about methods, “basic concepts” and presuppositions, the constant shift of “viewpoints”, and the continual redefinition of the “concepts” employed – and who sees that the theoretical and the historical approach are still separated from each other by an apparently unbridgeable chasm: “two sciences of economics!” as a despairing examinee in Vienna once sorrowfully complained. What is the meaning of “objectivity” in this context?<sup>3</sup>

The conflict referred to in this passage between the “theoretical” and the “historical” school of economics is the so-called “quarrel about methods” (*Methodenstreit*) which raged during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Since a certain familiarity with the main outlines of this methodological conflict facilitates the understanding of the problems with which Weber was faced, and helps us to appreciate the significance of his solutions, a brief account of the protagonists, the problems and the perspectives of the debate will be given below.

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2 In the discussion of value freedom, the fact that Weber's discussion was in practice concerned with the social rather than with the natural sciences was a minor one. But the distinction between the two groups of sciences becomes of crucial importance in the present discussion of the problems of objectivity; here, the attacks are only levelled at the objectivity of the *social* sciences, being in fact based on the affirmation of the objective character of the results of the *natural* sciences.

3 *MSS*, p. 63/*GAW*, pp. 160-61; cf. *MSS*, pp. 50-51/*GAW*, pp. 147-48. (Nau (1996, p. 28) ingeniously identifies this unfortunate youth as H.R. Seager, an American who spent some time between 1891 and 1893 in Berlin and Vienna, and wrote about the academic situation there in the *Journal of Political Economy* (1892/93). Unfortunately, the identification is not credible. Seager's article shows no evidence of any despair on Seager's part: he deals briskly and in a neutral fashion with the theoretical differences involved).

## The precursors

The “quarrel about methods” (“Methodenstreit”)<sup>4</sup>

In its later stages, classical economics had moved towards an increasing abstraction from reality. The German economists Roscher, Hildebrand and Knies (the “elder historical school” of economics) revolted against this “anaemic”<sup>5</sup> tendency and, around 1850, tried to lay the foundations of a historical, and consequently a realistic, science of economics. Their doctrines, however, had little immediate influence on economic theory,<sup>6</sup> which was at that time dominated by naturalist and positivist schools of thought.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, however, political developments gave new actuality and new incentives to the historical school of economics. The classical economists had worked on the theoretical assumption – which was sometimes transformed into a political demand – that government did not interfere with the free play of economic forces; and since the policy of laissez-faire was now being progressively abandoned in practice, it seemed logical to seek a new theoretical foundation for economic policy. The consequence was a revival of the historical aspect of economics: the “younger historical school”, with Gustav von Schmoller as its acknowledged leader, redefined and adapted the doctrines of the “elder school”.<sup>8</sup>

The intimate connection of the “younger school” with practical economic policy found its institutional expression in the *Association*, which was created in 1872. As mentioned in Ch. 1, the *Association* had a political purpose with strong ethical overtones, namely that of furthering the economic and social advancement of the growing working class and of securing, partly by means of this advancement, its integration into a harmonious economic whole embracing all participants in the economic process. The *Association*, in short, tried to exercise a mediating function in the field of politics and economics. In their enthusiastic efforts in this direction, some members of the *Association* clearly manifested their view of economics as an ethical discipline.<sup>9</sup>

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4 References in this section, apart from those involving primary sources, are mainly to Weber’s own historical summaries in *Objectivity* (ORK, pp. 93-94; MSS, pp. 51-52, 85-89/GAW, pp. 42-43, 148-49, 185-89) and *Value Freedom* (MSS, pp. 43-44/GAW, pp. 536-37). These summaries are not in any way comprehensive, or even well balanced; but they are valuable because they give us Weber’s own view of the main stages and problems of the development of economic theory, and consequently help to explain the solutions that he proposed.

5 The expression is Schmoller’s (Schmoller 1883, p. 242).

6 ORK, pp. 93-94/GAW, p. 42.

7 ORK, pp. 93-94/GAW, p. 42; cf. MSS, p. 44/GAW, pp. 536-37.

8 MSS, p. 44/GAW, p. 537.

9 MSS, p. 52/GAW, p. 148. Apart from its general wish to further the harmony of economic life, the historical school of economics had a specific claim to a more “ethical” status than the classical theory. The latter had concentrated on one isolated factor: the *enlightened*

Later, the concrete purpose of the historical tendency waned, partly because there seemed to be little chance of seeing this purpose carried out in practice; and the conviction that an ethical element was indispensable to economic thought consequently lost its self-evident character and became a methodological problem. It was therefore only natural that Max Weber's demand for value freedom (in particular, the demand that the scientific process and the scientific results should be free from ethical elements) was frequently formulated in connection with discussions of "the question of the workers"<sup>10</sup> and within the framework of the congresses of the *Association*. But the views of the historicists, and their declining importance, were probably the immediate occasion rather than the fundamental cause of Weber's demand. Of far greater importance in this connection was the "quarrel about methods".

Two names have above all been associated with this controversy: those of Gustav von Schmoller and Carl Menger. There seem to be good reasons for concentrating on these two figures. For one thing, Menger's general attack on the historical school (1883), Schmoller's sharp review of Menger's work in that same year, and Menger's no less sharp rejoinder (1884) undoubtedly marked the climax of the conflict.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the specific views of the two protagonists, extreme in Schmoller's case, moderate in Menger's, seem to have isolated them within their respective movements.<sup>12</sup>

The controversy raged around the question whether "pure theory", with its sharply defined concepts, had a legitimate place in the science of economics. Although Schmoller had acknowledged the existence of empirical regularities in the field of economics, he firmly denied that they could be identified or formulated by means of classical "pure" theory. In his view, economic phenomena were determined by a complex of, partly non-economic, social factors; and he regarded the method of the classical school, with its elaboration of a system of comparatively abstract "laws", as totally unsuitable for the understanding of the relative weight and importance of these social factors: the classical system, with its clear-cut and "unrealistic" concepts, could only provide a caricature of reality and of real causal connections.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the science of economics ought to concentrate on producing detailed studies of economic history, in which the complexity of the subject-matter was safeguarded by the lack of precise concepts. From such studies in detail, he imagined that it was possible, by means of some sort of induction, to arrive at a more specific formulation of the central concepts and at an understanding of the regularities prevailing in the

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*self-interest* of the individual; by abandoning this exclusiveness in favour of a more complex analysis of economic factors, the "younger historicists" were able to maintain that they had superseded the "egoism" of pure theory.

10 See, for instance, the remarks in *Objectivity*, *MSS*, pp. 66-67/*GAW*, pp. 164-65.

11 Menger 1883; Schmoller 1883; Menger 1884.

12 *MSS*, pp. 87-88/*GAW*, p. 187 ("the creator of the theory" is Menger).

13 Schmoller 1883, pp. 242, 244-45, 247.

field of economics. To Schmoller, clearly defined concepts stood at the end, not at the beginning, of the scientific process.<sup>14</sup>

Faced with this indiscriminate “historization” of the whole of the science of economics, it was not too difficult for Menger to take a more moderate stand, acknowledging, in principle, the value of historical investigations,<sup>15</sup> but refusing to accept “micro-history”<sup>16</sup> as a scientific ideal. In his eyes, pure theory was indispensable as an aid to the discovery of economic laws and regularities.<sup>17</sup>

One may wonder why the younger historical school did not simply adopt Menger’s moderate position, with its acknowledgement that both theory and history were valuable elements of economic science.<sup>18</sup> Viewed in a wider context, however, the problem was complicated by other considerations.

Behind the limited confrontation of theory and history in the science of economics lay the general conflict between positivism and historicism (both concepts taken in their widest sense), which was of fundamental importance to the social sciences of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The enormous advances of natural science, and the ensuing self-confident claim by its disciples that it held a methodological monopoly in all scientific disciplines, kept the historical sciences on a constant defensive. A particularly hard blow to historicism was the growth of a biological science which aimed at defining the concept of development along the lines of the traditional natural sciences. Here the very core of history seemed to fall into the hands of its positivist opponents.<sup>20</sup> Viewed in this light, the debate between Schmoller and Menger takes on a more alarming aspect from Schmoller’s point of view. The potential danger to the historical school was that Menger’s position, if pushed to its extreme conclusion (a tendency which Menger himself apparently did not ignore) might claim for pure theory a monopoly in the sphere of economics.<sup>21</sup> Such a claim would be able to draw on the seemingly unshakeable prestige of the natural sciences, and of positivism in general, as being “real” science, whereas Schmoller’s “historical induction” had

14 Schmoller 1883, pp. 241, 243, 245; cf. *MSS*, p. 44/*GAW*, p. 537 and Tenbruck 1999 (1959), pp. 584-85.

15 See, for instance, Menger 1883, p. 98 and Menger 1884, pp. 13, 22, 25.

16 Menger 1884, pp. 37, 38.

17 See, for instance, Menger 1883, pp. 12, 254-55; Menger 1884, pp. 48-49, 57. Cf. *MSS*, p. 87/*GAW*, p. 187.

18 Weber certainly felt that Menger was, on the main points, right in his criticism of Schmoller, and says as much in a letter of 30 October 1908 to Brentano (*MWG II/5*).

19 Cf. the highly useful account in Schnädelbach (1984), pp. 12-108.

20 Weber (*MSS*, p. 86/*GAW*, p. 186) dramatically speaks of “the impending ‘Götterdämmerung’ of all evaluative standpoints in all sciences”.

21 See the following illuminating passage in a letter from Weber to Rickert of 3 November 1907: “... if biology is viewed as value-free, things start getting – at the very least – serious for *sociology*, particularly *economic sociology*: in that discipline, too, it *might* be possible to claim that the focus on what is *relevant* from the point of view of the – purely physiological – *sustenance of life* constitutes what is significant; and *in that case*, things are (*in principle*) no different than they are in [the field of] biology” (*MWG II/5*).

methodological feet of clay in this respect.<sup>22</sup> In fact, a number of economists of a positivist bent did advance exorbitant methodological claims, culminating in the idea of an abstract theoretical system of economics from which concrete economic life could be deduced.<sup>23</sup>

Since this dilemma of economics: how to defend the concrete, historical, "inductive" point of view against general, abstract, possibly "deductive" tendencies, was lent added weight by the general conflict between positivism and historicism, it was only natural that the first attempts to give historical method a firm methodological basis came not from the specialized discipline of economics but from the ranks of philosophers and historians with philosophical leanings.

In 1883, the year in which the "quarrel about methods" really caught fire, the first of these attempts was made by Wilhelm Dilthey in his *Introduction to the Spiritual Sciences* (*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*). In Dilthey's view, the method of natural science only applied to objects of a physical nature, but not to spiritual (*geistige*) phenomena; the latter instead required a particular kind of intuition and empathy (*Verstehen*). In this way, Dilthey raised a number of "spiritual sciences" to the same level as the natural sciences, while preserving for them a materially and methodologically specific domain.

Dilthey defined his two main categories on the basis of the subject-matter of the disciplines which they contained, and on the distinction between the two corresponding methods, which were also mainly derived from the peculiarities of the scientific objects. This way of dealing with the question was certainly in accordance with the view taken by a large number of scholars working in the field of "spiritual sciences", and this correspondence with scientific practice made it difficult to reject Dilthey's point of view completely. On the other hand, it was difficult to back up the intuitive plausibility of Dilthey's distinction by sufficiently rigorous logical arguments. The central weakness in this connection was the existence of a discipline of psychology that worked along the lines of the sciences of nature. If the very constituent of the "spiritual sciences", the "spirit", was accessible to a scientific treatment which aimed at general statements, the way seemed open for the natural sciences to subjugate the field of the "spiritual sciences" in its entirety. In that case, generalizing psychology might function as a kind of "historical mathematics" or "historical chemistry", the abstract laws of which simply took concrete shape in the historical subject-matter.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the subsequent attempts to salvage the "scientific" status of the threatened historical disciplines concentrated on the elaboration of a distinction between these disciplines and the natural sciences with respect to their methods. Among these attempts, the philosopher Wilhelm Windelband's Rectoral Lecture "History and Natural Science" ("Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft") from 1894 seemed most promising. Here a methodical distinction was elaborated between the

22 See, for instance, Menger 1884, pp. 49-50 and *MSS*, pp. 86-87/*GAW*, p. 187.

23 *MSS*, pp. 72-73, 84, 87-88, 106/*GAW*, pp. 171-72, 184, 187-88, 208.

24 Cf. Simmel 1892, p. 2 and *MSS*, pp. 74-75/*GAW*, pp. 173-74.

“nomothetic” sciences (which seek to formulate general laws) and the “idiographic” disciplines (which are concerned with discrete and individual facts or events), and between their respective aims, “law” (Gesetz) and “shape” (Gestalt).

At the time of its appearance, the lecture was regarded as a “declaration of war on positivism”.<sup>25</sup> Its central thesis remained unquestioned; but the work was very short and insufficient as a logical basis for the claim that the historical sciences possessed an independent methodological status equal to that of natural science. Consequently, these problems were taken up again by Windelband’s pupil Heinrich Rickert.

### *Rickert’s theory of science and the objectivity of history*

In Rickert’s work *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science (Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung)*, which he finished in 1902, the relation between the historical disciplines and the natural sciences is subjected to a thorough and unusually stringent analysis, which in important respects goes beyond the earlier attempts.

In the first part of *Limits*, which was published in 1896, Rickert’s primary aim is a defensive one. He tries to show that the status of a discipline as empirical is not necessarily dependent on its adoption of the methods of natural science, and that there are even aspects of empirical reality which cannot be understood by means of this method, but demand a different approach. Thus, Rickert tries to reject the positivist claims to methodological exclusiveness by showing that it is neither necessary nor even always sufficient to proceed by way of generalization and abstraction: his argument is designed to show “in what areas the formation of concepts of natural science makes sense, and in what areas the sense of that kind of concept formation is by necessity lost”,<sup>26</sup> i.e., where the limits of the usefulness of the methods of natural science are to be found – hence the title of the work.

Although this part of Rickert’s work is the least original and, in the present context, the least problematical one,<sup>27</sup> a brief outline of his discussion may still be useful in order to throw light on the later development of his argument, and on Weber’s parallel discussions.

In *Limits*, the starting point of Rickert’s analysis<sup>28</sup> is empirical reality. He explicitly leaves to one side the question of its precise *epistemological* status, and simply takes it for granted that he is dealing with “a reality of perceivable phenomena which has extension in space and time”,<sup>29</sup> and which has been formed by means of constitutive *categories*.<sup>30</sup> This empirical reality, Rickert asserts, is fundamentally inexhaustible

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25 Hughes 1958, p. 47.

26 Rickert 1902, p. 303.

27 This was Weber’s opinion, too, as his letter to L. von Bortkiewicz of 12 March 1906 (MWG II/5), makes clear.

28 Rickert 1902, pp. 32-39, particularly pp. 32-36.

29 Rickert 1902, p. 32.

30 Rickert discusses these questions in his *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*.

and boundless: both in space and in time, the number of possible objects of our perception is infinitely great, and any such object may furthermore be divided into an infinite number of lesser objects, each of them different from all the others at least by its place in space and time (since two objects cannot be in exactly the same place at exactly the same time). Empirical reality is an "infinite multiplicity" (unübersehbare Mannigfaltigkeit).<sup>31</sup>

Obviously, such an infinite multiplicity of objects cannot be reproduced in its entirety. Any such attempt would result in a never-ending stream of statements, each concerning a particular object in a particular respect. Consequently, a science pretending to embrace the *totality* of its subject-matter, however limited the latter may be (in volume and/or time) is a fundamental impossibility. Conversely, the precondition of any existing science is the necessity of *surmounting* this infinity in some way;<sup>32</sup> scientific work always represents a *processing* of reality: "... all scientific thought [is] conceptual thought".<sup>33</sup>

Infinite reality is surmounted by means of *concepts*.<sup>34</sup> The simplest kind of concept is the everyday *word*, or rather the meaning of such words;<sup>35</sup> but from the point of view of science, these common-sense meanings are too vague and must be replaced by proper definitions, i.e. by statements investing the meaning of the word with the requisite degree of precision.<sup>36</sup>

In a number of disciplines, this process of definition is carried out by summarizing the traits *common* to all the objects covered by the word in question.<sup>37</sup> The definition abstracts from the individual character of particular objects, so that only their general qualities are retained in the concept. For reasons which are immaterial in this connection, these general concepts in their turn have to be fitted into a framework or system of general regularities, culminating, in principle, in one all-embracing and completely general law of nature.<sup>38</sup> The cognitive aim of these disciplines, which we can call the natural sciences (in the *logical* sense of the word), is ever-increasing *abstraction*.

This, in Rickert's eyes, is what constitutes the limitation of the method in question. As we have seen, empirical reality is characterized by the fact that its constituent objects are individual; and since the method of abstraction seeks to reduce, and in the last resort completely to eliminate, this element of individuality, it can in fact be said to lead away from empirical reality:<sup>39</sup> "What defines the limit of concept

31 Rickert 1902, p. 33.

32 Rickert 1902, p. 36.

33 Rickert 1902, p. 140.

34 Rickert 1902, p. 43.

35 Rickert 1902, pp. 39-41, 43.

36 Rickert 1902, pp. 54-55. Rickert himself avoids the word "definition", but only for polemical reasons which do not stand in the way of its being used here (cf. Rickert 1902, p. 65n3).

37 Rickert 1902, pp. 50-51.

38 Rickert 1902, pp. 62-74, particularly pp. 68-69, 72-74.

39 Rickert 1902, pp. 228-29, 236-39.

formation in natural science, a limit that can never be surmounted, is nothing but empirical reality in itself".<sup>40</sup> Now, since our interest is very often connected with the individual and real aspect of things, it has to be satisfied by another method that will allow us to understand what individual phenomena really are or were. The science (or group of disciplines) which employs such an individualizing method can be conveniently referred to as historical science<sup>41</sup> (in the logical sense of the word); and since, unlike natural science, it gives information which seeks to approach reality as closely as possible, it can also be given the predicate of a "science of reality" (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*).<sup>42</sup> But it must be borne in mind that this "science of reality", although it does not abstract from reality, still has to select from it: the historical point of view, too, is an aspect, not a reproduction.<sup>43</sup> In this way, Rickert constructs a dualism of natural and historical science based primarily on the different methods and cognitive aims of the two categories, and only in a derivative sense on the differences of their objects; as he succinctly puts it: "[empirical reality] becomes nature when we observe it with respect to what is common; it becomes history when we observe it with respect to what is special".<sup>44</sup>

Up to this point, Rickert has, by and large, although in far greater detail, repeated the arguments of Windelband's Rectoral Lecture.<sup>45</sup> The problem still remains of constructing a positive theory of the concept formation of historical science. The central difficulty in this connection is the following: It seems beyond doubt that the natural sciences (in the logical sense of the word) are justified in claiming the status of "science"; the criterion according to which they formulate their concepts, hypotheses and laws is objective, in the sense that it seems to relate solely to the object under investigation and consequently to be, in principle, independent of the personality of the scientist applying it. On the other hand, it seems very doubtful whether it is possible to find similar "objective" criteria for the formulation of historical concepts. If such criteria cannot be found, the general demonstration of the *raison d'être* of the individual and historical aspect loses its point, since "historical science" would then be history, but not science. Whenever the need for a scientific treatment of historically relevant material manifested itself, positivism would immediately renew its claim to exclusiveness.

Faced with this dilemma, Windelband had contented himself with a restatement of the classical view of history as a discipline on the borderline between science and art; according to this view, the historian has to "fulfil a similar task, vis-à-vis that

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40 Rickert 1902, p. 239.

41 Rickert 1902, pp. 249-51.

42 Rickert 1902, p. 255; the term "*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*" was originally used by Simmel (1892, p. 43), cf. Rickert 1913 (1902), p. 222.

43 Rickert 1902, p. 252.

44 Rickert 1902, p. 255.

45 Cf. Rickert 1902, p. 302n2, where Rickert himself acknowledges this fact. The contribution of Simmel in this connection is also pointed out by Rickert (1902, pp. 301-302).

which existed in reality, as the artist vis-à-vis that which exists in his imagination".<sup>46</sup> While this doctrine rendered historical method immune against positivist attacks – since the historian was partly bound to norms different from those of strict science – it meant the renunciation of the scientific status of history.

This solution was obviously unsatisfactory; but on the other hand, it was difficult to see how the concepts of historical science were to be given an objectivity equivalent to that of natural science. Weber's reaction to Windelband's Rectoral Lecture (as described by Rickert<sup>47</sup>) reflects this difficulty: Weber criticized Windelband's "aestheticism", but admitted that the elaboration of a conceptual logic of history was probably an impossible task.<sup>48</sup>

This was the task which Rickert set himself in the second part of *Limits* (published 1902).

As we have seen, history, although a "science of reality", remains dependent on a process of selection from the empirical reality which forms its primary subject-matter. The essential must be distinguished from the inessential, and for this distinction it is necessary to have criteria.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the first problem is whether it is possible to find criteria which are sufficiently firm to serve as a basis for scientific treatment of these phenomena, and which at the same time preserve the individual element constituting the focus of historical interest.<sup>50</sup>

In this respect, Rickert's basic contention is that we select, among the infinity of possible phenomena, precisely those which seem important to us because of their special character, their individuality, and which would consequently lose their importance to us if they were analysed into their component parts.<sup>51</sup> To attribute importance to the individuality of certain phenomena again means connecting them with some value in relation to which they acquire their importance.<sup>52</sup> The importance or significance of phenomena in their individual aspect is always derived from their relation to a value; and only this relation permits a selection from the infinite multiplicity of reality which respects the individual character of the phenomena selected, while being rooted in a firm criterion (namely, the value in question). Consequently, the relation between value and phenomenon becomes the pivot of Rickert's further elaboration of a positive theory of history; and since it is also central to the understanding of Weber's methodology, it will receive full treatment in this connection.

What is the nature of the relation between values and phenomena? To answer this question, Rickert first turns to (past or present) real life. Real life, as he sees it,

46 Windelband (1914a (1884)), p. 150.

47 Rickert 1986 (1929), pp. 8-9/Rickert 1929 (1902), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

48 The question, which is not quite simple, of the source value of Rickert's accounts of the relationship between Weber and himself will be gone into below, pp. 125-26.

49 Rickert 1902, p. 326.

50 Rickert 1902, pp. 336-37, 342.

51 Rickert here makes elegant play with the etymology "indivisible" of the word "individual".

52 Rickert 1902, pp. 351-52.

necessarily implies orientation towards “goals”, and a person who is “really” living is therefore by definition value-oriented, judging and evaluating himself and the surrounding world (I07, pp. 25-26).<sup>53</sup> Thus defined, man cannot be interested solely in the general regularities of life, but must to a certain extent also pay attention to things in their individual aspect; indeed, it may be held that phenomena attracting attention in, and because of, this individual aspect, constitute reality as such.<sup>54</sup> To Rickert, such an individualizing viewpoint is “the historical conception in its most original form”.<sup>55</sup>

The gist of Rickert’s analysis of the object level of historical science is expressed in the following statement: “... reality becomes history with respect to the significance which that which is special possesses by virtue of its uniqueness for human beings who strive and act ...” For “that which is special” with respect to this individual significance, Rickert uses the term “historical individual”.<sup>56</sup>

By an elegant twist of thought, Rickert now demonstrates that this statement is also valid for the higher, theoretical research level – the level of the historian himself – subject only to two modifications. First, the relation between phenomenon and value, which on the object level took the form of practical *evaluation*, must be, so to speak, defused, and transformed into a theoretical *value relation* (Wertbeziehung).<sup>57</sup> And secondly, the value entering into such a value relation must be *generally* valid, not just, as on the object level, rooted in the personal *subjectivity* of the evaluating individual (I07, pp. 22-25).<sup>58</sup>

The first point reflects the concern for the *value freedom* (in Weber’s sense) of history; and Rickert takes great pains to emphasize the fundamental difference between value relation and practical valuation: “... it would be almost the worst of all misconceptions if my position were taken to imply that I see the formulation of value judgments as a task to be performed by historical science”.<sup>59</sup> Value relation simply indicates that a certain phenomenon is found to be “worthy of” interest, “worth” assessing – paradoxically speaking: worth evaluating. *What* attitude should be adopted, *how* the phenomenon should be evaluated, remains an open question. Thus, two persons committed to diametrically opposite political values will, by this

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53 Rickert’s choice of words leaves no doubt on this point: “Whoever lives, i.e. sets goals for himself and wants to realize them ... “ (Rickert 1902, p. 353); “... the real human being – who is always a striving, evaluating, position-taking human being ... ” (Rickert 1902, p. 354).

54 Rickert 1902, p. 354. Rickert adds, however, that he is only describing an *aspect*, on the same theoretical level as that of natural science or of art.

55 Rickert 1902, p. 354.

56 Rickert 1902, p. 355.

57 The relation between value and phenomenon expressing itself in *practical* valuation (and which Rickert and Weber sometimes refer to as “Wertbezogenheit”) will be translated as “value orientation”.

58 Rickert 1902, pp. 355-56.

59 Rickert 1902, pp. 363-64.

very opposition of political views, indicate their agreement on the fact that politics is worth discussing, i.e., in their value relation to politics as a theoretical value.<sup>60</sup>

The second point is dictated by the concern for the *general validity* of history. The historian selects his material by means of theoretical value relation. If the values entering into this value relation are not shared by his contemporaries, that is to say, by his public, his work will be regarded as totally uninteresting; and since historical reality is defined by the interest of certain persons in the individuality of the phenomena in question, a totally uninteresting account cannot, by definition, give any information concerning historical reality: *it simply is not valid as history*. For a historical account to be valid for a person, this person must accept the value relation on which the account is based; thus, if the account is to be valid for everybody, the values entering into the value relation must be accepted by everybody; they must be what Rickert calls "empirically general". "Everybody", however, does not in this connection mean "everybody everywhere", but only "everybody in a given 'community' (Gemeinschaft)".<sup>61</sup>

The results of Rickert's discussion up to this point are summarized in the following passage:

[History is] a science of *reality* insofar as it concerns itself with unique individual realities as such, and it is a *science* of reality insofar as it adopts a position of pure observation which is valid for everybody, and consequently takes as objects of the historical account only those individual realities which are significant by virtue of their relation to a general value.<sup>62</sup>

The key words are: *individual* reality and *value relation* to (empirically) *general values*.

From Rickert's subsequent discussion, only two main problems will be treated here: the question of *what values* the historian should relate his material to; and the question of the *objectivity of historical science*.

So far, Rickert's argument has only led us to see historical science as an account of reality under a certain *aspect* (albeit a very "realistic" one); and the values on the basis of which the objects of history were selected have been "general" only in the sense that they were common to the historian and the "community" for which he was writing – and were therefore general on the research level. Does this mean that any value can be used as a basis for the construction of historical objects, as long as it is endorsed by the historian and by his public?

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60 Rickert 1902, pp. 364-65.

61 Rickert 1902, pp. 380-81. Accordingly, it is possible to speak, for instance, of a valid family history when all members of the family agree that the recorded facts are worth remembering. It is clear that not every more or less fortuitous human grouping can lay claim to the status of a "community"; but it is not quite obvious what criteria Rickert uses for the purpose of deciding this point, nor whether and how these criteria can be said to be objective. The problems in this connection will be treated more thoroughly below, pp. 122-24.

62 Rickert 1902, p. 369.

This is not Rickert's view. On the contrary, he tries to show<sup>63</sup> that there is a necessary connection between the object and the method of historical science, in the sense that the historian may in his *theoretical* work only relate his raw material to values which have served as a basis for the *practical* value orientation (valuation, etc.) of persons living in the period under investigation. If a certain phenomenon (say, the Magna Carta) has only, in its time, been evaluated as being more or less acceptable or desirable from a *political* point of view, but not (for instance) in terms of its *artistic* (stylistic, calligraphic, etc.) qualities, Rickert would deem it illegitimate to include it in a history of *art*. He describes this connection between object and method in the following terms: "In an 'objective' scientific account, the values guiding the concept formation must always be derived from the historical material itself"<sup>64</sup> (it might be still more exact to say that the historical raw material implicitly indicates what aspects may *not* be adopted; the material exercises, so to speak, a veto with regard to certain value relations).

The details of Rickert's rather complicated argument in support of this thesis are of less importance in this context, and only two points which are relevant to the later discussion should be emphasized. First, the idea that the theoretical value relation is conditional on the existence of a practical value orientation (on the object level, not necessarily on the research level): figuratively speaking, a theoretical perspective cannot "float in the air", but has to represent the "sublimation" of a practical value judgment. And secondly, that the only angles from which the historian may legitimately regard a phenomenon are those from which it was already regarded and evaluated in its own time (a view implicit in the conclusion reached concerning the relation between object and method). This last assertion in its turn implies that the *human beings* regarding and evaluating the phenomena in their own time must stand at the centre of the historical account.

Thus, Rickert seems to have anchored the theoretical values guiding the historian firmly in the object of his investigation, and to have "objectified" them in the sense that they can no longer be chosen at random. But if the values present in the historical material set limits on the number of legitimate value relations, the value relations conversely circumscribe the "essential" object of history. This is a consequence of the obligation of the historian always to let his value relations be guided by values which are generally (empirically) valid in the "community" for which his account is written (that is to say, his public): on the object level of the historian, only those individuals who have been practically oriented towards precisely the same empirically general values will stand at the centre of his account.

What are the values, then, which may lay claim to "general validity"? By means of a complicated conceptual exegesis, Rickert arrives at the conclusion that values may only be regarded as generally valid for the "community" to which the historian addresses his account, if they are a "*common concern*" of the members of [this]

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63 Rickert 1902, pp. 560-67.

64 Rickert 1902, p. 567.

community".<sup>65</sup> We can restate this conclusion in the form that the values in question must not only be valid for each separate member of the "community", but must furthermore be valid for the members in their capacity as a "community". Among values of this kind we find, for instance, the Church, the State, Law, Science and Art.<sup>66</sup> One or more of such general values – which Rickert calls *cultural values*<sup>67</sup> – must therefore be at the root of human action in a historical process if this process is to be included in a historical account of general validity. "Valid", "objective" history must always be cultural history in the sense that it must be concerned with human behaviour oriented towards one or more cultural values, towards *culture*, and that it must be theoretically related to these same values.

This conclusion has a number of useful implications for Rickert. For one thing, he has established the interdependence of the object and the method of historical science, and consequently demonstrated the existence of firm criteria for the distinction between important and unimportant parts of the material. Moreover, he has been able to define not only the method but also the proper object of history without departing significantly from the actual practice of this discipline: the aspects generally adopted by historical writers are and have always been connected with cultural values in Rickert's sense: politics, art, religion, literature, etc. In the course of his discussion, Rickert has shown the constitutive importance of certain values, the cultural values, for history and for the definition of its proper object. But is it possible for historical science, thus defined, to lay claim to an objectivity of the same degree as that of natural science?<sup>68</sup> Rickert answers this question in the affirmative as far as *empirical objectivity* is concerned; in other words, he believes that history as an empirical discipline is just as objective as the natural sciences.

As a prelude to his discussion of this point, Rickert introduces an important definition. The statement that a discipline is empirically objective, he says, can only be taken to mean that its propositions possess "empirical validity", that they are valid, "true", in relation to reality. But since both the natural and the historical sciences are forced to carry out a *selection* from the unstructured reality that is their raw material, and since this selection must in both cases be guided by certain criteria, the problem of objectivity no longer concerns the accordance of the elements of reality present in the concepts and propositions of science with the raw reality from which they have been selected, but instead raises the question of the objectivity, i.e., of the "empirical validity", of the *criteria* of selection.<sup>69</sup>

Rickert now claims that this empirical validity is guaranteed only if the scholar employs cultural values actually held in the "community" to which he addresses himself, and if he can in addition presume that everybody in this "community" acknowledges these cultural values as "normatively general":

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65 Rickert 1902, p. 576.

66 Rickert 1902, p. 576.

67 Rickert 1902, pp. 577-78.

68 Rickert 1902, p. 599.

69 Rickert 1902, pp. 626-27.

The historian who, with respect to empirically given cultural values which a certain group of human beings hold to be normatively general, limits himself to an account of the unique, individual course of the past by means of historical concepts with individual content, will in this way have attained ... the highest objectivity which can, from an empirical point of view, be at all achieved in science.<sup>70</sup>

To a modern analyst, it may seem strange that Rickert defines “empirical validity” by reference to a situation where it is empirically established that everybody in a given “community” regards certain cultural values as being *normatively* valid, i.e., where empirical and normative elements are *combined*. Such a combination is necessary to Rickert’s construction, however: a *purely* empirical definition of validity would lead to the absurdity that, for instance, any member of Danish society could render a political history of Denmark “non-valid” or “non-objective” simply by refusing to see anything interesting in politics.<sup>71</sup> By introducing a normative element, Rickert preserves validity in this and analogous cases, since he may now claim that politics, for instance, is a *normative* cultural value in Danish society. On the other hand, Rickert’s solution raises new problems: what, for instance, is the meaning of the expression that a cultural value is “normatively general”? The norm *receiver* is of course the “community” in question; but who is the norm *sender*?<sup>72</sup> This function cannot be assumed by the members of the “community” as a whole (since the cultural values would then be empirically general, and, as such, vulnerable to the threat of “resignation” outlined above); instead, we have to suppose that particular, *normatively* designated persons or mechanisms defining cultural values, the “representatives” (in some sense) of society, are regarded by Rickert as the necessary or sufficient senders of cultural norms. At one point, this normative element is even presented without any empirical camouflage: here, Rickert defines culture as that which *ought to be* the concern of all the members of a community, and which one may *demand* from them that they care for” (my italics).<sup>73</sup>

As we have seen, Rickert states that the highest objectivity which can be attained from a strictly empirical point of view is secured by the relation of the historical material to “empirically general” values, as he defines them. Consequently, the

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70 Rickert 1902, pp. 631-32.

71 Burger (1987 (1976)), p. 39n15 makes precisely this point. Interestingly, Rickert himself in a programmatic exposition of “the philosophy of history” a few years later, seems to lay himself open to this “empirical” vitiation of objectivity (“... what is important is that history relates its objects to values that are regarded as valid by everybody to whom [the historical account] is addressed, *or that are at least understood as values by everybody*” (my italics) – Rickert 1907, p. 359).

72 Rickert eludes the answer to this question by speaking instead (Rickert 1902, p. 631) of a group of individuals (a “community”) who *regard* a cultural value as being “normatively general”, i.e., who simply *state* that the norm has been sent by somebody to somebody else. Weiss (1992, pp. 26-28) is also critical of Rickert’s discussion of cultural values, on grounds that seem to lie quite close to those expressed above. Eliaeson (2002, pp. 22-25), basing himself on B72, goes very thoroughly into this part of Rickert’s construction.

73 Rickert 1902, p. 577.

historical sciences cannot be shown to be less objective than the natural sciences. (The conceptualization of the latter is generalizing, and consequently guided by the common traits of their objects, i.e., by empirically demonstrable criteria.)<sup>74</sup>

That is as far as he needs to go from a strictly methodological point of view, he says. But he wants to extend the analysis further, by means of epistemological considerations, to cover the problem of the relationship between this methodological result and “general problems of *Weltanschauung*”. He does so, to put it briefly, by the following argument: As we have seen, “culture” can only be found in communities whose members regard certain values as their common concern and see it as their *duty* to take a stand with respect to these values. The relation of reality to *any* value which such human beings see it as their cultural duty to recognize as normative is *necessary*, that is to say, it has *objective* significance for that which is unconditionally valid. Any normatively general cultural value, and the culture which recognizes it as such, therefore stands in a necessary, more or less close, relation to absolute values. Thus, “the question of the critical objectivity of historical science has been answered, as well as can be done from a purely epistemological view”; and this has been done on purely formal and logical grounds.<sup>75</sup>

### Max Weber and the break-through to a modern social science<sup>76</sup>

As we have seen above, Weber himself repeatedly refers to the problems of the “quarrel about methods” as a basis for his own discussion of the objectivity of the historical sciences, above all in *Objectivity*. The influence of the “elder historical school” in this connection is more indirect: admittedly, Weber discusses the thought of two of its leading figures (in *Roscher and Knies*); but Roscher, as Weber explicitly remarks,<sup>77</sup> is chosen because of his instructive misconceptions; and the discussion of Knies's views occupies less than one-third of *Knies I-II*,<sup>78</sup> and results in a conclusion of the same negative kind as that concerning Roscher.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, it is not realistic, either, to expect Roscher or Knies to have furnished Weber with significant elements of his *solution* of the problem of objectivity. The possible influence of the “quarrel about methods” in this respect will be discussed in various connections below.

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74 Rickert 1902, p. 628.

75 Rickert 1902, pp. 702-705.

76 The formulation of this subtitle, which remains unchanged from *B72*, may perhaps be thought over-ambitious. But I am comforted by the fact that Horst Baier, whose dissertation was not known to me in 1972, concludes in remarkably similar terms: “Max Weber's essential methodological contribution is [the] break-out from the transcendental philosophy and the break-through to the investigation of reality (*Wirklichkeitsforschung*)” (Baier 1969, p. 150).

77 *ORK*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 1.

78 His name makes a last appearance *ORK*, p. 120/*GAW*, p. 64, to re-emerge only *ORK*, p. 199/*GAW*, p. 138.

79 *ORK*, p. 207/*GAW*, p. 145.

A more controversial question is that of Weber's methodological dependence on Rickert (*I07*, pp. 20-32).

Weber's work contains numerous *references* to Rickert, above all to *Limits*. In *Roscher*,<sup>80</sup> Weber states one of the aims of the essay to be that of "testing the value of [Rickert's] ideas for the methodology of our discipline";<sup>81</sup> and in the introductory footnote to *Objectivity*, the function of Rickert's thought as a basis for Weber's own discussions is similarly stressed: "Anyone familiar with the writings of modern logicians – let me just mention Windelband, Simmel and, especially for our purposes, Heinrich Rickert – will immediately notice that, in all important respects, this article builds on them".<sup>82</sup> As a correlate to these frequent references, Weber carries over considerable portions of Rickert's terminology into his own work ("value relation", "cultural science", "historical individual" (*historisches Individuum*), and a number of other terms).<sup>83</sup>

Rickert himself clearly regarded *Limits* as a necessary condition of Weber's early methodological work. In his preface to the 3rd/4th edition of the book, which was published in 1921 (and, characteristically, dedicated posthumously to Weber) the relationship with Weber is described along the following lines: Weber initially doubted the possibility of working out a positive theory of historical science, but was convinced by *Limits*, Part 2, that Rickert was right in characterizing history as an "individualizing cultural science" working on the basis of theoretical value relation, and "shortly afterwards made fruitful use of this view within his own discipline ..."<sup>84</sup> In short, Rickert regarded Weber as his methodological and epistemological pupil. He felt that Weber was especially indebted to him on the following points: the formation of individualizing concepts; the distinction between theoretical value relation and practical valuation; the view, based on this distinction, of history as a value-free discipline; and the idea that certain kinds of *material* ("culture") so to speak *demand* a particular, individualizing, kind of scientific treatment.<sup>85</sup>

Certain attempts have been made to dispute Rickert's account of the relationship between his theory of history and Weber's methodology. Leaving aside criticism based on downright misunderstandings, the objections that have been made all centre around Rickert's absolute system of values and, related to this, his concept

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80 It is not quite clear whether the expression "this essay" also refers to *Knies I-II*.

81 *ORK*, p. 58n9/*GAW*, p. 7n1.

82 *MSS*, p. 50/*GAW*, p. 146n1.

83 Weber was not quite happy with Rickert's choice of terms, however. For the most problematic aspect ("value"), see *I07*, pp. 27-28. Weber also has hesitations concerning Rickert's term "Naturwissenschaft", in his letters to Fr. Eulenburg and L. von Bortkiewicz (8 September 1905 and 12 March 1906, respectively (GStA I, Rep. 92, No. 30, Vol. 4 (copy) and *MWG II/5*)) and to Rickert himself (28 April 1905 (GStA I, Rep. 92, No. 25)).

84 Rickert 1913 (1902), pp. 8-9 and Rickert 1929 (1902), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

85 Rickert 1929 (1902), p. 758. This last point in particular seems to have been important to Rickert: "That is truly ... the *central* idea of my positive theory of history, which reveals the connection between form and substance".

of *objectivity*. On the other hand, almost all commentators seem to agree that Weber was strongly influenced by Rickert's analysis of the concept of value relation.<sup>86</sup>

While it is certain that Weber's treatment of the problem of objectivity, and its relation to Rickert's work, merits close investigation, the superficial likeness of Weber's and Rickert's views on value relation may have led some commentators to conclude too hastily that these views were fundamentally identical. The question will be taken up below, with the aim of pinpointing possible divergences of Weber's thought from Rickert's, and of analysing the significance of these divergences when viewed in a larger context.

Before we embark upon the actual analysis of Weber's views, it may be useful to give a brief summary of the general premises of his arguments in the early methodological essays,<sup>87</sup> confronted with the corresponding positions of Rickert, as they appear from the first edition of *Limits*.

The *sphere of application* of Weber's methodology is the science of economics, which is, however, extended in *Objectivity* to include the non-economic causes and consequences of economic phenomena and processes ("economically relevant" (ökonomisch relevante) and "economically determined" (ökonomisch bedingte) elements, respectively).<sup>88</sup> Rickert's focus is philosophical, and in this context he discusses "history" (in his logical sense of the term) in general.

The *problems* which Weber sets out to solve are closely connected with his sphere of interest. As we have seen, they were defined by the quarrel about methods, and include both the criticism of the historical and socio-economical point of view, and the question of the legitimate function of non-historical aspects in practical research, particularly with regard to the formation of concepts. In comparison, the complex of problems tackled by Rickert is at the same time wider and narrower: on the one hand, he takes it upon himself to defend and secure the legitimacy of the historical point of view in *all* the scientific disciplines that adopt it; but this historical point of view is above all regarded and treated as a logically extreme *type*, while Rickert does not deal in detail with actual research, in which the two typical aspects are mixed.

The *method* adopted by Weber also differs from that applied by Rickert: Weber on the whole remains on the level of "logic" and methodology (*I07*, pp. 7-11), whereas Rickert plays on the whole register of thought of neo-Kantian philosophy, particularly towards the end of *Limits*.

The different *aims* of Weber and Rickert, naturally enough, mirror the differences of the problems which they set out to solve: they have in common a desire to demonstrate the objectivity of the "cultural sciences"; but over and above this, Weber,

86 Among the few exceptions are Eugène Fleischmann (1964) and, following him, Runciman (1972). However, Fleischmann's claim that Rickert was the neo-Kantian for whom Weber had the least regard, so that Weber only quoted him out of politeness and deference, is not well documented, and where Fleischmann does quote sources, they turn out not to support his thesis.

87 Weber's positions on a number of these points later evolve; but at no time does he come *closer* to Rickert than in *Roscher and Knies* and *Objectivity*.

88 Cf. *MSS*, pp. 63-66/*GAW*, pp. 161-63.

to a far greater degree than Rickert, wants to analyse the practical consequences of the concept formation of the “cultural sciences”.

*The theoretical basis*

Like Rickert, Weber bases his discussion of the logic of history on the view that empirical reality is boundless, an “infinite multiplicity” (107, pp. 21-22). He repeats this idea in numerous passages of the various essays without modifying it in any important respect; at the most, one may point to a tendency in *Roscher* to keep very close to the Rickertian model,<sup>89</sup> while in *Knies I-II*, Weber embarks on more independent discussions of problems which have not been addressed by Rickert.<sup>90</sup> As might be expected, *Objectivity* contains the most elaborate statements of the position, like the following:

Now, as soon as we seek to reflect upon the way in which we encounter life in its immediate aspect, it presents us with a simply endless multiplicity of events, both “within” and “outside” ourselves, that emerge and fade away one after another or at the same time. And the absolute infinity of this multiplicity remains entirely undiminished in intensity if we focus our attention on an isolated individual “object” – for instance, a given act of exchange – that is, as soon as we make a serious attempt just to describe this “individual” exhaustively, in all its individual components, let alone to comprehend it in its causal determination.<sup>91</sup>

This passage also illustrates a particular point whose consequences are given considerable attention by Weber: the idea of the inexhaustibility of reality in its immediate aspect implies the existence of an equal, or perhaps even greater, infinity of potential causal explanations;<sup>92</sup> any “object”, however small, which we want to explain causally, represents an infinite number of qualities, and the individual manifestation of each of these qualities is again the result of the interplay of an infinite number of causal factors.

Here and there, Weber indicates more concretely how he imagines our perception of immediate reality to take place in practice. Thus, in *Knies I*, he writes: “... every individual event, no matter how simple it may appear, [comprises] an intensively infinite multiplicity, as soon as one chooses to comprehend it in that way”,<sup>93</sup> and in *Objectivity*, as we have seen, he speaks of “the way in which we encounter life in its immediate aspect [as soon as we seek to reflect on it]”.<sup>94</sup> In both cases, the perception of immediate and infinite reality is presented as the result of conscious reflection on

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<sup>89</sup> *ORK*, pp. 56-57/*GAW*, pp. 4-5; see also *ORK*, pp. 62-63, 64-65, 84n82/*GAW*, pp. 11, 14, 34n1.

<sup>90</sup> Examples of the discussions in these essays are *ORK*, pp. 102-103, 124, 138-39, 179/*GAW*, pp. 50, 67, 80, 120-21.

<sup>91</sup> *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 171.

<sup>92</sup> *ORK*, p. 124; *MSS*, pp. 78, 84, 130, 169/*GAW*, pp. 67, 177, 184, 232, 271.

<sup>93</sup> *ORK*, p. 124/*GAW*, p. 67.

<sup>94</sup> *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 171.

the structured, common-sense reality. Weber does *not* claim that we ever *perceive* reality in its infinite and immediate aspect, but only that it can be *demonstrated* that the reality confronting us in our daily lives is the structured version of something infinite and boundless.

These considerations, in themselves, run quite parallel to Rickert's construction in *Limits*. But it is interesting to note that Weber's account never assumes a more systematical character; on the contrary, there is a definite tendency towards a blurring of Rickert's fundamental distinction between constitutive categories and scientific concepts, between the epistemological and the methodological level of analysis.<sup>95</sup> Rickert's careful and logical chain of argument starts, so to speak, at the bottom, with the completely amorphous, un-categorized and "raw" reality. Weber, on the other hand, is more concerned with the *practice* of science: to him, the argument possesses its main relevance when it is used "from the top", that is, taking everyday, pre-formed experience as its point of departure.

One reason why Weber tends to focus his argument on reality as actually experienced rather than in its elementary, "immediate" aspect is that, in contradistinction to Rickert, he almost completely ignores the problems of the natural sciences and concentrates on those of social science. While the natural sciences may find it interesting to reflect on and seek information about a world which is not directly observable, and on this basis to frame propositions which may be scientifically valid but which lack common-sense evidence (for instance, about the speed of atoms or the chemical properties of certain substances), the interest of social science does not in the same way go beyond what can be directly observed. Weber's implicit concept of reality may, strictly speaking, be logically unclear, but it corresponds to the needs of the disciplines which stand at the centre of his interest.

This question has been treated at some length because it serves as an example of Weber's tendency to modify Rickert's system, and on some points even completely break with it, whenever logic threatens to get the better of social science (*IO7*, p. 29). Moreover, the problem of the structure of reality is of fundamental importance to Weber's theory of the objectivity of scientific results.<sup>96</sup>

Just like Rickert, Weber concludes from the view of reality as boundless that a scientific reproduction of the whole of reality is a practical, indeed a logical, impossibility. This again entails that all scientific disciplines *must*, consciously or unconsciously, make use of concepts, and that such concepts can only embrace *parts* of reality;<sup>97</sup> thus, a scientific discipline is never justified in claiming that its concepts reproduce reality, but only that they represent a *selection from reality*: "the ... infinite character and the absolute irrationality of every concrete multiplicity is conclusive

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95 See, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 155n54(1), 162-63, 178, 180/*GAW*, pp. 96n1, 104, 119, 121-22.

96 See below, pp. 157-58.

97 *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 171.

epistemological *proof* of the absolute absurdity of the idea that some kind of science may be able to ‘reproduce’ reality”,<sup>98</sup>

Although the parallel to Rickert is quite obvious on this point, it is nevertheless possible to discern a characteristic shift of emphasis. Rickert sees the problem of the concepts of science as a *logical* one; his aim is to show that the constructs of the historical sciences are more than just evocative word-paintings, that they are scientific concepts in the sense that they, like the concepts of natural science, are formed according to firm and “objective” criteria. Thus, the analysis of historical concepts is not the ultimate *purpose* of the discussion, but a – crucial – means of raising history to a status equivalent to that of natural science. Weber’s concern is a different one: as mentioned above, his basic problem is not that of history as a logical type, but rather of economics as a concrete discipline racked by a concrete internal conflict. Since this conflict between historicism and the Menger school focuses on the nature of the *concepts* of economics, the analysis of this issue becomes the chief aim of Weber’s discussion.

A detailed analysis of the main result of this conceptual discussion will be given in Chapter 4; but it seems useful already at the present stage to point to the added *weight* which Weber gives to the discussion of concepts, even though the *results* of this discussion do not differ from Rickert’s.

Weber’s treatment of concept formation in the natural sciences, of their limits, and of the essence of the historical point of view does not diverge from Rickert’s; but he only discusses the methods of natural science as a separate subject in his earliest methodological article, *Roscher*, where the influence of Rickert is most immediate.<sup>99</sup> As might be expected, Weber simply repeats the Rickertian view that natural science abstracts from reality in its individual and qualitative aspect and seeks to reduce it to general and purely quantitative concepts and laws.

Weber also without qualification accepts and repeats Rickert’s thesis of the rooting of historical interest in the *individuality* of the object,<sup>100</sup> and, like Rickert, he identifies this individual and qualitative reality with reality as such.<sup>101</sup> Weber, too, refers to disciplines based on a selection of material according to the individuality of the objects as “science of reality”<sup>102</sup> (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*), and takes over the description of the immediate objects of such disciplines as “historical individuals”.

98 *ORK*, p. 151n47/*GAW*, p. 92n1. Similar statements are found, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 57, 135n30, 172-73; *MSS*, pp. 92, 135, 175/*GAW*, pp. 5, 75n2(1), 113, 192-93, 237, 277.

99 *ORK*, pp. 55-56, 64/*GAW*, pp. 4-5, 13-14.

100 For instance *ORK*, pp. 57-58; *MSS*, pp. 74, 78, 143; *OSt*, p. 135/*GAW*, pp. 5-6, 172-73, 177, 245, 352. Weber’s formulations are identical whether he is talking of “historical” or of “social” science. This is understandable, since the interest in the *individual* aspect of things is a necessary and *logical* characteristic of *all* non-natural sciences (in the logical sense). (The term “historical” is only meant by Rickert to indicate the opposition to the point of view of natural science, not to limit the discussion to the discipline of history properly speaking.)

101 For instance *ORK*, p. 57; *MSS*, pp. 74, 135/*GAW*, pp. 5, 172, 237.

102 *ORK*, pp. 55, 173; *MSS*, p. 135/*GAW*, pp. 3, 113, 237 and, in a particularly prominent position, *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 170. However, Weber’s sparing use of the term (it only occurs

Although Weber thus consistently adheres to Rickert's positive theory that historical interest is based on the individual aspect of phenomena, he characteristically devotes at least as much space and energy to a number of attacks on the positivist position, according to which the essential part of reality is identical with the sum of regularities and *general* qualities which it contains.

This criticism is already levelled at Roscher<sup>103</sup> (although only in an indirect form: in *Roscher*, Weber usually refrains from overt criticism, preferring to let the impression of the confusion and methodological innocence of Roscher's thought emerge from a neutral, but carefully structured, exposé); the attack recurs in the discussion of Münsterberg's theory of science,<sup>104</sup> and is most clearly and completely unfolded in *Objectivity*:

Naturally, what is significant as such does not coincide with any law as such, and the more general the law, the less the coincidence. For the specific *significance* that a component of reality has for us is obviously *not* to be found in those relationships which it has in common with numerous other components.<sup>105</sup>

Directly derived from this position is Weber's denial of the possibility of deducing reality from some set of empirical laws.<sup>106</sup> From a purely logical point of view, this denial can be justified simply by pointing to the fact that reality, which is *individual*, cannot be deduced from regularities, which are *general* and abstract. Weber uses a similar argument, but links it up a little more closely with the structure of causal explanation, which is in his view the essential form of explanation in the historical sciences; he points out that causal explanation in history consists in tracing back, by means of one's knowledge of the relevant empirical regularities, individual situations to earlier individual situations, just as a prognosis represents a hypothetical development, by means of the same kind of general knowledge, of an individual situation into the future:

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six times in his writings, and never later than 1906) seems to indicate that he was less than enthusiastic about it; one reason for this may be that the word was a fertile source of misconceptions, particularly in discussions concerning the historicist belief in a science which is able to "reproduce" reality. (Tenbruck, in his later writings, on the contrary sees the concept of a "science of reality" as the key to Weber's methodology as a whole.) A strongly critical discussion of his views in this respect can be found in Wagner and Zipprian 1987.

103 *ORK*, pp. 64-65/*GAW*, p. 14.

104 *ORK*, p. 40n33/*GAW*, p. 81n1.

105 *MSS*, pp. 76-77/*GAW*, p. 176; see also *MSS*, pp. 72-73, 76, 80/*GAW*, pp. 171, 175, 180. This *logical* distinction is particularly vital because Weber recognizes that the importance of a phenomenon may *in practice* occasionally be found in those elements which it has in common with other phenomena (see *MSS*, p. 77/*GAW*, p. 176, where Weber's example is that of the use of money in economic transactions).

106 *ORK*, pp. 64, 135n30(2), 138-39; *MSS*, pp. 73, 75, 87-88/*GAW*, pp. 13, 75n2(2), 80, 171-72, 174, 188.

Where the *individuality* of a phenomenon is concerned, the question of causes is not a question of *laws* but of concrete causal *relationships*; not a question of the rubric under which the phenomenon can be subsumed as an exemplar, but a question of the individual constellation to which it should be attributed as a result: it is a question of *attribution*, of imputation.<sup>107</sup>

It is interesting that this argument is also used against the younger historical school and its belief in concepts as the aim of scientific inquiry.<sup>108</sup> Here again, Weber departs from the strict logical dualism history/natural science, in order to allow a closer discussion of the problems of a *concrete* discipline (in this case, economics).

### *Value relation*

How are the elements selected which are to enter into the historical concepts? What is the firm criterion needed to assure the logical equality of these concepts to those of natural science? As we have seen, Rickert claimed that this function was fulfilled by the relation between the phenomena in immediate reality and certain *values*, what he called the theoretical *value relation*. Weber completely accepts these basic premises of Rickert's argument. But in his interpretation and elaboration of these ideas, in the consequences which he draws from them, and in his final conception of social science, Weber diverges to an increasing extent from Rickert. As a result of this, the account of Weber's methodological thought, which has so far been presented in close parallel to the layout of Rickert's discussion, will from now on concentrate on presenting Weber's views in their specific context; only in the summaries of the main points will the attempt be made to assess the divergence of Weber from earlier theories of the historical sciences (including Rickert), and to estimate the importance of this divergence.

Weber's discussion of the relation of values to phenomena can be divided into two main categories: the first one, which is in the main restricted to *Objectivity*, contains a fairly consistent, constructive and positive formulation of Weber's view, whereas the second one, which is more extensive, covering *Knies II-II* and *Crit. Stud.*, consists of critical commentaries on a number of earlier attempts to fashion a logic of historical investigation.

It is natural to turn first to the positive discussion in *Objectivity*, both because it can be supposed to present a more coherent version of Weber's thought, and because *Objectivity* is chronologically prior to at least the later of the critical essays.

In its general form, Weber's description of the relation between value and phenomenon occupies a remarkably inferior place in *Objectivity*. The most important passage is the following:

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107 *MSS*, pp. 78-79/*GAW*, p. 178. Similar formulations are found *ORK*, p. 135n30(2); *MSS*, pp. 74, 75/*GAW*, pp. 75n2(2), 172, 174.

108 *ORK*, p. 64n23; *MSS*, pp. 73, 84, 106/*GAW*, pp. 13n1, 171, 184, 208.

Only a tiny part of the individual reality that we observe at a given time is coloured by our interest, which is conditioned by ... value ideas (Wertideen), and this part alone has significance for us; it has significance because it exhibits relations that are *important* to us by virtue of their connection to value ideas. Only for this reason, and to this extent, is it worth knowing for us in its specific individual character.<sup>109</sup>

In themselves, this statement does not diverge from Rickert; but it should be noted that the “connection to value ideas” mentioned by Weber is not explicitly classified as *theoretical* value relation rather than as *practical* value orientation. Rickert's careful and deliberate distinction between the object level and the research level is lacking, as is his consequent emphasis on the “sublimated” character of theoretical value relation and on the essential difference between practical valuation (value orientation) and theoretical value relation. Weber's choice of words does not actually contradict these ideas; but the vagueness of the passage suggests methodological hesitation on his part.

Apart from brief references,<sup>110</sup> the only other passage in *Objectivity* dealing with the relation between value and phenomenon is the following:

No law can reveal to us in *what* sense and in *what* relations [the individuality of objects becomes important to us], since this is determined by those *value ideas* in the light of which we look at “culture” in each individual case. “Culture” is a finite section of the meaningless infinity of events in the world, endowed with meaning and significance from the standpoint of *human beings*. This is true even when a human being is opposed, as its mortal enemy, to a *particular* culture and demands a “return to nature”. For he can only arrive at this position by *relating* that particular culture to his value ideas and finding it “wanting”.<sup>111</sup>

And a little later:

[We evaluate certain social phenomena, and] ... no matter how [they] are evaluated, they possess *cultural significance* for us, and it is upon this significance alone that their scientific interest rests.<sup>112</sup>

Here the difficulty inherent in the first passage reappears: the source of the values entering into the formation of the historical object is still not made explicit. “We” or “human beings” take an interest in (sections of) reality and, in so doing, transform it into “culture”.<sup>113</sup> and the interest to *science* of certain social phenomena rests on a significance which we infer from *practical* value orientation. The imprecision of the first passage is not dissipated: apparently, Weber does not in *Objectivity* make

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109 *MSS*, p. 76/*GAW*, p. 175.

110 *MSS*, pp. 77, 110-11/*GAW*, pp. 176, 213.

111 *MSS*, pp. 80-81/*GAW*, p. 180.

112 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, p. 181.

113 For a discussion of this concept, see below, pp. 151-56.

explicit use of Rickert's distinction between the object level and the research level of scientific inquiry.<sup>114</sup>

Does this mean that Weber also does away with the distinction between value judgments and value relation? A positive answer to this question would be completely at variance with Weber's principle of value freedom, which precisely debar scholars from regarding their own practical valuations of phenomena as being part of the scientific process. On the other hand, it must be admitted that explicit distinctions between value judgments and value relation are hard to find in *Objectivity*. The discussion, cited above, whether a "relation to value ideas" implies a *positive* valuation of the phenomenon concerned, is not relevant here, since this discussion does not deal with the difference between value judgments and value relation, but with the distinction between value judgments and *positive* value judgments. In fact, Weber only once, and implicitly, indicates that the scientist who has formed his object through value relation is not allowed, and certainly is not forced, to make value judgments as a part of his scientific treatment of it:

[The] proposition [maintaining the distinction between scientific and nonscientific forms of argument] remains true even though ... the ultimate "values" underlying our *practical* interest are and will remain of decisive importance for the *direction* which the ordering activity of thought within the cultural sciences will take in each particular case.<sup>115</sup>

And even here, it is noteworthy that Weber takes *practical* interest to be the guide of *scientific* inquiry.

Although Weber seems to relegate the upholding of the fundamental distinction between valuation and value relation to an inferior place in *Objectivity*, there can be no doubt of his conviction, in that essay as elsewhere, that the distinction is both legitimate and necessary.<sup>116</sup> This conclusion, on the other hand, raises the problem of what weight and importance should be attributed to the passages quoted above. The most reasonable answer seems to be that Weber's discussion of the relation between value and phenomenon is conducted on a general level. What is examined is not primarily the relation of "the scholar" or of "the person observed", but quite generally "man's" or "our" relation to the important, interesting, essential parts of reality. The point, quite simply put, is this: immediate reality in itself *has* no meaning or significance, but only *receives* it when *endowed* with it by man; in a slightly

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114 One of the very few commentators to reach a similar conclusion is Willy Strzelewicz (1933, pp. 20-21), who subjects the question to careful scrutiny.

115 *MSS*, p. 58/*GAW*, p. 155.

116 For instance, one may point to the explicit separation of the two spheres in *MSS*, p. 98/*GAW*, p. 199: "We are no longer dealing with the purely theoretical procedure of relating empirical reality to values, but with value judgments ..." This passage has not been quoted above in this connection, since it refers to Weber's concept of the ideal type and consequently does not form part of the discussion of the general principles guiding the formation of historical concepts.

expanded version of Goethe's words: "We know of no other meaningful world than that related to man".<sup>117</sup>

This "relation", in its turn, is the relation to a value. In extreme cases, this relation may be theoretical from the very beginning: a person *may* be interested in, say, politics without having ever uttered or even formulated in his own mind a single value judgment concerning political matters. But usually, as in the examples given by Weber, at least the point of departure will be a value judgment, a positive or negative attitude to, for instance, some political occurrence. The historical sciences in particular *depend* on such a – practical or theoretical – "relation".<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the point of view of science *as such* cannot legitimately be valuational, but must remain theoretical. The conclusion, in other words, is that practical value judgments will often serve as intermediate links for theoretical value relation, not only in the logical sense (as in Rickert's construction) but directly in each actual case, for the individual wishing to obtain historical knowledge. Just as it was demonstrated in the chapter on value freedom that a person may enter into two roles, being the source of, alternately, scientific and valuational propositions, so we here see that the social scientist will often have to pass through a phase of practical valuation in order to be able to assume his theoretical role. But where the discussion of value freedom made it clear, indeed of paramount importance, that the two roles were separate in principle and that this separation ought to be strictly and consistently preserved in practice, Weber's attitude to the problem of value relation seems far more flexible. Of course, scientific propositions and value judgments are still two entirely different things; but in pointing to valuations as a frequent, and legitimate, condition of value relation, Weber hints at the possibility of a more extensive, if still controlled, interplay of practice and theory, interest and perception.

If, with this provisional conclusion in mind, we turn to Weber's various *negative* discussions in *Knies I-II* and *Crit.Stud.*,<sup>119</sup> we may initially note that a common trait of most of the scholars attacked by Weber is their view that the specific quality of history resides in its *material*, either in "the specific qualities that this material, in contradistinction to events in nature, *objectively* possesses" (objectivism) or in "the special way in which the material is 'given'" (intuitionism).<sup>120</sup> Thus, these opponents of Weber's all hold positions opposed to Weber's basic premise of the meaninglessness of reality in its immediate aspect. It is therefore reasonable to expect that Weber's criticism will again remain on the general level, and shun the detailed Rickertian argument with its precise distinctions.

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117 Goethe 1981, p. 467 (no. 725).

118 We find an interesting, late, passage backing up this view in a letter from Weber to Rickert of 7 February 1913 (*MWG II/8*), in which he puts "valuation" and "value relation" side by side as "[means of] delimitation of *objects*".

119 But, characteristically, not in *Roscher*, the essay in which Weber is most directly under the influence of Rickert.

120 Schelting 1934, p. 149. Certain other points of view are also met with, which cannot be classified under one of the two main headings; particularly prominent among them is Ed. Meyer's doctrine of *causal efficiency* as the criterion of historical importance.

This assumption is confirmed right away, in Weber's discussion concerning Wilh. Wundt's concept of the "creative synthesis". In Wundt's work, the concept serves to introduce the idea (which violates Weber's principle of value freedom<sup>121</sup>) that history is marked by "growing psychic energy"; and Weber in principle attacks the "creative synthesis" on these grounds: "... one must be extremely careful not to try to interpret the concept as containing anything besides the manifestation of a *value judgment* ..."<sup>122</sup> Particularly, one must beware of thinking that this value judgment can be read off from the material as such. According to Weber, the empirical observation of changes occurring in the material may in itself only serve as a basis for the formulation of "causal inequations" (*Kausalungleichungen*), i.e., statements according to which a particular phenomenon has causal effects that are *unlike* their cause. Such causal inequations are found in every scientific discipline, in natural science as well as in history: oxygen and hydrogen atoms are qualitatively different from the water molecules into which they are incorporated; the various internal and external factors contributing to the growth of the German National Socialist party were qualitatively different from the result which they brought about. Only when causal inequations are transformed, by the introduction of human value judgments, into "value inequations" (*Wertungleichungen*), i.e., when we ascribe to the effect a positive or negative value which was not ascribed to the separate causes, does it become legitimate to employ value-laden terms like Wundt's "creative synthesis", to denote the changes in question.<sup>123</sup>

So far, Weber's criticism of Wundt seems to refer only to a violation of the principle of value freedom, in the shape of a vague, indeed a metaphysical, way of constructing scientific concepts.<sup>124</sup> But this criticism, which clearly refers to practical value judgments,<sup>125</sup> quickly merges into a discussion of historical concepts in general, of "value relation" rather than of "valuation": "... the reflections on this relation [to human valuations] [become] the determining *reason* behind our historical interest".<sup>126</sup> This emphasis on the role of practical valuations, of *value judgments*, as "triggers" of historical interest, is present throughout the essay.<sup>127</sup>

This discussion of Wundt's conceptual aberrations does not in its conclusion go beyond Weber's main contention: that reality only possesses such meaning as we

121 See above, pp. 76-78.

122 *ORK*, p. 101/*GAW*, p. 49.

123 *ORK*, pp. 101-102/*GAW*, pp. 49-50.

124 See a letter from Weber to W. Hellpach of 10 October 1905 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 17) in which he speaks of Wundt's terminology as containing "metaphysics and no psychology" (*Metaphysik und keine Psychologie*).

125 The hypothetical argument that the term "Wertung" should not, in Weber's early essays, be interpreted as indicating practical valuations, but rather theoretical value relation, is not supported by Weber's text; see, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 101-102/*GAW*, p. 51, where Weber separately discusses the possibility of interpreting the term "creative" in this neutral sense as well.

126 *ORK*, p. 102/*GAW*, p. 50.

127 For instance *ORK*, pp. 107-108, 115-16/*GAW*, pp. 54, 60.

choose to endow it with. The latter part of *Knies I* does, however – apart from brief references to the role of values in the selection of historical material<sup>128</sup> – contain indications that a more extensive analysis of the methodological principle of value relation is possible. Thus, commenting on Simmel's *Problems of the Philosophy of History (Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie)*, Weber writes:

The fact that the entire sense of our knowledge of individual [phenomena] is anchored in value ideas also manifests itself in the “creative” influence which the historian's own pronounced value judgments can have in helping him to attain historical knowledge ... Here, value judgments serve the cause of interpretation.<sup>129</sup>

What Weber refers to here is apparently the “interpretation” which he has briefly touched upon earlier in *Knies I*, and which consists in an “analysis of possible value relations”.<sup>130</sup> Here Weber, going far beyond Rickert, envisages a proper *theory* of social science method as a supplement to, indeed almost in place of, the purely abstract and formal description of the formation of historical concepts as theoretical value relation; in his own words, he proposes a “theory of ‘interpretation’”,<sup>131</sup> in which the formulation of practical value judgments even functions as a rudimentary historical *technique*. In light of this, it seems significant that two references to the distinction between value judgments and value relation<sup>132</sup> are precisely placed in this practical context; in the place of Rickert's logical “sublimation” of value judgments into value relation, Weber formulates an equally strict, but concrete distinction: valuations may function as a means, a technique, but this phase is only a transitory one, which must be followed by theoretical value relation, i.e., by neutral observation.

Weber now develops the theme of “value analysis” (Wertanalyse) or “value interpretation” (Wertinterpretation) – the terms are used interchangeably by him, and will both in the following be translated as “value interpretation” – in *Crit.Stud.* and, shortly afterwards, in *Knies II*.

According to Weber, the *occasion* of the value interpretation is furnished by the *valuation* of some phenomenon or event as more or less positive or negative. This practical valuation indicates that the object or event in question has become *important*; but if one wishes to observe and understand this object theoretically, it is necessary, without sacrificing its importance, to remove it, intellectually, to a certain distance; it must be submitted to “afterthought”, to “reflection”: “... we first have to ‘become objective’ vis-à-vis an experience”.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> ORK, pp. 145, 151n47, 155n54(2), 157-58, 159n57/GAW, pp. 86, 92n1, 95n3(2), 99, 100n2.

<sup>129</sup> ORK, p. 159n57/GAW, p. 100n2.

<sup>130</sup> ORK, p. 149n43/GAW, p. 89n2. It is indicative of the still undeveloped distinction between valuation and value relation that this “interpretation” is here seen as the prelude to a “valuation” (Wertung), not to theoretical value relation or to some other scientific activity.

<sup>131</sup> ORK, p. 151/GAW, p. 91.

<sup>132</sup> ORK, pp. 151, 159n57/GAW, pp. 91, 100n2.

<sup>133</sup> MSS, p. 158/GAW, pp. 260-61; see also MSS, p. 143/GAW, p. 245.

This intellectual “removal to a distance” liberates the object from the original connection with a value which was expressed in the initial value judgment; consequently, the idea of a relation of the phenomenon to *other* values becomes possible and relevant. This is the actual *substance* of value interpretation: “‘interpretation’ ... in *this* sense is an inquiry into those ‘values’ which ‘we’ can find ‘embodied’ in those objects ...”<sup>134</sup> If we take, say, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* as an example, a value interpretation of the work would consist in making clear what parts of it – if any – would be relevant to (for instance) a strictly Hegelian, a neo-Hegelian, a Chinese Communist, a purely historical, but also a literary or an anti-semitic valuation. In this way, value interpretation shows up the various possible theoretical value relations<sup>135</sup> of *Das Kapital*, and consequently the focus points of the different valuations of the work; potentially, this illustration even includes the elaboration of the *content* of these various valuations, since a complete knowledge of *where* a potential valuation will be brought to bear also implies knowledge of *what* is the substance of this valuation.<sup>136</sup> The function of value interpretation is seen by Weber as very important: it is the precondition of any historical work, since it makes clear what aspects of the observed phenomenon are relevant to a particular value: “it is ... the completely necessary ‘forma formans’ of historical ‘interest’ in an object, of its primary conceptualization ... and for the causal work of history which only then and for this reason becomes meaningfully possible”.<sup>137</sup>

This theory of the formation of potential historical concepts by means of value interpretation is important to Weber not least because it is a factor of *clarity*. Where intuitionism would have defined the task of the historian as an “empathy” (*Nacherleben*) with times past, Weber’s doctrine of value interpretation forces the scholar to *formulate* and *express* exactly what he means: “in contrast to the simple ‘emotional content’, we describe something as a ‘value’ precisely if and only if it can be the content of a position: that is, an articulate and conscious positive or negative ‘judgment’ ...”<sup>138</sup> The advantages of this precision are obvious: on the one hand, it has heuristic value, because it makes for clear-cut definitions of the problems involved; and on the other hand, it permits subsequent *control* of whether the concepts are sufficient.

Though a special merit of value interpretation is its precision, an “artistic” aspect is by no means excluded. In this connection, Weber remarks that value interpretation may allow certain persons, whose negative value judgments concerning a particular object or event would otherwise have led them to ignore this object, to obtain “neutral” knowledge of its richness of potential meanings. Analysis “at a distance”

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134 *ORK*, p. 181/*GAW*, p. 122.

135 *ORK*, p. 182; *MSS*, pp. 143, 150/*GAW*, pp. 123, 246, 252.

136 Thus, *MSS*, p. 160/*GAW*, p. 262 speaks of “possible valuations”.

137 *MSS*, p. 160/*GAW*, p. 263; see also, for instance, *ORK*, p. 181; *MSS*, p. 149/*GAW*, pp. 122, 251.

138 *ORK*, p. 182/*GAW*, p. 123; see also *ORK*, p. 184; *MSS*, p. 143/*GAW*, pp. 125, 245-46.

may thus serve to enlarge the spiritual horizon of the observer. As Weber puts it: "In fact, the 'interpretation' of the spiritual, aesthetic, or ethical creation has the same effects as these creations by themselves ..." <sup>139</sup>

The function of practical *value judgments* in the process of value interpretation was to supply the *occasion* for such value interpretation. But this does not exhaust their role. Of course, value interpretation *as such* does not include the formulation of practical, personal value judgments of the object under investigation; in this connection, such practical value judgments are only acceptable within an *a priori* normative frame of reference, which will for the most part be of a *logical* nature: for instance, a historian may brand Marx's *Das Kapital* as being logically deficient in certain respects. <sup>140</sup> And Weber by no means regards such a normative frame of reference as obligatory. <sup>141</sup> But on the other hand, he points out that a strongly developed "valuational gift" may have great influence on the value interpretation: "... 'valuation' [is] the normal *psychological* transitional stage for 'intellectual understanding'". <sup>142</sup> In a sense, a great "intellectual distance" between the scholar and his object, or peculiarities and eccentric traits in his value-oriented personality, may have a fruitful influence on his scholarly work, because he may find value relations which would never have occurred to the mind of the "ordinary" scholar. Here, valuation becomes a positive aid to scholarship. At the same time, of course, the scholar runs the risk that the eccentricities which can enrich his work may also, if they get out of hand, warp it to the same extent. <sup>143</sup>

A point of interest is Weber's explicit assertion that a *large number* of value aspects may become important, that a historical object may in fact contain an infinity of valuational points of attack, and that this will increase its historical interest accordingly. <sup>144</sup> The "normal" value aspects which serve to define the various

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139 *MSS*, pp. 144-45/*GAW*, p. 247. One may wonder why Weber consistently chooses intellectual or artistic products, the "spiritual, aesthetic or ethical creations" mentioned above, to exemplify his theory of value interpretation. Thus, in *MSS*, p. 144/*GAW*, p. 246, the enumeration of possible objects of value interpretation includes a number of literary works, ranging from Marx to Marie Bashkirtseff, and one work of visual art, but not a single "non-artistic" phenomenon. Weber's choice of "spiritual" examples probably does not reflect any point of principle (cf. *MSS*, p. 149/*GAW*, p. 251, where the focus of discussion suddenly expands to include, for instance, the modern system of international relations and Germany as a state, and *MSS*, p. 161/*GAW*, p. 263, where Weber talks about the historian "using the same methods, logically speaking, as an interpreter of 'Faust'"), but is prompted by the specific context of his argument. His *general* point remains that any object chosen as the point of departure of historical investigation may, and in principle ought to, be subjected to value interpretation. The only condition is that any object of value interpretation must "embody" human values.

140 *MSS*, p. 144/*GAW*, p. 246.

141 *ORK*, p. 182; *MSS*, p. 144/*GAW*, pp. 123, 246.

142 *ORK*, p. 184/*GAW*, p. 124.

143 *ORK*, p. 184/*GAW*, pp. 124-25.

144 *MSS*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 253.

“cultural sciences” – politics, art, literature, etc. – by no means exhaust the scholar’s possibilities; on the contrary, if he wishes to break new ground, he will have to go further than the “everyday valuations for household purposes”.<sup>145</sup>

A point which requires further analysis is Weber’s repeated use of the term “philosophy of history” to cover the process of value interpretation. Weber’s point of view is formulated most directly in *Knies II*: the “inquiry into those ‘values’ which ‘we’ *can* find ‘embodied’ in [the] objects” (quoted above) is unambiguously labelled as being “accomplished by the *philosophy* of history”.<sup>146</sup> The question is, however, what exactly Weber means by this. If we consider the context, it is clear that Weber takes great pains to stress that value interpretation is certainly not *history* in the empirical sense (i.e., the linking up of concrete historical objects with their causes and effects).<sup>147</sup> This view, which we also find in *Crit.Stud.*,<sup>148</sup> is easy to understand: as we have seen, value interpretation was meant as a preparatory exercise, which did not *in itself* qualify as history, whether it be in Weber’s narrow, or in a looser, sense of that term. Value interpretation consists in the analysis of a phenomenon in the light of a previously given value and consequently, in the last resort, also consists in determining the concrete value judgments which would be formulated by a person committed to the value in question. Such an analysis is of course value analysis as well as object analysis;<sup>149</sup> and in a way, it is quite fair to regard it as “applied conceptual analysis”, in the same way that statements concerning the relation of certain means to certain ends may be termed “applied causal analysis”. Just as the means-end analysis, for a given end, has a validity equal to that of the causal laws on which the analysis is based, the “applied conceptual analysis” (value interpretation) must be supposed, for a given historical object, to possess a validity equal to that of theoretical conceptual analysis. And Weber’s view that the status of the latter is equivalent to that of ordinary empirical truth is beyond doubt.<sup>150</sup>

The question is now whether Weber *explicitly* states that value interpretation is “applied conceptual analysis” with its clear status as science. In this connection, the continuation of the passage on “the philosophy of history” quoted immediately above is of relevance. Here, Weber carefully distinguishes between valuation and the “normal”, non-evaluating value interpretation, which “is, from a logical point of view, based on a ‘dialectical’ *analysis* of values”.<sup>151</sup> And if we examine the use in Weber’s works of the expression “dialectical analysis of values”,<sup>152</sup> we find it to cover the conceptual analysis of the inner consistency or lack of mutual contradiction of ideas and values. In the same way, the essence of value interpretation is to connect

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145 *MSS*, p. 161/*GAW*, p. 263.

146 *ORK*, p. 181/*GAW*, p. 122.

147 *ORK*, p. 181/*GAW*, p. 122.

148 *MSS*, pp. 146-47, 160-61/*GAW*, pp. 248-49, 263.

149 See below, p. 171.

150 This conclusion pre-empts the result of later discussions; see below, pp. 178-79.

151 *ORK*, p. 182/*GAW*, p. 123.

152 *MSS*, p. 54; *OST*, p. 85/*GAW*, pp. 151, 312-13.

a valuational attitude with an object and to carry out a conceptual analysis of the various relations in which the object becomes relevant to the value in question.

But if value interpretation in Weber's view keeps within the realm of "scientific truth" – why then does Weber employ the expression "philosophy of history"?

At one point, Weber himself, although not quite clearly, defines the concept of "philosophy of history": "If we take ... [those] values with which we approach the facts as our objects of analysis, we are – depending on the kind of knowledge that we wish to acquire – engaging in studies either in the *philosophy* of history or in the psychology of 'historical interest'".<sup>153</sup> In other words, the philosophy of history may sometimes consist in the analysis of the conceptual structure and the conceptual relations of values (whereas psychology looks for empirical causes, and is not concerned with normative validity). This "philosophical" treatment of values can take various forms.<sup>154</sup> It may try to demonstrate the *objective validity* of certain values; in that case, it comes under the heading of metaphysics. As will be shown below, Weber does not even attempt this kind of demonstration.<sup>155</sup> Another possible variety of "the philosophy of history" is the analysis of the essential nature of values (their character as expressions of will, practical imperatives, etc.); here, we move within the realm of the philosophical theory of values, which is usually ignored by Weber.<sup>156</sup> Finally, the "philosophy of history" may have a "dialectical" character, i.e., consist in *conceptual analysis*; and in this function, its results possess full scientific validity; they are products of "scientific philosophy".<sup>157</sup>

The later essays do not shed any new light on the problems of value relation in general and value interpretation in particular. *Value Freedom* simply refers to the earlier essays;<sup>158</sup> Weber's attitude does not seem to have changed in the interval. It is therefore not uninteresting to note that the only independent remark in *Value Freedom* concerning these problems tends to stress the close connection between value interpretation and conceptual analysis: "[Discussions of value] may to a large

<sup>153</sup> *MSS*, p. 160/*GAW*, p. 262.

<sup>154</sup> *ORK*, p. 183/*GAW*, p. 124.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *ORK*, p. 99n12/*GAW*, p. 47n1. This is no doubt what Rickert (1989 (1926), p. 77) refers to when he says that Weber "always rejected all philosophy of history in the real sense of the word".

<sup>156</sup> The only exception is *MSS*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 254, which may contain a reference to a discussion (a few pages earlier) of the status of values as "feeling", "striving" or "obligation", i.e., to an exercise in philosophical value theory. Interestingly enough, the passage in question is a defence of Rickert's elaboration of the doctrine of value relation. The whole question will be treated at greater length below, pp. 144-46.

<sup>157</sup> *ORK*, pp. 181, 183; *MSS*, pp. 152, 160/*GAW*, pp. 122, 124, 254, 262-63. This exegesis of the term "philosophy of history" is supported by Weber's use of the term "social philosophy" (*Sozialphilosophie*) (*MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, pp. 150-51), which covers a similar kind of conceptual analysis. (In *MSS*, p. 59/*GAW*, p. 156, the term "Sozialphilosophie" refers to non-scientific philosophy, a point which is, however, made quite clear by Weber himself).

<sup>158</sup> *MSS*, pp. 10n3, 22/*GAW*, pp. 49n1, 511.

extent relieve the scientific investigator, in particular the historian, of the task of ‘value interpretation’, or at least make it easier”.<sup>159</sup>

As we have seen, the concepts of social science were, in Weber’s view, formed by means of a relation between immediate reality and one or more values, by which certain parts of reality were selected. This is only a preliminary to the proper task of social science, however. This task, as Weber sees it, consists, at least as far as history in the narrow sense of the word is concerned, either in the causal *explanation* of the phenomena which have attracted the interest of the scholar, or in determining the causal *effects* of these phenomena. At this point, the original problem of the historical sciences reappears: any phenomenon has an infinite number of *possible* causes and effects, both because it is made up of an infinity of partial phenomena, and because any cause or effect determined is in its turn caused by or the cause of an infinitely great number of other phenomena. What criteria should the historian apply in order to select those factors which are to be included in his account?

The most unambiguous answer to this question is found in *Objectivity*:<sup>160</sup> “... what becomes the object of investigation, and how far this investigation extends into the infinity of causal relationships, – that is determined by the value ideas which govern the investigator and are dominant in his age ...”<sup>161</sup> Here, the actual historical work of discovering causes and effects is subjected to the same methodological condition as the primary choice of the historical object: in both cases, *value relation* provides the means of reducing the infinite multiplicity to a clear structure.

On the other hand, we have Weber’s claim that the results of historical science are *objectively* true. This claim is advanced more than once in *Crit.Stud.*,<sup>162</sup> and later on in *Stammler*, where Weber writes: “It is only the point of departure of the [causal] regress ... which is determined by ‘relevance’ from the standpoint of the ‘norm’”.<sup>163</sup>

Between these two passages, Weber seems to be caught in a dilemma: in *Objectivity*, he acknowledges the role of value relation even within the chains of causation, while in *Stammler* (and implicitly in *Crit.Stud.*), he seems to deny it, since value relation is here restricted to the formation of the original historical concept.

The contradiction is more apparent than real, however. Weber’s point of view, as it emerges from a closer examination of the essays in question, can be put as follows:

Any occurrence – in *Crit.Stud.*, Weber takes the death of Caesar as an example<sup>164</sup> – is in itself impossible to grasp in every particular. In order to reduce it to the elements

<sup>159</sup> MSS, p. 22/GAW, p. 512.

<sup>160</sup> Weber’s discussion (above all in *Crit.Stud.*) of the general problem of causation in the historical sciences is not directly relevant to the question treated here.

<sup>161</sup> MSS, p. 84/GAW, p. 184. Similarly in a letter to Gottl of 29 March 1906 (*MWG II/5*).

<sup>162</sup> For instance MSS, pp. 159, 169/GAW, pp. 261, 271.

<sup>163</sup> *OSt*, p. 121/GAW, p. 341.

<sup>164</sup> MSS, pp. 170-71/GAW, pp. 272-73.

that appear significant to him, the historian performs the original value relation. If, for instance, he is writing the political history of Ancient Rome, the political aspects of the event will be the ones that engage his attention. This selection introduces a subjective element into the process, since other scholars or scientists (e.g. surgeons or art historians) might have adopted a different aspect, and from that point of view selected quite different features of the event as the important ones.<sup>165</sup>

Now, the factors which made the politically important features of the event "Caesar's death" politically important, i.e., roughly speaking, the causes of the *political* event "Caesar's death", may *in principle*<sup>166</sup> be objectively ascertained. In this sense, Weber is justified in saying that we can obtain "absolute and unconditionally valid"<sup>167</sup> knowledge of the causes of a historical phenomenon. If the number of these causes is limited, it is just possible that the historian will list them all, although even here certain (mostly negatively defined) factors might well be left out (as, for instance, the fact that Caesar did not have a permanent bodyguard); but as these factors are pursued further, the scholar will find that the chains of causation which he unravels will to an increasing degree run outside his field of interest; accordingly, he will limit himself to a few such chains, which considerations of space will even prompt him to abandon beyond a certain point of the inquiry. The same process of selection will take place with regard to the *effects* of the event.

This process of selection again undoubtedly represents a *subjective* element; but this subjectivity does not render the conclusions reached any less objective, but only forces the historian to formulate them with greater caution. Instead of results of the form: "A was *the* cause of X", he must content himself with more limited statements, usually of the type: "A was a *necessary* condition of X". If we take as given the correctness of the intellectual operations on which such statements are based, the conclusions which they embody are certainly *objectively* true; but they are also partial and *subjective* in that they only relate to certain aspects of an event (summed up in the term "the event X") and only state *certain* necessary conditions of this (partially defined) event (in this case, the cause A, which the historian regards as interesting).<sup>168</sup>

Although Weber by and large subscribes to Rickert's doctrine of value relation as the "forma formans" of the object of history, and consequently as the criterion for the formation of historical concepts, it is interesting to note that the concept of value that he employs is markedly weaker and less characteristic than the one discussed in the chapter on value freedom. In the discussion of practical value judgments *leading*

<sup>165</sup> MSS, p. 170/GAW, p. 272.

<sup>166</sup> In *practice*, this causal analysis poses a number of problems in the field of the social sciences, which are, however, for the most part irrelevant to the present account.

<sup>167</sup> MSS, p. 159/GAW, p. 261.

<sup>168</sup> Rossi (Stammer 1971, pp. 75-76) and, following him, Ciaffa (1998, pp. 70-71) assert that Weber is caught in a dilemma because "the acceptance of certain value-assumptions directly or indirectly conditions the results of the research", in a sense which Weber would otherwise deny. Oakes 1988a, pp. 146-52 analyses the question carefully and reaches substantially the same conclusion, which in my opinion goes too far. Cf. Loos 1970, p. 10n57.

to value relation and value interpretation, the term “value” is obviously employed as the result of a conscious reflection on Weber’s part: he sees practical valuation as important and positive as such. But as soon as the argument is transferred to the theoretical level, the “relation at a distance” of the scholar to his object, Weber only infrequently speaks of “theoretical value relation” and of “values” as being at the root of such value relation, and instead employs expressions like, for instance, “interest” and “significance”. This wording apparently reflects a deliberate tendency in Weber’s discussion: thus, we find him more than once claiming that the concept of “value relation” is superfluous from a purely methodological point of view. We find an interesting early formulation of this position in a draft note, originally meant for publication, written by Weber when he was re-reading Rickert’s *Limits* in connection with his work on *Roscher* and *Knies I-II* (107, p. 27). Here, he criticizes Rickert for employing the vague and ambiguous terms “value” and “value relation” to denote ideas which can be expressed more simply:

When Rickert says [that “...when we claim that any object which is to be the subject of history must be related to a value, we are in fact only converting the quite trivial truth that everything which the historian describes must be interesting, characteristic, important or significant, into logical terminology”<sup>169</sup>], it would be more fair to say that in the place of a number of admittedly trivial, but completely *understandable* terms, we get a most dangerously shimmering and ambivalent expression, which positively invites misunderstanding ...

However much you shake Rickert’s concept of “value” ... all that emerges is the sense of “worth knowing about”; consequently, the “necessity” of relating [historical material] to a value can be reduced to the statement, which *on the face of it* appears quite trivial, that history should describe those parts of empirical *reality* which are *worth knowing*.<sup>170</sup>

In *Knies I-II* (which is probably in part based on these notes), the same point is made more than once, but in weakened form and without the polemical thrust.<sup>171</sup> In *Crit.Stud.*, we find a similar formulation: “From the strictly methodological point of view, the circumstance that certain *individual* components of reality are selected as objects of historical treatment can only be explained by reference to [the] *fact* that a corresponding *interest* exists”.<sup>172</sup> And as late as *Value Freedom*, the doctrine of value relation is summed up in the short statement that the term “value relation” represents “the philosophical interpretation of that specifically scientific ‘*interest*’ ... which governs the selection and formation of the object of an empirical inquiry”.<sup>173</sup>

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169 Rickert 1902, p. 368.

170 GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6. Quoted from Bruun 2001, which reproduces the full original text of the note in question (the “Nervi fragment”) with an English translation.

171 See, for instance, *ORK*, p. 58/*GAW*, p. 6 (“... what is essential, i.e., what is worth knowing for us ...”) and *ORK*, p. 151n47/*GAW*, p. 92n1, which can almost be seen as a ghostly abstract of the Nervi fragment.

172 *MSS*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 254.

173 *MSS*, p. 22/*GAW*, p. 511.

Moreover, certain of Weber's own discussions seem to serve as a practical correlate to this theoretical doubt concerning the relevance to methodology of the concept of value.<sup>174</sup>

Why, then, does Weber retain the concept of value, or, for that matter, introduce it at all? For Rickert, this was a necessity because his demonstration of the objectivity of the historical sciences depended on the assumption of general and objective values as criteria of selection. Whether this necessity was also incumbent on Weber is a question which will be discussed below; but if we provisionally abstract from this point, it might seem legitimate and tempting to interpret the doctrine of theoretical value relation, as it appears in Weber's methodology, as referring simply to the choice of different *aspects*: the expression "value relation" would in that case have to be regarded as a linguistic remnant, and be taken to imply simply that reality may be viewed under many different aspects or points of view, and that different parts of reality become relevant under different aspects.

Against this hypothesis must be set certain explicit denials by Weber himself. The most unequivocal of these denials is found in *Crit.Stud.*<sup>175</sup> Franz Eulenburg and others had criticized Rickert and claimed that his theoretical value relation was in fact nothing more than a subsumption under *general concepts*, "... like the separate treatment, within the natural sciences, of the 'chemical', 'physical' etc. 'aspect' of events"<sup>176</sup> – that it was, in other words, an aspect theory trimmed with metaphysical value judgments. Weber angrily rejects this criticism: "This is a strange misconception of the meaning – the only possible meaning – of 'value relation'".<sup>177</sup> As for practical *valuation* (which is relevant to the discussion, since it is a *practical* "value relation"), he – correctly – insists that it is something essentially different from a subsumption under a general concept; but when it comes to theoretical value relation, the argument begins to waver. Weber claims that the value interpretation of a historical object consists in pointing out with precision the numerous different relations in which the object engages our interest, and that the object which in this way engages our interest to the maximum is that which is relevant under a large number of aspects; and from this he concludes that it is just as pointless to try to exhaust the whole complex of meaning and values which we find in such an object, by referring to *one* general concept, as it would be to try, for instance, to say the *whole* truth in one sentence.<sup>178</sup> But that sort of ambition does not form part of Eulenburg's actual attempts to formulate an aspect theory: on the contrary, the idea of an aspect theory in Eulenburg's view implied that the reality and actual meaning

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174 For instance *MSS*, pp. 64-66/*GAW*, pp. 161-64, where the classification of phenomena as being "economic", "economically relevant" or "economically determined" is carried out without any reference to the term or concept of value.

175 *MSS*, pp. 149-52/*GAW*, pp. 252-54.

176 *MSS*, p. 150/*GAW*, p. 252.

177 *MSS*, p. 150/*GAW*, p. 252.

178 *MSS*, pp. 151-52/*GAW*, pp. 253-54.

of a phenomenon could only be rendered by a – possibly unending – listing of its meaning under different aspects.<sup>179</sup>

A more pertinent argument of Weber's is found in a letter of 29 March 1906, to Fr. Gottl,<sup>180</sup> in which Weber writes:

Moreover, I do *not* admit that “value” stands on the same level as “interest” or “significance” (Wesentlichkeit) ... Under *all* circumstances, “valuation” takes us into another world (that of the “subject taking a stand”, as Münsterberg describes it). In the *nomothetical* sciences, one also finds the guiding function of “interest” and the “significant”, but *not* the anchoring to “values”.

On the face of it, we here have a direct contradiction of the “aspect theory” interpretation and, more specifically, of the view that “interest” is terminologically preferable to “value”. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real.

First of all, one should note that Weber supports his retention of the value element by pointing to the necessity of distinguishing between the natural and the social sciences (as defined by their respective typical methods); in other words, the necessity is rooted in a respect for *Rickert's* methodological problems and aims.<sup>181</sup> In the “Nervi fragment” and the other passages quoted in that connection, Weber deals with the question of the best terminology for describing the selection of elements for a work of “history” (as opposed to natural science). *In this respect*, he registers a distinct preference for “interest” rather than “value”, and notes that “value” does not indicate more than “worth knowing”. What Weber is stressing in his letter to Gottl is something else: He is speaking about values as a basis for active valuation; and valuation is something that involves taking an *active* stand, and *therefore* has its home on a different level, logically speaking, from that of *theoretical* judgments of “interest”, “significance”, etc. Indeed, with this reading in mind, the letter to Gottl turns from a paradox into a further confirmation of the view in the “Nervi fragment”: in both texts, Weber is insisting that, since the concept of value belongs to the realm of active valuation, it is dangerous to use the term “value” in its “logical” designation of the process of theoretical concept formation in the historical sciences.

One is led to conclude that Weber normally actively defends the retention of the explicit value element in the theory of the constitution of scientific objects only when he argues on Rickert's behalf (in rejoinders to criticism, and thus in a context which is imposed upon him). In his own methodological constructions, the use

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179 “... again, if one tries to cover all aspects of a single object – its so-called ‘reality’ – then one has to break down that process into partial processes, and then base oneself on a succession of separate major concepts” (Eulenburg 1905, p. 526n18; this is the essay to which Weber refers).

180 *MWG II/5*.

181 This circumstance is explained by the fact that the primary target of both Eulenburg and Gottl is Rickert, not Weber (cf. certain remarks in the letter of 29 March 1906 to Gottl, and in letters of 16 April 1905 to Eulenburg (copy in *GStA I*, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/4) and of 12 March 1906 to von Bortkiewicz (*MWG II/5*)).

of the concept of value is still *justified*; but because of Weber's exclusive interest in the social sciences, the concept does not carry its original weight; it becomes unproblematical – indeed, in purely methodological discussions, unnecessary – and it comes to be employed tonelessly.<sup>182</sup> To close the gap between Weber's version of the theory of value relation and an aspect theory, all that is needed is the subsidence of the conflict between the natural and the social sciences.<sup>183</sup>

In fact, only in two cases – if we still abstract from the problem of the objectivity of science – does Weber's discussion of the formation of historical concepts depend on the use of the concept of “value” rather than “aspect” or “point of view”: first, as mentioned above, with regard to the valuation which is the point of departure of historical interest; and, secondly, in connection with his treatment of the implications of value interpretation. And on this last point, his analysis comes close to the general conceptual analysis of values which is primarily relevant not to the logic of history, but to the practice of social science.

Summing up, we can conclude that Weber's discussion of the relation between values and phenomena, without being actually different from Rickert's, implicitly diverges from it on the following points:

Rickert's careful distinction between the object level and the research level is blurred, mainly as a result of Weber's attacks on objectivism and intuitionism: since the investigator is allowed to assume, within limits, the role of practical valuation of the historical phenomena, the transition to his primary role of theoretical contemplation, although stressed by Weber as essential in principle, often simply means that the scholar changes roles.

The theory of value relation, applied to history as a type of scientific activity, is elaborated by means of Weber's reflections on value interpretation as a practical aid to the scholar; partly because of his belief in the importance of brilliant and unusual valuations on the scholar's part, Weber discusses this practical aid almost as if it were a scientific technique.

Weber puts the number of possible aspects as very great, indeed as infinite in the case of the most important historical objects; he sees the discovery of new aspects as highly desirable.

The reflections on value interpretation as an instrument for the construction of historical concepts tends to be absorbed by the more concrete treatment of values as an object of social science.

Weber's discussion of theoretical value relation seems to reduce the methodological importance of a specific reference to values, and consequently, to a certain extent, to pave the way for a simple aspect theory.

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182 Significantly, a large number of commentators (for instance Baumgarten (1964, p. 592) and Loos (1970, p. 34) tacitly replace “value” with terms like “aspect” or “point of view” in their interpretations.

183 See below, p. 161, for a discussion of the contribution made by Weber himself towards such a subsidence.

*The origin of the values; the concept of culture*

As we did in the account of Rickert's argument, we can now ask *where* the scholar is to seek the values to which he relates historical phenomena. The fundamental reason for this question is of course the need for a *justification* of the value chosen. As we have seen, the demand for such a justification was urgent in Rickert's case, since the question of the origin of the values was identical with that of their validity, and consequently of the *objectivity* of the results of historical science.

In Weber's case, this problem of objectivity and validity is best approached by asking whether the scientific *material* has a decisive influence on the selection of values.

The answer to this question was already foreshadowed in the discussion of Weber's attack on objectivism and intuitionism. Obviously, a scholar whose basic premise is that history only has the meaning with which we provide it will find it difficult to accept a view according to which this intrinsically "meaningless" subject-matter has any material influence on the formation of historical concepts. Weber's work contains a profusion of positive statements to this effect. Thus, he writes in *Objectivity*: "Again and again, the notion crops up that such perspectives can be 'derived from the material by itself'; but this is due to a naïve self-deception on the part of the academic specialist ..."<sup>184</sup> Indeed, as Weber points out, this "naïve" view contains a logical circularity, since it assumes the historical object to be formed – that is, defined – by means of values which are to be taken from the object itself.<sup>185</sup>

But even though these passages conclusively show that the values cannot *initially* be found in the historical subject-matter, Weber might still possibly accept the idea of a *subsequent* control, in the sense that the material, although not invested with a "value initiative", might, by virtue of its content, *prevent* certain value relations from being carried out. As mentioned above, this may even be the most accurate rendering of Rickert's thought. However, Weber explicitly rejects even this moderate version (whose logical structure is admittedly just as circular as that of the extreme one): for instance, he states in *Objectivity* that it is legitimate to classify an institution as "economic" – i.e., mainly interesting to the scholar in its economic aspect – even where its origin and function give no evidence of *deliberate* attempts to orientate it according to an economic point of view.<sup>186</sup> And in *Knies II*, Weber is quite explicit:

... [value interpretation] does not mean ... interpreting what those who historically participated in the production of the "valued" object subjectively "felt" from their point of view (if the value interpretation has intrinsic value, that kind of ["historical"] knowledge can only serve as a possible aid to improving our "understanding" of the value). Instead,

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184 *MSS*, p. 82/*GAW*, p. 181. The opposition to Rickert, both in substance and in formulation, is striking; cf. Rickert 1902, p. 567: "In an 'objective' scientific account, the values that guide the concept formation must always be derived from the historical material by itself".

185 *MSS*, p. 76/*GAW*, pp. 175-76.

186 *MSS*, p. 64/*GAW*, p. 162.

it means interpreting the values that “we” “can” – or possibly: “should” – find in the object.<sup>187</sup>

Thus, the practical valuations found on the object level may at most serve as useful signposts for the scholar and fire his imagination; but often, and particularly if the period investigated is one which has been discussed by scholars for a long time, the “object valuations” will be generally known, and have been used by generation after generation of unimaginative historians; they will have become “everyday valuations”. In such cases, Weber clearly expects scholars who are not methodologically “unconscious” to leap boldly to new and untried points of view.

It follows from this conclusion that the subject-matter of historical science may include more than culture in Rickert's normative sense of the word. This, however, only shifts the problems of the origin of the values, but does not solve it. In Weber's view, the values entering into theoretical value relation originate on the research level: that is, they represent the views of the social scientist (or of his contemporaries) as to what is of interest;<sup>188</sup> but is the scholar justified in regarding himself as quite free in this choice, so free that the aspect chosen may turn out to be interesting only to himself? Or is the choice restricted to values which are “general” in some sense, as was the case in Rickert's construction?

It is not possible to state Weber's position on this point unambiguously. The blurring, noted above, of the distinction between the object level and the research level is accompanied by a similar uncertainty in the distinction between the scholar and his contemporary public, his “times”. Weber usually employs the term “we”: “we” find a phenomenon interesting; “our” values have a decisive influence; and while this terminology emphasizes the opposition to objectivist views,<sup>189</sup> it does not tell us whether Weber addresses himself to, and by this expression refers to, his colleagues only, or whether he speaks to, and of, all those of his contemporaries who take an interest in scientific writings.<sup>190</sup> A significant indication of Weber's consciousness of the vagueness of the reference is his occasional and idiosyncratic use, in these connections, of inverted commas around the pronoun “we”.<sup>191</sup>

A number of arguments can be marshalled to support the view that Weber did not see any necessity for the scholar to restrict himself to, or even to include, empirically or normatively general values as criteria of selection: in short, that he saw theoretical value relation as the personal prerogative of the scholar. In this connection, the

187 *ORK*, p. 182/*GAW*, pp. 122-23. One should not see any neo-Kantian implications in the word “should” – it refers, as the context makes absolutely clear, to the situation of *normative* disciplines, like aesthetics.

188 “[It is] ... absolutely ... correct, that every ‘history’ is written from the standpoint of the value interests of the *present* ...” (*MSS*, p. 157/*GAW*, p. 259).

189 At least to the extent to which it is possible to state with certainty that Weber identifies himself with the *investigator*. This is usually the case in his methodological writings.

190 Instances of such neutral formulations are *ORK*, p. 185; *MSS*, pp. 76, 155/*GAW*, pp. 126, 175, 257.

191 For instance *ORK*, pp. 181-82; *MSS*, p. 151/*GAW*, pp. 122-23, 253.

discussion of value interpretation (summarized above) seems important, since it was clearly marked by Weber's conviction that the ability to arrive at new and original value relations was a positive attribute of the scholar. A number of other passages also support this "subjective" interpretation. In *Objectivity*, for instance, Weber writes:

... without the investigator's value ideas, there would be no principle according to which the subject-matter could be selected, and no meaningful knowledge of individual reality; and just as any attempt to gain knowledge of *individual* reality is simply meaningless if the investigator does not *believe* that the substance of some culture has *significance*, so the direction of his personal belief, the refraction of values in the prism of his soul, will give direction to his work. And the values to which the scientific genius relates the objects of his inquiry may be able to determine ... the "conception" of a whole epoch.<sup>192</sup>

Here, Weber's view is clearly that the personal preferences of the scholar are important to the selection of value relations, in fact so important that these preferences may influence the way in which a whole generation formulates its problems. But the values arrived at in this way are not explicitly stated to be those of the scholar himself;<sup>193</sup> the expression "the refraction of values in the prism of his soul" rather seems to imply that these values are shared by a number of people, and that they are only *modified*, varied, by the treatment which they receive at the hands of the imaginative scholar.

A more distinct "subjective" tendency is found in a passage in *Crit.Stud.* where Weber concurs with the view of Ed. Meyer according to which the historian finds the problems in terms of which he approaches his subject "within himself".<sup>194</sup> And the "subjective" interpretation is most clearly supported by the footnote, quoted above, in *Knies II*, in which he stresses the potentialities, with regard to value interpretation, of the "brilliant" historian, and then goes on to formulate his attitude as follows: "... in the choice of the values guiding [value relation] ... the historian is 'free'".<sup>195</sup>

Against these passages supporting the "subjective" construction, we have to set a number of others which explicitly refer to the values of the contemporaries of the scholar as having an important influence on his value relation.

Thus, we find Weber talking of "general cultural significance",<sup>196</sup> and, since he interprets "general" in this connection as synonymous with "universal",<sup>197</sup>

192 *MSS*, p. 82/*GAW*, p. 182.

193 As for the term "cultural substance", see below, pp. 151-56.

194 *MSS*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 254. This expression of Meyer's is particularly interesting since it is intended as a *clarification* of an earlier statement, according to which the interests of "the present" in general were decisive in the formation of historical concepts.

195 *ORK*, p. 183n89/*GAW*, p. 124n1.

196 *MSS*, p. 78/*GAW*, p. 178. Similarly *MSS*, p. 170/*GAW*, p. 272, where the term "general significance" is, however, put in inverted commas – a sure sign that Weber wants us to think carefully about what exactly it means.

197 Cf. Rickert's essay "Die vier Arten des Allgemeinen in der Geschichte" ("The four varieties of generality in history"), reprinted in Rickert 1929 (1902), especially pp. 742-44, 751-52.

of “universal ‘cultural values’” and of “universally significant” phenomena.<sup>198</sup> Expressions like “the value ideas which govern the investigator and are dominant in his age”<sup>199</sup> are also relevant here.

Of course it is *possible* to see the contrast between the affirmation of the independent, subjective role of the scholar on the one hand and the importance of general or universal values on the other, as indicating an inconsistency in Weber's thought. However, it seems important to emphasize that Weber's construction is not in the same way as Rickert's dependent on the general validity of the values entering into the theoretical value relation. The complete chain of reasoning leading to this affirmation will be given at a later point,<sup>200</sup> but already at this stage, it seems useful to quote the most relevant passage in this connection:

Undoubtedly, all such value ideas are “subjective”. Between the “historical” interest in a family chronicle and the “historical” interest in the development of the greatest imaginable cultural phenomena which over long periods have been, and still are, common to a nation or to mankind, there is an infinite scale of “significance”, a scale whose elements will for each of us be ordered differently.<sup>201</sup>

This must surely be taken to mean that the values chosen may be of great importance to one person but of little or no interest to another. Consequently, these values need not always, and perhaps cannot ever, be *empirically* general, i.e., be regarded as interesting by *everyone*. However, the most essential part of the passage is the sequel:

But obviously, this does *not* imply that *research* in the cultural sciences can only have *results* which are “subjective” *in the sense of being valid* for one person but not for another. Rather, what varies is the degree to which such results *interest* one person but not another.

In other words, the fact that values may lack empirical generality does not mean that the validity of a scientific work based on them is in any way forfeited or restricted, but only that fewer, possibly very few, people are going to be *interested* in the work. This last consequence is of course serious enough from the scholar's personal point of view; but it is of no great *logical* importance. While it is therefore still *possible* to see the different passages quoted above as revealing an inconsistency in Weber's construction, it is not *necessary* to do so: the “subjective” and the “contemporary” point of view may be reconciled in an interpretation according to which the fundamental right of the scholar to choose his theoretical values freely is tempered by his interest in (but not his duty of) choosing values whose empirically general

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198 MSS, pp. 82, 133n16/GAW, pp. 181 and 236n1 respectively. Similarly, in a letter to Count Keyserling of 21 June 1911 (MWG II/7) (“history is a *selection*, oriented towards universally significant *values*, from what exists”).

199 MSS, p. 84/GAW, p. 184.

200 See pp. 156-57.

201 MSS, pp. 83-84/GAW, pp. 183-84.

incidence will ensure the necessary interest in his work. This construction will be taken as the basis of the subsequent argument.

Much more important than the scattered references to “general” or “universal” values is Weber’s strikingly frequent use of the term “culture”, by itself or in constructions like “cultural value” or “cultural significance”.<sup>202</sup> As mentioned above,<sup>203</sup> Rickert defines a concept of culture which includes not only the empirically, but also the normatively, general validity. If Weber’s use of the word can be shown to coincide with Rickert’s definition of the concept, the “harmonizing” conclusion arrived at above must be abandoned to make place for an interpretation which accords far more prominence to the general aspects of the values entering into value relation than to the subjective ones.

In various passages, Weber analyses the concept of “culture”, explicitly or implicitly, or at least gives it a more precise definition. Naturally, these conceptual discussions must stand at the centre of the following account.

The apparently most “Rickertian” passage is found in a footnote,<sup>204</sup> in which Weber, in a context which includes theoretical value relation, laconically states that “the concept of ‘culture’ employed here is that [defined by] Rickert”.<sup>205</sup> It should be noted, however, that Weber adds: “At this point, before criticizing Stammer’s views on these issues” (that is, for polemical reasons rather than because of any fundamental necessity), “I shall deliberately refrain from introducing the concept of ‘social life’”.

In this passage, Weber also refers to *Objectivity* and *Crit.Stud.*, and in *Objectivity*, we do in fact find a number of interesting discussions of the concept of “culture”. The first one of these is fairly short: “The concept of culture is a *value concept*. Empirical reality *is* culture for us because, and to the extent that, we relate it to value ideas”.<sup>206</sup> One notes the “subjective” approach which characterizes both the non-objectivist definition of culture (as something to which the *observer* ascribes importance), but also the complete vagueness as to the nature of the values to be used as guidelines in this process. “Value ideas” is in itself an expression which may refer to any value, from the solitary and subjective to the social and general ones.

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202 For “cultural value”, cf. *ORK*, pp. 108, 142; *MSS*, pp. 78, 155/*GAW*, pp. 54, 83, 178, 257; for “cultural significance”, cf. *MSS*, pp. 72, 76, 111, 130/*GAW*, pp. 170, 175, 214, 232 (the term is almost exclusively used in *Objectivity*).

203 See pp. 122-24.

204 *OSt*, p. 124n16/*GAW*, p. 343n1.

205 A similar statement is found in the *Memorandum*, p. 167, where Weber, commenting on the term “cultural science”, refers to Rickert. The quotation is not very important, though, since this is obviously a purely formal reference without any attempt at closer discussion or definition. This formal character is emphasized by the fact that the reference to Rickert disappears in *Value Freedom* (*MSS*, p. 21/*GAW*, p. 511); “cultural science” is replaced by “empirical disciplines”.

206 *MSS*, p. 76/*GAW*, p. 175. Similarly in a letter of 10 October 1905 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 17) to Willy Hellpach.

A little later, this definition is expanded a little:<sup>207</sup> "'Culture' is a finite section of the meaningless infinity of events in the world, endowed with meaning and significance from the standpoint of *human beings*". And shortly afterwards, we find the following central and often-quoted passage:

The transcendental precondition of any *cultural science* is *not* that we find a particular, or indeed any, "culture" *valuable*, but that we *are* cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take up deliberate *positions* to the world, and to bestow *meaning* on it.<sup>208</sup>

Here again, culture is defined *subjectively*: everything to which we ascribe meaning is, because and only because of this circumstance, culture; and any value which can be used in such a value relation may legitimately be called a cultural value. The latter part of the quotation should probably be interpreted as a restatement of the argument without the special reference to the *theoretical* dimension: to a person moving in real life, culture is anything to which he takes a, practical or theoretical, valuational attitude. Nothing in the passage suggests that the values in question must fulfil certain conditions of generality (107, pp. 25-26).

In a number of other definitions or analytical passages in *Objectivity*, the same tendency is noticeable.<sup>209</sup> A similar, if implicit, reference is found in *Knies II*.<sup>210</sup> In *Crit.Stud.*, too,<sup>211</sup> "relation to value ideas", without further specification, is said to constitute the essence of the concept of culture, an identification which is repeated in *Value Freedom*.<sup>212</sup>

However, this array of definitions that are in themselves unequivocal does not completely solve the problem of the relation between Weber's and Rickert's concepts of culture. For one thing, they conflict with the footnote quoted above, which simply referred to Rickert's concept of culture; and moreover, it seems inexplicable that Weber, if "culture" to him meant *nothing* more than "the result of any value relation", should repeatedly go to the trouble of talking about "relation to ideas of cultural value", "cultural significance", etc. – since these formulations would then, strictly speaking, be completely tautological.

An interesting clue in this connection is provided by Emerich Francis, who points out that the term "culture" in Weber's work can often be replaced by "social" without any change of meaning in the given context.<sup>213</sup> Although this identification is not directly supported by the definitions of "culture" quoted above, it does seem to break

207 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, p. 180 (quoted in a larger context above, p. 180).

208 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, p. 180. An interesting point of detail is the unusually great number of underlined words in this passage.

209 For instance, in *MSS*, p. 85/*GAW*, p. 185, Weber uses the following definition: "'culture', i.e., significant in its specific character".

210 *ORK*, p. 142/*GAW*, p. 83.

211 *MSS*, p. 160/*GAW*, p. 262.

212 *MSS*, p. 22/*GAW*, p. 512: "cultural interests – that is to say: *value* interests ..."

213 Francis 1966, pp. 92, 98-99.

through here and there. One instance of this is the footnote quoted above,<sup>214</sup> in which “culture” and “social life” are implicitly treated by Weber as synonyms; in other passages, the term “the sciences of human culture” is placed in close conjunction with “the sciences of social life” or “knowledge in social science”;<sup>215</sup> and “the basic components of culture” are said to be the object of “social science”.<sup>216</sup> This social aspect is also indirectly present in the central definition just quoted,<sup>217</sup> which is accompanied by the remark: “Whatever this meaning may be, it will become the basis on which we are, in our life, led to *judge* certain phenomena of human community ...”<sup>218</sup> On the other hand, we do have an explicit remark from Weber to the effect that the term “social phenomena” “perhaps has a somewhat narrower reference [than that of ‘cultural life’]”.<sup>219</sup>

Francis<sup>220</sup> gives quite convincing reasons why Weber was somewhat wary of the term “social” in his early methodological work; but the passages quoted already seem to warrant the hypothesis that the term “culture” indicates or evokes overtones of a *social* element; consequently, the choice of the “cultural values” which govern the value relation may be similarly restricted to social values, the latter term being defined as values which in their orientation reach beyond the isolated individual. It should be noted, however, that all the passages supporting this hypothesis refer to the *subject-matter* of history, while not explicitly setting limits to the *values* which may be used as criteria of selection from this subject-matter.<sup>221</sup>

If we compare Rickert’s definition of culture with the two possible definitions sketched out above – culture as meaningful reality, and culture as meaningful social life (the latter concept defined as broadly and as formally as possible) – we arrive at the following conclusions:

The first Weberian concept of culture contains no indications of the nature of the values entering into the value relation. More especially, it implies no need to keep to social values (as, for instance, politics, art, economics, religion, literature). Naturally, it is to be expected that the interest of the scholar’s contemporary public will be more readily awakened by work based on such social criteria; but it may be possible to conceive of scholarly investigations where the value criteria of selection are solitary rather than social, but which would nevertheless command considerable attention; and even if works guided by such solitary values claimed the attention only of a very narrow circle, perhaps only of the scholar himself, this deficiency

214 See p. 151.

215 *MSS*, pp. 105 and 89/*GAW*, pp. 207 and 190, respectively.

216 *OSt*, p. 116/*GAW*, p. 337.

217 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, p. 180.

218 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, pp. 180-81.

219 *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 170.

220 Francis 1966, pp. 106-10.

221 On the other hand, we may have accounts of “non-social” life, written from the point of view of a social and cultural value: one example, which Weber goes into for polemical reasons, is Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, who, although alone on the island, behaves rationally from an economic point of view (*OSt*, pp. 99-100/*GAW*, p. 324).

would not in Weber's eyes detract from the *validity* of the scholarly effort. The divergence from Rickert's concept of culture here seems essential in a double sense: first, Weber nowhere excludes solitary values; and secondly, the values chosen (whether solitary or social) do not have to be empirically general in order to become logically acceptable. But admittedly, this category must be regarded as a purely limiting case.

The more relevant, "social" Weberian concept of culture lies considerably closer to Rickert's. Although the social aspect is only introduced explicitly by Weber with regard to the subject-matter, this admittedly implies a similar limitation of the theoretical values. (Similarly, under a solitary value aspect only those parts of the subject-matter would be considered important which interested the scholar because of their solitary, i.e., non-social, significance. Social life might of course serve as raw material for this scientific process; but its social aspects would not be incorporated into the concepts formed, so that the result could only in terms of a very formal interpretation qualify as part of "the sciences of social life".)

It therefore seems reasonable to assume that Weber's second definition of culture contains the implicit demand that the scholar should only use *social* values as criteria of selection in his scientific work. But this is the narrowest construction which can be put on the passages in question in Weber's work: *any* social value must be considered as logically acceptable in his view. Whether it will also engage the *interest* of the public is a question without importance in this connection (107, pp. 22-25).

Rickert's concept of culture initially exhibits features which seem to permit a similar interpretation. Although he relates the "general values", necessary to the objectivity of history, to the concept of "community", this concept is defined very broadly: "general values ... only occur in human beings ..., who live in some sort of *community* with each other, and who are therefore *social beings* in the widest sense of the term", and the general values are accordingly referred to as "social values".<sup>222</sup> So far, Weber's "social" definition of culture is identical with the one proposed by Rickert.

However, Rickert's broad definition of "community" is only tenable as long as he does not bring up the question of the relation between empirical and normative generality. When this happens, a little later on in the argument<sup>223</sup>, the result – which is necessary to Rickert's subsequent chain of reasoning – is that *normative* generality is seen as the major concept. In accordance with this conclusion, the *formal* definition of "community" is supplanted by a *material* one: Rickert now sees general values as those values which pertain to affairs or institutions common to "the members of a community" or "the members of a society".<sup>224</sup> "Community" becomes an objective

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222 Rickert 1902, p. 573.

223 See above, pp. 122-24.

224 Rickert 1902, pp. 576-77. The argument only deals directly with the historical object; but because of Rickert's doctrine of the interdependence of object and investigator, the conclusions are also valid for the "community" of the scholar, a point which is made quite clear in the discussion (Rickert 1902, p. 629).

structure embracing the persons or institutions who possess the “legitimate” (according to some higher principle) power of defining cultural values, as well as the persons of whom acceptance of these cultural values may “legitimately” (according to the same principle) be demanded.

Nothing in Weber’s work corresponds to this further limitation on Rickert’s part of the number of value aspects in social (“cultural”) science.<sup>225</sup> The scholar may often employ value criteria corresponding to those current among his contemporaries; but this is in no way a logical necessity in Weber’s eyes. On the contrary, the scholar may base his work on social values which, although they are not normative from the point of view of his own “community”, his nation, may nevertheless claim a large measure of interest from his contemporaries (one instance of this might be a work concerning the history or sociology of religion, written in a society which, *qua* society, was quite indifferent to religion, but which tolerated religious interest and religious practice on the part of its citizens: this work might be considered very interesting, but would apparently not, according to Rickert’s criterion, be based on cultural values). As mentioned above, Weber even expects that scholars who base their work on unusual value relations may *influence* their contemporaries: the fact that certain value criteria lack general validity may thus even endow them with a positive educational function.

A *third* concept of culture which lies close to the surface in *Rickert’s* work, without ever emerging completely, is the view of cultural values as embodying that which is normatively *valuable*. In this connection, one may point to his definition of “culture”<sup>226</sup> as “every good that *ought to be* the concern of all the members of a community, and which one may *demand* from them that they care for”.<sup>227</sup> This definition corresponds to a common-sense idea of culture frequently met with, and is indeed often used by Weber in this sense.<sup>228</sup> But this use of the word as a linguistic aid does not permit the conclusion that Weber deliberately defined “culture” as identical with the positively valuable part of social life. On the contrary, he sharply rejects “such crude misunderstandings as the idea that cultural significance may only be ascribed to valuable phenomena”, and adds: “prostitution is as much a cultural phenomenon as religion or money ...”<sup>229</sup> If we substitute “prostitution” for “culture”

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225 Before 1913, Weber very infrequently employs the term “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) in his methodological work, and usually (see *ORK*, pp. 85n83, 203/*GAW*, pp. 35n1, 141) in connection with a criticism of organic political theories. After 1913, the word acquires a technical meaning which is not far removed from the definition of “social” made above (cf. *GAW*, p. 441).

226 Rickert 1902, p. 577.

227 Similarly Oakes 1997, p. 71n7, who quotes Rickert’s revealing statement that “it can never occur to a historian to claim that Luther’s personality is historically *unimportant*”.

228 Francis 1966, pp. 94-98.

229 *MSS*, p. 81/*GAW*, p. 181.

in Rickert's "positive" definition of culture quoted above, we immediately see that Rickert cannot expect Weber to support this definition.<sup>230</sup>

The discussion can be summed up as follows: Neither of Weber's two possible concepts of culture contains the normative element which is a prominent feature of the Rickertian definitions of culture, and the first one (admittedly a limiting case) also lacks the social element which is essential to "culture" in Rickert's sense. The provisional hypothesis according to which Weber allows the scholar a free choice of theoretical values may therefore be regarded as correct, subject to two modifications: the value chosen must permit the endowment of reality with *meaning*; and it must moreover, if the second of Weber's definitions of culture is adopted, allow the socially (in the widest sense of the word) relevant phenomena to stand out, i.e., it must be a social value. On the other hand, it should be stressed that a large number of the theoretical values *actually* employed by historians are probably covered *both* by one of Weber's *and* by Rickert's definitions of cultural values.

### *Objectivity*

The next problem, which is in a certain sense decisive both to Weber and to Rickert, is that concerning the *objectivity* of the results of social science (107, pp. 26-32). First of all, it is necessary to provide a firm logical basis for the conclusion touched upon<sup>231</sup> and even pre-empted<sup>232</sup> in the account given above, according to which the question of the general validity of the value criteria in Weber's view, unlike that of Rickert, is irrelevant to the validity of the scientific results.

As we have seen, Rickert's conclusion was based on the following argument: since immediate reality is infinite in its multiplicity, any science has to *select* its subject-matter from it. The objectivity of the scientific results therefore cannot reside in their correspondence with the *material* on which they are based, since this material is always the result of a prior selection and processing; instead, the objectivity of the results must depend on the *objectivity of the criteria* of this prior selection. Since the criteria of selection in the historical, "cultural" sciences are cultural values, we need a demonstration of the empirical objectivity of these cultural values; and Rickert carries out this demonstration by establishing empirically that the cultural values in question are *normatively* general.

This kind of demonstration is completely lacking in Weber's work. From the very beginning, in a note written during his first reading of *Limits*, he rejects the whole idea:

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230 Probably, though, the definition in question results from the confusion between the "technical" and the common-sense concepts of culture; such a confusion is almost inevitable when technical terms lie close to everyday language, as they do in *Limits*. On this last point, see Weber's criticism of Rickert's term "natural science", *ORK*, p. 185n92/*GAW*, p. 126n1.

231 See pp. 140, 144.

232 See p. 150.

The *actual* existence of a *general* interest in many parts of reality, and the *lack*, even the factually *general* lack, of such an interest in by far the larger part of reality is, as a fact, quite easy to explain *psychologically*, and the same holds for the *gradations*, at least in their general features ... [,] but the attempt – *to formulate norms* in my opinion leads ... into metaphysics ...<sup>233</sup>

In *Knies I*, the question of the validity of the guiding theoretical values is relegated to the field of the philosophy of history.<sup>234</sup> In *Objectivity*,<sup>235</sup> *Knies II*<sup>236</sup> and *Crit. Stud.*,<sup>237</sup> we find similar refusals of a discussion of the question. In the last of these essays, Weber illustrates his view by an example: it is not possible, he says, to *prove*, by logical or empirical argument, the value of a scientific interest in Marx's "Das Kapital", in modern political history, or in any other historical object.<sup>238</sup>

Thus, Weber severs the connection between empirically demonstrated and normatively valid values; at the most, his interest goes as far as the empirical generality of the latter, but this is not for logical reasons but because he sees it as *practically* desirable that the work of scholars should command interest among their contemporaries. In principle, Weber regards the theoretical values which guide the work of social science as purely subjective – except perhaps for a necessary social element – and not as tied to any higher philosophical or logical necessity.

This undoubtedly brings Weber into harmony with his own demand for the *value freedom* of science. But on the other hand, the question of the *objectivity* of science presents itself with renewed urgency: if the theoretical values which have a constitutive function in social science are completely subjective, how are we able to speak of "objective" knowledge in these disciplines at all? Has not the strict adherence to the principle of value freedom brought with it the logical disintegration of the "Is" category? Have not *both* spheres, the sphere of scientific inquiry as well as the value sphere, been made optional, so that you *choose* scientific truth in the same way as you choose (indeed, *must* choose) a value?

The account given above showed that Weber certainly did not accept this interpretation. But the central problem is of course that of *defending* the objectivity of social science, and this problem grows more acute when Rickert's line of defence is rejected. In the light of this, Weber's own argument seems surprisingly brief. Even in *Objectivity*, the title of which indicates that the essay is above all meant to discuss

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233 "Das *faktische* Bestehen *allgemeinen* Interesses an manchen Teilen der Wirklichkeit u. das *Fehlen*, auch das faktisch *allgemeine* Fehlen von solchem an dem überwiegenden andern Teil derselben ist als Thatsache *psychologisch* recht leicht zu erklären, ebenso wenigstens in ihren allgemeinen Zügen die *Gradabstufung* ... [,] der Versuch aber – *Normen zu formulieren* führt m. E. ... in die Metaphysik ..." [unfinished] (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6).

234 *ORK*, p. 99n12/*GAW*, p. 47n1. "Philosophy of history" is here clearly understood as speculative, not as "scientific" philosophy.

235 *MSS*, p. 111/*GAW*, p. 213.

236 *ORK*, p. 181/*GAW*, p. 122.

237 *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, p. 261.

238 *MSS*, p. 149/*GAW*, p. 251.

the question of objectivity, the direct treatment of the problem is limited to a few pages and has an almost casual character.

While Weber in *Roscher* keeps quite silent on this point, in *Knies I*, he breaks with “categorical” objectivity and introduces his own solution: “objective” reality is here defined as the reality which we find when we abstract from all value judgments and value relations, i.e., as identical with immediate reality.<sup>239</sup> Consequently, this “objective” reality in itself has no settled value or interest; but the conclusion arrived at above still holds, according to which Weber regards immediate reality as consisting of something more than just an infinite number of fragmentary events and qualities, and in fact ascribes to it a common-sense structure. Weber believes that it is possible in this mass of material, which is structured and infinite at the same time, to record qualitative changes and unanalysed causal connections: “... the only concept that applies to ‘objectified’<sup>240</sup> ... events is that of qualitative change, and the only concept that applies to the objectified causal investigation of this change is that of causal nonequivalence”.<sup>241</sup>

These passages must be interpreted to mean that questions of empirical fact and of causal connections must, *and can*, in Weber's view, be answered by reference to “objective” reality. Rickert was forced by his logical fragmentation of immediate reality, and led by his Kantian belief in fundamental “categorical” objectivity, to try to demonstrate the objectivity of the guiding theoretical values of the historical sciences; but Weber's view of immediate reality as “objectified” and “structured” permits him to define “objective truth” by means of a *reference to reality*<sup>242</sup> (107, pp. 21-22).

In *Knies I*, this definition of the objectivity of the scientific results is only implicit in the definition of the term “objective”; it is formulated once, but in a very tentative fashion.<sup>243</sup> In *Objectivity*, however, Weber approaches the problem of objectivity more directly, and devotes particular attention to the relation, in social science, between subjective value criteria and objectively true results.

The necessity of the former is emphasized at least as strongly as the possibility of the latter: “There *is*”, Weber writes, “no absolutely ‘objective’ scientific analysis of cultural life or ... ‘social phenomena’ *independent* of special and ‘one-sided’ perspectives ... ”;<sup>244</sup> and the *subjectivity* of these points of view is constantly

239 *ORK*, pp. 101, 106-107, 119, 122/*GAW*, pp. 49, 53, 63, 65.

240 The concept “objectified” is here used by Weber in order to assure the distinction between the amorphous stream of consciousness postulated by intuitionism and the “structured” statements of empirical fact arrived at by means of “distant” investigation.

241 *ORK*, p. 119/*GAW*, p. 63; see also *ORK*, pp. 106-107/*GAW*, p. 53.

242 Naturally, this does not mean that all the philosophical problems connected with the objectivity of statements of fact have been solved. But Weber's view at least seems to correspond closely to the “reference theory of truth” mentioned by Brecht (1959, pp. 49-51), who believes this solution to be adequate from the point of view of Scientific Method.

243 *ORK*, p. 135n30(4)/*GAW*, p. 75n2(4).

244 *MSS*, p. 72/*GAW*, p. 170.

stressed.<sup>245</sup> It is impossible to take the whole of reality as one's subject-matter; no discipline provides us with the whole truth concerning any phenomenon, however minute. But within this subjective and partial framework, the results of scientific inquiry *can* attain the status of empirical truth, of objective validity: they are not subjective in the sense that they "are valid for one person but not for another";<sup>246</sup> on the contrary, they constitute "purely causal knowledge". And this assumption of objectivity in its turn means that the scholar is not allowed to proceed at will when performing a causal analysis: he is not allowed to stress, for purely subjective reasons, one cause rather than another; in his scholarly work, he is "naturally ... bound to the norms governing our thought".<sup>247</sup>

Perhaps the best summary of Weber's views with regard to the simultaneously subjective and objective character of the results of social science is that which he gives in *Crit.Stud.*:

On the one hand, Eduard Meyer is not correct in asserting that we are "never" able to attain "absolute and unconditionally valid" knowledge of anything historical: this is not true as far as the "causes" are concerned. It is, however, equally incorrect when it is then asserted that the validity of knowledge in the natural sciences is in a position which is "no different" from that of the historical disciplines: this is not true for ... the way in which "values" play a role in history, nor for the modality of those values...<sup>248</sup>

A handwritten note, probably from the same period,<sup>249</sup> makes the same point with a stronger emphasis on the claim that the results of scientific activity are *objective*, and that their claim to this objectivity is based on their correspondence with the *material*:

We "get knowledge" of the intensive infinity of hist[orical] relationships by again and again introducing "thoughts" into it – that constitutes the "subjectivity" of history –, and – that constitutes the "objectivity" [of history] – by again and again conscientiously testing, on the basis of the *material*, whether these thoughts represent an "adequate" picture, or which form of thought and combination of thoughts, among several imaginable ones, represents the most adequate picture of the event that is at all possible.<sup>250</sup>

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245 MSS, pp. 82-83, 111/GAW, pp. 182-83, 213.

246 MSS, p. 84/GAW, p. 184.

247 MSS, p. 84/GAW, p. 184; see also ORK, p. 183n89/GAW, p. 124n1.

248 MSS, p. 159/GAW, p. 261.

249 On the envelope in which it is placed, Weber has written: "Entwicklung. v. Below/E. Meyer", which seems to indicate that the notes were written in preparation for *Crit.Stud.*, where one finds a discussion of the views of v. Below and Ed. Meyer on historical development.

250 "Wir 'erkennen' die intensive Unendlichkeit der gesch. Zusammenhänge indem wir – darin besteht die 'Subjektivität' der Geschichte – wieder und immer wieder 'Gedanken' in sie hineintragen und – darin besteht ihre 'Objektivität' – an der Hand des *Stoffes* wieder u. immer wieder gewissenhaft prüfen, ob diese Gedanken ein 'adäquates' Bild, resp. welche Gedankenform und Gedankencombination von mehreren denkbaren das adäquatest-mögliche Bild des Vorganges darstellen" (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6).

Since the two parts of Weber's definition of "objectivity" – the emphasis on the objective validity and on the subjective framework of social science – differ in their polemical tendency and actual importance, it may be useful to treat them and their implications separately.

As mentioned above, Weber ascribes *objective validity* to the "causal" analysis of social science, i.e., to the demonstration of the causes or consequences of a certain, individually important, phenomenon. This analysis of course by definition also includes the recording of individual facts, a point which in one case is made quite clear by Weber.<sup>251</sup>

The concept of objectivity, as defined by Weber for the social sciences, is in principle identical with the one current in the *natural sciences*. Causal analysis consists in the practical application of knowledge of empirical regularities, and this knowledge is supplied by the natural sciences (in Rickert's – and Weber's – logical sense of the word). Consequently, it must be possible to claim for the causal explanation of historical phenomena the same degree and kind of validity as that possessed by the general laws by the aid of which the explanation is established. Weber of course realizes that most of the "laws" which the historian applies when carrying out a causal analysis are of an everyday kind and may even, if formulated with precision, appear slightly comical.<sup>252</sup> But this does not in the least weaken the logical principle.

On the other hand, Weber is perfectly aware that the possibilities open to natural science of controlling results by means of experiments and prognostic hypotheses cannot be extended to the social sciences, since the primary objects of the latter are, by definition, interesting by virtue of their individual characteristics, so that two or more of such objects are hardly ever alike in all essential respects. However, this circumstance does not lead Weber to abandon his claim that the results of social science are objective, but instead impels him to elaborate a specific theory of causation in the social sciences, the theory of the "objective possibility" (*objektive Möglichkeit*).<sup>253</sup> Stated briefly, this refers to an intellectual operation by which the scholar attempts, by means of his knowledge of scientific or everyday empirical regularities, to ascertain whether a certain actual historical event would have been likely to occur if one or more of the causal factors actually present had been lacking; in other words, the scholar tries to establish whether a combination of causes which was altered or reduced (compared to the actual one) would still have been sufficient to bring about the actual result (that is, those of the elements of this result which seem important to the observer). In continuation of this, the scholar may try to

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251 *MSS*, pp. 168-69/*GAW*, p. 271: "... a purely causal problem which can be solved by simply establishing facts that can be 'objectively' determined by means of observation and causal analysis ..."

252 See, for instance, *ORK*, p. 171/*GAW*, p. 112, where Weber describes the following rhyme by the German humorist Wilhelm Busch as a "quite perfectly formulated 'historical law': "If you are pleased when someone else is sad/Then chances are that people will be mad [at you]" (*Wer sich freut, wenn wer betrübt/macht sich meistens unbeliebt*).

253 See in particular *MSS*, pp. 164-88/*GAW*, pp. 266-90.

imagine what *other* outcomes seem to be the “objectively possible” results of the altered or reduced combination of causal factors.<sup>254</sup> The significance of this kind of analysis does not primarily reside in its concrete value to history or social science – in fact, it hardly amounts to more than a conveniently labelled, and perhaps rather more controlled, version of ordinary historical analysis – but rather in its purely theoretical and hypothetical character, what H. Stuart Hughes has called “the fictional approach”.<sup>255</sup> The full importance of this approach, and its connection with other problems in Weber’s work, will become apparent in Chapter 4 on the ideal type.

In establishing the objectivity of the social sciences, Weber has accomplished the primary and short-term purpose of successfully rejecting the pretensions of *positivism*. By defining this objectivity in such a way as to make it not only equal in dignity to, but in certain essential respects even identical with that claimed by natural science, he has at the same time repudiated the concept of spiritual intuition propagated by the *intuitionist* school and also – to the extent that objectivity is now rooted in the subject-matter and not in the categories – dissociated himself from *Rickert’s* neo-Kantian views of objectivity. But, moreover, he has in a sense rendered the conflict between natural and social science unimportant for the future. Rickert still bases his argument on the demonstration of two aims of scientific investigation which, even if they are of equal rank and equally “objective”, are diametrically opposed to each other: this fundamental opposition forms part of his proof. Weber’s chain of reasoning, on the other hand, implies the fundamental *unity* of all empirical disciplines: the criteria of truth which are his tacit premises when he speaks of “causal validity” and of “truth which must be accepted as valid even by a Chinese”,<sup>256</sup> what he calls “the rules of logic and method”,<sup>257</sup> must in principle hold for them all. In this perspective, Weber’s campaign against positivism is terminated not only by an armistice, but by an actual conclusion of peace.<sup>258</sup>

This conclusion of peace with natural science is secured from degenerating into a capitulation, by means of the *subjective framework* into which the objective results of social science have to be inserted. It is significant that the discussion of this subjective aspect – as was the case with the discussion of the value element in the principle of value freedom – commands Weber’s attention to a far greater degree than the objective one. This is obvious in *Objectivity*: Weber’s treatment of the foundations of empirical objectivity is sparing, indirect, almost casual, whereas

254 For a thorough analysis of the concept, see Turner and Factor (1981).

255 Hughes 1958, p. 310.

256 See above, pp. 12-15, 64-65, 87.

257 *FMW*, p. 143/*GAW*, pp. 598-99.

258 Occasionally (for instance in Loos 1970, pp. 13, 22), one meets this last conclusion in the pointed form that Weber himself adhered to a *positivist* ideal of scientific inquiry. This is only correct if “positivism” is interpreted broadly, as roughly synonymous with “the ideal of scientific inquiry usually accepted today in the field of natural science”. Weber had no wish to be associated with positivism in its *classical* form, a fact that is clearly brought out in his letter to Hermann Kantorowicz of 10 October 1908 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 19), in which he dissociates himself from Kantorowicz’s professed “positivism”.

the apotheosis of the essay, the almost passionate last pages which culminate in a sweeping quotation from Goethe, are devoted to the problems of the theoretical values, the changing aspects (*I07*, p. 28).<sup>259</sup>

The reason for this special interest may of course partly lie in the necessity of retaining the subjective element of social science as a bulwark against positivism and its involuntary helpmates, objectivism and intuitionism, in order to prevent the "twilight of all value perspectives" which Weber sees as a grim possibility.<sup>260</sup> In the general subjective tendency of his approach, and in the definition of the spheres of the respective groups of sciences on grounds of method rather than according to some uncertain criterion applying to their subject-matter, Weber is completely at one with Rickert. But it is significant that Weber does not stop here, but elaborates implications of the subjective point of view which are certainly not fully compatible with Rickert's doctrine:

Rickert's foundation of the objectivity of social science in the objectivity of its essential methodological category, i.e., of the cultural values as criteria of selection, had forced him to take a static view of these value criteria. According to him, a correct and thorough review of the given historical material would once and for all bring to light all the value criteria which could claim to be legitimate in relation to this material; later changes, however radical, in the ranking and estimate of the cultural sciences would make no difference in this connection:

Consequently, the science of history will in all probability never arrive at a point where all historical accounts will have to be invalidated because the values that were used as a basis for them are no longer regarded as normatively general; that is, history will never feel the need to build its concepts by means of wholly new cultural values, since it must always interpret human existence in the past according to premises that belong to that past existence ...<sup>261</sup>

Weber dispenses completely with this static view of the theoretical values, and to a far greater degree emphasizes the importance and positive role of the personality of the scholar in the field of social science. Not only the value aspects in general, but even the practical valuations of the scholar, are given a central place in the scientific process.

The value aspects are justified by their usefulness and fruitfulness: "[The one-sided analysis of cultural reality] is not 'arbitrary' as long as it meets with *success*; that is, as long as it provides knowledge of relationships that turns out to be *valuable* for the causal imputation of concrete historical events".<sup>262</sup> As mentioned above, Weber sometimes states this fruitfulness to be a direct consequence of the ability of the

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259 In view of this, Weber's choice of the *term* "objectivity" for the title of the essay does not seem particularly apt, except as a manifestation of his usual wish to choose the "uncomfortable" solution, terminologically and otherwise.

260 *MSS*, p. 86/*GAW*, p. 186.

261 Rickert 1902, pp. 638-39.

262 *MSS*, p. 71/*GAW*, p. 170.

scholar to reach beyond ordinary points of view, in short, of his *personality*. Where Rickert saw the historical material as dictating its conditions to the scholar, Weber sees the situation quite differently: the scholar may, by virtue of his value-oriented personality, fashion the views of right and wrong, of significance and insignificance, of a whole age.<sup>263</sup>

But while Weber's elaboration of the subjective point of view permits the scholar to leave his imprint on an age, it also compels him to acknowledge that his work will by necessity grow obsolete and unimportant. He formulates this view of the constant change of scientific aspects with the urgency and literary passion which he often reserves for truths which run contrary to his personal preferences and which he – *particularly for this reason* – takes great pains to express with the greatest possible force. In *Objectivity*, the question is still formulated in close connection with the problems of methodology:

The immeasurable stream of events flows unendingly towards eternity. The cultural problems that move humankind constantly assume new forms and colourings; within that ever infinite stream of individual events, the boundaries of the area which acquires meaning and significance for us therefore remain fluid... The intellectual contexts within which it is viewed and scientifically comprehended shift over time; thus, the points of departure of the cultural sciences remain subject to change in the limitless future ...<sup>264</sup>

*Crit.Stud.* contains a laconic statement to the same effect.<sup>265</sup> It is only in *Sc.Voc.* that the idea is taken up again, but now marked by a strong note of personal commitment, indicating that this problem occupies a central place in Weber's thought:

In the field of science, each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be obsolete in ten, twenty, fifty years' time. That is the fate – indeed, the very *meaning* – of scientific work, to which it is subjected and devoted in a quite specific sense, as compared with other cultural elements with which it shares this fate: Every scientific "accomplishment" raises new "questions" and *demands* to be "surpassed" and outdated. Whoever wishes to serve science has to resign himself to this fact. ... Let me repeat: to be surpassed scientifically is not only our common fate, but also our common goal.<sup>266</sup>

The literary quality of these last passages should not be allowed to obscure their real importance. Weber's view of aspects as ever-changing can be seen as part of a wider theoretical whole, which has a decisive influence on the principle of value freedom, on his reflections on values as an object of scientific inquiry, and on his views concerning the essential relation between science and politics.<sup>267</sup> More concretely, it

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263 *MSS*, p. 82/*GAW*, p. 182.

264 *MSS*, p. 84/*GAW*, p. 184; see also *MSS*, p. 111/*GAW*, pp. 213-14. The contrast to Rickert's static view is striking.

265 *MSS*, p. 159/*GAW*, pp. 261-62.

266 *FMW*, p. 138/*GAW*, p. 592.

267 See below, pp. 192-93, 243-45.

serves as an additional indication of the “fictional” tendency in Weber’s theory of the concepts of social science: in itself, any true statement is partial and one-sided; and not even a constantly growing complex of such partial truths will ever be completely exhaustive.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> This is probably the correct construction to put on the following passage in a letter from Weber to Gottl, 28 March 1906 (*MWG II/5*): “In the idiographic disciplines, the one-sidedness of the perspective is always provisional ...”

## Chapter 3

# Values as an Object of Scientific Inquiry: Value Analysis

Although Weber devotes much space and care to the discussion of values as an object of scientific inquiry, this question nevertheless at first sight seems to be of minor importance in his methodology: a special case presenting no great problems and possessing but little interest.

In *Value Freedom*, Weber brands the claim that values could *not* be the object of a value-free (in his sense) science as an “almost incredibly strong misconception”.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the fundamental *susceptibility* of values to scientific investigation was no longer seriously contested by his contemporaries, and Weber could reasonably expect general support on this point. His own treatment of the question is correspondingly less polemical and more detailed and constructive than most of his other methodological arguments.<sup>2</sup>

The problems that Weber discusses in this connection concern the *ways* in which values may be treated as an object of scientific inquiry (a procedure which will be referred to below as (*scientific*) *value analysis*) and, more particularly, the question of what results *cannot* be achieved by means of such scientific treatment. But since these questions are in fact nothing more than concrete versions of the problem of the value freedom of science (“what methods and results should be invested with the predicate ‘scientific’?”), both they and the answers that Weber supplies to them might, at first sight, be regarded as being of little independent interest.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the idea of theoretical value relation, they do not involve the elaboration and restatement of complicated methodological arguments; nor do they contain definitions of new concepts which, like the ideal type, have come to occupy a central place in later theoretical debates.

If Weber’s treatment of the problem is still of considerable importance, and indeed on certain points essential to the further argument of the present work, the reasons lie not in the abstract methodological *premises* or the fundamental *status*

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1 *MSS*, p. 11/*GAW*, pp. 499-500.

2 This is only true, though, as far as his treatment of the positive *content* of the value analysis is concerned. His views on its *limitations* form part of his general position concerning the value freedom of the scientific results, and are formulated with corresponding polemical vigour.

3 Breiner (1996, p. 68n15) mistakenly reads my remarks on this point in *B72* as implying that I have overlooked the importance of “value interpretation”.

of scientific value analysis, but in the concrete *results* which Weber alleges that it may be able to yield. His combination of “abstract” and “practical” value analysis forms the basis of the “methodological rationalism” which is a central feature of his sociological theory. In the present context, it helps us to understand both his concept of the ideal type and his view of the relation between science and politics. Moreover, scientific value analysis lays the foundations for Weber's theory of the fundamental value conflict, a theory which is closely connected with his demand for value freedom and which has a decisive influence on his theoretical and practical discussion of the nature of politics.

It may be seen as an indication of the fairly uncontroversial status of the question of values as an object of scientific inquiry that it is almost exclusively discussed by Weber in his most general and positive “programmatically” methodological essays, *Objectivity* and *Value Freedom*.<sup>4</sup> *Sc.Voc.* and *Pol.Voc.* only deal with one particular aspect of the question (the value conflict); and in *Stammler*, Weber discusses problems that have a certain connection with the problems of value analysis, without however being directly relevant to the present account. Weber also comments upon the questions of value analysis at the various congresses of the *Association* and the *Society* in the years 1909–12,<sup>5</sup> but here, too, polemical overtones are largely absent.

Weber's position does not seem to have developed significantly after his first statement of it in 1904. Certain points are only taken up in the later essays; other ones recede into the background; but by and large, the manner of his approach remains unchanged.

As already noted, Weber is firmly convinced that values are in principle susceptible to scientific inquiry. He explicitly states this conviction in order to rebut the fallacious objection to the principle of value freedom that the latter also implies freedom from values on the *object level* of scientific inquiry. “What is the implication of this proposition [the demand for the value freedom of the scientific results]?” he writes in *Objectivity*. “Certainly not that value judgments are completely *beyond* scientific discussion because they are, in the last analysis, based on certain ideals and are therefore ‘subjective’ in origin”. And, widening the concept of “discussion”, he continues: “Value judgments are not immune to critical discussion”.<sup>6</sup>

The question remains, however, *how far* this critical discussion can go without leaving the field of scientific inquiry. We find one comprehensive answer to this question in his report to the first congress of the *Society* in 1910: values are susceptible to scientific treatment concerning “... the *fact that they exist*, ... the supposed or real reasons for this existence, ... what success they [the values] have achieved and what are their chances of success, ... their consequences ‘in principle’ and ‘in practice’...”<sup>7</sup>

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4 On this point, the *Memorandum* differs significantly from *Value Freedom*; these divergences will be taken into account in the course of the discussion below.

5 Particularly the *Association* congress in Vienna 1909 and the *Society* congress in Frankfurt 1910.

6 *MSS*, p. 52/*GAW*, p. 149. Similarly *MSS*, p. 11/*GAW*, pp. 499-500; *GASS*, p. 417.

7 *GASS*, p. 431.

Among these elements, the most important in a methodological context is Weber's discussion of the consequences of values "in principle" and "in practice".

The "principle" part of value analysis, consisting in an "*analytical investigation of the ideal meaning* of what we want to achieve",<sup>8</sup> that is, the treatment of values in their theoretical aspect, as ideas, will be referred to in the following as *axiological value analysis*, while the "practical" part, which is concerned with the empirical consequences of setting the value in question as a practical goal, will be called *teleological value analysis*.<sup>9</sup>

### Axiological value analysis

The concept of value used by Weber in his discussion of axiological value analysis is not unambiguous; instead, we find the same complex of "active" and "static" components, of value judgments and ultimate "ideals", which we met with<sup>10</sup> in Weber's definition of those value elements which it was necessary to eliminate from the research level of scientific inquiry.<sup>11</sup> Weber is particularly fond of discussing value analysis, even in its axiological form, in terms of "goals",<sup>12</sup> that is, in a pure means-ends context. I shall retain this dual aspect of the terminology, which apparently does not indicate any material change in Weber's position (*IO7*, p. 15): for the purposes of axiological analysis, the value judgments, value axioms, goals, etc. analysed are all regarded as "a purely ideal object of conceptual analysis, distilled by the ... scholar".<sup>13</sup>

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8 Schelting 1934, p. 22.

9 "Axiological" and "teleological" are admittedly unlovely terms, for which I shall not try to offer any other apology than the fact that there seemed to be no obviously better alternatives. "Axiological", which is borrowed from Schelting (1934), is criticized by Huff (1984, pp. 37, 43n4), although his criticism seems mainly to be directed at Oakes, who uses it in his translation of a wide variety of German compound terms involving "Wert". Anyway, since "axiology" is usually defined as "the study of the nature of values", the term should not be too much out of place when employed in the restricted sense given above. "Axiological value analysis" at first glance looks like a pleonasm, but considering that it is contrasted with another kind of value analysis, the pleonasm is only apparent. The term "teleological" carries heavy unwanted overtones, but has been chosen, in accordance with its etymology, to emphasize that the value is actually set as a *goal*, and that the focus of interest is its relations in that context only.

10 See above, pp. 65-70.

11 Among the "static" ones, we find, for instance, "value", "idea" (*MSS*, pp. 53-54/*GAW*, p. 150) and "ideal" (*MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151); among the "active" ones are "value judgment" (*MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151) and "valuation" (*MSS*, pp. 18, 20/*GAW*, pp. 508, 510).

12 For instance *MSS*, pp. 18, 53-54/*GAW*, pp. 150-51, 508.

13 *OSt*, p. 127/*GAW*, p. 346.

## Content

When confronted with a valuation or a concrete goal, the scholar who conducts an axiological value analysis can first of all, in Weber's view, "[make] explicit and [develop] in a logically consistent manner the 'ideas' which actually do, or which can, underlie the concrete end".<sup>14</sup> The term "ideas" in this quotation is probably not meant to cover all the possible "ultimate" value axioms,<sup>15</sup> but only those which can be found as *conscious* motives of behaviour in the person observed, or at least in his epoch or in past generations, and which have been formulated with sufficient precision to become the legitimate object of scientific examination.<sup>16</sup>

To put it a little crudely, Weber seems to be referring to the scholarly presentation and systematic discussion of the various "isms", in the actual case (the programmatic declaration of the new editorial team of the *Archives*) of course mainly those connected with the theory of *social* policy. Weber himself sees this kind of analytical work as a "task of *social philosophy*".<sup>17</sup>

It is characteristic of this kind of analysis that the immediate focus of scientific interest is not the concrete value or goal sparking off the investigations, but rather the systems and complexes of ideas to which this concrete value may in principle be traced back. When Weber sums up the general aim of axiological value analysis as the "*insight* into the *significance* of what is actually striven for",<sup>18</sup> this is only true in a hypothetical and limited sense. What the "analysis of ideas" can offer the acting person is a discussion of those *explicit* systems and complexes of ideas which *might* have been the ultimate premises of his concrete goal. *If* his goal was in fact derived from these ideas, such a discussion is naturally of value to him; but even then, its usefulness to the individual will often be limited by the fact that such systems or complexes belong on a fairly low level of abstraction, so that the systematic "analysis of ideas" does not trace the concrete goal back to its abstract premises beyond a certain point. Moreover, the actual motives for the setting of the goal may have been quite different from the "ideas" analysed, in which case the "analysis of ideas" has no real connection with the concrete goal which, in principle, formed its point of departure. Thus, the narrowing down of the object of the analysis to conscious and explicit "ideas" mostly stands in the way of a systematic and exhaustive axiological analysis of the motives leading to the setting of a concrete goal.

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14 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

15 The term "higher" value axiom, goal, etc. will – in accordance with Weber's own usage, cf. *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510, where he speaks of "ascending" analysis – be used to denote the axioms and ends from which the value or goal in question may be deduced by conceptual logic. Similarly, the "highest" or "ultimate" values or goals are those which cannot be deduced by this means from any other axiom or goal. The word "general" has been purposely avoided in this connection (see below, pp. 177-78).

16 See a number of other passages, *MSS*, pp. 54, 94-95/*GAW*, pp. 150-51 and 195-96, where "idea" is defined in the same way.

17 *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151. See the discussion above, pp. 139-40.

18 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

Behind Weber's introduction of the "analysis of ideas" into the account of the possibilities of axiological value analysis, we should rather see his interest in the *historical* importance of formulated and conscious ideas acting as driving forces of behaviour.<sup>19</sup> The axiological structure of the various "ideas" may exercise great influence on the action *actually* motivated by the ideas. Viewed in this perspective, the "analysis of ideas" is an axiological *preliminary* to the "explanatory" value analysis discussed below.

While it is quite reasonable for Weber to include this kind of preliminary work among the tasks of the *Archives*, and consequently to defend it in *Objectivity*, the place of the "analysis of ideas" in the *general* scheme of axiological value analysis is more doubtful; and the secondary character of its role is probably confirmed by the fact that Weber does not raise this question in his later essays. Nevertheless, the point has its importance, since it gives an indication of the specific viewpoints and problems which dominate Weber's fundamental discussion in *Objectivity* of the ideal type.

The *Memorandum* already contains the greater part of Weber's remarks on the content and function of value analysis, and *Value Freedom* does not add very much to them. One insertion is curious, however: Weber in the 1917 article adds a phrase according to which his analysis of discussions of practical values only takes into account the values of "those persons who participate in the discussion".<sup>20</sup> There seem to be no rational grounds for a restriction of this kind: why should not the tasks of value analysis be equally relevant to the discussion of *other people's* values? The point has never, as far as I can see, attracted the attention of commentators.<sup>21</sup> One explanation might be the definitional restriction of "valuations" to those that have as their object "a phenomenon that is capable of being influenced by our actions".<sup>22</sup> Another one could be found in the fact that Weber strongly stresses the importance of being fully conscious of all the implications of one's own valuational standpoint. For him, this is not just an academic, but also an existential point.<sup>23</sup>

Far more thorough than Weber's discussion of how concrete valuations may be traced back to "ideas" that are already explicit is his treatment of the axiological value analysis which concentrates on the concrete goal structures and on their, conscious or *unconscious*, premises.

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19 Cf. *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151.

20 *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510.

21 On the other hand, translators seem to have been troubled by it: Freund (Weber 1965, p. 431) amplifies his translation by a – very reasonable – interpolation: "... including the values ..." (my italics), while Shils and Finch (*MSS*, p. 20) simply drop the whole troublesome passage from their translation.

22 See Ch. 1, p. 67.

23 See, for instance, the following letter from Weber to Erich Trummler of 17 January 1918 (*GPS I*, pp. 474-75): "On the basis of very long experience, and also as a matter of principle, I take the position that the individual can *only* reach clarity about what he himself really strives for (Wollen) by testing what he believes to be his 'ultimate' conviction against his stand on problems which are sharply defined, critical and *quite concrete*".

The first task of such axiological value analysis is to make explicit the various *possible* ultimate axioms from which the concrete valuation in question may be deduced.<sup>24</sup> This places the goal or valuation in a systematic context of higher and ultimate axioms from which it *might* theoretically have been deduced: its "ultimate structure of meaning", as Weber calls it,<sup>25</sup> or what we might term the *vertical* structure of the valuation, is uncovered.

Sometimes, the individual in question has not given any thought at all to the "higher" premises on which his goal is based, so that we are investigating a "value judgment which has imposed itself without conscious reflection".<sup>26</sup> In that case, value analysis makes the very first contribution towards the understanding of the essential (axiological) basis for a concrete attitude.

In some cases, only one possible higher or ultimate axiom can be found; but it is also conceivable that *several different* value axioms have to be considered as possible premises of the concrete valuation. In this situation, which Weber gives special attention,<sup>27</sup> value analysis can be of use not only where the valuation is totally unreflected, but also in cases where the acting person has correctly identified *one* of the possible ultimate axioms as a premise of his goal, but not considered the *other* possible axioms. A last possibility is of course that the individual in question has made every conceivable effort to investigate the valuational basis of his action and goals, but that his analysis has simply been wrong on some point.<sup>28</sup>

After working out in this way the vertical structure of the concrete valuation, the scholar may go on to examine the relation between this vertical structure and *other* value axioms (and the vertical value structures that can be deduced from them): "assign them their 'place' within the totality of possible 'ultimate' values, and delimit their spheres of validity of meaning".<sup>29</sup> Such a theoretical localization of the concrete valuation and its higher axioms enables us to identify clearly what value systems we implicitly support and – above all – *reject* by committing ourselves to a particular

24 See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 20, 54; *OSt*, p. 85; *FMW*, pp. 151-52/*GAW*, pp. 151, 312-13, 510, 608; *GASS*, pp. 417, 435.

25 *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 508.

26 *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 153.

27 Cf. *MSS*, p. 12/*GAW*, p. 500: "we may find that precisely the *same* end is striven after for very different ultimate reasons". Direct or indirect references to the possibility of the existence of a *number of* ultimate value axioms are found *MSS*, p. 54; *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, pp. 151, 608; *GASS*, p. 417.

28 This interpretation has to be taken into consideration when we meet with terms like "be mistaken" (*MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510; *GASS*, p. 417). More probably, however, these passages refer to one of the first two categories: the wholly or mainly unreflecting valuation, or the imperfect analysis of a valuation which can be deduced from more than one ultimate value axiom. Thus, for instance, *GASS*, p. 417 speaks of value axioms "that you simply have not been aware of".

29 *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 508; similar passages *MSS*, p. 21; *FMW*, pp. 151-52/*GAW*, pp. 511, 608.

valuational attitude. As Weber puts it in *Sc.Voc.*: “Figuratively speaking, you serve this god *and offend that other god* when you decide to adhere to this position”.<sup>30</sup>

This analysis, which we may call the *horizontal* value analysis, starts from an examination of the relevant ultimate value axioms, since the full extent of the opposition to other value systems only becomes apparent at a high level of abstraction. But Weber assumes that the analysis may then move downwards again in order to show the acting individual what other concrete attitudes are compatible or incompatible with his own value judgment or goal.

In *Value Freedom* and *Sc.Voc.*, Weber gives special attention to a variant of this horizontal analysis, in which the starting-point is not a vertical value structure, but some phenomenon which can be judged according to a number of different value premises. Here the analysis in question must try to determine *all* the value axioms which may serve as the basis for a possible value judgment concerning the phenomenon;<sup>31</sup> the analysis may even go so far as to try to list the possible *concrete* value judgments.<sup>32</sup> This kind of value analysis is of course simply an extension of the vertical and horizontal types, taking its point of departure among the higher rather than among the lower value premises. But at the same time, it corresponds exactly to the *value interpretation* discussed above,<sup>33</sup> since the latter also tried to discover “focal points for *possible* evaluative attitudes”;<sup>34</sup> Weber himself acknowledges the parallel by remarking that value analysis of this kind may prepare or even supplant a value interpretation.<sup>35</sup> The interesting point about this function of axiological value analysis is that it confirms the possibility of constructing a clear and reasonably uncomplicated framework for theoretical value relation. The somewhat intangible preconditions of social scientific inquiry are made accessible to precise analysis. Rickert’s methodological and epistemological tours de force are transformed by Weber into ordinary, almost routine, methods.

A further step in this direction is accomplished when the analysis not only reveals how a *particular* phenomenon is judged under different value axioms, but also tells us what concrete value judgments would result from the application of a certain value axiom or combination of such axioms to a whole *series* of phenomena (ideally, every possible relevant one). This amounts to the tracing *downwards* of the vertical structure of a value axiom. As Weber points out, this kind of investigation is not purely axiological, since it implies the elaboration of “a casuistic analysis, as exhaustive as possible, of those empirical facts which *may* be at all relevant

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30 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 608.

31 *MSS*, p. 10/*GAW*, p. 499. The fact that Weber here speaks of “normative” sciences does not imply that the analysis is less binding than other kinds of axiological value analysis, or even empirical analysis in general. See below, pp. 178-79.

32 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 607. The “position” referred to has the status of a concrete valuation rather than of a value axiom.

33 See pp. 136-41.

34 *MSS*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 253.

35 *MSS*, pp. 21-22/*GAW*, pp. 511-12.

for a practical evaluation".<sup>36</sup> But since the empirical element is supplied by the imagination and general faculty of combination of the scholar rather than by means of the empirical value analysis discussed below, it seems more reasonable to deal with the point – which acquires a particular importance in the discussion of the ideal type – at the present stage.

Naturally, horizontal value analysis is especially important in cases where the value judgment examined may be deduced from more than one axiom. In such cases, the demonstration of a *conflict* between these axioms is of immediate interest to the individual concerned, because it points to a latent inconsistency in the goal structure which may require a solution in the form of some kind of choice or compromise.<sup>37</sup>

### *Function*

This leads us to the question of the *function* of axiological value analysis. In the passage from *Objectivity* quoted above,<sup>38</sup> this analysis was referred to as a "criticism" of value judgments, and in *Value Freedom*, Weber also claims that this criticism is the essential purpose of axiological value analysis.<sup>39</sup> But we need a closer examination to understand exactly how Weber views the nature and scope of this criticism.

Criticism of this kind is of course most direct in cases where one or more of the values conflicting with the one examined is actually *held* by the scholar performing the analysis, so that the horizontal value analysis is not restricted to the theoretical and hypothetical level. This "positive" criticism, as Weber at one point calls it, may in his opinion be extremely useful to science, because it shows up the scope of the values criticized in a more effective way than the usual neutral discussion.<sup>40</sup> The parallel to the discussion of value interpretation, with its shift from the practical value judgments of the scholar to the neutral listing of possible valuational attitudes, is obvious, although Weber himself does not mention it.

Certain passages even give the impression that Weber regards the scholar's *ability* to formulate practical value judgments concerning the object of the valuations or goals examined by him, or, more radically still, his *actual* formulation of such value judgments, as a *necessary* condition of value analysis, at least in its horizontal aspect.<sup>41</sup> While the former view is sufficiently moderate to present no special difficulties, the latter one certainly goes beyond Weber's conclusions concerning value interpretation, according to which the practical value judgments of the scholar are useful *aids* to his analysis, but not its inevitable *preconditions*.

One should keep in mind, though, that the extreme view is found in a passage from *Objectivity*. This is the earliest of the essays in which Weber deals with value

36 *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510.

37 This point is implicit in the formulation, for instance, of *GASS*, p. 417.

38 See p. 166.

39 *MSS*, p. 12/*GAW*, p. 501; see also *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151.

40 *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157.

41 *GASS*, p. 477 and *MSS*, pp. 59-60/*GAW*, pp. 156-57 respectively.

analysis at all, and moreover, it is to a certain degree marked by its status as a programmatic essay for the *Archives of Social Science and Social Policy* (underlined by me). Probably it is only this latter consideration which leads Weber to discuss the question of the scientific status and value of the essays on social policy which the *Archives* will be publishing. And the former circumstance, the place of *Objectivity* at the very beginning of Weber's methodological production, may serve to explain the apparently rather too pointed statement that practical valuations are "obligatory" and "unavoidable" in axiological value analysis.<sup>42</sup> As the discussion of theoretical value relation showed, Weber's distinction between practical valuation and theoretical value relation is still rather uncertain in *Knies I-II*, not in the sense that he shows an insufficient grasp of the fundamental difference between science and values, but because his attack on objectivism makes him take up a position from which the *difference* between value orientation and value relation seems less significant than their *common distance* from the intrinsically "meaningless" material. In the same way, Weber's emphasis in *Objectivity* on the fundamental possibility of value analysis may have overshadowed his wish and ability to transform the positive criticism of values into a *theory* of horizontal value analysis (and, in fact, *Objectivity* does not contain any attempt to formulate such a theory). In any event, Weber's fundamental position remains unshaken, here as well as in *Knies I-II*, a fact which is attested by the following passage: "... we would not dream of passing off such discussions ['positive' criticism based on the ideals of the scholar] as '*science*'".<sup>43</sup>

In fact, there is no doubt that the critical function with which Weber invests axiological analysis is not practical, but *scientific*;<sup>44</sup> the criticism is not positive, but what he calls "dialectical".<sup>45</sup>

The substance of this dialectical criticism, however, turns out to be strangely intangible. When discussing the function of axiological analysis, Weber constantly emphasizes the possibility of uncovering the *consistent* vertical value structures of concrete valuations or goals, and of examining, by means of horizontal analysis, the mutual compatibility of these various consistent structures. It is not unreasonable for Weber to describe the critical function of this kind of analysis as "testing ideals against the demand for the *internal consistency* of what we strive for".<sup>46</sup> But what exactly is the meaning of the statement that a particular end or goal is or is not "internally consistent"? And in what sense can a demonstration of inconsistency be said to possess a critical function *in relation to the concrete goals or valuations examined*? Taking the discussion of the various possible results of axiological analysis as our starting-point, we may arrive at the following conclusions:

It is always possible to carry out a horizontal value analysis; and this form of analysis may be said to contain an element of criticism even in relation to the

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42 *MSS*, pp. 59 and 60/*GAW*, pp. 156 and 157 respectively.

43 *MSS*, p. 60/*GAW*, p. 157.

44 See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 12, 54/*GAW*, pp. 151, 501.

45 *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151; *GASS*, p. 417.

46 *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151.

concrete goal or valuation under discussion, inasmuch as it makes the acting person conscious of certain fundamental value conflicts which may induce him to alter his concrete goal.

However, it is important to be aware of the nature and limits of such criticism. If we suppose that the analysis may sometimes bring about a change of attitude in the acting person, the implication is that the latter must already have regarded as positive (have "embraced") the value or values which are shown by the horizontal analysis to conflict with the ultimate value axiom of the primary concrete goal. Thus, value analysis confronts the concrete valuations of an individual with opposing value axioms *held by the same individual*: the resulting criticism has the form "You are not acting in accordance with the value axioms which you have hitherto professed and/or been guided by".<sup>47</sup> Of course, this criticism acts by showing up an inconsistency.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the "critical function" does not operate directly, but depends on a further condition, namely, that the individual in question accepts the positive value – ideally, the duty – of *acting consistently*. There is no intrinsic reason, however, why this condition should always be fulfilled. The inconsistency demonstrated will be of a purely theoretical kind, and need not lead to any difficulty in practice. Therefore, axiological consistency by no means always appears to be necessary, and it is correspondingly difficult, from a purely logical point of view, to make the criticism inherent in the value analysis "stick".

Apart from cases where the condition of axiological consistency is fulfilled, the only other possible critical function of the value analysis described here consists in denouncing cases where concrete valuations are described, in more or less good faith, in terms which are properly applicable to a conflicting value axiom. However, this turns out to be simply a problem of correct "labelling"<sup>49</sup> which, although its importance is considerable in practical politics (where certain labels like "democracy", "popular", "progressive", "liberal", etc. are coveted because of their positive connotations), is of little theoretical interest.<sup>50</sup>

If we turn to the possibility of uncovering inconsistencies within a *single* valuation or goal, we can distinguish between two cases:

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47 A good example of the actual use of this kind of criticism is found in Weber's letter to Robert Michels of 12 May 1909 (*MWG II/6*), in which he writes: "The ethic of the strike? Well, dear friend, at the end of your article you *do* actually write that *every* strike *is* justified *because* it lies on the road towards the future goal ... but surely ... that [*is*] an 'ethic of consequences': the *means* are 'justified' *because* the *result* that one hopes to achieve is 'justified'. – But syndicalism ... [*is*] ... a religion based on *conviction*, a religion whose existence is justified *even if no* future goal is *ever* 'achieved', and even if science can demonstrate that there is no chance of this ever happening".

48 This is probably the demonstration of "internal inconsistencies" which Weber has in mind in his discussion of "dialectical criticism", *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151.

49 Cf. Schelting 1934, pp. 24-25.

50 This is Weber's general view concerning terminological discussions; cf. *MSS*, p. 10/*GAW*, p. 499: "terminological (and therefore utterly sterile) [conflict] ..."

- 1) It can be shown by vertical analysis that the valuation in question can only be deduced from *one* ultimate axiom. Here, the only critical functions possible are those described above.
- 2) The valuation may be deduced from *several* conflicting ultimate value axioms. This is apparently the problem which occupies Weber most, at least in his early essays and speeches.<sup>51</sup> In what sense may the awareness of this conflict be said to possess a critical function? Certainly not with regard to the concrete value judgment in question, which not only cannot be called inconsistent, but which may even be said to be backed up by *several* legitimating value axioms. Only in relation to *subsequent* concrete valuations of *other* phenomena may the knowledge of this latent conflict acquire a critical potential, since the acting person must then, but only then, choose one of the several possible ultimate value positions as a basis for his *new* value judgment. This kind of criticism may therefore be said to be *hypothetical*, since it demonstrates the possible inconsistency of *future* actions, viewed in relation to the *present* one. And since this hypothetical criticism turns out to be a confrontation of *several* (hypothetical) goals pursued by the same person, it also depends on the acceptance by the individual of the positive value of axiological consistency.<sup>52</sup>

We can sum up the results reached above by saying that if the axiological criticism of concrete valuations is to go beyond mere terminological feuds, it will always be conditional on the acknowledgement, by the individual whose valuations are being examined, of the positive value of logical *consistency* in one's valuations and actions. In the cases, which are apparently of particular importance to Weber, where more than one ultimate value axiom can be demonstrated as the possible theoretical basis of a concrete valuation, the intended criticism is further restricted in that it applies only to *future* valuations and goals, but not to the concrete attitude examined.

The latter element – the *potential* character of the value conflict – has a certain bearing on the question of the construction of the ideal type.<sup>53</sup> But the former one – the acknowledgement of the value of axiological consistency – is of more immediate interest. Does Weber, as in his discussion of value freedom, clearly indicate the hypothetical character of the criticism, the existence of an implicit “Ought” premise, or does he claim that criticism of an attitude as being axiologically inconsistent may be scientifically binding *in itself*? (107, pp. 34-36).

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51 Cf. *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151 and, quite unambiguously, *GASS*, p. 417: “... I take your value judgment and analyse it dialectically for you, ... in order to trace it back to its ultimate axioms, in order to show you what are the *possible* ‘ultimate’ value judgments that it implies”

52 Myrdal's criticism (Myrdal 1953, p. 203) of Weber's reflections on axiological consistency seems to rest on an inadequate interpretation of Weber's thought, probably due to his faulty translation of Weber's text.

53 See below, p. 223.

The point is perhaps open to dispute. While Weber clearly denies that science has the right to tell the individual *which* of several possible ultimate axioms of a concrete valuation should be chosen,<sup>54</sup> he at least once demands, without any qualifying clauses, that the individual *should* choose between the conflicting axioms, i.e., *should* be consistent. The passage in question<sup>55</sup> speaks of the various *possible* value axioms, “which are perhaps completely incompatible, or only compatible if compromises are made, and between which you consequently have to *choose*”.<sup>56</sup> A number of important passages, however, support a different interpretation. Thus, in *Objectivity*, Weber writes:

Making a person *conscious* of ... the ultimate [value] standards which are manifested in a concrete value judgment is ... as far as [the scientific treatment of value judgments] can go without entering into the realm of speculation. Whether the person who expresses this value judgment *should* adhere to these ultimate standards is his completely personal affair; it is a question [which is decided on the basis] of what he strives for and what his conscience tells him, not of empirical knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

And this passage seems to refer not to the choice *between* value axioms (an act of choice that in Weber's view lies indisputably within the exclusive province of the individual) but to the decision in favour of axiological consistency: the decision to choose between them *at all*.

Weber touches on this question again as late as in *Sc.Voc.*: “In terms of its *meaning*, such and such a practical standpoint can be derived with inner consistency, and therefore with honesty, from such and such an ultimate position based on a philosophy of life (‘Weltanschauung’); and: “if you remain faithful to yourself, you will necessarily arrive at such and such ultimate, inner *conclusions* in terms of meaning”.<sup>58</sup> Although it may sound paradoxical, these last passages also support the hypothesis that Weber did not pretend to have *scientific* backing for a demand for axiological consistency. The terms employed – “honesty”, “faithful” – have significant ethical connotations. In *Sc.Voc.*, Weber puts forward his view of the “*ethic*” of science, i.e., of the duties necessarily incumbent on anyone *who has chosen science as a vocation*. One of these duties was, as we have seen,<sup>59</sup> “intellectual honesty”, the duty to follow truth wherever it leads. When, towards the end of the lecture,<sup>60</sup> Weber again speaks of the “plain duty” to be “intellectually honest”, he clearly addresses himself to the members of the audience in their quality as practically value-oriented

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54 For a more thorough account of Weber's argument in support of this position, see below, pp. 192-93.

55 *GASS*, p. 417.

56 One should note, however, that Weber's italicization does not concern the necessity of choosing but only the element of choice in itself (“*wählen* muss”).

57 *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151.

58 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 607.

59 See p. 99.

60 *FMW*, p. 155/*GAW*, p. 613.

and goal-setting individuals, and the demand, which is evidently a passionate and immensely charged absolute in Weber's personal ethic, is formulated purely in terms of the ethics of value spheres. He who *wishes* to be true to himself, to be honest, must acknowledge that his concrete valuational attitude will always conflict with this or that ultimate value. But nowhere does Weber say that this demand for intellectual honesty is *objectively* binding. If a person denies the value of scientific truth and in practice acts without regard for it, he is logically blind and deaf, "intellectually dishonest" and "untrue" to himself in the sense defined above; but Weber indicates no way of proving him wrong in a more absolute sense.<sup>61</sup>

Weber's emphasis on the *consistency* of the value structures elaborated by means of axiological value analysis has further interesting implications: If the "tracing back" of concrete valuations to ultimate value axioms, from which they can be deduced with "inner consistency", is to fulfil a critical function, this logically implies that the ultimate value axioms must themselves be defined in detail. In order to claim that an axiological conflict exists between certain value axioms, it is necessary to know the exact implications of these axioms. Ideally, therefore, each value axiom should be formulated in such detail that it is possible to state precisely the concrete attitude towards any relevant empirical phenomenon which it implies. Valuations and goals are *practical* attitudes; and if the axiological analysis is to be of practical value, it must concentrate on formulating and making explicit value axioms that can produce *unambiguous* concrete norms for action.

A number of passages indicate that Weber himself is aware of this point. Thus, it is significant that his repeated use of the terms "consistency" and "consistent" is not always restricted to the analysis of the relation between concrete valuations and ultimate values, but is made to apply, in a central passage in *Value Freedom*, to the *axiom as such*: here, the first task of axiological value analysis is said to be "to work out the ultimate, internally 'consistent' value axioms from which the ... opinions [in question] can be derived", a terminology which clearly indicates the demand for precise axioms. And Weber goes on to state that the second task of value analysis is "to deduce the 'consequences', in terms of *value* judgments, which would follow from particular ultimate value axioms if they and they alone were made the basis of the practical evaluation of factual situations".<sup>62</sup> Here, the direction of the analysis – *from the axiom towards the concrete attitude* – logically presupposes that the axiom is unambiguous.

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61 One further indication of this is the fact that Weber does not in this connection see the function of value analysis as one of criticism, which might possibly result in a change of behaviour, but as that of providing "clarity" (Klarheit).

62 *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510. In *OSt*, pp. 83, 85/*GAW*, pp. 311, 313, we find passages marked by the same "practical" tendency. The fact that Weber alters the expression "more and more general evaluative positions" (*Memorandum*, p. 165) to "more and more fundamental (prinzipiell) evaluative positions" (*Value Freedom*, *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510) may also be seen as an indication of his wish to remove any overtones of vagueness suggested by the term "general", as applied to ultimate values.

We may conclude that Weber's view of axiological value analysis, and of its function as a potential criticism of practical goals and valuations, includes the demand for an exact definition of the ultimate value axioms, and for the internal consistency of these axioms. In a general theoretical context, this conclusion is interesting because it would have been possible for Weber to define an axiological value analysis which obeyed different rules and served different ends; and in the context of the present work, the point is of importance for a proper understanding of Weber's concept of the ideal type.

### Validity

The question of the validity, the binding force, of axiological value analysis presents certain difficulties. Above all, Weber now and then speaks of this kind of analysis as "philosophy";<sup>63</sup> and although we concluded<sup>64</sup> that a term like "philosophy of history" *might* be used by Weber to denote a form of analysis possessing a validity equivalent to that of ordinary empirical science, a closer examination nevertheless seems to be required.

The results of this examination, however, leave no doubt: Weber consistently employs the terms "science" and "scientific" when speaking of this kind of value analysis,<sup>65</sup> a terminology which must be taken to imply that he regards the results of axiological analysis as *binding*. In a passage from *Objectivity*, he even quite explicitly states that the binding force of axiological analysis is equivalent to that of empirical science:

... to be deemed successful, the *logical* analysis of an ideal with respect to its contents and its ultimate axioms, and the demonstration of the logical and practical consequences of pursuing this ideal, must also be valid for [a Chinese]; even though he may not "have an ear for" our ethical imperatives, and even though he may, and most probably often will, reject the ideal and the concrete *evaluations* flowing from it, this in no way detracts from the scientific value of that intellectual *analysis*.<sup>66</sup>

One apparently inexplicable departure from this assumption is found in *Value Freedom*.<sup>67</sup> Here, Weber enumerates two sets of questions, of which, he claims, the first but not the second can be solved by scientific means, and includes in the set of "non-scientific" problems the following two: "... from which points of view might

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63 *MSS*, p. 18; *FMW*, pp. 151-52/*GAW*, pp. 508, 608; see also *MSS*, p. 54/*GAW*, p. 151, which, however, only deals with the "analysis of ideas" discussed above.

64 Above, pp. 139-40.

65 See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 19, 54/*GAW*, pp. 150, 508 (where value analysis is described, albeit in a negative context, as "(rational or empirical) scientific procedure"); *FMW*, pp. 151-52/*GAW*, p. 608.

66 *MSS*, pp. 58-59/*GAW*, pp. 155-56. For similar passages, see *FMW*, p. 146/*GAW*, pp. 601-602; *GASS*, p. 418.

67 *MSS*, p. 19/*GAW*, p. 509.

[a particular] situation seem practically desirable or undesirable?" and: "are there propositions (axioms), of whatever kind, which can be formulated in general terms and to which these points of view are reducible?" The first of these questions obviously refers to the kind of value analysis which Weber calls "value interpretation", while the second one forms part of an ordinary vertical value analysis. For Weber to range such questions with those belonging *wholly* to the value sphere (such as: "... what one should *do* in a concrete situation", etc.) flies in the face of his general view of the "scientific" validity of axiological analysis.

I find it difficult, however, to view this single passage as implying a modification of Weber's general conclusion. One major reason for adhering to this conclusion without modification is the fact that Weber, almost immediately after the "deviant" passages just quoted, offers a systematic account of the possibilities of value analysis that leaves no doubt as to the "scientific" status of answers to those two questions that he has just grouped together with "non-scientific" value problems. The best explanation which can be offered of the "deviant" passage is probably that Weber, in what is in fact a rhetorically highly charged enumeration of questions, momentarily confuses or conflates the distinction between the theoretical and the empirical sciences with the logical gap between "Is" and "Ought".

Hans Albert<sup>68</sup> has drawn attention to a development in Weber's thought on a point of detail. Until 1913, Weber refers to axiological analysis as *logical* analysis, and in the *Memorandum*<sup>69</sup>, he accordingly describes its validity as follows: "It acquires its 'validity' through the validity of logic". In *Value Freedom*, however, the word "logical" is consistently replaced by the words "in terms of meaning" or similar expressions, or is removed completely. (Curiously enough, in one instance, the word "logic" in its "old" sense is inserted in the 1917 version.<sup>70</sup>) Apparently, Weber wishes to correct his earlier classification of any kind of scientific philosophy, especially the philosophy of value, as "logic" (*IO7*, pp. 7-11). The change does not, however, seem to affect the essential problem of validity: thus, the passage in question now reads: "It is 'valid' in the same sense that logic is valid".<sup>71</sup>

### Teleological value analysis

While axiological value analysis considers its object from a conceptual and theoretical viewpoint, its complement, teleological value analysis, employs a more restrictive concept of value. Values as an object of this kind of analysis are considered exclusively

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68 Albert 1967, p. 268n60; Albert 1968, p. 74n27; Albert 2003, pp. 88-89.

69 *Memorandum*, p. 165.

70 *MSS*, p. 33/*GAW*, p. 524.

71 *MSS*, p. 20/*GAW*, p. 510.

in their capacity as *goals*,<sup>72</sup> the latter concept being interpreted in a strictly empirical sense, as the *empirical situation* which the individual tries to bring about.<sup>73</sup>

### Content

Teleological value analysis invariably takes as its starting-point a situation in which the value in question functions as a fixed actual or hypothetical goal. In this connection, the first task of analysis, according to Weber, is to find out by what means this goal may be attained. Theoretically, such an analysis should at least try to list the *sufficient* and the *necessary* means of bringing about the desired state of affairs. Weber constantly shows awareness of *both* of these possibilities; but it is nevertheless possible to demonstrate a certain shift of emphasis in his treatment of this point. In *Objectivity*, Weber mostly dwells on the analysis of the relation to the goal of certain *given* means: "... in this way, we can estimate the chances of achieving a particular goal with the given available means".<sup>74</sup> The problem seems to be defined in very concrete terms: is it possible, with the given means A, B and C, to attain a desired, previously fixed goal? In short, we are asking whether certain means are *sufficient*. A somewhat broader, but otherwise perfectly similar, discussion is found in a couple of passages written during the years 1905–07; here, Weber simply refers to the examination of the means that lead to the goal at all: "... we are looking for some x which would have y ... as its general consequence ..."<sup>75</sup> Here, too, what is asked for – in quite general terms – are the means *sufficient* to reach a given goal.

In Weber's interventions during the 1909 congress of the *Association* and the 1910 congress of the *Society*, one notices a small but significant change: He now focuses his discussion on the means which *must* be employed if the given goal is to be attained: the *necessary* conditions.<sup>76</sup> In *Value Freedom* and *Sc.Voc.*, this shift of emphasis becomes even more pronounced: here, Weber speaks of the need to

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72 In *Objectivity*, and at the 1909 congress of the *Association*, Weber explicitly speaks of "goals" (*MSS*, pp. 52-53/*GAW*, p. 149; *GASS*, p. 418). In *Value Freedom* and *Sc.Voc.*, he emphasizes the link to the object of axiological analysis by employing terms like "realization of a practical, evaluative position" (*MSS*, p. 21/*GAW*, pp. 510-11), "directives for valued action, derived from practical political value judgments" (*MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 508), etc. But he quickly reverts to the "goal" terminology, probably because of the lack of precision and general unwieldiness of the alternative expressions.

73 This last conclusion is not explicitly stated by Weber, but lies implicit in his views concerning the questions which teleological value analysis may ask and answer. The "goal" may of course be negative (something which one strives to avoid) as well as positive (something striven for).

74 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 149.

75 *OSt*, p. 84/*GAW*, p. 312.

76 *GASS*, pp. 418, 482.

know the “unavoidable means”<sup>77</sup> of reaching the goal. Interest is now focused on the *necessary* means.

When the scholar has determined the various (sufficient or necessary) means of attaining the goal, his next task within the framework of teleological value analysis is that of examining the side effects of these means. On this point, the two groups of conditions distinguished above merge into a single one: Weber’s discussion of the side effects of *sufficient* means seems to proceed on the assumption that these means have attained a status of *necessity* in relation to the goal.<sup>78</sup>

The premise of Weber’s analysis of the side effects of the means employed is important. This premise, which is sometimes described by Weber as “the interdependence of all events”,<sup>79</sup> and which lies implicit in his general description of the side effects as “unwanted”,<sup>80</sup> may be stated as follows: *any action has consequences apart from those directly wanted and anticipated by the acting person.*

He takes this to be a special instance of the general theory, which he borrows from Rickert, of the infinite multiplicity of reality; and he consequently seems to regard it, like Rickert’s theory, as an indisputable axiom. In itself, it does not imply that the side effects are important from the point of view of the actor, or any other person; nor does it indicate whether these effects should be regarded as positive or negative. But the idea as such is the first link in a long chain of reasoning which will be pursued below.

### Function

According to Weber, teleological value analysis, like its axiological complement, has a *critical* function. Just as the pure dialectical criticism tests the axiological consistency of concrete valuations, the “technical”<sup>81</sup> criticism is concerned with teleological consistency, i.e., with the actual empirical possibility of attaining the chosen goal. This means that the teleological criticism, and the analysis which gives it force, does not raise any special problem of *validity*. Its binding force is identical with that of ordinary empirical science, since its propositions are simply inversions of (more or less exact and established) statements of cause and effect.<sup>82</sup>

The first possibility of formulating a teleological criticism occurs when the analysis of the potential means shows that there are *no* means (at the command of the acting person – at all at a given time – during a shorter or longer period – or, marginally, anywhere at any time) capable of attaining the goal.<sup>83</sup> In less extreme

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77 *MSS*, pp. 19, 21/*GAW*, pp. 508, 510. Similarly *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 607, and in a letter to Marianne Weber of 22 March 1916 (copy in *GStA I*, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/2).

78 Cf. *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, pp. 149-50.

79 *MSS*, p. 53; *ORK*, pp. 84n82, 204/*GAW*, pp. 34n1, 142, 150.

80 For instance *MSS*, pp. 19, 21, 53/*GAW*, pp. 150, 508, 510.

81 See *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150, where the term, however, seems to include the “combined” criticism discussed below.

82 *MSS*, p. 26/*GAW*, p. 517.

83 *MSS*, pp. 21, 53/*GAW*, pp. 149, 510.

cases, it may be that the desired result can only be brought about under more or less *improbable* circumstances.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from such uncomplicated cases, which correspond to the first task of teleological analysis, the analysis of the side effects of the means forms the basis of a special kind of criticism: It is conceivable that the means chosen to attain a given goal are burdened with side effects which, with certainty or with a greater or lesser degree of probability, preclude the goal from being attained.<sup>85</sup> Analogously to the well-known concept of the "self-defeating prophecy", one might here speak of a "self-defeating strategy".<sup>86</sup> Naturally, this problem of the "self-defeating strategy" is particularly prominent with regard to situations involving complex relations of cause and effect, as for instance those relevant to political action. A striking example of a strategy which, in Weber's view, is self-defeating is discussed in a letter to Robert Michels: "Surely, you cannot be unaware that a *quite* considerable number of all strikes (as for instance the failed harbour strike in Hamburg) not only set back the unions ... but retarded *any* progress for the class movement by years, or even by decades".<sup>87</sup>

Just as the acknowledgement of the positive value of axiological consistency was a necessary premise of the critical function of axiological analysis, teleological value analysis can only claim to possess a critical function if we presuppose that the person setting the goal actually *wants* to attain it. Of course, this condition is a matter of form to a far greater extent than that on which the axiological criticism depends: while no inner *necessity* prevents a person from acting in an axiologically inconsistent manner (as long as his behaviour does not result in teleological inconsistencies), he will almost by definition want to reach the goal which he has set for himself, at least in the sense that he will not lavish time, energy or money on trying to reach a goal which he knows in advance to be unattainable, and that his willingness to "invest" in the attempt will rise with the chances of success. Here, an "Is" premise almost irresistibly slides towards an "Ought" conclusion: one should not attempt what one knows to be impossible.

In Weber's early work (*Objectivity*), his formulations suggest that he may be willing to abstract from this, logically necessary, intermediate condition: the demonstration that a goal is unattainable amounts, he says, to an indirect criticism of *the goal as such* as "meaningless under the given circumstances".<sup>88</sup>

84 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, pp. 510-11.

85 *MSS*, p. 21/*GAW*, pp. 510-11.

86 As far as the *necessary* means are concerned, such a self-defeating strategy of course amounts to the complete impracticability of the goal.

87 Weber to Michels, 19 February 1909; see also the letter to Michels of 12 May 1909 (both *MWG II/6*).

88 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 149. The addition "under the given circumstances" does, however, relativize the criticism (as does the addition "in practice" to the parallel mention of the possibility of goals "making sense"). In any case, Weber does not speak of "demonstrably false" or "objectively absurd" valuations or goals.

In view of this, it seems particularly interesting that Weber later, in *Value Freedom*, clearly emphasizes the *hypothetical* nature of teleological goal criticism. Any new fact, he says – as an example, he refers to “developmental trends” – may render the attainment of the goal “so unlikely, that [the acting person’s] work, judged by its chances of success, is bound to look like sterile tilting at windmills”;<sup>89</sup> and this will of course raise the problem whether to abandon the goal.<sup>90</sup> But this decision, this “balancing of the end against the indispensable means, of the intended goal against the unavoidable side-effects”, cannot be assumed by any scientific discipline, whether empirical or non-empirical.<sup>91</sup> To support this contention, Weber advances two arguments:

According to Weber’s first argument, while politics may be “the art of the possible”, one can in many cases only attain the possible by striving for the impossible. This opinion doubtlessly reflects central aspects of Weber’s views on the nature of politics; but in the present context, its logic is not very convincing. If the teleological value analysis has been thorough and skilful, one of its results will have been the knowledge (on which, in fact, Weber’s contention is based) that a certain political goal may not be attainable, but that it is most nearly reached if it is retained as a goal *in spite of its being unattainable*. The knowledge of what individuals may accomplish when they serve unattainable ideals is a knowledge of empirical fact; and in the present case it actually leads to the modification of the original goal. The retention of the original goal A, in spite of the fact that it is impossible to attain, can no longer be classified as the setting of a goal, but instead serves as the necessary means to a new end B (“a situation as close as possible to A”).

Weber’s second argument, however, completely dispenses with the idea of an “external” goal. Here he takes the case of an individual (in his example, a syndicalist) who, although acting in a way which may theoretically be interpreted as contributing to some goal, in fact does not at all orient his behaviour according to its “external” results. He only acts in order to produce or affirm his “internal” conviction that his commitment is “genuine”; what is important to him is the “intrinsic value”, not the “instrumental value” of his actions.<sup>92</sup> In Weber’s view, it is absurd to submit behaviour of this kind to criticism based on teleological value analysis, since the latter can only state the chances of achieving “external” results.<sup>93</sup> The action can only be analysed *axiologically*, and the result of this analysis is limited to the statement that *if the behaviour in question is to be regarded as axiologically consistent, it*

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89 *MSS*, p. 23/*GAW*, p. 513.

90 Weber uses the expression “abandon his hopes of realizing his practical valuations”, a phrase which may be interpreted as referring only to the *acknowledgement* of impossibility, not to the abandonment of the goal as such. However, the context seems to make it clear that the problem discussed is one of valuations and goals, and not simply of theoretical clarity.

91 *MSS*, p. 23/*GAW*, p. 513.

92 *MSS*, p. 24/*GAW*, pp. 513-14; similarly in a letter to E. Lesser of 18 August 1913 (*MWG II/8*). For a fuller discussion of the problems raised by these categories, see below, p. 197.

93 *MSS*, p. 24/*GAW*, p. 514.

must be oriented towards such and such an “internal”, axiological goal, and that it consequently cannot be “proved wrong” by the results of *teleological* analysis.<sup>94</sup>

A function of teleological value analysis which Weber particularly discusses in *Value Freedom* is that of defining more exactly certain vague concepts like “progress” and “adaptation”. To the extent that the situations to which these concepts refer can be defined precisely, it is possible, on the basis of a teleological value analysis which takes these situations as the fixed goal, to arrive at statements according to which the discovery or use of certain means marks a “progress” towards, or a greater or lesser “adaptation” to, the previously defined situation.<sup>95</sup> In other cases, too, Weber regards it as legitimate to designate certain means as more or less “correct”, if the context is a purely teleological one, and the end is given.<sup>96</sup>

To designate this last category, Weber several times employs a term which (like other parts of Weber's terminology) almost invites misunderstanding: he calls it a “teleological valuation” (teleologische Wertung).<sup>97</sup> Of course, this expression does not refer to a value judgment in the ordinary sense, and Weber emphasizes that such “teleological valuations” are nothing more than inversions of statements of cause and effect.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, he makes it clear that the objectively binding force which he – rightly – ascribes to these “valuations” depends on the acceptance of the same premise as that on which the critical function of teleological value analysis rests. For one thing, one must presuppose a wish to strive for the goal, so that it is legitimate to regard the goal as fixed;<sup>99</sup> and since, in the “teleological valuations”, the means are not only described as sufficient or necessary in relation to the goal, but may also be weighed against each other as being, teleologically, more or less acceptable, one must further presuppose a fixed order of priority concerning the various technical principles of rationality (speed, security, completeness, etc.).<sup>100</sup> Finally, the validity of the teleological valuation is conditional on the wish to pursue the goal *rationally*;

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94 This seems to be the most reasonable interpretation of the rather cryptic passage, *MSS*, p. 24/*GAW*, p. 514: “All that can be said from a ‘scientific’ point of view is *that* this conception of his [the syndicalist's] own ideals is the only one which is internally consistent, and that it cannot be contradicted by external ‘facts’”.

95 Concerning “adaptation”, cf. *MSS*, p. 26/*GAW*, p. 517; concerning “progress”, cf. *MSS*, pp. 29, 33-36, 38/*GAW*, pp. 520, 524-27, 529-30.

96 See, for instance, *ORK*, p. 184n90; *FMW*, p. 147/*GAW*, pp. 125n1, 603.

97 For instance *ORK*, pp. 184n90, 187-88/*GAW*, pp. 125n1, 129. Weber's choice seems all the more curious since he himself, as early as 1897, criticizes Sombart (in a letter of 8 February 1897) for employing the term “ideal” to designate the same concept as that covered by the term “teleological valuation” (copy in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/4).

98 *ORK*, pp. 187-88; *MSS*, pp. 26, 37-38, 45/*GAW*, pp. 129, 517, 529, 538.

99 See, for instance, *ORK*, pp. 187-88; *MSS*, p. 26; *FMW*, p. 147/*GAW*, pp. 129, 517, 603.

100 See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 35-37/*GAW*, pp. 527, 529.

the acting person must acknowledge the teleological form of analysis as a relevant standard for the judging of his behaviour.<sup>101</sup>

### The combined value analysis

Viewed separately, axiological and teleological value analysis are only partial, and their critical function is artificially restricted to their respective spheres: axiological analysis allows us to demonstrate axiomatic inconsistencies; teleological analysis informs us of conflicts in the empirical world. The two forms only acquire their full weight and moment when they are combined; and even though Weber constantly emphasizes the distinction between them (and between their various elements) his discussions are usually rounded off by an examination of the most complex form of goal criticism.

Here, the basic analysis is teleological, while the intended criticism is axiological: what value conflicts can be expected to result from the attempt to reach a given goal? In the same way, the concept of value analysed is a compound of the conceptual/theoretical and the practical/goal-oriented value aspects described above.

The substance of the combined value analysis is subdivided by Weber according to the same principles as those governing the teleological examination of *attainable* goals.

In order to reach a certain goal, one must employ certain means. In Weber's view, a combined value analysis may initially elaborate the vertical value structure of the means *as such*, and subsequently confront these value structures with the ideals of the acting person.

This point is taken up by Weber at a remarkably late stage. It is first mentioned in his speech at the congress of the *Association* in 1909,<sup>102</sup> and is elaborated in *Value Freedom*<sup>103</sup> and *Sc. Voc.*<sup>104</sup> The parallel to the late appearance in Weber's work of the problem of the "ethic of conviction" (*Gesinnungsethik*) is suggestive. In order to judge means *by themselves*, without reference to their external consequences, one needs a permanent inner standard of legitimate forms of behaviour. For instance, a democratic politician who refuses, for reasons of "principle", to negotiate with a dictator, even though he knows that the negotiation may result in the advancement of his democratic cause, will have to justify his refusal by means of arguments based on inner value axioms (questions of conscience, etc.) if he wants to shield himself from teleological criticism.

A second task of combined value analysis is that of working out the relations between the *side effects* of the necessary or chosen means and various value

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101 This last condition is expressed directly *Ost*, p. 106; *MSS*, pp. 37-38/*GAW*, pp. 329, 529; indirectly, Weber regularly reminds us of it by letting the predicate "correct" be accompanied by modifying words like "technically".

102 *GASS*, p. 418.

103 *MSS*, pp. 18, 21, 23/*GAW*, pp. 508, 511, 513.

104 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 607.

structures.<sup>105</sup> This analysis will show whether the side effects are in accordance with the ideals of the acting person, or whether they conflict with these ideals to a greater or lesser degree.

Axiological criticism only applies to a goal which is isolated from the whole causal structure surrounding it. Teleological criticism, on the other hand, is concerned only with the practicability of the chosen goals. However important these forms of criticism may be by themselves, it is still reasonable to expect that the material on which the actual criticism of goals (or of the means calculated to reach them) is based will in practice be furnished by the *combined* value analysis. The combined analysis elaborates the vertical and horizontal value structure not just of the goal itself, but of the whole sequence of moves by which it is to be attained. In order to achieve this purpose, it tries to furnish the answers to the two questions which may be said to define, in conjunction with the purely axiological or teleological questions ("What do we want?" and "What can we do?"), the central and fundamental political problems: "Does the end justify the means?" and "Does the end justify the side effects?"

As the above discussion concerning the binding force of teleological and axiological criticism showed us, it is not possible to *demonstrate* the necessity of answering these basic questions. In his methodological writings, Weber does not go into this problem as far as the combined analysis is concerned. But we find a significant passage in *Objectivity*: "... in his deliberations, no person behaving responsibly can avoid this balancing of the ends of an action against its consequences ..."<sup>106</sup> While *consistency* is the undemonstrable axiom of *axiological*, and orientation after *external results* that of *teleological*, criticism, Weber sees *responsibility* as the specific precondition on which the critical function of *combined* value analysis, the conclusive sifting of ends and means, is based. The aid that objective knowledge is able to render to subjective goals and actions depends on the assumption that the individual concerned is willing to act in a *responsible* manner. We shall return to this element of *responsibility*, which is central to Weber's position, in Chapter 5.

A precondition of combined value analysis, and particularly of its critical function, is the acknowledgement of the fundamental "ethical irrationality" or "value irrationality" of the world.<sup>107</sup> As Schelting concisely puts it:

In our conscious life and action, we are [simultaneously] placed under two fundamentally different "laws" that are completely "indifferent" to each other; and there is no guarantee

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<sup>105</sup> MSS, pp. 19, 21, 23, 53; FMW, p. 151/GAW, pp. 150, 508, 511, 513, 607; GASS, p. 418.

<sup>106</sup> MSS, p. 53/GAW, p. 150.

<sup>107</sup> The first term is Weber's own (GPS, p. 541); the second one, which represents a generalization of the principle, is coined by Schelting (1934, p. 28), but we find a close approximation to it in a note of Weber's from 1903 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6) which contains the following passage: "The world is also irrational *in the sense that conflict* is eternal, including *within* us, and between *end* and means" ("Welt ist auch *darin* irrational, dass der *Kampfewig* ist, auch *im* Menschen, auch zwischen *Zweck* u. *Mittel*").

that the *causally* necessary means will accord with the values inherent in the end striven for.<sup>108</sup>

If this assumption did not hold, it would be a waste of time to combine the axiological and teleological value analysis at all: in that case, empirical regularities would run absolutely parallel to the various value structures; the technically necessary or sufficient means to reach, say, an ethically positive goal would always be equally positive from an ethical point of view, and would only have ethically positive side effects.

Although (or, perhaps, because) it is quite clear from Weber's work, and in fact follows logically from his theory of the fundamental value conflict,<sup>109</sup> that he himself regards the world as value-irrational, his explicit treatment of the point is limited to the discussion, in *Pol.Voc.*, of a special case, that of *ethical* irrationality, which is of particular importance to the active politician.<sup>110</sup> However, the idea of a value-irrational world is based on the premise that causal connections are in themselves neutral with regard to values, and this premise is in turn closely connected with Weber's often reiterated doctrine according to which the material of social science only *possesses* such meaning as it is *given*: Weber's fight against objectivism and intuitionism is implicitly a fight to prevent the axiological and the teleological systems from being mistakenly identified with each other.

In *Pol.Voc.*, Weber strongly emphasizes the ethical irrationality of the world. This irrationality is, in his view, demonstrated "not just [by] the entire course of world history, but also [by] any unbiased and thorough examination of daily experience",<sup>111</sup> and it is the active factor behind the rise of the various religions, although the solutions that these religions provide to the problem have of course varied widely.

It will be noticed that Weber's argument is partly based on empirical facts which may serve as an *indication*, but by no means as *proof*, of its correctness. The rise of religion may perfectly well result from the prevalence of logical fallacies, and the "course of world history" is also a somewhat shaky standard of measurement, if one considers Weber's own warning that the subject-matter of history possesses no intrinsic meaning. Strictly speaking, we are left only with "the unbiased and thorough examination of daily experience", but the latter turns out to be amply sufficient. As soon as a person has established by such an examination the existence of just one discrepancy between the teleological and the axiological system, that is, between the world of facts and causal connections on the one hand, and his own value system on the other, he is compelled to acknowledge that only a combined value analysis can help him to a full awareness of his various goals and values and their implications.

It should be stressed that the assumption of the value irrationality of the world does not imply that the axiological and the teleological systems run counter to each other at *every* point, that, for instance, *only* evil means lead to good results. (Indeed,

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108 Schelting 1934, p. 26.

109 See below, pp. 192-93.

110 *LSPW*, pp. 362-64/*GPS*, pp. 542-44.

111 *LSPW*, p. 362/*GPS*, p. 542.

such an interpretation would mean that the assumption of value irrationality could never be conclusively verified, since any future instance of concordance between the axiological and the teleological systems would suffice to disprove it.)

The idea of the value irrationality of the world becomes especially significant when viewed in conjunction with the assumption of the "interdependence of all events". To use Schopenhauer's simile, which Weber takes over,<sup>112</sup> causation is not a cab which can be hailed and made to pull up at will. The first consequence of this is that behaviour does not only have calculated and desired consequences. Means, even when viewed in an isolated context of cause and effect, are not "causally neutral", and this circumstance raises the whole problem of the teleological "side effects". But moreover, the causal effects of behaviour not only reach beyond what is *desired*, but also, in principle, beyond the realm of *prediction*: an individual who acts should be aware of the fact that he will never be able to predict all the consequences of his actions. If the world were *value-rational*, this would not matter greatly, since all the consequences, predictable or unpredictable, of, for instance, ethically positive actions would be ethically positive in their turn. But the fundamental value *irrationality* of the world means that the consequences of a given action cannot be guaranteed to take over its axiological status; and in the present case, where we deal with unpredictable consequences, no combined value analysis, however thorough, would be able to reveal *what* the axiological status of these unpredictable consequences would be. Any person acting with the intention of attaining a certain goal should realize that the final result of his action may be absolutely contrary to his original intention, and that he has no means of preventing this development, or even of predicting its precise direction. This is what Schelting in his careful analysis, keeping close to Weber's own terminology, refers to as "the paradox of consequences".<sup>113</sup>

Apparently, Weber himself only once, in *Pol.Voc.*, discusses this question explicitly, in close connection with the problems of political action.<sup>114</sup> However, the concept of a "paradox of consequences" is implicit in Weber's view of theoretical value relation: The values that have guided human behaviour during a certain period or in a certain culture may be absolutely different from those that guide the judgment or investigation by posterity of this behaviour. This idea of a theoretical "change of meaning" is quite parallel to the assumption of a paradox of consequences. But whereas the phenomenon of a "change of meaning", which belongs in a theoretical context, primarily engages our neutral *interest*, its practical correlate, the paradox of consequences, defines a situation which Weber sees as deeply *tragic*, when he speaks of "the tragedy in which all action ... is in fact enmeshed".<sup>115</sup>

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112 *ORK*, p. 135/*GAW*, p. 77.

113 Schelting 1934, pp. 42-52.

114 *LSPW*, p. 355/*GPS*, p. 535.

115 *LSPW*, pp. 354-55/*GPS*, p. 535. Judith Janoska-Bendl (1965, p. 11) claims that Weber was convinced of "the fundamental *irrationality* of reality as such", and that this conviction acted as an ontological premise in his methodology. If the statement is meant to refer to the value irrationality discussed above, the choice of terms is unfortunate: what Weber sees as irrational is not reality *in itself* (since the category of irrationality is not inherent *in*, but

As we have seen, Weber regarded both axiological, teleological and combined value analysis as necessary to the complete understanding of the premises and consequences of action in a given situation. But in *Sc. Voc.*,<sup>116</sup> he interestingly enough ranks these three varieties of the scientific investigation of values not only according to their content or function, but also according to the inherent *dignity* which they possess in his eyes. He accords the lowest place to the empirical analysis (which includes the teleological value analysis) "... how to control life, both the external world and human action, by calculation ..."<sup>117</sup> This is *technical* knowledge, which can be regarded as a transferable *commodity*, fundamentally no different from vegetables bought at a market stall.<sup>118</sup> Combined value analysis, of course, goes further, but is still seen by Weber as restricted to the field of technical knowledge in the sense that the situations of choice are defined according to the empirical relations of the means, ends and side effects to each other. The purpose of this kind of analysis is finally to sanction or reject a concrete goal; the intention is practical.<sup>119</sup> Consequently, the highest rank in Weber's hierarchy is assumed by the purely axiological analysis of values, by means of which the goal is not criticized on grounds of empirical impossibility or because striving for it has undesirable consequences, but simply as the concrete embodiment of a certain *value*.<sup>120</sup> Weber sees this kind of analysis, and this kind only, as yielding purely *theoretical* knowledge, in the form of an "... *account ... of the ultimate meaning of [the acting person's] own conduct*".<sup>121</sup> Whereas technical knowledge (in the broad sense of the word), and consequently the results of teleological and combined value analysis, *may* be seen as valuable solely on account of the material advantages which its possession affords, axiological analysis, being completely theoretical, yields a sort of knowledge whose value cannot be deduced from its practical advantages and which Weber therefore sees as having an *ethical* function. And it is significant that Weber believes one of the results of this ethical function to be a heightened sense of *responsibility* of the acting person;<sup>122</sup> this responsibility is the quality which a person needs in order to acknowledge teleological and combined value analysis as legitimate not only when they offer him material advantages, *but also in cases where the criticism which they imply conflicts with his*

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applied to the subject-matter) but reality *in its relation to (and, in Weber's view, fundamental discrepancy from) any axiological structure*. Nor is it accurate to claim that Weber's theory of value irrationality depends on or hides ontological and philosophical premises. Weber's argument is based on a combination of axiological and teleological value analysis, both of which he regards as objectively valid.

116 *FMW*, pp. 150-51/*GAW*, pp. 607-608.

117 *FMW*, p. 150/*GAW*, p. 607.

118 The simile is Weber's own.

119 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, pp. 607-608.

120 Cf. Weber's letter of 13 September 1907 to Else Jaffé (*MWG II/5*): "One should not criticize an ethic on any *other* basis than that of one's *own* ideals – otherwise, one gets into shabby calculations of 'costs' " ... "

121 *FMW*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 608.

122 *FMW*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 608.

*material interests*. An individual who entirely keeps within a “technical” universe – in the broad sense – will not get sufficient opportunity to exercise his sense of responsibility.<sup>123</sup>

This part of Weber's argument seems to have evolved gradually in his mind and to have received its clear formulation at a rather late stage of his methodological production. This is indicated not only by the late date (1917) of *Sc.Voc.*, but also by another circumstance, which was already touched upon above: In the *Objectivity* and *Stammler* essays,<sup>124</sup> Weber bases his discussion on the question whether certain means are *sufficient* to reach a goal, and what would be the side effects of such sufficient means; but in his later essays<sup>125</sup> he instead takes as his starting-point the problem of the *necessary* means and their side effects. In its shortest form, the question of the early essays runs: “Is it possible for me to reach the goal A with the means at my disposal and without too heavy a ‘cost’ to other ideals and goals to which I am committed?”; the later Weber asks: “What does my acceptance of the goal A entail?” The shift of emphasis is small but significant: In the former case, the goal *as a concrete goal* is given. Although it may be dropped as a result of the criticism implicit in the value analysis, this criticism is basically directed at the means: “I cannot reach my goal A by the means available without paying too high a price. That is: the means are unsuitable; therefore I must modify the goal”. In the latter case, the goal is given only in a hypothetical sense, not absolutely fixed, and serves as the direct target for the criticism resulting from the value analysis: “The achievement of the goal is tied to the employment of means the ‘cost’ of which is unacceptable. That is: the goal is unacceptable”. There seems to be a definite shift here away from a technical towards an “axiological” *starting-point*, a closer attention to the ultimate value axioms. This shift of emphasis does not amount to a change of attitude, but rather indicates a greater awareness of the consequences of an already drawn conclusion. The problem changes, but not the solution.

### The “explanatory” value analysis

The forms of value analysis dealt with above do not exhaust all the possibilities of scientific treatment of values, which may also include the analysis of *how values come to be held*, and of *the consequences of their being held*. One might, however, regard these questions as marginal in the context of the present study, inasmuch as values are here treated without any regard for their specific axiological or goal-character, but simply as points of arrival or departure in a causal concatenation of empirical facts.

The marginal status of these questions from a purely *methodological* point of view is reflected in the fact that they are only infrequently taken up in Weber's

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123 This train of thought is not made explicit in *Sc.Voc.*, but in my opinion lies close to the surface of Weber's argument.

124 *MSS*, p. 53; *OSt*, p. 84/*GAW*, pp. 149, 312; see also *GASS*, p. 402.

125 *MSS*, pp. 18-19, 20-21; *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, pp. 508, 510, 607.

methodological work.<sup>126</sup> In fact, with regard to the question of the *causes* of valuational commitment we find only one explicit discussion, in *Value Freedom*:

The one and only result which can ever be achieved by empirical-psychological and historical investigation of a particular valuational position, with a view to determining its individual, social and historical causes, is its *interpretative explanation* (*verstehend* zu erklären). That is ... extremely important from the scientific point of view, in two respects: 1) when one aims at an empirical causal study of human action, by determining what are *really* its ultimate *motives*; and 2) when one is engaged in discussion with someone whose values are (really or apparently) different from one's own, by determining the real value-positions of the opponent.<sup>127</sup>

It is plain from this passage and from its context<sup>128</sup> that the kind of scientific inquiry described here by Weber goes beyond teleological, axiological or combined value analysis and enters the field of causal explanation.

Such an explanation may have a certain practical importance as a condition of effective value analysis (Weber's reason no. 2 in the quotation): A discussion involving value positions may be completely unfruitful if the scholar restricts himself to telling the other participants what their value judgments "really" mean, and that if they think differently, they are wrong. It will be far more effective for him to look for the ultimate axioms which *actually* guide these persons, and to continue the discussion on this basis.

Of much greater importance to social science is the first of Weber's reasons: that "explanatory" analysis may be needed to determine what the motives of human action really are. The concept of "interpretative explanation" stands at the very centre of Weber's approach to sociology<sup>129</sup> in general. In the real world, human action which is based on a fully elaborated axiological analysis and which is at the same time teleologically faultless must be regarded as a purely limiting case. If social scientists want to *understand* why people commit themselves to this or that position, axiological, teleological or combined value analysis is not sufficient, since action is hardly ever perfectly rational. "The empirical-historical process in people's minds must as a rule be understood as conditioned by *psychology*, and not by logic".<sup>130</sup> "Explanatory", motivational, analysis must be brought into play.

This is not the place to go into the details of Weber's concrete sociological studies. In the context of the present methodological account, the "explanatory" analysis is above all important because it can serve, alongside the axiological and teleological

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<sup>126</sup> The question discussed above, p. 89, of the empirical consequences of judicial norms will not be considered in this connection.

<sup>127</sup> *MSS*, pp. 13-14/*GAW*, p. 503.

<sup>128</sup> Weber has been discussing "realistic" normative sciences (ethics, mathematics), i.e., disciplines which causally explain the formulation of ethical or mathematical (normative) statements (*GAW*, pp. 502-503).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. his definition of "sociology", *ES*, p. 4/*WG*, p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> *MSS*, p. 96/*GAW*, p. 198.

analysis, as a basis for Weber's concept of the ideal type, which will be dealt with in Chapter 2.

### The value conflict

Weber's discussion of the *possibilities* of value analysis, as set out above, frequently includes a further point of great importance: the claim that ultimate values are in axiological conflict with each other, or what we may term the doctrine of the *fundamental value conflict*.<sup>131</sup>

#### Formulation

The theory of the collision of values is put forward as early as *Objectivity*:

The fate of a cultural epoch which has eaten from the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the *meaning* of events in the world from the results of an analysis, however perfect, of these events ... and that the highest ideals, those that move us most profoundly, will always work themselves out in a struggle with other ideals, ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us.<sup>132</sup>

The fact that Weber continues by talking about "the profound seriousness of this situation"<sup>133</sup> only serves to underline the extraordinary importance that he ascribes to the nature and consequences of this view. The emotional tension seems to be still greater in the later essays: here, the conflict of values and ideals is described as a fight between the different "gods",<sup>134</sup> and in *Value Freedom*, even more radically, as an "irreconcilable struggle to the death – as it were, between 'God' and the 'Devil'".<sup>135</sup> *Sc.Voc.* contains similarly dramatic phraseology.<sup>136</sup>

The exact meaning of passages like the ones quoted is a matter of some difficulty: their precision is blurred by their literary pathos. Translated into the arid language of value analysis, they can probably be read as follows: For any value axiom or valuation, the proposition holds that it is possible to define one or more different value axioms or valuations, on the same level of abstraction, with which it conflicts axiologically (in the sense that the value judgment, deduced from the former axiom, of a concrete phenomenon would be different from that or those deduced from the latter one(s)). And since Weber emphasizes that ultimate value axioms must be *unambiguous*, this

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131 *I07*, p. 37. Weber himself in one case (*MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 508) uses the term "collision of values", but also speaks of a "conflict" between values (for instance *MSS*, pp. 15, 19/*GAW*, pp. 504, 508).

132 *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 154.

133 *GAW*, p. 154.

134 The first instance of this is found in *Two Laws* (*LSPW*, pp. 78-79/*GPS*, p. 142).

135 *MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 507; the passage in question is not found in the *Memorandum*, but is an addition from 1917.

136 *FMW*, pp. 147, 151/*GAW*, pp. 603, 608.

means that he regards all value systems as being “open” upwards,<sup>137</sup> – that is to say, that no empirical or theoretical science is able to demonstrate, whether in a concrete case or generally, the existence of only one single ultimate value axiom: on any level of abstraction, it will always be possible to find two or more conflicting axioms.<sup>138</sup>

Weber does not limit himself to the general assertion of the existence of a fundamental value conflict, but frequently goes into closer detail concerning the nature of the conflict and the values involved.

The detailed treatment of these problems occurs rather late in Weber’s work. In *Objectivity*, where the basic idea of a value conflict is already propounded with much weight, Weber’s only gives the concrete example of the conflict between ethical norms and “cultural values”.<sup>139</sup> The description of this conflict, which forms a parallel to Weber’s claim that it is impossible to deduce ethical norms of behaviour from empirical cultural values, is quite general. On either side of the conflict, we may find a number of materially different value systems. These are not further defined. But Weber in this article refers to the classic philosophical “triad” of values: truth, morals and culture – in other words: what we *know*, what we *ought to*, and what we *want to*.<sup>140</sup>

Letters and fragments from the period 1907–13<sup>141</sup> contain certain indications of what value spheres Weber has in mind; but it is not until *Value Freedom*, and the political essay from 1916 which bears the significant title “Between Two Laws” (*Two Laws*), that we find explicit discussions of this point, which is later taken up in *Sc.Voc.* and *Pol.Voc.*

It is clear from these essays that Weber mostly remains within a well-established and traditional philosophical framework. As examples of the values involved in the

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137 If we discard the assumption that the ultimate value axioms are unambiguous, this means that an axiological conflict on a lower level of abstraction need not persist on a higher level: for instance, if the term “democracy” is not defined in precise terms, it is possible to deduce from it quite different, even totally opposed, concrete value judgments.

138 This does not, of course, imply that *all* imaginable ultimate value axioms conflict with each other in each given case. Such an implication could only be supported by a more elaborate philosophical theory of the structure of the value sphere. Weber did not base himself on, let alone elaborate, such a theory, and it is doubtful whether he would even have regarded it as “scientific philosophy”.

139 *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 154.

140 *MSS*, p. 58/*GAW*, p. 154. We can trace back this triad in Weber’s thought to his student days, cf. *JB*, pp. 260-61 (letter to Emmy Baumgarten, 5 July 1887).

141 Baumgarten 1964, pp. 400-401 (fragment from c. 1912), *MWG II/5* (letter to Else Jaffé-Richthofen, 13 September 1907), *MWG II/6* (letter to Toennies, 19 February 1909).

value conflict, he mentions intellect (truth) and religion,<sup>142</sup> as well as beauty<sup>143</sup> and erotic love.<sup>144</sup>

Occasionally, Weber treats the *ethical* sphere in apparent parallel to these other "traditional" value spheres. Thus, he writes in *Sc. Voc.*: "... it is a commonplace that something can be true although (and even: because) it is not beautiful and not holy and not good".<sup>145</sup> In the same passage, the Good is opposed to Truth. But closer scrutiny reveals that Weber does not always treat the ethical value sphere as being on the same level as those of religion, aesthetics, etc.

In this connection, the problem seems to have been that the Kantian categorical ethical imperative, which was regarded by Weber as the natural basis for a definition of a distinctive ethical value sphere, was of an extremely *abstract* and correspondingly formal nature.<sup>146</sup> This had led certain thinkers to claim that the categorical imperative was *completely* formal, i.e., that it could not serve as a basis for practical value judgments at all.

If this extreme interpretation were accepted, Weber's doctrine of the fundamental conflict of values would be seriously weakened: *every* value, *qua* value, implies that a person committed to it acknowledges the legitimacy of the demand for value orientation; and if this implied an acceptance of the value of ethics (defined in this completely formal manner), formal ethics must be regarded as standing outside or aloof from the general conflict of values. Naturally, such a special status of ethics, while extremely welcome to the "ethical" school of economics, was not acceptable to Weber.<sup>147</sup> An article by the leader of the "ethicists", Schmoller, in the *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*,<sup>148</sup> in which the "formal" view of ethical norms, was used as an argument against Weber, made it clear that an explicit defence of Weber's position was needed. Accordingly, the *Memorandum* contains a brief rejection of Schmoller's view;<sup>149</sup> and in *Value Freedom*, this summary denial is underpinned by a

142 Concerning the tension between intellect and religion, cf. *MSS*, p. 14; *FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GAW*, pp. 504, 603-604; *FMW*, pp. 350-52/*GARS I*, pp. 564-66; *MWG II/6* (letter to Toennies 19 February 1909). Concerning the tension between intellect and ethics, cf. *MSS*, p. 14; *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, pp. 504, 604.

143 This value sphere is in Weber's view opposed to that of religion (*FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GAW*, pp. 603-604; *LSPW*, pp. 78-79/*GPS*, p. 142; *FMW*, pp. 340-43/*GARS I*, pp. 554-56), of ethics (*FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GAW*, pp. 603-04; Baumgarten 1964, p. 652 (letter of August 1915 to Mina Tobler)) and of truth (*FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GAW*, pp. 603-604).

144 *MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 507; see also *FMW*, pp. 343-50/*GARS I*, pp. 556-63.

145 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604. In a letter to Mina Tobler from 1915 (Baumgarten 1964, p. 652) we find a similar contrast between what is "moral" and what is "beautiful".

146 Apparently, Weber concentrates on that part of the Kantian imperative which affirms that other human beings should not be used exclusively as *means*, but should also invariably be the *end* of action.

147 Notes of Weber's (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6) show that he was probably convinced of the inadequacy of the radically "formal" position as early as 1903.

148 Reprinted as Schmoller (1949).

149 *Memorandum*, p. 160.

detailed argument,<sup>150</sup> which for the first time gives a clear indication of Weber's solution of the problem concerning the status of ethics relative to the other traditional value spheres, and at the same time reaffirms his doctrine of the conflict of *all* value spheres.

Weber is perfectly aware, however, that the "traditional" examples are by no means exhaustive, but only represent "the most elementary cases of [the] struggle that the gods of the various orders and values are engaged in".<sup>151</sup>

For one thing, the conflict between the "traditional" value spheres may manifest itself on all levels of abstraction: since it is impossible to demonstrate scientifically that only *one* particular value is relevant to a concrete phenomenon, the fundamental value conflict may flare up in connection with quite insignificant details: the tension between "God" and "the Devil" communicates itself, in its full logical force, to the problems of everyday life.<sup>152</sup>

Weber also gives a number of instances of value conflicts *apart from* the "traditional" ones mentioned above. Thus, in *Sc.Voc.*, he writes: "I do not know how one could make a 'scientific' judgment concerning the [respective] *value[s]* of French and German culture".<sup>153</sup> *Two Laws* also contains a strong reminder that the "cultural values of small nations" conflict with the duties and possibilities of the "power state".<sup>154</sup> In these cases, the general value sphere of "culture" (which Weber normally contrasts with that of the individual: cultural values vs. individual ethics) is not differentiated according to material fields of activity – various "cultural values", such as politics, literature, art, etc. – but along "formal" national lines. Although other "formal" distinctions (chronological ones, for instance) are conceivable,<sup>155</sup> Weber seems to be particularly interested in the national one.<sup>156</sup>

As far as the "non-traditional" conflicts are concerned, Weber's main attention seems to centre on the problems of the *ethical* sphere. He assumes (as we have seen) that Kantian ethics *may* serve as a basis for certain practical value judgments. But on the other hand, he emphasizes that this assumption in no way amounts to the claim that the categorical imperative, as he interprets it, offers a basis for unambiguous value judgments of *every* phenomenon and event. In other words, certain groups of problems are ethically neutral, if "ethics" is defined in the narrow sense adopted

150 *MSS*, pp. 15-17/*GAW*, pp. 505-506. Here Weber reverses Schmoller's argument and claims that "those spheres of values which permit or prescribe the treatment of others 'merely as a means' [are] different in principle from ethics" (*MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 506).

151 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604.

152 Although there is no doubt that this was indeed Weber's view, it usually remains implicit in his work.

153 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604. Naturally enough for a Frenchman, Aron (1959, p. 52) concentrates on this example; but he denies that it can legitimately be seen as an example of a fundamental value conflict (see also Aron 1971, pp. 95-96).

154 *LSPW*, pp. 75-77/*GPS*, pp. 139-41.

155 In *MSS*, pp. 143-44/*GAW*, p. 246, Weber points to a possible chronological conflict in the field of aesthetics.

156 See below, pp. 248-50.

by Weber. Consequently, value judgments concerning these problems may only lay claim to the predicate "ethical" if they are based on a new and more "material" definition of ethics.

A number of passages seem to indicate that Weber expects such problems to be of a *practical* nature, to be relevant to the sphere of action. In *Value Freedom*, for instance, he writes: "The possibility of a normative ethic is by no means called into question merely because there are problems of a *practical* kind for which such a normative ethic cannot by itself provide any unambiguous guidance ..."<sup>157</sup>

The concrete example given by Weber in this connection is indeed, as he himself points out, a practical one: that of "justice" and "just distribution" in the field of social policy.<sup>158</sup> Here, he outlines two diametrically opposed definitions of "just distribution": according to the first one, benefits should be distributed in *direct* proportion to effort (the latter being, of course, in part a product of the physical and intellectual *ability* of the individual); according to the second one, benefits should be distributed in *inverse* proportion to effort (in order to *neutralize* differences of intellect and strength). Both of these principles, he claims, are "ethical" in the Kantian sense; consequently, the question of the just distribution of benefits in society cannot be finally resolved by recourse to Kantian ethics.

This problem concerning the definition of "justice" shows the difficulty of deciding *what* should be the end of practical (here: political) action. But Weber goes still further and raises a fundamental question, on which the whole of his subsequent discussion of politics and of its relation to the ethical and other value spheres is based: should action be deliberately guided by the wish to attain certain goals *at all*? This question is formulated by Weber in the following important passage:

... [the fundamental question] is whether the intrinsic value of ethical conduct (usually referred to as the "pure will" or the "conviction") is in itself sufficient to justify this conduct, in accordance with the maxim "The Christian acts rightly and leaves the outcome to God", as it has been formulated by Christian moralists. Or whether the responsibility for those *consequences* of the action which can be foreseen as possible or probable, because this action is enmeshed in the ethically irrational world, should also be taken into account? ... these maxims are in eternal conflict with each other, a conflict which simply cannot be resolved by the means that an ethics can offer in and of itself.<sup>159</sup>

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157 *MSS*, p. 15/*GAW*, p. 504.

158 *MSS*, pp. 15-16/*GAW*, p. 505.

159 *MSS*, p. 16/*GAW*, p. 505. This passage is not found in the *Memorandum*, which, however, already contains a number of other observations concerning the fundamental antagonism (*Memorandum*, pp. 169-71, cf. *MSS*, pp. 23-25/*GAW*, pp. 513-15). The idea of the two maxims and the dichotomy between them is definitely present in Weber's mind as early as 1906, however (in an article on the political situation in Russia, *LSPW*, p. 42/*GPS*, pp. 39-40). For a full discussion of Weber's early interest in the ethic of conviction (in particular the "Russian idea" and the possible inspiration from Georg Lukacz), see Schluchter 1996a, pp. 53-59.

In the context of the theory of the fundamental conflict of values, this particular antagonism will be the focus of the discussion in the rest of this chapter. Its full weight and importance will only become apparent later on, but an introductory treatment and definition is necessary at this stage.

The essence of the dichotomy, as described in the passage quoted above,<sup>160</sup> is the rejection or acceptance by the acting person of the principle of letting his actions be guided by their predicted *consequences* and by the positive or negative value with which the person invests these consequences. Though contradictory, both attitudes are “ethical” in the narrow Kantian sense, so that it is justified to qualify them both as “ethics”, and, as Weber does a little later, to define them respectively as the *ethic of conviction* (*Gesinnungsethik*), and the *ethic of consequences* (*Erfolgsethik*).<sup>161</sup> Obviously, the two sides of the antagonism find their complete parallels in aspects of Weber’s thought discussed above. Thus, the ethic of conviction is by definition guided by the wish to conform to the value rationality inherent in any axiologically consistent system.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, the ethic of consequences is based on the *combination* of valuational and causal rationality reflected in the combined value analysis.

The fact that the two alternatives are neutral in relation to Kantian ethics means that they *cut across* the traditional value distinctions forming the framework of Kantian ethics. The ethic of conviction may legitimately operate in connection with any consistent axiological system which in some way rejects the “world”, in the sense that it denies that the category of physical causation is relevant for the orientation of actions.<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, the fact that ethics and religion, the Good and the Sacred, are described by Weber as separate spheres when he discusses the value conflict, does not prevent him from defining a *religious ethic of conviction*. Quite the contrary: Weber may even without contradicting himself regard the radical commitment to religious values as the most extreme instance of an ethic of conviction. The dichotomy between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of consequences merges with the fundamental tension between the “spirit” and the “world”.<sup>164</sup>

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160 Weber’s views remain unchanged over time, so that the passage quoted may legitimately serve as a paradigm.

161 Both terms are Weber’s own, although “ethic of consequences” only occurs once in his printed work (in the 1906 article quoted immediately above).

162 See above, p. 186.

163 This is the gist of Weber’s statement concerning the syndicalist: “. . . if he is consistent, his kingdom, like the kingdom of any ethic of conviction, is not of this world” (*MSS*, p. 24/*GAW*, p. 514). Cf. Scaff 1989, pp. 91-92.

164 In *Interm. Refl.*, where Weber describes the development of the tension between the religions of salvation and the “world”, the amalgamation mentioned in the text is clearly noticeable. Thus, Weber speaks of “religiousness guided by convictions” (*Gesinnungsreligiosität*), as opposed to the “inherent laws” (*innere Eigengesetzlichkeiten*) of the world (all of the latter being connected with rational systems apart from that of religious conviction); cf. *FMW*, p. 339/*GARS I*, p. 552.

*Logical status*

*Validity* What kind of validity does Weber claim for his theory of the fundamental conflict of values? Does he hold that the conflict can be demonstrated by scientific means? that it is an undemonstrable, speculative conclusion? or simply that it is an (absolute or relative) subjective preference (*I07*, p. 37)?

In *Objectivity* (in which, as we have seen, the theory is stated in a fairly undifferentiated form) Weber occasionally employs modified formulations which suggest that he only regards it as (more or less) *probable* that an axiological conflict can be demonstrated to exist between the value chosen and one or more other values. For instance, we find a passage like: "Since in the great majority of all cases every goal that is striven for 'costs' something or at least may 'cost' something"<sup>165</sup> and, a little later: "... if we... were to regard the conflicts that immediately arise when we attempt to carry out in practice [seemingly 'obvious' goals of social policy] as purely technical questions of expedience (which would quite often be erroneous) ..."<sup>166</sup> The first of these passages, however, deals not with the *fundamental* value conflict but with the weighing, in the course of a combined value analysis, of undesirable side effects against the desired goal, a situation which differs in certain respects from that with regard to which the value conflict is defined. As for the second passage, it only seems to emphasize the fundamental truth that means cannot be expected to be value-neutral: because of the value irrationality of the world, a value analysis is insufficient if it does not go beyond a teleological examination.

The only indication of a genuine hesitation on Weber's part with regard to the absolute validity of the principle is also found in *Objectivity*, where at one point<sup>167</sup> he uses the expression that any action "in its consequences implies an *endorsement* of certain values, and therefore ... regularly the *rejection of other values*". Strictly speaking, the term "regularly" (regelmässig), with its exclusive *empirical* reference, is incompatible with the postulate of *logical* truth.

On the other hand, Weber constantly, and particularly in his later essays, claims that the value conflict is *eternal* and *absolute*. As we have seen, he is fond of the metaphor of an *eternal* conflict between "gods" or "God" and "the Devil";<sup>168</sup> and this terminology which, although expressive, is not altogether precise with regard to the question of validity, is supplemented by references to the *absolute* nature of the conflict: it cannot be resolved by scientific means.<sup>169</sup> These two characteristics are even explicitly linked together in a passage in *Sc.Voc.* where Weber speaks of the "eternal struggle of [the] gods with each other ... – or, speaking unmetaphorically, the fact that the ultimate attitudes toward life that are at all *possible* are irreconcilable,

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165 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

166 *MSS*, p. 56/*GAW*, p. 153.

167 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

168 *MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 507; similar formulations in *MSS*, p. 57; *FMW*, pp. 148-49, 151/*GAW*, pp. 154, 604-605, 608.

169 See, for instance, *FMW*, p. 147/*GAW*, p. 603.

and that the conflict between them can therefore never be finally decided ...”<sup>170</sup> Considering that Weber describes this as a “fundamental fact” (*Grundsachverhalt*), it seems justified to conclude that Weber regards his theory of the fundamental conflict of values as (logically) *true*.

This positive conclusion has a number of negative implications: First of all, the *logical* validity of Weber’s theory stands in sharp contrast to its definite lack of *actual empirical acceptance*. This is pointed out by Weber himself in *Value Freedom*: “The different value spheres intersect and are intertwined in almost every single important position adopted by human beings in the real world”:<sup>171</sup> in other words, the principle of axiological consistency is not observed in practice. This confusion may be “pragmatically conditioned”;<sup>172</sup> but, as in the case of his discussion of pseudo-value freedom<sup>173</sup> (which runs parallel to this one), Weber often points to the part played by purely psychological and unconscious factors. The grim consciousness of the antagonism of values is worn down and fades away into the “routine” of everyday life, absorbed by its toil or neutralized by the steady, unconscious tendency towards a comfortable harmonization of opposites.<sup>174</sup>

Occasionally (for the first time in *Two Laws*), Weber employs a phrase borrowed from John Stuart Mill, according to which all purely empirical views of the world lead to polytheism.<sup>175</sup> Sometimes,<sup>176</sup> Weber seems to employ Mill’s “polytheism” simply as a metaphor for the “intertwining of the value spheres” that we can observe empirically. Elsewhere, for instance in *Two Laws*,<sup>177</sup> and most clearly in *Sc.Voc.*,<sup>178</sup> Weber seems to extend the argument and make the “polytheism” in question function almost as a synonym for the value conflict *itself*. In fact, Weber’s use of the quotation from Mill encapsulates the tension between the validity of the principle of value conflict and its lack of empirical acceptance. The “polytheism” metaphor is a particularly vivid description, from the empirical point of view, of the “fundamental fact” that an irreducible conflict exists between “multiple sets of values”.<sup>179</sup> But the Greeks were great pragmatists in handling this value conflict in practice: In Weber’s own words, they “sometimes sacrificed to Aphrodite, and then to Apollo, and each of them above all to the gods of his particular *polis*”.<sup>180</sup>

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170 *FMW*, p. 152/*GAW*, p. 608.

171 *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 507.

172 *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 507.

173 See above, pp. 101-02.

174 *MSS*, pp. 18, 27, 57-58/*GAW*, pp. 154-55, 507, 517.

175 *LSPW*, pp. 78-79; *MSS*, p. 17; *FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GPS*, p. 142; *GAW*, pp. 507, 603; see also *LSPW*, pp. 362-63/*GPS*, p. 542.

176 *MSS*, p. 17/*GAW*, p. 507.

177 *LSPW*, pp. 78-79/*GPS*, p. 142.

178 *FMW*, pp. 147-48/*GAW*, pp. 603-604.

179 *LSPW*, p. 79/*GAW*, p. 142.

180 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604. See also *Pol.Voc.*, where Weber says that the gods of the Greeks were worshipped side by side, although they “quite often” fought among themselves.

Weber's discussion of the question of the empirical awareness (or lack of awareness) of the value conflict, and of the connected problem concerning the actual axiological consistency of action, has strong ethical overtones. But it is worth noting that his treatment of the problem of humdrum "everyday life" is not restricted to the ethical and axiological field, but includes reflections on the very *fact* of the unconscious harmonization of conflicts, and on its consequences. As in his dispassionate analysis of the ethically loaded problems raised by the employment of vague concepts by the adherents of the Schmoller school of economics, Weber here points out that the axiological confusion may have "far-reaching consequences", which are especially dangerous if they are not clearly perceived.<sup>181</sup> He gives a concrete example of this by pointing out that any kind of society gives certain types of people a particularly good chance of arriving at the levers of influence. Consequently, the acceptance of a particular kind of societal organization, even one that seems to guarantee peace and harmony under all conditions, represents a regular *choice*, one result of which is to create better conditions for the growth of certain characteristics, and to retard or hinder the flowering of others.<sup>182</sup>

The doctrine of the fundamental conflict of values is axiological, i.e., based on conceptual analysis. It is undemonstrable by empirical observation, but it seems beyond doubt that Weber viewed it as true, as logically *valid*. It is easy to understand, though, how doubts have arisen on this point. The language used by Weber in his discussion is so charged, and seems to invest conflict with a positive and peace with a negative emotional value to such an extent, that many commentators have felt justified in assuming that the field of scientific inquiry has been left behind. On closer examination, however, Weber everywhere turns out to regard the value conflict not only as a passionate preference, but also as a scientific truth. For instance, one may point to his metaphor of the "cultural epoch which has eaten from the tree of knowledge"<sup>183</sup> and to his prominent use of words like "know", "conscious", etc. when speaking of our awareness of the value conflict.

The fact that the definition of scientific knowledge adopted here only *evolved* slowly from a metaphysical and religious unitary conception of the world does not in Weber's view detract from the *truth* of the theory of value conflict (although it may of course have had an influence on the *value* of this truth, i.e., on the interest which it commanded at various times). Especially in *Interm.Refl.*, Weber gives detailed accounts of the historical developments by which the various "worldly" spheres were differentiated according to their different "worldly" inherent laws (*Eigengesetzlichkeiten*).<sup>184</sup> But here, as in *Sc.Voc.*, his conclusion contains the additional assertion of normative *validity*: "However, it is the destiny of our culture

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181 *MSS*, p. 27/*GAW*, p. 517.

182 *MSS*, p. 27/*GAW*, p. 517.

183 *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 154; see also *MSS*, p. 18/*GAW*, p. 507: "The fruit of the tree of knowledge, disturbing to human complacency yet inescapable, is precisely this and nothing else: to know about these conflicts ..."

184 *FMW*, pp. 327-59/*GARS I*, pp. 540-73.

that we become more clearly aware of [the value conflict], after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years by the (allegedly or presumably) exclusive orientation towards the sublime fervour of the Christian ethic”, he writes in *Sc.Voc.*,<sup>185</sup> and in *GARS I*, the tension between intellect and religion is traced back, beyond the multitude of its historical incarnations, to “the inescapable disparities between the ultimate forms of world views”.<sup>186</sup> Thus, Weber always observes his own principle of value freedom in this connection. He carries out, in the manner of a “sociology of knowledge”, the empirical investigation of the growing awareness through time of the antagonism of values; but this does not weaken his claim that his assertion of this antagonism is true and scientifically valid.

*Relation to the principle of value freedom* In the discussion of the value conflict, parallels have several times been drawn to the principle of value freedom. It may therefore be useful to try to clarify the relation between the theory that the sphere of scientific inquiry and the value sphere are logically heterogeneous (the theory forming the logical *basis* of the principle of value freedom) and Weber’s thoughts concerning the axiological value conflict.

Weber himself does not go much into this question. Apart from a fleeting reference in *Objectivity*,<sup>187</sup> he only once, in *Sc.Voc.*, explicitly links up the two principles with each other: “The ... ‘scientific’ advocacy of practical standpoints ... is impossible for much more fundamental reasons. It is meaningless in principle because the different value systems of the world stand in conflict with one another”.<sup>188</sup> Here the principle of value freedom is *deduced* from the theory of value conflict.

On the face of it, this construction seems unacceptable: the theory of value conflict is not methodologically on the same level as the discussion of value freedom or of axiological and teleological value analysis, since it is only a result – albeit a very general and important one – of an axiological analysis. And since the validity of the latter in its turn depends on its value freedom, it seems logically impossible to *deduce* the view of the heterogeneous nature of the spheres from the theory of value conflict. This chain of reasoning rather seems to point in the opposite direction, to the deduction *of* the theory of value conflict *from* the principle of value freedom.

In fact, however, the objection to Weber’s argument in *Sc.Voc.* is inadequate: The theory of value conflict is the result of an axiological value analysis claiming scientific *validity*. But the same applies to the view that the sphere of scientific inquiry is logically heterogeneous from the value sphere; and this view was the only argument advanced by Weber to support his demand for value freedom. Thus, *both*

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185 *FMW*, p. 149/*GAW*, p. 605.

186 *FMW*, p. 352/*GARS I*, p. 565.

187 *MSS*, p. 154/*GAW*, p. 154: “... that ‘views of the world’ can never be the product of advancements in empirical knowledge and that, *consequently* (my italics), the highest ideals, those that move us most profoundly, will always work themselves out in the struggle with other ideals ...”

188 *FMW*, p. 147/*GAW*, p. 603.

principles, value freedom and value conflict, are based on "logic" in the form of conceptual analysis and are, in the last instance, derived from a common premise, in the form of a certain conception of the conditions defining knowledge as true. The science to which the theory of value conflict denies the right to mediate between ultimate value axioms is defined in the same way as the science which, according to the principle of value freedom, is incapable of demonstrating the objective truth of values.

In fact, a closer examination reveals that the two principles coincide. On the one hand, this is true in a *negative* sense. In a situation in which one of them does not hold, the other one cannot be maintained either. For instance, the theory of a fundamental value conflict is false if the truth of one of the following two propositions can be demonstrated by scientific means: 1) Every value or valuation can be traced back to one and the same ultimate value axiom; 2) Although we can find more than one ultimate value axiom, one and only one of them can be shown to occupy an objectively higher rank than the others, or, alternatively, they all have their place in some objectively fixed hierarchy.

If proposition 1) holds, any valuation would be demonstrably equivalent to any other one, and all preferences would be equally true (or false). The principle of value freedom would lose all meaning. (Probably it is a version of this situation which Weber refers to as *genuine* "relativism", which, "to be consistent, is only meaningfully tenable on the basis of a very special ('organic') type of metaphysics".<sup>189</sup> It seems justified to interpret the term "'organic' metaphysics" as referring to a theory according to which valuations have a natural function in an "organic" whole embracing them all; in such a system, all valuations would be equivalent, and relativism in the strict sense of the word would reign, as in the situation defined under 1)).<sup>190</sup>

If proposition 2) holds, value conflicts would be possible but not insoluble. Their solution would be provided by scientific analysis, which would be able to decide whether a particular valuation was objectively warranted in the situation analysed. Consequently, the principle of value freedom would not be applicable. (The passage in *Value Freedom* which speaks of "a hierarchy of values unequivocally prescribed by ecclesiastical dogmas"<sup>191</sup> probably refers to this kind of system.)

From an opposite angle, too, the effects of the two principles are identical: a science that was able to demonstrate the objective validity of *one* value would thereby lay the foundation for a scientific hierarchy of values; and a science that was able to demonstrate the objective validity of *all* values would make nonsense of the theory of the fundamental conflict of values.

Moreover, it can be demonstrated that the two principles also coincide in a *positive* sense: the principle of value freedom, according to which it is impossible

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189 MSS, p. 18/GAW, p. 508.

190 It seems reasonable to connect these reflections on "organic" metaphysics with Weber's discussion of various kinds of "organic" or "emanationist" theories of the state, the more so as these discussions are always concluded by a rejection of the theories in question.

191 MSS, p. 19/GAW, p. 509.

to deduce an objective valuation from an empirical fact, finds its sufficient reason in the theory of the value conflict, which lays down that any valuation may be confronted with another one on the same level of abstraction, without any chance of scientific mediation. And inversely, the theory of value conflict may be said to follow from the heterogeneity of the “Is” and “Ought” spheres, since the impossibility of demonstrating the superiority of one value over another is only a special instance of the general impossibility of proving the objective validity of *any* value.<sup>192</sup>

If the two principles are thus to be regarded as, so to speak, coexistent formulations of the same fundamental theory (that of the logical gap between Is and Ought), one may ask why they are kept separate in Weber’s work. He does not tell us, so we cannot be sure of the answer. But at least one can point to the fact that the two principles are, generally speaking, relevant to different groups and to different situations.

The idea of value freedom is relevant to *scientific inquiry*; without going into the motives of its formulation and propagation, we may describe it as being above all a caveat addressed to the *scholar*, enjoining him to acknowledge the limits of his activity and the dangers to its character as science.

The theory of value conflict, on the other hand, has a far more direct relevance to human *action*. The impossibility of choosing objectively between two values only presents a real dilemma to a person who wishes to choose them both, i.e., whose situation is not that of theoretical inquiry, but that of practical valuation or goal-setting. As Weber himself admits, the essential framework for the discussion and application of this principle is that of *the weighing against each other of ends and means*.

### *Relation to the value analysis*

The combined value analysis can show us in what cases the achievement of a goal has negative consequences for *other* goals and values; that is, it uncovers the value conflicts implied by the realization of a certain goal. In itself, value analysis, as Weber describes it, cannot go beyond this point. But the most important *result* of axiological value analysis – the theory of the fundamental conflict of values – adds to this abstract set of possibilities the concrete demonstration that value conflicts uncovered by combined value analysis are *insoluble* by scientific means. Weber, who otherwise does not devote much space to the theoretical possibilities or actual results of value analysis, strongly emphasizes this element and links it up with his general discussion of value analysis.

Occasionally, Weber quite explicitly claims that it is impossible to weigh the values involved in a value analysis against each other in a scientifically binding manner: “... to decide on how to balance [the goal against the side effects] is certainly *not* a possible task for science, but has to be left to the will of the individual”, he

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<sup>192</sup> Eliaeson (2002, p. 114n40) is among the few commentators who explicitly discuss these relationships.

writes in *Objectivity*;<sup>193</sup> and in later essays, we find similar formulations.<sup>194</sup> The main point is everywhere the same: "... the issue ... is the irresolvable one of *balancing* ends, means and side-effects against each other".<sup>195</sup>

Often, though, Weber states this view in *positive* terms:<sup>196</sup> the individual must *choose* between the values in question: "[The individual] has to *choose* which of these gods he will and should serve, or when he will or should serve the one and when the other".<sup>197</sup> This might lead one to think that Weber always demands a *radical* decision, that his ideal of human behaviour is of the "all or nothing" variety. This assumption is supported by the fact that in one instance, referring to the issue of the use of physical force,<sup>198</sup> Weber undoubtedly takes this radical position, which indeed seems to correspond to a general polarizing trend in his thought. In Weber's writings on value analysis, however, he is anxious to dismiss this assumption. The necessity of *choice* between the values entering into the value analysis is absolute, in the sense that science can provide us with no objective decision in this matter; but the choice may lead to a compromise as well as to an extreme position. This conclusion is already implicit in Weber's use of the word "balancing";<sup>199</sup> but more than once, he directly proclaims the legitimacy of trying to reach some middle position in a given situation.<sup>200</sup>

However, Weber usually relegates his discussion of the possibility of taking up a mediating and harmonizing attitude to a secondary place. This may be seen as symptomatic of the polarizing trend of his thought; but he himself provides a more explicit explanation – or at least rationalization – of the low priority that he gives to the positions of compromise: although a compromise may be the result of a choice no less deliberate than that leading to a radical position, the *danger* that "middle-of-the-road" valuations will be regarded as "scientific" is far greater than in the case

193 *MSS*, p. 53/*GAW*, p. 150.

194 See, for instance, *MSS*, p. 19; *FMW*, p. 151; *LSPW*, p. 360/*GAW*, pp. 508, 607; *GPS*, p. 540; *GASS*, p. 482; Baumgarten 1964, p. 399 (fragment on normative ethics).

195 *MSS*, p. 26/*GAW*, pp. 516-17.

196 This is another small but significant indication of Weber's focus on the value sphere: he transforms the affirmation of the *limits* of science into an emphasis on the *possibilities* and *necessities* of human valuation.

197 *LSPW*, p. 79/*GPS*, p. 142; similarly, *MSS*, pp. 19, 53; *OSI*, p. 85; *FMW*, p. 152; *LSPW*, p. 355/*GAW*, pp. 150, 312, 508, 608; *GPS*, p. 536; *GASS*, p. 417.

198 See below, pp. 245-48.

199 *MSS*, pp. 26, 53/*GAW*, pp. 150, 516-17.

200 For instance *MSS*, p. 19; *LSPW*, p. 79/*GAW*, pp. 402n1, 508; *GPS*, p. 142. In one passage, *GASS*, p. 417, Weber even links together the two possibilities: "... [value judgments] which are perhaps mutually completely incompatible, or only compatible by means of a compromise, and between which you consequently have to *choose*". Weber's acknowledgement of the legitimate role of compromise is very clear in a letter of 2 April 1913 to Robert Wilbrandt (*MWG II/8*), in which he writes: "I hold the view that what dominates the sphere of values is the irresolvable *conflict*, and consequently the necessity of constant compromises ..."

of “consistent” ideals.<sup>201</sup> Since moderate positions will usually *in fact* command a greater following than extreme ones, Weber’s warning can also be seen as referring to the danger of facts (in this case, the views of the great majority) exercising a normative function in politics: the “self-evidence” of a view, resulting from its actual dominant position, is certainly not, in his view, a valid argument.

Combined value analysis, based on the results of axiological and teleological analysis, examines the relation between the various values and goals in the system subjected to analysis, and also the means, both in themselves and with respect to their side effects. Weber usually seems to regard the status of the means as being absolutely identical in the two respects;<sup>202</sup> but a closer analysis shows that the status of means-in-themselves is quite different from that of means-as-causes.

When Weber asserts that means may be rejected out of hand, “in themselves”,<sup>203</sup> this implies that their status in the weighing of ends and means against each other is determined *solely by their place in some axiological system*. For instance, certain means, like murder and lies, normally lie under interdict, so to speak, in a “narrow” ethical system, that is, they are judged negatively, whatever their possible desirable consequences. A number of other value systems (religion, aesthetics, etc.) *may* also be defined in such a way that they deny the “world”, refusing to compromise with causation, and striving instead for the “pure” religious conviction, the immediately beautiful act, etc. Clearly, the existence of this kind of value among those which are to be taken into account in the analysis will result in the rejection out of hand, as such, of means judged to be negative in terms of these values. Strictly speaking, their means status is purely hypothetical; instead, they should be regarded as actions or objects possessing a negative intrinsic ethical (religious, etc.) value which debars them in advance from being taken into account as teleological means.

On the other hand, this kind of analysis is unacceptable to the ethic of consequences. Here, the weighing of values against each other *must* include *both* a causal *and* an axiological element. Means must be judged both by their effects (as far as they can be predicted) and by the value status of these effects.

In a sense, the complete examination of an ends-means structure, as described by Weber in his discussion of value analysis (particularly the *combined* value analysis) implies a fundamental decision in favour of the ethic of *consequences*. The very setting of a goal at all, and the subsequent attempt to reach it by certain means, represents a compromise with causation, with the “world”; actions are viewed not only according to their intrinsic axiological value but also in the context of their causal *consequences*, which may bring about situations possessing a (perhaps radically) different intrinsic axiological value.

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201 *MSS*, pp. 57-58/*GAW*, pp. 154-55.

202 For instance *MSS*, p. 21; *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, pp. 511, 607; *GASS*, p. 418.

203 *FMW*, p. 151/*GAW*, p. 607.

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## Chapter 4

# Values as an Instrument of Scientific Inquiry: The Ideal Type

As we have seen, the question of the *formation of concepts* occupies a central place in Weber's methodology. Apart from his *general* discussion of the construction of the concepts of social science, Weber's interest in this problem is evident from his exhaustive treatment of a *specific* kind of concept, which he calls the *ideal type*.

Weber's fullest and most inclusive account of the concept of the ideal type, its nature and function, is found in *Objectivity*.<sup>1</sup> In the essays published before 1909,<sup>2</sup> he elaborates and develops his views on the concept in various ways. Later, the problem is discussed in *Categories*, (briefly) in *Value Freedom*, and in the theoretical introduction to *ES*,<sup>3</sup> written during the last years of his life. Thus, the problems of the ideal type occupied him during the whole of the period marked by his interest in methodology.

Contrary to our findings concerning the other complexes of problems treated in the present work, Weber's ideas on this matter seem to have varied considerably over time. Above all, there is a pronounced change in favour of generalizing and sociological formulations in the later work (*Categories* and *ES*) when compared with the earlier essays (particularly *Objectivity*); but one can find other differences, too, even within one and the same essay.

This circumstance has been noted by many commentators. Some of them, such as Schelting,<sup>4</sup> explicitly draw the conclusion that Weber's concept of the ideal type was methodologically unclear and full of contradictions. Others, like Burger<sup>5</sup> (and, following him, Merz<sup>6</sup>), struggle to show that it is possible to reconcile the apparent differences within a satisfactory methodological framework. Still others (Gerhardt<sup>7</sup>) try to solve the problem by putting it in a completely new context (*IO7*, pp. 42-47).

In any event, it should be stressed that Weber himself apparently does not see any contradiction in making the term "ideal type" cover both the earlier and the later discussions of the concept, and that he refers to his first discussion (in *Objectivity*)

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1 Above all *MSS*, pp. 90-110/*GAW*, pp. 190-212.

2 Particularly in *Knies II*, *Crit.Stud.* and *Stammler*.

3 *ES*, pp. 3-22/*WG*, pp. 1-11. In the rest of *ES*, Weber *makes use of* a large number of ideal types.

4 Schelting (1922, 1934).

5 Burger (1987 (1976)).

6 Merz (1990).

7 Gerhardt (2001, 2004).

of the concept as late as in *ES*.<sup>8</sup> It therefore seems reasonable to work from the hypothesis that it is possible to understand Weber's various discussions of the ideal type without assuming the existence of any fundamental breaks in his thought, the central principle remaining fairly unchanged from its first formulation in *Objectivity*, but being later developed in various directions without, however, losing its essential inner consistency. More concretely, an attempt will be made to show the fruitfulness of viewing the concept of the ideal type in the light of Weber's reflections on *value relation* and *value analysis*.

The problems surrounding the ideal type quickly lead one into complicated discussions concerning, for instance, Weber's views on "interpretation" (*Verstehen*) in social science, and his concepts of causation and rationality. These concepts and ideas will be referred to whenever necessary; but they will only be discussed in substance insofar as they are naturally related to the two main aspects mentioned above: value relation and value analysis. The reference to the two latter aspects also has the function of linking up the arguments in this chapter with the general lines of thought that guide the present work.

### The central principle

As mentioned above, Weber discusses the concept of the ideal type most thoroughly in *Objectivity*. This essay also contains the most complete enumeration of the central elements of the concept. At the very beginning of his discussion, Weber characterizes the ideal type as follows:

This mental image (*Gedankenbild*) brings together certain relationships and events of historical life to form an internally consistent cosmos of *conceptual* interrelations. In substance, this construct bears the character of a *utopia* which we arrive at by mentally accentuating (*gedankliche Steigerung*) certain elements of reality.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the expression "mentally accentuating" is defined more precisely, when Weber speaks of:

the one-sided *accentuation of one or a number of* viewpoints and ... the synthesis of a great many diffuse and discrete *individual* phenomena (which may be more present in one place, less in another, and occasionally be completely absent, and which are in conformity with those one-sided, accentuated perspectives), into an internally consistent *mental* image.<sup>10</sup>

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8 *ES*, p. 22/*WG*, p. 11. Similar references are found in *Knies II* and *Stammler (ORK)*, p. 191n95; *OSI*, p. 107n11/*GAW*, pp. 131n1 and 330n1).

9 *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 190.

10 *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 191.

That this image, this intellectual construct, is a “utopia” means, as Weber explains in the same passage, that “in its conceptual purity, this mental image cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality ...”<sup>11</sup>

These passages from *Objectivity*, which are clearly meant as introductory summaries guiding the subsequent discussion, seem to include all the essential attributes of the ideal type. According to them, the ideal type is a *mental image* (Gedankenbild), which is constructed by means of *accentuation* (Steigerung) of certain selected, one-sided (einseitige) *viewpoints*, and is consequently *unreal* (Utopie),<sup>12</sup> as well as being characterized by *internal consistency* (widerspruchsflos).

The discussion below will be guided by the double intention of showing how the concept of the ideal type, as described, can be related to, and be seen as evolving from, other methodological chains of reasoning in Weber’s work, and how it is further developed in various directions without being modified in its essence.

### The conceptual aspect: ideal type and value relation

*The premises: The relation to the “quarrel about methods” and to Rickert*

The treatment of the ideal type in *Objectivity* opens with the description of it as “a kind of conceptual construction which is specific, and to a certain extent indispensable, to the sciences of human culture”.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the discussion of the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences may contribute to our understanding of the nature of the ideal type.

As is to be expected, the great majority of the relevant passages in Weber’s work are found in *Objectivity*, where the connection with the “quarrel about methods” in economics, and with Rickert’s theory of science, is most immediate.

The statement that the concept of the ideal type is *specific* to the social sciences makes it natural, when looking for those elements of the concept which determine this specific function, to consider the characteristics which in Weber’s view (as derived from Rickert) define the historical (in the logical sense of the word) sciences as different from the natural sciences. As shown in Ch. 2, the most prominent of these characteristics was the theoretical *value relation* by which certain significant or interesting elements were selected from infinite reality.

In fact, Weber constantly emphasizes the power of the ideal type to select and express *significant* aspects of reality; thus, he writes,

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<sup>11</sup> MSS, p. 90/GAW, p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> In Weber’s view, a mental or intellectual abstraction, a concept, is of course always unreal in the sense that it cannot *reproduce* reality; but the unreality referred to here is so to speak, of the second degree, in that the concept has no actual correlate in empirical reality: it is a *construct*.

<sup>13</sup> MSS, p. 89/GAW, pp. 189-90. Rossi (1987, p. 45) seems to believe that “every concept and every empirical regularity in the historical and social sciences has the character of an ideal type”. This is surely going too far.

as soon as the historian goes beyond merely registering the existence of concrete relationships and attempts to determine the *cultural significance* of an individual event, however simple, – to ‘characterize’ it – he works, and *has to* work, with concepts that can only be defined sharply and unambiguously in ideal types.<sup>14</sup>

At one point, this parallel between the ideal type and the value relation is extended, in that Weber stresses the need to construct a *large number* of ideal types in precisely those cases where he usually emphasizes the importance of *value interpretation*.<sup>15</sup>

The close connection of the ideal type with the theoretical value relation essential to the historical sciences permits us to explain a number of the elements of the ideal type, as Weber describes them. Thus, the fact that the ideal type only includes those *parts* of reality which become relevant from a certain point of view makes it reasonable to describe it as an *mental abstraction*;<sup>16</sup> and the introduction of the idea of points of view implies a narrowness in the individual ideal type which justifies Weber's emphasis on the *one-sidedness* of the concept.<sup>17</sup>

By linking up the concept of the ideal type so closely with the doctrine of theoretical value relation, Weber clearly repudiates the position of the “younger historical school” in the “quarrel about methods”.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Weber himself points out, in more or less veiled terms, that his defence of the ideal type brings him into conflict with the views of the leader of the school, Schmoller (although he never mentions him by name in this connection).

This is already true with regard to the view of theoretical value relation as a starting-point for analysis. This view squares badly with Schmoller's idea of a historical “induction” and of a subsequent “deduction” of actual reality from the concepts formed by “induction”. Weber expressly notes this discrepancy, and defines its nature and scope more clearly by pointing out that the “inductive” theory is based on the assumption that it is possible to *reproduce* the whole of reality in a concept, an assumption which stands in obvious contradiction to the abstract view of concepts that Weber took over from the neo-Kantians.<sup>19</sup> This contradiction also expresses itself in Schmoller's dislike of the precise and one-sided concepts which Weber regards as quite necessary to the cultural sciences.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Weber points to the fact that the younger historical school regards concepts as the *end* of scientific inquiry, whereas the ideal type is clearly meant

14 *MSS*, p. 92/*GAW*, p. 193. Similar formulations, *MSS*, pp. 91, 93-94/*GAW*, pp. 192, 194.

15 *MSS*, p. 97/*GAW*, p. 198; see above, p. 139.

16 Cf. *MSS*, p. 91/*GAW*, p. 192 (“... selection of those relationships which are to be included in an ideal type of a particular culture ...”) and *MSS*, p. 92/*GAW*, p. 193 (“... abstract ideal types ...”). In both cases, the element of significance is explicitly present in the context.

17 This quality is frequently mentioned by Weber in subsequent discussions; see, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 95, 106-107/*GAW*, pp. 196, 208-209.

18 See above, pp. 111-13.

19 *MSS*, p. 106/*GAW*, p. 208; see also *MSS*, p. 92/*GAW*, pp. 192-93.

20 *MSS*, pp. 92, 103-104, 106/*GAW*, pp. 193, 205, 208.

to be an *instrument* at the service of other scientific purposes. He appears to attach great importance to this point, which is made not only in *Objectivity*<sup>21</sup> but also in *Stammler*,<sup>22</sup> and as late as 1917 in *Value Freedom*, where Weber writes: "... the theoretical constructs can only assist in the attainment of knowledge of reality; by themselves, they cannot provide such knowledge".<sup>23</sup>

Weber not only *records* his disagreement with the Schmoller school, but directly *criticizes* the latter. He claims that the view of concepts as reproductions of reality is logically *untenable*,<sup>24</sup> and points out that when the historicists reject value relation as a methodological guide, this means *either* that they have to restrict themselves to purely formal aspects, like those of the history of law – a restriction which implies the identification of the formally normative with the actually significant;<sup>25</sup> *or* that they run the risk of letting themselves be guided by obscure and unconscious criteria of selection.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, there seem to be strong indications that the specific importance of the ideal type to social science is derived from its close connection with methodological principles which were already formulated by Rickert in his *Limits*. In view of this, it is interesting to note that Weber seems to *go beyond* Rickert's theory of science by claiming that the ideal type – a logical category which, as such, is *not* borrowed from Rickert – is *necessary* to social science.

Certain formal considerations already make this assumption plausible. Thus, Weber, who is normally generous with his references to Rickert's methodology, completely avoids such references in his discussion of the ideal type. There are good reasons for this silence: In a letter to G. von Below of 17 July 1904,<sup>27</sup> Weber modestly says that *Objectivity* is nothing more than an application of Rickert's ideas, but then continues: "... with the exception of the last third [i.e., the discussion of the ideal type], which is, however, the part which I find the most important". Conversely, the references to the ideal type in the second and later editions of *Limits* are extremely cursory, in spite of the somewhat hazy claim advanced by Rickert himself<sup>28</sup> that Weber's concept was inspired by *Limits*.

These formal considerations are supported by the results of a closer examination of the relevant portions of Rickert's theory of science, an examination which makes it clear that Weber's position differs from Rickert's *even with regard to the conflict with Schmoller* discussed above.

21 *MSS*, pp. 92, 106-107/*GAW*, pp. 193, 208-209.

22 *OSt*, p. 141n23/*GAW*, p. 357n1.

23 *MSS*, p. 44/*GAW*, p. 537. This passage is not found in the *Memorandum*.

24 For instance *MSS*, pp. 92, 106/*GAW*, pp. 192-93, 208.

25 *MSS*, p. 94/*GAW*, p. 195.

26 *MSS*, pp. 94-95, 107/*GAW*, pp. 195-96, 209. This obscurity and lack of conscious reflection may have serious consequences; for Weber's criticism of the Schmoller school (on a concrete point), see above, pp. 79-80.

27 Copy in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/4.

28 Rickert 1929 (1902), p. 758. Rickert may in part be interpreting a letter of 14 June 1904 from Weber, which will be discussed below.

For one thing, there is *no* parallel in Rickert's theory to Weber's demand that the aspects considered by the scholar to be significant should be made *explicit* by means of ideal types. This is not surprising, since Rickert is interested in history as a *type* of scientific inquiry, whereas Weber's discussion of methodological questions is rooted in and focuses on the concrete problems of the science of economics;<sup>29</sup> but it is worth noting that Rickert, by ignoring the need for explicit definition of the aspects, in principle runs the same danger as the younger historicists: the obscurity of the aspects increases the danger of an unwitting violation of the principle of value freedom.

To this must be added another consideration. As we have seen,<sup>30</sup> Rickert, unlike Weber, assumes that the group of values to which a given historical material may legitimately be related is limited to the values which have demonstrably served as guides to human behaviour in this material.

This means that Rickert, although his neo-Kantianism of course prevents him from embracing a "reproduction theory", finds it difficult to subscribe to the idea of the *one-sidedness* of the ideal type which Weber emphasizes so strongly: the maximum number of legitimate aspects is fixed once and for all, so that the historical material in question can be summed up in, if not one, at least a finite number of concepts, the totality of which must be said to exhaust the scientific importance of the material;<sup>31</sup> such a complex of concepts would have some claim to represent a *complete* rather than a one-sided view, and might even, when elaborated, turn out to be not unlike the historicist concepts supposed to contain *all* the historically significant material, and denounced so frequently by Weber.<sup>32</sup>

While the discrepancies noted above might be said only to represent differences of *tendency*, we can establish the existence of an *actual* divergence between Rickert and Weber on a third point, namely the relation between valuation and value relation. A letter from Weber to Rickert of 14 June 1904 offers important evidence in this respect. In this letter, Weber writes:

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29 See above, p. 126.

30 See pp. 122, 147.

31 Rickert 1902, pp. 638-39.

32 A juxtaposition of Rickert and Weber on this point is most revealing:

Rickert 1902, pp. 408-409: "As the concepts of history become more and more comprehensive and extensive, they must come to contain more of reality, and their content must become progressively more rich. One may then even say that ... the most comprehensive historical concept ... would have to include the whole multiplicity of a universal history or history of the world".

Weber, *MSS*, p. 97/*GAW*, p. 198: "The more comprehensive the relationships are which have to be described, and the more many-sided their cultural *significance* has been, the *more* the synthesis and systematic exposition of them in a mental and conceptual system approximates the character of an ideal type, and the *less* is it possible to make do with just *one* such concept ..."

I am very pleased with your acceptance of the idea of the “ideal type”. I really feel that a category of this kind is necessary to distinguish between “valuation” and “value relation”.<sup>33</sup>

Rickert<sup>34</sup> may have taken this statement to mean that Weber found the elements of his theory of the ideal type in Rickert’s logical distinction between valuation and value relation. But when the letter is read in a wider context, it seems to suggest quite a different interpretation.

The crucial problem in this connection is that of explaining why Weber found it necessary to develop a separate concept in order to distinguish valuation from value relation, while Rickert, who otherwise lays great stress on this distinction, does not seem to have experienced the same necessity. What can be the reason for this new development?

The answer to this question may perhaps be found in Rickert’s normative concept of cultural values. In Rickert’s view, as we have seen, only certain kinds of human interaction qualify as “communities”, i.e., as frameworks for the definition or adoption of cultural values. This restriction conceals an objectivist conception: certain patterns of interaction (the family, the nation, etc.) *are* “communities”, while other ones (probably, for instance, classes) *are not* “communities” in Rickert’s sense, whatever the subjective interests of the scholars concerned. This objectivism in its turn implies the existence of a *valuational* element in the historical concepts, as Rickert defines them: the cultural values on which the study of a given “community” and its history may be based are fixed in advance, since the historian is only allowed to regard certain setters of cultural norms as legitimate.

As we have seen, Weber dissociates himself from this normative concept of culture and, with minor modifications, leaves the scholar free to choose his aspects as he pleases. In so doing, Weber has *in principle* disengaged his theory of the formation of historical concepts from the implicit objectivism of Rickert’s theory of science; but *in practice*, Weber’s continued use of the Rickertian terminology may tempt the reader to ignore the repudiation of objectivism and to reintroduce the normative concept of culture into his interpretation of Weber. Consequently, Weber has to make certain that the concepts of the cultural sciences are defined so that *they do not correspond to any particular phenomenon in the reality from which their elements are taken*. Only in this way is it possible to translate the repudiation of objectivism into practice; a concept which is unreal in this sense, which is, in Weber’s words, a “utopia”, cannot be suspected of latent objectivism.<sup>35</sup> This seems to be one

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33 “Ihre Zustimmung zu dem Gedanken des ‘Idealtypus’ erfreut mich sehr. In der That halte ich eine ähnliche Kategorie für notwendig, um ‘werthendes’ und ‘werthbeziehendes’ Urteil scheiden zu können”. (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 25). See also a later letter from Weber to Rickert of 28 April 1905 (*ibid.*), in which the ideal type is described as “necessary in substance” (*sachlich* gefordert).

34 *Limits*, 1929 (1902), p. 758.

35 Cf. Weber’s warning against emanationist concepts, for instance *MSS*, pp. 94, 102-103/GAW, pp. 195, 204-205, and against the belief that scientific and objective criteria of

of the main reasons for Weber's emphatic assertion that the ideal type is specifically *unreal*, that it is an "Utopie"; and this assertion at the same time constitutes a tacit, but unambiguous, dissociation from Rickert's theory of science.

Weber's open criticism of Schmoller, and his implicit modification of Rickert, may be seen as important reasons for his characterization of the ideal type as being *abstract, one-sided and unreal*; they also explain his emphasis on its *instrumental* function in scientific research. But thus defined, Weber's position is in fact identical with the moderate one taken up by Menger in the "quarrel about methods":<sup>36</sup> in Menger's view, the doctrines of theoretical economics were precisely characterized by their one-sidedness and abstraction;<sup>37</sup> and he believed that no "realistic", i.e., historical, science of economics could dispense with the help afforded by such abstract propositions. In fact therefore, Weber, in his discussion of the *nature* and general *function* of concepts, sides *with* the abstract school and *against* the historical one.

Weber repeatedly stresses the fact that the ideal *type* should not be confused with practical *ideals*: "... the idea of what *ought to be*, of an 'ideal' must be carefully kept separate from these mental pictures [the ideal types], which are 'ideal' in the strictly *logical* sense of the term";<sup>38</sup> indeed, the opposite view would violate Weber's general demand for the value freedom of the scientific process, and destroy the distinction between value judgments and theoretical value relation which he sees as necessary for the construction of historical concepts.

Viewed from this perspective, the choice of the *term* "ideal type" seems somewhat inapt, since the word must evoke exactly those connotations which Weber tried to avoid. In the letter (quoted above) to Rickert of 14 June 1904, Weber gives the following reasons for his choice:

I chose that term [ideal type], in the same way that one uses the terminology "ideal limiting case", "ideal clarity" of some typical process, "ideal construction", etc., *without* the implication of a positive *valuation* (*Sein-Sollendes*), and in the same way that [the concept] which *Jellinek* ([in his book] *Allg[emeine] Staatslehre*) calls an "ideal type" is only meant to be perfect in a logical sense, not an *ideal*.<sup>39</sup>

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selection and valuation may be found in the subject-matter as such, *MSS*, pp. 97-98/*GAW*, p. 199.

36 See above, p. 113. See the general arguments in favour of Menger, *MSS*, pp. 44-45, 97-98/*GAW*, pp. 187, 537.

37 It is open to discussion whether Menger regarded the propositions of theoretical economics as unreal in Weber's definite sense of that word; but his arguments tend in this direction.

38 *MSS*, pp. 91-92/*GAW*, p. 192; similarly, *MSS*, pp. 98-99/*GAW*, pp. 199-200.

39 "Ich nannte sie so, wie der Sprachgebrauch von 'idealem Grenzfall', 'idealer Reinheit' eines typischen Vorganges, 'idealer Konstruktion' etc. spricht, *ohne* damit ein *Sein-sollendes* zu meinen, ferner wie das, was *Jellinek* (*Allg. Staatslehre*) 'Idealtypus' nennt, als nur im logischen Sinn perfekt gedacht ist, nicht als *Vorbild*'.

In this passage, we find a number of the characteristics of the concept: the “ideal limiting case” invokes its *abstraction* and *unreality*, while the term “logically perfect” must be supposed to have some connection with the *internal consistency* of the ideal type. Nevertheless, the choice of the word “ideal type” seems to owe much to the more or less deliberate preference on Weber’s part for terms from which the meaning almost has to be wrested.<sup>40</sup>

This apart, Weber seems to have attached little importance to the *term* “ideal type”. Thus, in the letter of 14 June 1904 quoted above, he writes: “How it is termed is a minor consideration”,<sup>41</sup> and in *Value Freedom*, he exhibits a similar indifference to the question of terminology.<sup>42</sup> The term is used much less frequently in the later essays, being supplanted by the term “pure type”, or simply “type”.

### *The ideal type as an aid to the exposition of scientific results*

The ideal type is stated by Weber to have as its first function that of being an *aid to the exposition of scientific results*.

This function is above all discussed in *Objectivity*,<sup>43</sup> alongside the discussion of the conceptual elements of the ideal type. But although Weber states that it is in principle linked with these elements, his actual treatment of the function is curiously vague and ambiguous, and opens up new aspects of the problem.

Weber seems to lay great stress on the usefulness of the ideal type as an aid to the presentation of results. Thus, he writes:

Our imagination can often dispense with the explicit conceptual formulation [of the logically necessary “conceptual shorthand”] as a means of *research* – but for the purposes

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40 The letter of 14 June 1904 quoted in the text sheds new light on the question of the relation between Weber’s and Jellinek’s concepts of “ideal type”. Marianne Weber (1975, p. 314/Marianne Weber (1950 (1926)), p. 356 and a number of later commentators maintain that Weber not only borrowed the *word* from Jellinek, but that the *concept* to which it referred was the same in Jellinek’s case as in Weber’s. This was wrong (as was first pointed out by Tenbruck (1999 (1959), p. 48): Jellinek’s ideal type is defined as a normative *ideal*. The letter to Rickert now permits us to explain how Marianne Weber came to make such an elementary mistake, since it demonstrates that Weber himself was apparently equally mistaken on the point, at least at the time. The text is quite unambiguous: “in the same way that [the concept] which *Jellinek* ([in his book] *Allg[e]meine Staatslehre*) *calls* an ‘ideal type’ ...” (last italics mine): not the terms, but their material reference are the object of the comparison. Since we know for a fact that Marianne Weber made use of her husband’s letters, this one among them, when writing his biography, the error may in this way have slipped in, to be repeated by later commentators. At any rate, this example adds strength to the warning that it may be dangerous to base one’s interpretation of Weber on the assumption that his own thought was free from logical inconsistencies.

41 See for a similar statement a letter to Rickert (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 25) of 28 April 1905.

42 *MSS*, p. 42/GAW, p. 535.

43 Now and then (*MSS*, p. 43/GAW, pp. 397, 536) he makes a brief reference to it in his later essays.

of *exposition*, so far as it seeks to be unambiguous, the use of such explicit formulations in the domain of cultural analysis is in numerous cases quite indispensable.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, while a tacit *notion* of the implications of the concepts that he employs is often sufficient for the purposes of the *scholar*, Weber in this passage points to the necessity, which is already implicit in the demand for the value freedom of the scientific process, of furnishing the *reader* with an *explicit* definition of the concepts. Such an explicit definition is provided by the ideal type.

What apparently in Weber's view makes the ideal types particularly useful to the exposition of scientific results is their ability to make explicit the *significant* parts of reality,<sup>45</sup> the parts, that is, which are of special interest to the cultural sciences. Moreover, Weber clearly assumes that this ability is a function of the *unreality* of the ideal type, of its status as a limiting case: "the work of social science (in our sense) is concerned with [the] practical *significance* [for instance of certain norms]. But this significance can very often only be brought unambiguously to mind by relating the empirical data to an ideal limiting case".<sup>46</sup>

However, the use of ideal types to render the significance of phenomena intelligible to the reader leads to important changes in the character of the scientific account as such. Instead of a number of concepts deriving their significance from a relation to one or more "values", but nevertheless described and analysed as individual units, we now get a group of constructed ideal types, to which the rest of the concepts are compared and in relation to which they are classified. The "classical" historical account, which Rickert no doubt regarded as his paradigm, is superseded by the *systematic* treatment of the material.

In fact, the existence of this systematic element, which is directly acknowledged by Weber himself,<sup>47</sup> means that the bounds of historical science, as defined by Rickert, are *overstepped*. Weber demands that history, as a "science of reality" characterized by concepts which are "close" to reality (in the sense that they represent a selection from, but not an abstraction from, immediate reality), should be made to include elements of pure theory in the shape of types which are in a specific sense "remote from" reality. "The science of reality" is confronted with the necessity of having recourse to unreal concepts. As Weber himself puts it (in a discussion of the concept of "objective possibility"): "In order to understand the real causal connections, we *construct unreal ones*".<sup>48</sup>

There are indications, however, that Weber does not regard the necessity of employing ideal types in the exposition of scientific results as equally pressing in all fields. "In a vast number of cases," he writes, "particularly in the field of descriptive political history, the vagueness [of the concepts] is surely not prejudicial to the clarity

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44 *MSS*, p. 94/*GAW*, p. 195.

45 *MSS*, pp. 90, 92-93/*GAW*, pp. 190, 193-94.

46 *MSS*, p. 94/*GAW*, p. 195.

47 Cf. *MSS*, p. 97/*GAW*, pp. 198-99: "... high systematic value for the purposes of exposition ..."

48 *MSS*, pp. 185-86/*GAW*, p. 287.

of the exposition".<sup>49</sup> Weber's reason for allowing the "descriptive political history" in particular to dispense with ideal types may of course be that the major aspect, politics, is in this case so clear and well-defined that the reader does not require any comparisons with constructed limiting cases.<sup>50</sup> A more important point, however, seems to be raised by the expression "descriptive". Since *all* kinds of history are based on "accounts", the word should probably be taken as an indication that the political history referred to is *merely* an account of events succeeding each other, unlike other kinds of history which go further than the simple recording of facts. It is not difficult to determine what is the additional element distinguishing the latter disciplines, since it will be remembered that Weber regarded *causal explanation* as the essential task of historical science; in the field of economics in particular, the need to *explain* facts will probably be considerably greater than that of simply *describing* them.

Consequently, it seems reasonable to formulate the hypothesis that the usefulness (or even the necessity) of the ideal type as an aid to the exposition of scientific results is limited to, or at least especially prominent in, those cases where it is also able to fulfil some function in connection with the causal explanation of the material from which it has been abstracted. And this hypothesis is strengthened by the major argument that Weber offers for the usefulness of the ideal type in the exposition of scientific results: This reason was, as we have seen, that the ideal type brings out the "significance" of the phenomena. But on closer examination, we notice that the expression "significance" often seems to refer not only to the intrinsic interest that a given phenomenon may possess, but also to its causal effects, its *consequences*. This is true, for example, of the term "practical significance"<sup>51</sup> of legal norms, which Weber directly contrasts with their purely formal legal "validity" for a given community; and in a previous discussion of the relevance of the ideal type "to certain important elements of cultural significance (Kulturbedeutungen) which the 'sectarian spirit' has had for modern culture", the causal element *coexists* with the element of meaningfulness.<sup>52</sup>

The term "genetic concept"<sup>53</sup> has a similar double reference. This concept is historical, in that it has been formed according to a criterion of "theoretical value", of interest or *significance*, and it is therefore something more than the "descriptive

49 *MSS*, p. 93/*GAW*, p. 193.

50 Moreover, Weber notes (*MSS*, p. 93/*GAW*, pp. 193-94) that the reader may have an adequate, although imprecise, "feel" for or "notion" of what such a "vague" concept implies in each particular case.

51 *MSS*, p. 94/*GAW*, p. 195.

52 *MSS*, pp. 93-94/*GAW*, p. 194. In an early note of Weber's (probably from 1903), a similar distinction is made between the "historical" (causal) and the "personal" significance of individuals (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6). The category of "personal" significance results from a value relation which Weber identifies as a *practical* one ("*measured by ethical and other yardsticks*") – an argument characteristic of his early hesitation between valuation and value relation.

53 *MSS*, pp. 90, 93, 100, 106, 141/*GAW*, pp. 191, 194, 202, 208, 243.

reduction” of a phenomenon to its separate components. But the etymology of the term at the same time connects it with notions of development and causation. As Weber puts it: A “genetic” concept, “like *any* logically fully developed concept, involves a *judgment* of the ‘typical’ *conditions* [of the material reference of the concept, in this case the phenomenon of ‘economic barter’]”.<sup>54</sup> The passage just quoted referring to the “sectarian spirit” is in fact an exemplification by Weber of precisely this concept.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, both the origin and the consequences of the function of the ideal type as an aid to the exposition of scientific results go beyond its immediate basis, Rickert's theory of science, and indicate the existence of a separate function connected with the causal explanation of historical phenomena. This function will be discussed and analysed in the following section.

### **The motivational aspect: ideal type and value analysis**

While Weber does not always make the connection between the conceptual and the causal aspects of the ideal type very clear, both *Objectivity* and the later essays make it perfectly obvious that a central purpose of the ideal type is to function as an aid to the causal explanation of social phenomena. At the very beginning of his discussion in *Objectivity*, Weber mentions the function of the ideal type as a help to sharpening “the judgment [of scholars] concerning causal imputation”;<sup>56</sup> and a little later, he states that its value in practice depends on how successful it is in furthering “knowledge of concrete cultural phenomena – their context, their causal determination and their *significance*”.<sup>57</sup> In this passage, the value-related and the causal component are present side by side; and similar parallel discussions are found elsewhere.<sup>58</sup> I shall now try to establish the premises of Weber's thought concerning the relevance of the ideal type to causal analysis, to demonstrate the relation between this part of his thought and the rest of his methodology, and to present a more detailed picture of the function of the ideal type in this connection.

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54 *MSS*, p. 100/*GAW*, p. 202.

55 Burger (1987 (1976)), p. 128, says that in Weber's view “[i]deal types are genetic concepts”. As far as I can see, Weber's position is in fact the logically opposite one: genetic concepts are ideal types (*MSS*, p. 100/*GAW*, p. 202), but ideal types are not necessarily genetic concepts. Weber is not very precise about the relationship, as the discussion in Turner and Factor 1994, pp. 154-55 clearly shows.

56 *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 190.

57 *MSS*, p. 92/*GAW*, p. 193.

58 For instance *MSS*, pp. 43, 90-91/*GAW*, pp. 191, 397, 536.

*The premise: value orientation*

We have seen that Weber regards the ideal type as being specific to “the sciences of human culture”.<sup>59</sup> This expression was interpreted as an indication of the fairly close connection with Rickert’s theory of science; but the passage must also imply that the disciplines that are to make use of the ideal type have as their object “culture”, i.e., *the practical or theoretical valuational attitudes of human beings to the world in which they live*. Consequently, causal explanation in these disciplines will always consist in the explanation of human behaviour (or of the results of such behaviour), and this subject-matter will be explained by factors peculiar to human behaviour rather than by non-human factors, of whatever kind. Thus, the ideal type is used as an aid to the causal explanation of phenomena characterized by human value orientation.

This point is often explicitly made by Weber. In *Knies I-II*, his arguments are still marked by his dependence on Rickert (for whom the definition of *human action* as the essential object of historical science was beyond dispute): the concept of “history” is linked to the function of “... the causal explanation of cultural-historical facts”, and Weber elaborates on this by claiming that this function,

because of the nature of the concept of “culture”, *invariably* [means] that [a truly “historical” account] will as its culmination lead to knowledge of a context into which *understandable* human action – or, more generally, behaviour – can be fitted, and by which it can be seen as influenced. Why? Because that is what “historical” *interest* is anchored in.<sup>60</sup>

In *Knies II*, Weber follows up his argument, referring directly to Rickert, by stating that the object of history, “from the point of view of a philosophy of history”, is the “realization of values”.<sup>61</sup>

As early as *Stammler*, though, Weber abandons arguments concerning abstract methodological principles, and instead concentrates on the empirical fact that norms of various kinds *may* motivate human behaviour, acting as a “real cause of action”.<sup>62</sup> In *Categories*, this process of liberation from the philosophy of history is completed; here, Weber’s discussion is carried on within the framework of a discipline the objects and aims of which are *defined* in advance. This discipline, the “interpretative sociology” (*verstehende Soziologie*), takes as its object “action”, that is, “a behaviour towards ‘objects’ which is specified by some ... ‘intrinsic’ or ‘intended’ *meaning*”,<sup>63</sup> and the sociologist (in this sense) tries to *explain* behaviour by reference to this “meaning” or supposed *motivation*. Weber does not in principle

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59 *MSS*, p. 89/*GAW*, p. 190.

60 *ORK*, p. 142/*GAW*, p. 83; cf. *ORK*, p. 157/*GAW*, p. 99.

61 *ORK*, pp. 175-76/*GAW*, p. 116.

62 *OSt*, p. 106/*GAW*, p. 329; see also for instance *OSt*, pp. 113-14, 122-23/*GAW*, pp. 335, 342.

63 *GAW*, p. 429; cf. *ES*, p. 4/*WG*, p. 1.

exclude the possibility of *different* approaches, even to this kind of material;<sup>64</sup> his definition of the field of activity of sociology is simply based on the assumption that the criteria adopted will prove to be *fruitful*.

### *The relation to the value analysis*

The ideal type is constructed as an aid to the causal analysis and explanation of behaviour which is *value-oriented* in the broadest sense of the term; and, as we shall see, the principles of its construction are closely connected with the value analysis, both in its axiological and teleological form. Although Weber does not explicitly link the ideal type to the value analysis,<sup>65</sup> he frequently discusses the concept of the ideal type in terms indicative of the connection between the axiological and the teleological, that is, the motivational and the causal, aspect.

This is the case, for instance, with the definition, in *Objectivity*, of the ideal type as “the construction of relationships which our *imagination* sees as sufficiently motivated ... and which appear *adequate* from the standpoint of our nomological knowledge”.<sup>66</sup> This tentative alliance between “sufficient motivation” and “nomological adequacy” is developed and clarified in the course of Weber's methodological production, to reach its final form in *ES*<sup>67</sup> in the shape of the conceptual pair “adequacy on the level of meaning” (Sinnadäquanz) / “causal adequacy” (Kausaladäquanz), which can be said to mirror the distinction between axiological and teleological value analysis. In *Stammler*, similar considerations lead Weber to combine the elaboration of an inner meaning with the empirical behaviour corresponding to this meaning.<sup>68</sup> In *Value Freedom*, too, “empirical-technical” and “logical” constructions are juxtaposed, but the emphasis here seems rather to be laid on the possibility of constructing and employing the two forms *separately*.<sup>69</sup>

Occasionally, Weber discusses ideal types which apparently contain only one of the two elements: the axiological/motivational or the teleological/empirical one.

As far as the *axiological* aspect is concerned, this is true of the discussion in *Objectivity* of certain ideal types like “medieval Christianity” and “liberalism” which synthesize ideas, dogmas, principles, maxims, etc.<sup>70</sup> These ideal types seem to contain no *direct* reference to empirical facts, and above all not to the observable behaviour which the ideal type was supposed to help to explain.

64 *GAW*, pp. 430-31; cf. *ES*, pp. 12-13/*WG*, p. 6.

65 He comes closest to doing so in a passage, *MSS*, p. 43/*GAW*, p. 535, where he says that a rational ideal type can be, for instance, “a ‘valuation’ of any conceivable kind, which is put into the most rational form possible”.

66 *MSS*, p. 92/*GAW*, p. 192. A somewhat differently worded but materially identical passage is found a couple of pages later, *MSS*, p. 93/*GAW*, p. 194. Merz (1990, pp. 381-92) goes thoroughly into this element, which he sees as highly significant.

67 *ES*, pp. 11-12/*WG*, pp. 5-6.

68 *OSt*, p. 111/*GAW*, p. 333.

69 *MSS*, p. 42/*GAW*, pp. 534-35.

70 *MSS*, pp. 42, 96-97/*GAW*, pp. 197-98, 534-35.

As for the *teleological* aspect, it may similarly be said to occur by itself in cases where the concepts discussed by Weber can be classified as ideal types only because they refer to completely *rational* behaviour, while the actual *goal* of this rational behaviour is not defined explicitly. Such types of “isolated rationality” are now and then touched on by Weber, always in the field of *economics*.<sup>71</sup>

In the great majority of cases, however, the axiological and the teleological element are *jointly* present in the ideal types; the latter include *both* motivation by ideas or values *and* the corresponding empirical (possibly, but not necessarily, rational) behaviour.

This is most clearly seen in the detailed discussion of various examples in *Objectivity*. Here, Weber for instance describes how “the ‘idea’ of ‘craft’” can be constructed as an axiological ideal type, and continues:

One can ... further attempt to describe a society in which all branches of economic and even intellectual activity are governed by maxims that appear to us to be an application of the same principle which characterizes “craft”, formulated as an ideal type.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the idea embodied in the ideal type is assumed to be the constant motive of behaviour, the latter being described in similar ideal-typical terms.

Another thorough discussion in *Objectivity* of such a complete ideal type concerns the possibility of constructing the ideal type of the “state”.<sup>73</sup> Here, the “dual aspect” of the ideal type is especially prominent and bears an interesting relation to concrete reality. Empirically, Weber says, the “state” consists of an immense number of human actions of all kinds, “held together by an idea, namely, the belief in norms which are in fact (or which ought to be) valid, and in relations of authority of some human beings over other human beings”.<sup>74</sup> The state consists of *action* characterized by a particular, central *motivation*. This motive, however, can only be made intelligible by means of ideal types; and Weber sees such ideal types as extremely important motives of “state” behaviour.<sup>75</sup>

In the later essays, the examples grow less detailed; but the complementary relation of the axiological and teleological aspects can still be clearly perceived, for instance, in the ideal type of “the rational economic behaviour of Robinson

71 For instance *GAW*, pp. 394, 397.

72 *MSS*, pp. 90-91/*GAW*, p. 191. In parallel, Weber outlines a “capitalist” principle and the corresponding “capitalist” society, *MSS*, p. 91/*GAW*, pp. 191-92.

73 *MSS*, p. 99/*GAW*, pp. 200-201.

74 *MSS*, p. 99/*GAW*, p. 200. See also a note from 1903 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 31/6) in which Weber, commenting on the concept of “state”, says that “what comes first is the definition of the *end*, the *idea* of the institution”.

75 Weber does not go more deeply into the construction of the *teleological* side of the ideal type of the state, and instead examines the fact – which is interesting from other points of view – that *actual* behaviour may be motivated by more or less correctly perceived axiological ideal types of the “principle of the state”. There is no doubt, however, that his argument also implies an ideal-typical construction as a teleological correlate of this “principle of the state”.

Crusoe",<sup>76</sup> and in the minutely detailed treatment in *Stammler* of the logical structure of card games.<sup>77</sup>

As mentioned above, the complementary relation of the axiological and the teleological value structures may, in certain of Weber's discussions of the ideal type, recede into the background to such an extent that one is tempted to define two *kinds* of ideal type (or even three, if the "complete" type counts separately); but if we relate Weber's description of the ideal type to the theoretical value analysis, the distinction between different kinds of ideal types no longer seems justified: teleological value analysis, and the rational ideal type into which it may be transformed, can only be elaborated if the values or goals striven for are known in advance; and on the other hand, although it is possible to work out the axiological structure of a value without referring directly to empirical actions, this empirical element remains latent in the axiological analysis, since the latter always implies the possibility of defining practical attitudes to concrete phenomena in concrete situations.

If the "one-sided" ideal types mentioned above are re-examined in the light of this conclusion, and in a more general context, they are found to lose their one-sidedness and to exhibit features which can be related *both* to axiologically defined structures *and* to empirical behaviour. Thus, the syntheses of ideas referred to above<sup>78</sup> are stated by Weber himself to include "those 'ideas' which dominate (i.e., which are diffusely active in) the people of a given epoch",<sup>79</sup> that is to say, the (presumed) motives of behaviour of historical persons; similarly, Weber points out that the concept of a "city economy" is closely connected with certain *normative ideas* which served as a code of behaviour in the economic life of medieval cities.<sup>80</sup> The example of an apparently purely axiological type in *Value Freedom* also turns out, on closer examination, to be meant as an instrument for the analysis of human action.<sup>81</sup>

As for the "isolated rational" ideal types of economic behaviour, their apparent one-sidedness is due to the fact that the economic goal – (subjectively) optimal satisfaction of needs – remains *implicit*. In a number of passages, partly in connection with his discussion of the "one-sided" ideal types, Weber makes these goals and purposes explicit and thus supplies the types with the element of value which they apparently lacked.<sup>82</sup>

The relation between the concept of the ideal type and Weber's theory of value analysis seems to explain some of the central characteristics of the ideal type which have not yet been discussed.

76 *OSt*, pp. 111-12/*GAW*, p. 333.

77 *OSt*, pp. 116-24/*GAW*, pp. 337-43. (The game of Skat is used by Weber – who no doubt draws on extensive experience from his student years – as a down-to-earth paradigm of all situations governed by judicial norms.)

78 See pp. 208, 212.

79 *MSS*, pp. 95-96/*GAW*, p. 197; similarly, *MSS*, pp. 96-97/*GAW*, p. 198.

80 *MSS*, p. 95/*GAW*, p. 196; cf. *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 191.

81 *MSS*, pp. 42-43/*GAW*, p. 535.

82 For instance *MSS*, pp. 43-44, 100/*GAW*, pp. 202, 391, 536.

Above all, this is true of the *internal consistency* of the ideal type. Although Weber constantly, with insignificant variations, emphasizes the need for such consistency,<sup>83</sup> this demand has not received more than a perfunctory analysis in the literature on Weber's methodology.<sup>84</sup> However, the demand is by no means self-evident: it would be possible to construct concepts which referred to some kind of normative idea, but which contained internal contradictions, even in cases where these norms were regarded as motives of behaviour.<sup>85</sup> But if we view the premise of consistency in the light of the connection with the theory of value analysis, its necessity on the other hand becomes immediately apparent: as mentioned earlier,<sup>86</sup> the unambiguousness and internal consistency of the ultimate value axioms were regarded by Weber as preconditions both of axiological and of teleological value analysis. As far as the axiological analysis is concerned, this unambiguousness is necessary for tracing back practical value judgments, and consequently the hypothetical pattern of behaviour motivated by an ethic of conviction, to any particular value axiom; and in teleological analysis, unambiguousness is simply a *conditio sine qua non*: the appropriateness of means to reach a given end can only be demonstrated if the end is defined with complete precision.

The description of the ideal type as the result of an *accentuation* of certain *one-sided viewpoints* is also more easily understood if it is connected with the theory of value analysis.

Like so many other of Weber's concepts, that of "accentuation" seems to have a dual aspect. On the one hand, it indicates an *isolation* of the perspective or point of view, in the sense that it is given added weight *in relation to other perspectives*. The claim that the ideal type represents an analytical accentuation of certain viewpoints in fact seems to imply that these points of view or aspects are the *only ones* which are taken into consideration when the concept is constructed, and that they may, therefore, legitimately be described as *selected* and *one-sided*. This implies a correspondingly added interest in those elements of reality which are picked out in the light of the selected viewpoint(s).<sup>87</sup>

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83 "Consistent", *MSS*, pp. 42, 90-91, 96; *OSt*, p. 112/*GAW*, pp. 190-92, 197, 333, 535; "internally consistent", *MSS*, p. 91/*GAW*, pp. 191-92; "unambiguousness", *MSS*, pp. 43, 105/*GAW*, pp. 206, 536.

84 The point is mentioned, but not elaborated, by Baier 1969, p. 237 and Merz 1990, p. 396n1062. Freund (Weber 1965, p. 482n7) makes a little more of the principle of internal consistency and stresses its importance as a link between value analysis and the ideal type. Treiber (1997, p. 428) traces the terminology back to Fr. A. Lange.

85 Weber himself implicitly acknowledges this fact by referring, in one case, to the ideas of Christianity entertained by individual persons in the Middle Ages as "a chaos of infinitely differentiated and highly contradictory complexes of ideas and feelings of all kinds" (*MSS*, p. 96/*GAW*, p. 197).

86 See pp. 177, 184.

87 Cf. *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 190, where Weber in this connection speaks of an "accentuation of certain elements of reality".

But Weber's concept of "accentuation" also seems to cover the elaboration of a value in all its logical consequences, which is the substance of axiological and combined value analysis.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the "accentuation" of a *valuational point of view*, in its axiological aspect, means that the value is *isolated* and *worked out* in its last consequences.

As for the ideal type of *rational* behaviour, the interpretation of the term "accentuation" is reasonably simple: the principle of rationality includes the assumption of an absolute optimum, the attainment of or approximation to which (in relation to actual, purely non-rational behaviour) may naturally be described as an "accentuation" of the rationality of the behaviour.<sup>89</sup>

Up to this point, we have been concerned with those aspects of the ideal type which were connected with axiological and teleological value analysis, that is, with those forms of analysis which operate on the assumption of either a logically or an empirically *correct* orientation of behaviour. It is interesting to note, though, that Weber follows up his earlier acknowledgement of the necessity of a *subjective*, "explanatory" value analysis by pointing out that the important element of motivation is *psychological* rather than purely *logical*, a circumstance which leads to certain difficulties in the analysis of motivation.

Weber touches on the idea as early as *Objectivity*;<sup>90</sup> but the greater part of his reflections on this point is found in *Categories* and later essays. Here, the ideal types and their construction play a minor role; the focus of discussion is Weber's claim that the deduction of hypothetical motives from observed behaviour cannot limit itself to the correctly deduced goals or axioms. In *Categories*, Weber dwells on the circumstance that it is possible to see behaviour as teleologically correct, but in relation to a goal which is not clear to the acting person;<sup>91</sup> in such cases, we may be said to uncover the correct goal orientation of the subconscious. This line of thought is dangerous, however – a fact which Weber fully realizes – because it tends towards the assumption that the subjectively subconscious goals are *actual* goals; this assumption in fact comes close to a violation of the principle of value freedom. Normally, therefore, Weber constructs his examples from the opposite point of view, and tries to demonstrate the possibility that behaviour which "from the outside", empirically, seems oriented towards a certain value or goal, may "from the inside", with regard to its actual, subjective motivation, turn out to be dependent on quite different motives.<sup>92</sup> In this connection, he refers to the particularly interesting case (which he examines in the essay on the *Protestant Ethic*) of the puritans, whose belief in religious predestination acted as a psychological motive for intense worldly

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88 This interpretation is supported, for instance, by the expression "accentuated one-sidedly in its consequences", *MSS*, p. 91/*GAW*, p. 191.

89 Cf. Weber's expression "accentuation in the direction of rationality" (*Steigerung ins Rationale*), *GAW*, p. 397.

90 *MSS*, p. 96/*GAW*, p. 198.

91 *GAW*, pp. 434-35. See also *ES*, pp. 9-10/*WG*, p. 4.

92 For instance *GAW*, pp. 434-36; *ES*, p. 10/*WG*, p. 4.

activity, the results of which were regarded as indications of the future religious status of the persons concerned.<sup>93</sup> The intellectual connection between axiom and behaviour is in this case “understandable”, and consequently amenable to “explanatory” value analysis; but it is not *logical*, and cannot be uncovered by means of axiological analysis.

*The ideal type as a heuristic aid*

Apart from the function of the ideal type as an aid to the exposition of scientific results, Weber mentions its role as a *heuristic* instrument of causal analysis.<sup>94</sup> This function does not in itself present any special difficulty; but certain aspects of Weber’s treatment of it require a more thorough discussion.

A brief account of the heuristic role of the ideal type is found in *Knies II*: “... [the ideal type] can help the scholar to reach an empirically valid interpretation, in the sense that the given facts are *compared with* a possible interpretation – an *interpretative scheme* ...”<sup>95</sup> Thus, observed behaviour is compared with models of behaviour *constructed* from certain explicit premises, and the distance between construction and reality is assessed. If this distance is small, we can assume that the motives of the actual behaviour were roughly the same as the premises of the constructed type; if, on the other hand, the distance is great, the comparison may at least serve as an indication of the improbability of the premises of the constructed behaviour, and perhaps also as a guide to the points at which *different* actual motives have been operative.<sup>96</sup> Since the ideal type is a deliberately *unrealistic* abstraction, one may expect that the comparison will often have the latter kind of results.

The greater or smaller discrepancy existing between the ideal type and empirical reality may – depending on the kind of type concerned – be defined according to two different criteria. On the one hand, it may result from the fact that the persons observed were actually committed to other *values* (as teleological goals or as axiological norms) than the ones used as premises for the construction of the ideal type. On the other hand, the discrepancy may be the result of the fact that the persons observed exhibit a lower degree of *teleological rationality* than that assumed to be present in the ideal type.

In view of this, it is highly significant that Weber almost completely ignores the purely axiological aspect in his discussion, and instead everywhere concentrates on *differences in the degree of rationality*.

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93 GAW, pp. 435-36.

94 Thus, for instance, MSS, pp. 90, 103; ORK, pp. 188-89; OSt, p. 122/GAW, pp. 130, 190, 205, 342; ES, p. 21/WG, p. 10.

95 ORK, p. 189/GAW, p. 130.

96 See, for instance, MSS, p. 102/GAW, p. 203; FMW, pp. 323-24/GARS I, pp. 536-37.

In fact, Weber only once<sup>97</sup> seems to mention that the comparison with an ideal type may possibly point to goals or *values* which were not incorporated into the type. This happens in the only detailed discussion in *Objectivity* of the heuristic function of ideal types, where Weber outlines an ideal-typical development, under certain conditions, from a “craft” to a “capitalist” culture, and continues: “If the ideal type was ‘correctly’ constructed, and if the actual course of events does *not* correspond to [that predicted by] the ideal type, this would prove that medieval society was in certain respects *not* strictly ‘craft’ oriented”. Since the ideal type of the “craft culture”, as defined by Weber, must be one of objective axiological rationality,<sup>98</sup> the demonstration that the Middle Ages lacked this “craft” character is a (partial) invalidation of the theory that this particular value acted as a norm for the historical persons concerned.

On the other hand, we find a very large number of instances, especially in *Stammler*, *Categories* and *ES*, where the function of the ideal type as a heuristic aid consists in the demonstration of a lack of *teleological rationality* in real life. This dominating teleological interest is reflected in the fact that the ideal types discussed in all these essays are ideal types of teleological rationality, often even of *objective* teleological rationality, i.e., constructions based on the assumption that the conditions of behaviour are fully known by the acting person. This is the case both with respect to the formulation of abstract economic “laws”<sup>99</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>100</sup> In other places, Weber refers to types of *subjective* teleological rationality.<sup>101</sup>

To this must be added that the discrepancies noted by means of the ideal types usually relate to the teleological and rational aspect, while the axiological and motivational elements of the types are only included to a very minor degree. This is especially clear with regard to the objective types, since Weber, when discussing their heuristic function, interprets actual divergences from them as indicating that the *actual* teleological rationality of the observed behaviour is only *subjective*.<sup>102</sup>

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97 *MSS*, p. 102/*GAW*, p. 203. See also *MSS*, p. 43/*GAW*, p. 535, where Weber denies that types of objective rationality (“correctness types”) possess any kind of heuristic monopoly, and refers to ideal types of axiological rationality without, however, discussing the *result* of working with such types.

98 Cf. *MSS*, p. 91/*GAW*, p. 191, where expressions like “principle” and “maxim” are used to indicate both economic and inner, spiritual activity.

99 *GAW*, pp. 130, 429, 534.

100 For instance *ORK*, pp. 187-88; *MSS*, p. 42/*GAW*, pp. 129, 432, 534; *ES*, pp. 6, 21/*WG*, pp. 2-3, 10. In *ES*, Weber in this connection speaks of “goal rational” behaviour, a term which rather seems to refer to *subjective* teleological rationality. This is explained, however, by the fact that the terms “correctness rational” and “correctness type” are only found in *Categories*: the *objective* element in the examples is clear from the context. Norkus (2003, pp. 132ff) evolves an interesting theory of formal and substantive rationality on this basis.

101 For instance *ORK*, pp. 189-90/*GAW*, pp. 130, 430, 432; *ES*, pp. 6, 21/*WG*, pp. 2-3, 10.

102 *ORK*, pp. 187-88; *MSS*, p. 42/*GAW*, pp. 129, 432, 534; *ES*, pp. 6, 21/*WG*, pp. 2-3, 10.

As for the ideal types of subjective teleological rationality, Weber often claims that divergences from them indicate the presence of “non-rational” elements in the actual motivation of the observed behaviour;<sup>103</sup> and this expression, which *might* be interpreted as including what we have called axiological rationality, that is, value-oriented behaviour, is in fact explained by reference to comprehensible but non-rational,<sup>104</sup> affective,<sup>105</sup> or even incomprehensible<sup>106</sup> types of behaviour. Only once, in *ES*,<sup>107</sup> the fact that the actual goals do not correspond to those included in the type is mentioned as a possible reason for the divergence of actual behaviour from that defined by the type; but only in passing, and at the very end of the list of possible factors.

It is possible to advance more than one explanation of this early and significant shift of interest from the axiological towards the teleological and rational elements of (assumed or actual) motivation. First, it may be noted that the examples quoted by Weber in *Objectivity* are remote from us in time, a circumstance which gives the question of the values guiding the observed behaviour a greater relevance than in the case of his later illustrations, which are of a more contemporary nature. This argument may be supplemented by the further observation that the *recent*, “rational” examples quoted by Weber often refer to situations in which the goals (for instance economic, strategic and political motives) must be taken as given *a priori*.

Both these arguments, however, seem to rest on a third, and more fundamental, circumstance: the shift in Weber’s interest is the visible sign that Weber, in the years 1904–07, is liberating himself from the “static” theory of history implied by Schmoller’s “historical induction” and still perceptible in Rickert’s description of historical concepts as “charged with meaning”.

The conditions of this emancipation are of course present as early as *Objectivity*, in the sense that Weber in that essay elevates concepts characterized by their deliberate *unreality* and *abstraction* to the status of indispensable aids to the historical sciences. But in that essay, Weber’s views concerning the heuristic function of the ideal type are still marked by a certain dependence on the static view. As long as the ideal type is supposed to transmit knowledge of the *values* to be found in a given historical object, and not directly of the actual *consequences* of these values (as motives) for the behaviour of the object, the focus of interest is the valuational significance of the object *as such*. Another indication of this is the fact that the role of the ideal type as an aid to the *exposition* of results is far more prominent in *Objectivity* than the description of its *heuristic* function.

Already in *Knies II*, however, the picture changes: Weber now concentrates on rational types and on divergences from such types, and the heuristic function is discussed more concretely. What is particularly interesting in this connection

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103 For instance *ORK*, pp. 189-90/*GAW*, pp. 130, 430; *ES*, p. 6/*WG*, pp. 2-3.

104 *GAW*, p. 432.

105 *ES*, p. 25/*WG*, p. 12.

106 *GAW*, p. 432.

107 *ES*, p. 21/*WG*, p. 10.

is Weber's distinction between "purely individual" concepts and general ideal types.<sup>108</sup> The former, but not the latter, in his view function as causal *hypotheses* in connection with *unique* historical phenomena and events. The fact that the two types are contrasted is in itself significant, because it testifies to Weber's growing interest in general types of behaviour. But a point of special interest is Weber's treatment of the "individual" concepts.

These individual concepts are immediately afterwards classified as ideal types,<sup>109</sup> and consequently belong to the same category as the *general* types mentioned. Moreover, their "individual" character on closer examination turns out to be less prominent than might be expected. True, their *function* is restricted to the causal analysis of unique historical objects; but the same restriction applies to *any* attempt to employ the ideal type heuristically in causal research, even when the type is a *general* one.<sup>110</sup> And the "individual" *type* is in itself partly constructed in accordance with a general principle, that of teleological *rationality*. Thus, the difference between the "individual" type and those that Weber describes as "general" resides exclusively in the (presumed) uniqueness of the *goals* included in the individual type; but even where these goals are formulated quite concretely, analysis may often show that they represent the application of general value axioms to unique conditions; and moreover, Weber is obviously far less interested in the unique characteristics of the goal than in the greater or lesser degree of rationality with which it is pursued.

In fact, the tendency towards *generalization* resulting from the inclusion (at least after 1904) of teleological rationality as a constant feature of Weber's ideal types is, in *Knies II*, only kept in check by the function of the ideal type as an aid to the causal analysis of *unique* historical phenomena and events. And just as the rational element in the construction and function of the type quickly overshadows the "static" value element, the importance of the element of generality seems to increase with time: the ideal type is freed from its former association with historical science, and grows to be the basis of a general *sociology*. Here, too, the change is gradual: four years after the foundation of the *Society* in 1909, in *Categories* (1913), Weber still places history and sociology side by side with regard to the utilization of the heuristic function of the ideal type;<sup>111</sup> in *Value Freedom*, "causal imputation" is seen as a major reason for the construction of types.<sup>112</sup> But in *ES*, the break is complete: "Sociology formulates ... type concepts and seeks to formulate *general* laws about empirical reality. This distinguishes it from history, which aims at the causal analysis and imputation of

108 *ORK*, pp. 174-75 and pp. 190-91/*GAW*, pp. 115, 130.

109 *ORK*, p. 189/*GAW*, p. 130: "In *every* case, however, the relation between such rational, teleological constructions and reality ... is that of an ideal-typical concept".

110 One example supporting this contention is the way in which Weber, in *Stammler* (*OSI*, pp. 106-107/*GAW*, pp. 329-30), applies the general ideal types discussed in *Knies II* (the propositions of economics) in an analysis of unique behaviour (the foreign policy of Fr. Wilhelm IV).

111 *GAW*, p. 433.

112 *MSS*, p. 43/*GAW*, pp. 535-36. The passage is taken over from the *Memorandum* without any major changes.

individual, culturally important actions, structures and personalities".<sup>113</sup> The *material* of sociology, Weber maintains, is largely, but not exclusively, selected according to the values relevant to historical science; its *results* are largely, but not exclusively, framed so as to be useful to the work of the historian. But although they may collaborate, sociology and history are two separate and independent disciplines.

This distinction has been interpreted as the symptom of a radical change in Weber's thought; but it seems quite legitimate rather to regard it as the natural consequence of the instability of the alliance achieved by Weber in *Objectivity* between ideal types and historical science, an alliance in which the type, the potentially sociological element, which is dominant from the beginning, gains ever greater supremacy in its teleological and rational form. Weber's sociology is deeply rooted in his views on the nature of the historical (cultural) sciences.

The fact that Weber in this connection describes the function of ideal types as *heuristic* already seems to indicate that such types are *not* to be regarded as hypotheses in the usual sense of the word. The terminology instead suggests a more indirect role: the ideal type may help us to *formulate* hypotheses. Weber's emphasis on the unreality of the ideal type gives strong substantive support to this interpretation.

As early as *Objectivity*, Weber explicitly stresses the fact that the relation of the ideal type to causal hypotheses is an indirect one: "... [the ideal type] *is* no hypothesis, but seeks to guide the formation of hypotheses".<sup>114</sup> In the light of this, one is surprised by his uncertainty in *Knies II*, where the individual, objective type of teleological rationality is more than once described as a "hypothesis" or "interpretative hypothesis".<sup>115</sup> However, the context makes it clear that Weber, who is discussing the relation between ideal types and ordinary hypotheses, is probably, as is his wont, making use of a problematic terminology in order to point out the problems connected with the concepts which it covers. Weber repeats that ideal types are constructed from abstract and unrealistic premises; their origin disqualifies them from attaining the status of hypotheses. But "they can *function* as hypotheses, when the interpretation of concrete processes is employed for heuristic purposes".<sup>116</sup> Whenever they are invalidated in this function – as they usually will be, because of their basic unreality – they are, however, again separated from "normal" hypotheses; since the types are constructed on the basis of unrealistic assumptions, their validity is not affected by the empirical invalidation; they can be used afresh.<sup>117</sup>

In later essays, the element of unreality grows more pronounced; Weber does not describe the ideal types as hypotheses, even in a qualified sense, but rather stresses their unreal character. In *Value Freedom*, this tendency leads him to talk about ideal

113 *ES*, p. 19/*WG*, p. 14.

114 *MSS*, p. 90/*GAW*, p. 190.

115 *ORK*, pp. 175, 189/*GAW*, pp. 115, 130.

116 *ORK*, p. 190/*GAW*, p. 131.

117 *ORK*, p. 190/*GAW*, p. 131.

types as “fictions”.<sup>118</sup> This open acknowledgement of the fictional character of the concepts is a symbol of their emancipation from the framework of historical science: the concern for the contact with empirical reality recedes as sociology develops as a discipline distinct from history.

The view of the ideal type as purely fictional naturally suggests that what is significant and fruitful about the concept is its *divergence* from reality. This is openly acknowledged by Weber in *ES*: “The more precisely and unambiguously the ideal types have been constructed, that is to say: the more *unrealistic* they are ... , the more useful are they, terminologically and for purposes of classification, as well as heuristically”.<sup>119</sup> Consequently, even if all the ideal types concerned turn out to be types of teleological rationality, this does not imply the existence in Weber's work of a “rationalistic prejudice” in the form of a theory according to which the persons observed are *in fact* acting in a rational manner: if anything, the rationality of the ideal types rather points to Weber's interest in the *irrational* elements of motivation.

In accordance with his own warning against investing scientific approaches with the dignity of a philosophy of life, Weber takes pains to deny any suggestion that his types reflect a “rationalistic prejudice”. Both in *Categories*<sup>120</sup> and in *ES*,<sup>121</sup> he stresses the importance of *irrational* factors. But he does admit that there is an evident danger of rationalistic misconceptions of his types;<sup>122</sup> and although he theoretically rejects any such misconception regarding his own work, it cannot be denied that his system of predominantly rational sociological concepts, the application of which must result in the labelling of irrational elements of motivation as “deviations”, constitutes a fertile *basis* for misunderstanding.

Weber's constant use of rational ideal types, in spite of his own warnings, may be ascribed to a number of factors. For one thing, it should be remembered that he regarded the wish to act rationally as a highly significant component of modern occidental culture. Although the rational types cannot, and ought not to, function as hypotheses, let alone as part of a *philosophy* of history,<sup>123</sup> their basic premises conform to what Weber believes to be a rationalistic *tendency* in the subject-matter. Consequently, they are particularly well suited to the demonstration of the actual, greater *or lesser*, degree of rationality exhibited by this subject-matter.

As far as the objectively rational types are concerned, one can moreover point to the circumstance that an ideal type constructed from a premise of rationality, especially objective rationality, possesses a maximum of *validity*. Since the objectively rational type is nothing more than the embodiment of the results of an

<sup>118</sup> *MSS*, pp. 35, 44-45/*GAW*, pp. 529, 537. Both these passages are additions from 1917; the term, in this sense, does not occur earlier in Weber's work.

<sup>119</sup> *ES*, p. 21/*WG*, p. 10. See also *FMW*, pp. 323-24/*GARS I*, pp. 536-37.

<sup>120</sup> *GAW*, pp. 429-30.

<sup>121</sup> *ES*, pp. 6-7/*WG*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>122</sup> *ES*, pp. 6-7/*WG*, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Weber explicitly and repeatedly rejects any attempt to interpret the concept of the ideal type as implying a philosophy of history. See, for instance, *MSS*, pp. 94, 103; *OSt*, pp. 113-14/*GAW*, pp. 195, 205, 335.

(axiological or teleological) value analysis, its only subjective element is the choice of the hypothetical goal or value. Consequently, it is theoretically possible to eliminate all sources of error from it. This circumstance has immense importance for the objectivity of the scientific results: other scholars may always dispute the correctness of the more or less “explanatory” (subjective rational, comprehensible non-rational or affective) types, not only with regard to the choice of one rather than another type in the concrete case, but also with regard to the concrete elaboration of this type, since it will always to a certain extent depend on the subjective “interpretation” of the scholar. A correctly constructed type of objective rationality, on the other hand, possesses indisputable validity (if we take the choice of the hypothetical goal or value as given); it is objectively *true*. Although the *fruitfulness* of such objective types is still open to legitimate doubt, they do, when actually applied, facilitate the discussion of the scientific results attained by means of ideal-typical analysis.

Weber usually does not mention this aspect of the problem, perhaps because of his unwillingness to regard concepts as fixed once and for all. His own defence of the rational type instead relies on their “comprehensible” nature,<sup>124</sup> which however, as far as *intellectual* comprehension is concerned, seems to correspond exactly to the knowledge yielded by axiological and teleological value analysis.<sup>125</sup>

### *The origin of the values*

Since the rational ideal types are always constructed around a value acting as a hypothetical purpose or norm, one may ask where Weber believes these values to be found: is the scholar free to construct an ideal type around any value, or does he have to consider the subject-matter to which the type is to be applied? Although this question is in a sense parallel to the one discussed above<sup>126</sup> concerning the origin of the values entering into historical concepts in general, it differs from it on two counts: first, because the ideal types are presumably applied to a material which already possesses a conceptual structure; and secondly, because the ideal type is usually meant to be a direct aid to the uncovering of the motivations by which the observed persons have actually been guided. The first point removes the logical circularity of the contention that the value premises should be taken from the material itself; and the second one establishes an intimate connection between the values present in the material and those selected by the scholar for his construction of ideal types. Both of them seem to suggest a *diminution* of the almost unlimited subjectivity of choice conceded by Weber in his discussion of the theoretical value relation.

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124 See, for instance, *GAW*, p. 432; *ES*, pp. 5-6/*WG*, p. 2.

125 *ES*, pp 55-6/*WG*, p. 2. In this connection, Judith Janoska-Bendl (1965, p. 53) points to Weber’s critical attitude to psychology. It should be borne in mind, however, that Weber’s dislike was mainly directed against the pretensions of *generalizing* psychology, as a discipline of *natural* science; “interpretative” (*verstehende*) psychology, on the other hand, was part of the basis of his own sociology.

126 See pp. 147-56.

Against this background, it is interesting that Weber in fact underlines that the freedom of choice is undiminished when it comes to the construction of ideal types. This is quite explicitly stated in *Objectivity*, where the discussion centres round the axiological types; and the same conclusion seems to be implicit in the later essays and in *ES* with respect to the teleological ideal types.

In *Objectivity*,<sup>127</sup> Weber presents his view of the relation between the value premises of the ideal type on the one hand and reality on the other one. This view, though fundamentally clear, is quite complicated in its details. The main line of the argument is the following:

On the basis of a given part of empirical reality, one or more ideal types may be constructed.<sup>128</sup> The value element entering into such constructions is arrived at by a process by which the scholar constructs on the basis of individual empirical phenomena a "consistent ideal image which he relates to [the] expression of ideas that seems to manifest itself in it".<sup>129</sup> Thus, the influence of the subject-matter is decisive, in the sense that it must be possible for the value resulting from the process of abstraction to be "read into" the phenomena in question: the value must be *one possible* motive of the behaviour constituting or causing the observed phenomena. On the other hand, Weber does not demand that the "idea" abstracted should have any connection with the *actual* motivation causing the phenomena; in fact, he seems to suppose that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at these actual motives at this stage of the analysis.

Now, it is possible that the substance of these ideal types was present, if only in a more primitive and inchoate form, in the minds of those individuals whose behaviour constituted or caused the historical object on which the ideal type was based.<sup>130</sup> It is tempting to regard this identity of an ideal type abstracted *from* reality with an ideal motivating behaviour *in* this same reality as something more than a coincidence; but Weber carefully stresses that the causal relations between ideals in reality and ideal types may take many different forms: "In principle, we only need to observe that [the ideal and the ideal type] are obviously fundamentally different".<sup>131</sup>

This intricate balance between norm and theory, concept and reality, is now complicated even further by the circumstance that the actually operative ideals, as mentioned above, are found in numerous, more or less articulate, deliberate and consistent variants in the minds of the historical individuals concerned. If the scholar

127 *MSS*, pp. 89-92, 94-97, 98-100/*GAW*, pp. 190-92, 195-98, 200-201.

128 *MSS*, pp. 89-90/*GAW*, p. 190. Weber refers to such ideal types as "'ideas' of historical phenomena". This expression exposes the concept to the danger of being confused with *actual* motivating ideas or of being hypostatized as the "essence" of history. Weber warns against both of these misconceptions (*MSS*, pp. 94-95; *OSI*, pp. 114-15/*GAW*, pp. 195-96, 336), but, characteristically, does not remove their cause.

129 *MSS*, pp. 90-91/*GAW*, p. 191; cf. *MSS*, pp. 91-92/*GAW*, p. 192.

130 *MSS*, pp. 94-95/*GAW*, pp. 195-96. Weber describes these ideals, too, as "ideas". They are probably of the same kind as the ideals referred to in Weber's introductory discussion of the value analysis (*MSS*, pp. 53-54/*GAW*, p. 150).

131 *MSS*, p. 95/*GAW*, pp. 196-97.

is therefore to arrive at a clear understanding of the significance of such an ideal in its various forms, he has to construct an *ideal type of the ideal*.<sup>132</sup>

*In principle*, this process of construction does not differ from the abstraction from concrete phenomena of an inherent “expression of ideas”, as discussed above. In this case, however, the phenomena belong to the “internal” reality of the observed individuals, to the world of their ideas as it is revealed (usually through art and literature) to the scholar; and the abstraction of the “expression of ideas” incorporated in these phenomena consists in tracing the ideal back to the ultimate principle on which it is based.

If this principle is clear and easy to grasp, so that it has been assimilated and applied without distortion by the observed individuals, it is of course easy to trace and to introduce into the ideal type.<sup>133</sup> In such cases, the material may properly be said to control the value basis of the ideal type. Very often, however, the principle has disappeared in its original form and has to be *reconstructed* from the various existing ideals which it has inspired; and since the relation of these ideals to the principle may be quite obscure, the independent role of the scholar, who “reads” hypothetical value orientations “into” the material, is re-activated. The status of the concepts constructed by the scholar as “an ‘idea’ that, that *we* [the scholars] create” becomes even clearer in cases where the principle on which the ideal type is to be based has *never* been explicitly formulated. Here the “internal” material is just as inaccessible, and the role of the scholar as a source of value premises just as crucial, as in the case, discussed initially, of ideal types abstracted from empirical reality.<sup>134</sup> Wherever the analysis of actual motives is problematical, the subjective component of the value basis of the ideal type becomes an unavoidable necessity.<sup>135</sup>

In his later essays, Weber is more concerned with teleological types, in which the value element is less prominent and often wholly straightforward (the fixed economic goal of the optimal satisfaction of needs, etc.). The problem which now comes to occupy him is that of distinguishing between *objective* and *subjective* types of teleological rationality. He applies himself to this task with great thoroughness, both in *Stammler*,<sup>136</sup> *Categories*<sup>137</sup> and *ES*.<sup>138</sup> In the course of his discussion, he repeatedly emphasizes that the purpose of social science is the uncovering of the

132 *MSS*, pp. 95-96/*GAW*, p. 197.

133 *MSS*, p. 96/*GAW*, pp. 197-98.

134 *MSS*, pp. 96-97/*GAW*, p. 198.

135 Henrich (1952, p. 92) seems to conclude in the same sense, but goes on to substitute an “objectively necessary”, if only latent, axiological orientation, constructed from within, i.e., through the elaboration of certain (postulated) essential ideas, for an “objectively possible” axiological orientation, constructed from without, i.e., by an abstraction from empirical reality. The plainly *fictional* nature of the ideal type is ignored, and replaced by a concept which is rooted in normative essentialism.

136 For instance *OSt*, pp. 111-12/*GAW*, pp. 333-34.

137 For instance *GAW*, p. 433.

138 For instance *ES*, pp. 4-5/*WG*, pp. 1-2.

“subjectively attributed meaning” (subjektiv gemeinte Sinn).<sup>139</sup> The significance of this expression, however, seems to lie in its negative, not in its positive, content. This point is made very clearly in the commentary to Weber’s fundamental definition in *ES*:

“Meaning” is here to be understood as the subjective meaning either actually attributed by [(a) particular actor(s)] ... or attributed to the hypothetical actor (or actors), *conceived* as a type, in a conceptually constructed *pure* type. In no way is this “meaning” to be understood as an objectively “correct” meaning or one which is “true” in some metaphysically determined sense. It is this which distinguishes the empirical sciences of action ... from the dogmatic disciplines ...<sup>140</sup>

Here the claims of *actual* and of *hypothetical and typical* value orientation to the description “subjectively attributed” are seen as equally justified: the fact that actual motivation is often difficult to unravel<sup>141</sup> means that the scholar retains his fundamental freedom of choice with respect to the value premise of the ideal type.

Weber’s assertion of the subjectivity of the values on which the ideal type is based seems to reflect the connection between the ideal type and Weber’s version of the theory of value relation; and this connection manifests itself in the subsequent discussion as well. Thus, in *Objectivity* (where the concern with the problems of history is most obvious and direct) he emphasizes that the ideal type depends on “one-sided viewpoints”, so that many *different* types are needed in order to characterize the central and significant historical phenomena.<sup>142</sup> In view of this, the explicit inclusion of *one-sidedness* as a constitutive element of the ideal type seems particularly justified. This one-sidedness even (as in the case of theoretical value relation) persists through time: in Weber’s view, any single ideal type must be regarded as *transitory*. It is impossible for a complex of ideal types to exhaust the significance of a given object, even if new ideal types are added to this complex as time goes on.<sup>143</sup> The practical interest of the scholar changes with the development of his culture: new aspects of the historical material catch his attention, while older ones are discarded. Weber sums up this view as follows: “The greatest advances in the field of the social sciences are, as far as *substance* is concerned, tied up with the shift in practical cultural problems, and take the *form* of a critique of conceptual construction”.<sup>144</sup>

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139 As far as *Categories* is concerned, this aspect is explicitly mentioned in the introductory footnote: “The pedantic long-windedness of the formulations is due to a wish to distinguish clearly between *subjectively* attributed and objectively valid meaning ...” (*GAW*, p. 427n1). In *ES*, the fundamental definition of “social action” contains the same emphasis (*ES*, p. 4/*WG*, p. 1).

140 *ES*, p. 4/*WG*, pp. 1-2.

141 One reason for this may be that the acting person himself is not conscious of the motivation. Cf. *ES*, pp. 21-22/*WG*, p. 10.

142 *MSS*, pp. 91-92/*GAW*, p. 192.

143 *MSS*, pp. 104-105/*GAW*, pp. 206-207.

144 *MSS*, p. 106/*GAW*, p. 208.

### The prognostic aspect: ideal type and politics

Through his discussion of the logical significance of the ideal type, Weber creates new possibilities of *prognosis* in the social sciences. The view of the ideal type as a one-sided, fictional course of action to which it is often possible to ascribe objective validity (as long as certain hypothetical premises are regarded as given) makes it possible to escape from the traditional position, according to which the object of historical science is unique and is consequently unsuitable as a basis for or an object of predictions. On the other hand, the retention of the individual *significance* of historical phenomena as an integrated part of the ideal type ensures that any knowledge of regularities which one arrives at by this means will avoid the emptiness of positivistic laws and preserve a natural relation with concrete cultural problems.

To certain disciplines in the field of social science, and to their practical counterparts, these new perspectives were not especially important. This was the case, for instance, of theoretical economics, which was based on the assumption that “economic man” was motivated solely by certain well-defined and constant purposes, and which was therefore less interested in the axiological possibilities of the Weberian ideal type.

On the other hand, ideal types seem particularly well suited to the world of *politics*, since the work of politicians is marked by the necessity of predicting, with a fair degree of certainty, the probable behaviour and the probable reactions of individuals acting from the most diverse motives. In view of the wealth of possible political attitudes, the axiological flexibility of the ideal type constitutes a special advantage.<sup>145</sup>

The main value of the ideal type from a political point of view, however, is derived not only from its flexibility: the fact that it is possible to introduce into it a large number of different values and purposes, but also – perhaps even primarily – from the fact that it is constructed in connection with, and is consequently able to transmit knowledge of, *motives of actual behaviour*. Since politicians seek to translate their values into practice, in constant conflict with other individuals committed to *different* values, they are often less concerned with the predictability of empirical behaviour than with the possibility of *revealing, understanding, and entering into the spirit of* the values motivating this conflicting behaviour. For this purpose, the ideal type, which is rooted in axiological and explanatory value analysis, becomes a precious instrument. A particularly useful feature in this connection is its *internal consistency*: this characteristic endows the selected values – particularly those included in types of axiological rationality, as in *Objectivity* – with a coherence and a resulting immediate *self-evidence* which is far greater than that possessed by ordinary models of behaviour and motivation. Another fruitful aspect of the concept is the possibility, directly mentioned by Weber (who makes lavish use of it in his

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145 Weber’s general view of the nature of politics is described below, pp. 242-43.

own sociological work), of rendering the ideal type more graphic by the inclusion of elements of reality in it.

All the reasons named make the ideal type, particularly in its axiological form, an extremely useful instrument of political analysis. It should be noted, however, that the features referred to – axiological flexibility, internal consistency of the basic values, and graphic impressiveness – at the same time constitute the main danger to the correct utilization of this first-rate analytical instrument. The reasons for this are the following:

Naturally, the prognostic function of the ideal type is of a *hypothetical* nature: *if* the conditions embodied in the type are present in real life, *then* we may expect to find an actual course of behaviour corresponding to the “typical” one; or (since the ideal type is by definition *unreal*), to the extent that the conditions isolated in the type are met with in real life, we may expect real behaviour to conform more closely to the type. Since a great many conditions of behaviour *other* than those included in the type may be of importance to the actual chain of events, any such prognosis is *partial*. The danger of the ideal type (especially in its axiological form) is its tendency to make one forget this hypothetical restriction. Its plasticity, inner consistency and graphic self-evidence give it a power of psychological penetration which in practice sweeps aside any number of theoretical safeguards (warnings against universalization, generalization, etc.). The ideal type is, so to speak, by nature an *expansive* concept.

A good illustration of this is afforded by Weber's brilliant application of the ideal-typical method to the analysis of the Protestant Ethic and the possible importance of this ethic for the distinctive spirit of modern capitalism. Weber himself expressly denies that he has any other intention than that of examining “whether and to what extent religious influences have been among the determinants of the qualitative shaping and of the quantitative expansion of [the capitalist] ‘spirit’ across the world, and what concrete *aspects* of that *culture* which rests on capitalist foundations can be traced back to them”;<sup>146</sup> what he is offering is a one-sided and partial examination of the relation between two aspects of concrete reality (embodied in their respective ideal types). Nevertheless, Weber's thesis has wearisomely often been discussed as if he claimed the existence of an actual *relation of cause and effect* between two sections of historical reality in their entirety. It would be unjustified to ascribe this development merely to superficial readings and unwarranted inferences on the part of the critics: the tendency described in part follows from the “expansive” nature of the ideal type, its ability to captivate and fill the imagination.

The same danger exists in the field of political analysis, and here we possess an even clearer example of its actuality: In his political writings of 1917–18, Weber undoubtedly reads unreal and intensified features of ideal types like “legal authority”, “charismatic authority” and “bureaucracy” into the concrete reality of German political life, and from his analysis draws conclusions which are meant as guidance for political practice after the war. The actual developments in the Weimar

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146 BW, p. 36/PE I, p. 77.

Republic contradicted the chains of reasoning supporting these conclusions in the most flagrant manner.

Of course, the danger of employing the “expansive” ideal type as an instrument of political analysis is matched by the particular suitability of the ideal type as a vehicle for political *propaganda*. The “expansiveness” which clouds the clear vision of reality at the same time heightens the suggestibility of the imagination.<sup>147</sup>

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147 An example is Weber’s passionate outburst against the Allied powers and their treatment of Germany after World War I: “Like the Jews, we have become a pariah people ...” (according to a contemporary report, copy in GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/5). “Pariah people” is defined as an ideal type, *ES*, p. 493/*WG*, p. 300. The fact that the statement formed part of a political speech made by Weber in front of his students (of economics and sociology) in Munich of course increases the impressiveness of the expression even further.

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## Chapter 5

# The Complementary Relation of Values and Scientific Inquiry: Politics and Science

In Chapter 3, I tried to show that Weber's view of the combined value analysis and of its possibilities rested on two implicit conditions: that the goals were fixed, and that teleological considerations were acknowledged as legitimate. This latent restriction of the value conflict becomes an open and central problem when we turn to the discussion of *politics* and the role of the *politician*.

Weber's reflections on politics have been discussed often, and from several different approaches. Authors working from a *historical* or *practical political* point of view<sup>1</sup> have concentrated on Weber's role as a publicist, as a politically – above all nationally – committed scholar, and accordingly on the essays and articles in *GPS*; from a *politico-ethical*<sup>2</sup> aspect, discussion has centred on Weber's view of politics as a vocation, as it emerges from *Pol.Voc.* contrasted with *Sc.Voc.*; and *sociologists*<sup>3</sup> have mainly worked on Weber's systematic, empirical "sociology of domination" and the rudiments of his "sociology of the state", and consequently directed their chief attention to *ES*.<sup>4</sup> Under each of these three approaches, although the accents have been set differently, the results have been roughly the same: *conflict* and *power* are, in Weber's view, the fundamental conditions of political activity.

As far as I can see, however, most of the commentators have been content with *demonstrating* the existence of these two central features of Weber's thought; having done so, they have perhaps gone on to show the way in which these concepts were linked with other sociological concepts; or they have evaluated Weber's ideas and their implications – often negatively – from the point of view of the ideals of the commentators themselves. The elements of conflict and power in Weber's thought are, so to speak, viewed "from above", in relative isolation from his theory of scientific inquiry. Attempts to regard them "from below" have often amounted only to tracing back these elements to Weber's alleged "personal" philosophical attitude. In the present chapter, however, I shall try to study the question in the light of the hypothesis that the concepts of conflict and power, which indisputably constitute the central core of Weber's view of the nature of politics, *may* be contained within

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1 For instance Aron (1971); Mommsen (1974 (1959)); Beetham (1974).

2 For instance Aron (1959) and Schluchter (1991, 1996a, 2000).

3 For instance Winckelmann (1952); Hättich (1967); Breiner (1996); Fitz (2004).

4 Obviously, the categories are not clear-cut, and several of the authors cited belong to more than one of them.

the frame of reference defined by his various methodological reflections, and may consequently lay claim to the same scientific validity as the rest of his theory of scientific inquiry.

### The premises

In the account given above (Chapter 3) of Weber's thoughts concerning values as an object of scientific inquiry, one of the chief conclusions was that Weber claimed the existence of a fundamental, *theoretical value conflict*. The first explicit premise of his reflections on the essential qualities of politics is the idea of a *concrete struggle* between different political parties, camps, nations, and so on. The transition in his thought from a theoretical to a practical conflict may seem short and self-evident; and this is perhaps the reason why Weber himself does not comment on the relation between the two ideas. Weber's silence on this point means that a commentator who wishes to complete the chain of argument by inserting the missing logical link connecting the theoretical and the practical value conflict has no *direct* support for this interpretation, which therefore, strictly speaking, must remain his own construction. On the other hand, the *indirect* support is exceptionally good: We find sporadic passages in Weber's work that point to such a connection, and these passages are not contradicted elsewhere. Moreover, this line of thought is a natural continuation of Weber's views on values as an object of scientific inquiry, and it serves, as will become apparent, as an equally natural and logical foundation for Weber's further reflections. Indeed, the argument almost seems logically inescapable as the basis for a meaningful definition of politics.

### The implicit premises

The fundamental conception of the nature of politics which lies latent in Weber's works can be formulated as follows: Politics, in the broadest sense of the term, is characterized by *the attempt to attain one or more goals whose realization does not solely depend on the person setting them* (what I shall refer to below, for convenience, as *external*<sup>5</sup> goals). Politics, according to this characterization, is therefore always *action whose intended consequences include, or are conditional on, the behaviour of other persons than the acting person himself*.

The first part of the description, the element of *goal-setting*, is explicitly mentioned more than once in *GPS* and *ES*. Thus, in *ES*, Weber writes: "... [social action by political parties] is always directed towards a goal (Ziel) which is striven

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5 In *B72*, I used the term "supra-individual" to designate this quality. However, not only was the term misunderstood by later commentators (Mommson 1974 (1959), p. 475); but it could also be confused with Weber's own usage of the term "überindividuell", which usually carries overtones of *absolute* or at least *normative* validity. I have therefore in *B07* replaced it with "external", which seems to carry the essential meaning but is not open to the same misconstructions.

for in a planned manner. This goal may be ‘substantive’ (to carry out a programme for ideal or material purposes (Zwecke)) or ‘personal’ ...”<sup>6</sup> The same elements of “goal” and “purpose” emerge in *Parl.Gov.*: “The business of politics is *carried out by interested parties* (Interessenten). (By ‘interested parties’ I ... [mean] those with political interests who strive after political power and responsibility for the purpose of realising certain political ideas)”.<sup>7</sup> Similar views are implicit in other passages.<sup>8</sup>

The *external* element is perhaps less explicit in Weber’s work; still, it is possible to point to scattered hints, for instance in the passage from *ES* quoted above, which speaks of “parties” in the following way: “their action is oriented towards acquiring social power, i.e., towards influencing social action ...”<sup>9</sup> It also seems reasonable to maintain that defining politics as leadership activity implies not only the setting of goals but also the notion of the leader leading *other* persons towards the goal or purpose in question. Generally speaking, of course, Weber’s work is almost exclusively concentrated around social phenomena; but this in itself is not conclusive, since his definition of the term “social” is wider than our definition of the term “external” for the present purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Even apart from the analysis of the concrete texts, it seems fair to say that some kind of attainment of external goals is almost a necessary element of any definition of politics. This statement cannot of course be conclusively verified according to the usual criteria of science; but we can show it to be an eminently reasonable one if we examine the kind of behaviour which the characterization would *not* fit. This behaviour would not include any attempt to attain or implement external goals; behaviour involving others would lack all sense of purpose, and purposive behaviour would exclusively affect the behaving person himself. Only a totally meditative or a chaotic-affective society would seem to fulfil these conditions; and in such societies, the category of “politics” would be similarly out of place.

It should be emphasized that the characterization does not claim to *exhaust* Weber’s definition of politics (and consequently has not been *called* a definition). What it purports to give are the (hypothetical) *necessary* but not necessarily

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6 *ES*, p. 938/WG, p. 539.

7 *LSPW*, p. 228/GPS, p. 401. In *Pol.Voc.* (*LSPW*, pp. 334-35/*GPS*, pp. 528-29), the idea of “interested parties” is again advanced, but this time without the element of goal-setting; this may be due to the fact that Weber is in the specific context more interested in the methods by which politicians try to obtain power.

8 At the beginning of *Pol.Voc.* (*LSPW*, p. 309/*GPS*, p. 505), politics in the broadest sense is defined as “every kind of independent *leadership* activity”. It would seem impossible to speak of “leadership” without implying at the same time the idea that particular people are being led towards or away from some goal, so that the leader, in this sense, “sets goals” by his activity.

9 *ES*, p. 938/WG, p. 539.

10 Cf. *ES*, p. 4/WG, p. 1, where “action” is described as “social” “insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of *others* and is oriented by this in its course”. Behaviour may be “social” in this sense without being directed to some purpose that includes or presupposes a particular behaviour on the part of other persons.

sufficient conditions for classifying phenomena as “political” (politics in the broad sense of the term). This is obvious if one compares the characterization with the introduction to *Pol. Voc.*, where Weber defines the concept of politics more closely. But an implication which can be shown to be derived from the characterization will also hold for any narrower definition of politics based on that characterization. We can therefore conclude that it is legitimate to relate any discussion by Weber of the special tasks, possibilities and duties inherent in the sphere of politics, and consequently incumbent on politicians, to the fundamental characteristics of *the attainment of goals and an external context*.

### *The explicit premises*

The proposed characterization of the nature of politics, as Weber sees it, allows us to draw the negative conclusion that he does *not* distinguish politics, at least in the broadest sense of the term, from other categories of behaviour or phenomena by the concrete *character* of the goals whose attainment or implementation is attempted. *What is the aim of external striving is a question to which no definite answer can be given.*

This conclusion, however, leads us from the uncovering of the hypothetical and implicit foundations of Weber's thought to arguments that are directly and explicitly expressed in his work. For example, at the outset of *Pol.Voc.*, he refuses to discuss “the *content* ... that one ought to give to one's political activity. For this has nothing to do with the general question of what the profession of politics is and what it can mean ...”<sup>11</sup> This preliminary delimitation of the subject of the lecture is partly motivated by Weber's wish to counter the temptation to mix up “Is” questions with “Ought” questions, a temptation which in the concrete circumstances surrounding the lecture was particularly obvious. But it also brings the question of the *means* of politics into focus and pushes that of its concrete *goals* into the background. The concept of “politics”, it seems, cannot be defined *concretely* by looking at the “typical” political goals pursued. As we have seen, Weber continues by characterizing politics in the broad sense as “every kind of independent *leadership* activity”,<sup>12</sup> a formulation which also leaves the question of the goals open.

Weber immediately narrows down his characterization of politics by defining it as “the leadership, or the exercise of influence on the leadership, of a *political* association (Verband), which in today's world means: a *state*”.<sup>13</sup> But it is obvious that he maintains his condition of “goal neutrality” with respect to this narrower definition. In fact, Weber seems anxious to emphasize straight away, and strongly, that the definition of politics which he employs (both in *Pol. Voc.* and in *ES*) does not imply any reference to, let alone inclusion or exclusion of, particular political goals. A “political association”, particularly a state, “cannot be defined sociologically in

11 *LSPW*, p. 309/*GPS*, p. 505.

12 *LSPW*, p. 309/*GPS*, p. 505.

13 *LSPW*, p. 310/*GPS*, p. 505.

terms of the content of its activities”, as Weber conclusively states a few sentences later.<sup>14</sup> Similar passages can be found in *ES*.<sup>15</sup>

## Politics as conflict

The characterization sketched out above – politics as the attempt to attain or implement external, but otherwise undefined, goals – permit us to draw a number of conclusions.

The statement that the attainment of a goal depends on the behaviour of others means that these other persons are in principle able to *prevent* the goal from being attained by refusing, deliberately or unconsciously, to act as required.

In itself, this condition only constitutes an added *difficulty* in the elaboration of goals: the latter must be acceptable to the persons affected by it. This presupposes that balances must be struck and compromises worked out in the same way as in the case of fundamental conflict between different value axioms held by the same person; but the condition *as such* does not theoretically prevent an acceptable compromise from being worked out, nor does it even exclude the theoretical possibility that hard and patient research into social problems and into the psychology of human beings, their wants and needs, may one day have yielded such a fund of knowledge that acceptable compromises can *always* be worked out.

This theoretical chance of political harmony is, however, definitely dismissed by Weber, since his theory of the fundamental conflict of values implies that it will always be possible to define a view in opposition to any given and accepted social compromise. In other words, he regards it as an objective truth that a harmonization of views will always carry with it an antagonism in relation to one or more other ideals and values: “‘Peace’ means a shift in the forms of the conflict or the parties to the conflict or the objects of the conflict or, finally, in the chances of selection – and nothing else”.<sup>16</sup> For the individual, this implies only the necessity of an *inner* weighing of different values and ends against each other; and such a procedure may theoretically result in an individual harmony. This possibility disappears, however, when the goals have an external character. Here, the ends are no longer given: in a political context, it is only possible to carry out the technical and teleological weighing of ends and means against each other if one is conscious of the fact that the basis of the operation, the group of ends and values regarded as given points of reference, is not under one’s own full control and may therefore change from one moment to the next, so that the preliminary balance which one has struck will be upset. Science can point to no *theoretically* binding way of forcing another person to accept a political compromise as valid. The theoretical conflict of values thus always entails a fundamental – even if perhaps only a latent – conflict between

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14 *LSPW*, p. 310/*GPS*, pp. 505-506.

15 *ES*, p. 902/*WG*, pp. 514-15; see also the more indirect reference to the goals of political parties, in *ES*, p. 938/*WG*, p. 539.

16 *MSS*, p. 27/*GAW*, p. 517.

value positions, and consequently between the individuals committed to these value positions.

This element of conflict is strongly brought out in Weber's work; as early as *Objectivity*, he writes:

Actually, the distinctive characteristic of problems of social *policy* is that they *cannot* be resolved by means of merely technical considerations on the basis of fixed goals: that there can and indeed *must* be *controversy* about the regulatory value standards, because the problem reaches into the area of general cultural questions.<sup>17</sup>

This methodological position is hammered out again and again in Weber's political writings: "Politics is: *fight* (Kampf)", he declares in *Parl.Gov.*;<sup>18</sup> and in the less directly "political" context of *Pol. Voc.* he repeats that "... partisanship, fighting, passion – *ira et studium* – those are the element in which the politician thrives".<sup>19</sup> The status of this view as more than a subjective preference is emphasized in an early statement of the same kind, made at the 1896 congress of the National-Social Party, where he describes "the unavoidable, eternal fight between human beings" as a "fundamental fact".<sup>20</sup>

These pithy formulations should not be construed as implying that Weber regards politics as a conflict where it is in principle impossible, or at least undesirable to try to reach agreement with the other side. On the contrary, he emphasizes that it is justified to seek and accept *political compromises*. We find this view as early as in *Objectivity*,<sup>21</sup> and find traces of it later in, for instance, *Suffr.Dem.Germ.*<sup>22</sup> But the actual possibility of reaching compromises with the other side, and the legitimate wish on the part of politicians to make them, to "get results", cannot disguise or remove the basic fact that, measured with the standards of science, no compromise is "better" or more "objective" than the opposing values that it seeks to harmonize. The duality of this position is expressed in almost epigrammatic form in Weber's letters from 1920: "The politician *must* make compromises ... – the scholar *may not* cover them".<sup>23</sup>

From a theoretical point of view, this position follows logically from the application of the principles of value freedom and value conflict to the sphere of politics. And in relation to political practice it means that conflict becomes the unalterable condition

17 *MSS*, p. 56/*GAW*, p. 153.

18 *LSPW*, p. 154nB/*GPS*, p. 329n1; see also the almost identical formulations in *GPS*, pp. 347, 392.

19 *LSPW*, p. 330/*GPS*, p. 524.

20 Mommsen 1974 (1959), p. 43.

21 *MSS*, p. 57/*GAW*, p. 154.

22 *GPS*, p. 261, where "fighting" and "compromise" are mentioned side by side as the suitable functions of political parties and interest groups.

23 ("Der Politiker *muss* Kompromisse machen ... – der *Gelehrte darf* sie nicht decken"). Letter to Klara Mommsen, (probably) 12 April 1920 (GStA I, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 23).

and fundamental element of politics, sometimes latent, sometimes manifest, but never *completely* exorcised.

### **Politics as power conflict**

Since it is to be expected that any striving to realize purposes in any external context may meet with opposition, and that such opposition cannot be removed by means of scientifically binding arguments, the attainment of such goals, and therefore all political action, depends on the ability to *surmount* the opposition if necessary. If the politician, as defined by Weber, is to carry out his policy, he must by implication always possess the means of *forcing other persons to bow to his will*. In Weber's terminology, this means that the politician must possess or control *power* (Macht). "'Power' means: any probability (Chance) of imposing one's own will in a social relationship, even against resistance, irrespective of the basis on which that probability rests", the definition runs in *ES*,<sup>24</sup> and we find an echo of this definition in *Value Freedom*, where Weber speaks of the power of the state as "a means of compulsion against resistance".<sup>25</sup> If we base ourselves on this definition, politics is consequently a struggle which in the last instance may have to be waged by means of *power*: it is a conflict involving power as an instrument, and therefore (already in this sense) essentially a *power conflict*.

That this identification of politics as a power conflict is only, in its general form, made explicit in *Pol. Voc.* does not indicate that Weber came late to it. On the contrary: as mentioned above,<sup>26</sup> we already find it, more indirectly formulated, in the *Inaugural Lecture*. Here, Weber several times connects the terms "political" and "power" in a single sentence;<sup>27</sup> the two concepts seem to possess some kind of affinity in his thought; and in one instance, he comes near to identifying one with the other:

In the final analysis, processes of economic development ... are *power* struggles, and the ultimate and decisive interests which economic policy must serve are the interests of national *power* ... The science of national economic policy (Volkswirtschaftspolitik) is a *political science*.<sup>28</sup>

In *Pol. Voc.*, this conceptual identification is complete: "power is the inevitable means ... of all politics",<sup>29</sup> as Weber puts it in his introduction to the discussion of politics as an inner vocation and of the qualities which it demands; and the stress

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<sup>24</sup> *ES*, p. 53/*WG*, p. 28; for other (somewhat earlier), but in all essential respects similar definitions, cf. *ES*, pp. 926, 942/*WG*, p. 531, 542.

<sup>25</sup> *MSS*, p. 47/*GAW*, p. 540.

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 95-96.

<sup>27</sup> For instance *LSPW*, pp. 20, 26/*GPS*, pp. 18, 23.

<sup>28</sup> *LSPW*, p. 16/*GPS*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *LSPW*, p. 354/*GPS*, p. 547.

laid on power as an unavoidable and specific instrument of politics recurs frequently throughout the lecture.<sup>30</sup>

We also find Weber emphasizing the special link between politics and power in the special discussions of his *definition* of politics with its emphasis on the political *structure*, particularly the *state*. Thus, the “political community” (politische Gemeinschaft) is, in *ES*, partly defined by its “readiness to resort to physical force”;<sup>31</sup> and Weber’s characterizations of the “political organization” (politische Verband) in later works strongly bring out the same element. In *Pol. Voc.*, Weber writes: “In the last analysis, the modern state can only be defined sociologically in terms of a specific *means* which is peculiar to the state, as it is to all other political associations, namely physical violence (Gewaltsamkeit)”;<sup>32</sup> and in *GARS*, the wording is still more pointed, the essence of politics being described as “the appeal to the naked violence of coercive means”.<sup>33</sup>

A characteristic trait of the “political organization”, in particular of its modern variety – the state – is its *monopolization* of the means of physical violence which serve as instruments of politics, at least to the extent that concentrations of the means of violence are only regarded as legitimate if they are authorized by the state.<sup>34</sup> In practice, this means that persons who wish to engage in politics – and who consequently need power with which to wage the political struggle – at first have to fight others for this power. Politics, in Weber’s narrower definition, thus in practice often becomes a power conflict in the sense of struggle *for* power. This is directly pointed out in formulations like the definition in *Pol. Voc.* of politics as “striving for a share of power or for influence on the distribution of power”,<sup>35</sup> and hinted at in the various analyses of the behaviour of *political parties*.<sup>36</sup>

This shift of the problem of power in practice from the conflict *by means of* to the conflict *concerning* power does not in itself result in any major modification of Weber’s views of the special demands of politics and the specific ethic of the political sphere; but it does form the background of an important, and often somewhat neglected, aspect of the political “ethic”, as elaborated by Weber.<sup>37</sup>

In a number of the quotations given above,<sup>38</sup> Weber replaces the vague term “power” (Macht) by the more precise and radical one of “violence” (Gewalt). Should this be taken to mean that “power” as a political instrument is always *physical* power, some form of physical *violence*?

30 For instance *LSPW*, pp. 357, 362, 366/*GPS*, pp. 550, 554, 558.

31 *ES*, p. 901/*WG*, p. 514; see also *ES*, p. 904/*WG*, p. 516.

32 *LSPW*, p. 310/*GPS*, p. 506.

33 *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547.

34 The problem of legitimacy is central to Weber’s political sociology, but will not be treated here. Indirectly, though, it has a certain bearing on some of the discussions below.

35 *LSPW*, p. 311/*GPS*, p. 506.

36 See, for instance, the formal definition, *ES*, p. 284/*WG*, p. 167.

37 See below, pp. 263-70.

38 *ES*, p. 901/*WG*, p. 514 and particularly *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547.

Some other passages may give the impression that Weber actually identifies power with physical violence. The whole discussion subsequent to the definition in *ES* is carried out with the aid of terms like “physical force” and “violence”.<sup>39</sup> In *Pol. Voc.*, we find similar signs of an identification of the two concepts,<sup>40</sup> particularly in the introduction, where Weber with approval quotes Trotski’s statement that “Every state is founded on physical force”,<sup>41</sup> a statement which we find in sharpened form in Weber’s own definition: “All political structures (Gebilde) are structures of physical force (Gewaltgebilde)”.<sup>42</sup>

In the context of the argument presented above, the shift from “power” to “physical force”/“physical violence” seems justified, inasmuch as political power, in order to fulfil the need defined by Weber’s implicit characterization, must include the ability to prevail against *any* kind of opposition. Naturally, the politician has a broad spectrum of formally non-violent means at his disposal, ranging from the utilization of positions of prestige and reputation, over cunning and lies, to direct psychological pressure. But there is always the risk that the persons on whose behaviour the attainment of the goal depends will be impervious to this pressure, and that they may, even without provocation, make use of physical means of violence in their resistance. In this case, only physical violence can break down the opposition,<sup>43</sup> and just as the attainment of a goal in an external context may always *in the last resort* come to depend on the use of power, the need for the use of such power may always *in the last resort* become a need for the exercise of physical violence. Under this construction, power and physical violence are not *identical*; but the acceptance of political power implies the acceptance of the risk of having to use violence. Richelieu expressed this in epigrammatic form when he had the words “Ultima ratio regum” (the ultimate argument of kings) engraved upon the French cannon; and Weber echoes both the thought and the epigram in his comments in *ES* on the definition of the “political organization”:

Obviously, the use of physical force is neither the sole, nor even the normal, means of administration for political organizations. On the contrary, their leaders have employed all conceivable means in order to make their goals prevail. Nevertheless, the threat and, if necessary, the use of force are the means *specific* to political organizations, and are always the *ultima ratio* when other methods fail.<sup>44</sup>

In continuation of this comment, he writes in *Pol.Voc.*: “Of course, violence is not the normal or sole means used by the state. There is no question of that. But it is the

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39 *ES*, pp. 901-904/ *WG*, pp. 514-16.

40 *LSPW*, pp. 364, 366/*GPS*, pp. 556, 558.

41 *LSPW*, p. 310/*GPS*, p. 506.

42 *ES*, p. 910/*WG*, p. 520.

43 Weber himself sketches out a similar spectrum of instruments of power and means of violence in connection with his treatment of the struggle of the political parties *for* power (cf. *ES*, p. 938/*WG*, p. 539).

44 *ES*, p. 54/*WG*, p. 29.

means *specific* to the state".<sup>45</sup> Physical violence is the backbone of political power, but not necessarily its visage.

In Weber's work, one notes a certain – more or less implicit – tendency to stress the violent element in the concept of power when the subject under discussion belongs to the field of *foreign* policy, whereas Weber's treatment of *domestic* political matters quickly concentrates on the various principles of legitimacy, their relation to one another, their development, etc. An explicit distinction between the external and the internal aspects of politics is found in *GARS I*, where "the ultimate end of safeguarding (or changing) the external and internal distribution of power" is stated as being a dominant principle of all politics, but more particularly of *foreign policy*.<sup>46</sup> This special emphasis on the reliance of foreign policy on physical violence seems to me closely bound up with Weber's thoughts on power conflict and on legitimacy.

According to Weber's definition, the legitimate use of physical violence is in a state limited to the organs of the state itself. This means, as noted earlier, that persons wishing to enter politics must in the great majority of cases start by attempting to get (a share in the) possession of the legitimate means of physical violence in the state in question; their political activity *by means of* power is dependent on a preliminary struggle with others *for* power. In this preliminary power conflict, the participants *may* resort to physical violence;<sup>47</sup> but since this would constitute an act of provocation in relation to the state (which precisely possesses and tries to uphold a monopoly of legitimate use of physical force), the struggle will usually be of a non-violent kind. The state may even intervene in order to provide the power conflict with a fixed framework (electoral laws, etc.). The element of violence thus recedes into the background in this phase. When a group comes into possession of legitimate power, by whatever means, it may of course exercise it in its physical and violent form within the state. The legitimate character of the power may, however, make it possible to avoid the actual exercise of violence, since legitimacy is defined by Weber in such a way that legitimate power (order, etc.) "... is regarded as being somehow valid (obligatory or exemplary) *for* the action".<sup>48</sup> The legitimacy of the political power will often express itself in a tendency on the part of the persons affected to anticipate and adjust themselves to the goals that the power is meant to back up if necessary. The element of violence, and in many cases also of power, is replaced by relations of legitimacy.

When it comes to relations *between* states, to international politics, conditions are quite different.<sup>49</sup> Above all, each actor, or state, by definition possesses in advance a greater or smaller amount of control over means of physical violence. These

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45 *LSPW*, p. 310/*GPS*, p. 506. See also *LSPW*, p. 357/*GPS*, p. 550: "... power, backed up by *violence*". It is interesting to note the importance accorded by Weber to the spoken and written *word*, and to the knowledge and insight which it represents, as an instrument of political power (see, for instance, *LSPW*, p. 181/*GPS*, p. 354).

46 *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547.

47 Cf. *ES*, p. 938/*WG*, p. 539.

48 *ES*, p. 31/*WG*, p. 22.

49 Breiner 2004, pp. 299-300 has a long discussion of this aspect.

means may in some cases be quite modest (frontier guards, police, small armed forces), and the state in question is therefore, viewed in this perspective, a “small state” (Kleinstaat).<sup>50</sup> “Small states” are compelled by their relative powerlessness to remain politically passive and concentrate on “good administration”;<sup>51</sup> but a number of states, by reason of their size and/or historical tradition, have very considerable amounts of physical force at their disposal; they are, in Weber’s terminology, “power states” (Machtstaaten).<sup>52</sup>

As actors in international politics, the states, particularly of course the “power states”, therefore have the specific instrument of political activity at their disposal, and are, in principle, able to conduct a foreign policy (in Weber’s sense of the word). In itself, the possession of this ability does not compel them to make use of it; a state may *choose* to “abandon [all thoughts of participating in] world politics”, to remain “unpolitical” in the field of foreign policy and to concentrate exclusively on the attainment of domestic goals, or at least in its foreign relations only back up its initiatives by non-violent means.<sup>53</sup> This introversion, however, has as its condition that no *other* state wishes to expand at the expense of the “passive” state, or at least does not see its way to realizing such ambitions. The first possibility – the lack of even the threat to a given state – *may* exist;<sup>54</sup> but often the factor permitting the state to turn inwards, remain passive in the field of foreign affairs, will be some sort of balance of power among the surrounding *power* states.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, such a balance of power implies a *willingness* on the part of the states participating in it to take positive political action, if required, in international politics, in the sense discussed, i.e., to make use of their means of violence to the full; and to this willingness must, as Weber points out, be added the fact that a power state, in its capacity of power state, represents an obstacle and a danger in the eyes of other power states, and may consequently, simply because of its *potential* ability to play a role in foreign affairs, be drawn into the manoeuvres of international politics as a possible object of the exercise of power.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Weber sees strong inherent forces in the international political system (to use a modern term) pushing “power states” into the field of active foreign policy. Furthermore, in international conflicts, one participating power state can claim no greater legitimacy than another: on the contrary, *each* power state will

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50 *LSPW*, p. 127/*GPS*, pp. 176, 289.

51 As examples of such “small states”, Weber mentions Switzerland, with its neutralist ideology (*LSPW*, pp. 75-76, 127/*GPS*, pp. 143-44, 289), Denmark, Holland and Norway (*LSPW*, p. 127/*GPS*, p. 289). It should be noted that Weber explicitly says that “small states” are no less “valuable” or “important” in the eyes of history for having to take this stance.

52 *LSPW*, pp. 75-77/*GPS*, pp. 142-44.

53 *LSPW*, p. 127/*GPS*, p. 289.

54 Weber here points to Norway and Switzerland (*ES*, p. 910/*WG*, p. 520).

55 This, according to Weber, is the case of Switzerland (*ES*, p. 910/*WG*, p. 520).

56 *LSPW*, p. 77/*GPS*, pp. 143-44.

claim a legitimacy based on national or national-cultural values;<sup>57</sup> as mentioned above,<sup>58</sup> the values of different national cultures are, in Weber's eyes, axiologically incommensurable.<sup>59</sup> If we add to these reflections the fact that each power state taking part in a conflict will often have enormous physical means of violence at its disposal, whereas the state in its domestic relations with the person or persons who are to be influenced possesses a decisive margin of strength, it is not difficult to see why Weber found it necessary to stress the violent aspect of foreign, rather than of domestic, policy.

## The ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility

### *The ethic of conviction*

The characterization of politics as conflict implies that political goals can never, in principle, be regarded as fixed once and for all – let alone be demonstrated by scientific means – but that on the contrary the conflict between different goals is a distinctive feature of politics. But in the last analysis, a further, fundamental problem may arise: whether human activity should be guided by the wish to attain “outer” goals *at all*, i.e., whether the interest in the *teleological* component of values is legitimate, or whether such activity should be motivated only by its intrinsic value, i.e., by purely *axiological* considerations. In short, the fundamental conflict inherent in the concept of politics also includes the dichotomy between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of consequences.

This dichotomy acquires a special poignancy with respect to political questions. The ethic of conviction manifests itself, among other things, in that means to a given end are judged only according to their intrinsic value, and that they are rejected, regardless of their positive teleological status – their aptness as means to the given end – if this intrinsic value turns out to be a negative one. Now, politics is characterized by its distinctive instrument, power, which has an extremely negative value in the ethical system within which Weber usually operates. This ethically negative character is above all due to the fact that *physical violence* is the extreme manifestation of power. Weber is quite conscious of this aspect and brings it out clearly: “The specific means of *legitimate violence per se* in the hands of human associations is what gives

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57 *ES*, pp. 925-26/*WG*, p. 530. The paragraph in question is a striking example of Weber's capacity for value-free analysis; he carries through a dispassionate analysis of one of the highest and most passionately defended of his own ideals, the belief in the nation as a supreme value, without flinching from any of the uncomfortable consequences of this analysis. (The slight sneer that can be detected in Mommsen's (1974 (1959), p. 67n116) description of a similar position taken by Weber at the Second Congress of the *Society* is in my view unjustified.)

58 See p. 195.

59 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604.

all the ethical problems of politics their particular character".<sup>60</sup> But it should not be overlooked that other forms of power, as for instance *lies*, may also carry a strongly negative ethical load.<sup>61</sup> What is in any event certain is that the function of power as an instrument of politics is at the root of a fundamental axiological conflict between the political and the ethical sphere.

Moreover, in Weber's view the element of power is responsible for recreating, on the plane of actual empirical reality, the tension in principle between politics and ethics: war, which is the extreme manifestation of power, creates among the participants on either side a feeling of inner solidarity, of essential brotherhood, which is the only sentiment strong enough to rival effectively the similar ethical and religious feelings.<sup>62</sup>

Accordingly, Weber mainly discusses and elaborates the dichotomy – ethic of conviction/ethic of consequences<sup>63</sup> – in the light of his knowledge of the ethically negative value of the political sphere. Within the political sphere, marked inescapably by its specific element of power, one may, according to Weber, choose either of two fundamental attitudes: that of the *ethic of conviction* (*Gesinnungsethik*) or that of the *ethic of responsibility* (*Verantwortungsethik*) (107, pp. 49-55).

A person who accepts the ethic of conviction will reject any other criterion for judging his actions than that based on their intrinsic axiological (in this case, ethical) value.<sup>64</sup> If forced to choose between ethically "clean hands" and the attainment of political goals – a choice which he cannot hope to escape permanently if he engages in any kind of politics – he will always sacrifice the goal in order to preserve the ethically correct character of his conduct.

It may be useful to give a brief account of Weber's treatment of variants of action motivated by an ethic of conviction and their relevance to political problems in particular. We can distinguish between the *religious-acosmistic*, the *pacifist-political*, and the *radical-revolutionary* attitude.

If a person committed to an ethic of conviction finds himself in a political situation where power, particularly physical violence, is being employed *against* him, he will, according to Weber, solve the problem of the ethically correct behaviour along the lines of the simple formula: "Resist not evil with force"<sup>65</sup>. By completely abstaining from the use of force, and by respecting instead in practice the injunction of the Sermon on the Mount to "turn the other cheek", the person committed to an ethic of

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60 *LSPW*, p. 364/*GPS*, p. 556. See also *LSPW*, pp. 358, 360-61, 365-66/*GPS*, pp. 550, 552-53, 557.

61 Cf. Weber's discussion of the demand for unconditional truth made by *absolute* ethics (*LSPW*, p. 359/*GPS*, p. 551).

62 *FMW*, p. 335/*GARS I*, pp. 548-49. It should be emphasized that this empirical circumstance has no bearing on the question of the *logical* incompatibility of politics and ethics, as Weber discusses it.

63 See above, p. 197.

64 *MSS*, p. 16; *LSPW*, pp. 359-60/*GAW*, p. 505; *GPS*, p. 551.

65 *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547; similarly *FMW*, pp. 148, 336; *LSPW*, p. 358/*GARS I*, p. 549; *GPS*, p. 550; *GAW*, p. 604.

conviction wholly escapes what Weber calls “the inescapable pragma of violence”.<sup>66</sup> He avoids the theoretically infinite escalation of physical compulsion by taking refuge on a qualitatively different level of reaction: the violence necessitated by politics is intercepted by a passivity legitimated by ethics.

If this logic is carried to its last conclusion, it involves more than simply the rejection of a particular *means* – power – and culminates in a complete *religious acosmism*, the absolute rejection of the “world” and of all worldly things.

This attitude, which corresponds to a complete fulfilment of the demands of the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>67</sup> stands in absolute contrast to worldly activity, and in particular to its essence: political action. All teleological considerations are rejected en bloc:

[The Gospels] are in opposition not just to war – of which they make no specific mention – but ultimately to each and every law of the social world, if that world seeks to be a *place of worldly “culture”*, one devoted to the beauty, dignity, honour and greatness of the “creatures” of this earth.<sup>68</sup>

The kingdom of the religious-acosmistic ethic of conviction “is not of this world”.

However, one sometimes finds in Weber a tendency to limit the discussion to the question of the rejection or acceptance of certain means *in a context which otherwise remains worldly*.<sup>69</sup> The position defined in these cases is still marked by the rejection of force as a political instrument, but it does not extend the rejection to the whole sphere of political activity in general, as long as the political ends are striven for only by non-violent means. Thus, the attitude can be seen as a commitment to a *policy of pacifism*. Such a policy is not opposed to all dealings with the “world”, nor does it put a negative value on teleological considerations as such; rather, it operates on the assumption that the axiological and teleological systems are *identical*, that “only good can flow from good, only evil from evil”, a view for which Weber criticizes his pacifist colleague F. W. Foerster.<sup>70</sup>

The *radical-revolutionary* protagonists of an ethic of conviction, as described by Weber, exhibit a similar tendency to ignore the teleological system or to identify it with the axiological one. Here, the situation is a little more complicated, though, and in certain respects differs from that of the two other variants.

66 *FMW*, p. 336/*GARS I*, p. 549; see below, pp. 257-58.

67 *LSPW*, pp. 357-58/*GPS*, pp. 550-51.

68 *LSPW*, p. 78/*GPS*, p. 145.

69 For instance, one may compare the passage *LSPW*, p. 358/*GPS*, p. 551 (“Anyone seeking to act in accordance with the ethic of the Gospel should not go on strike – they are a form of coercion – but instead join a ‘yellow union’”) with *LSPW*, p. 144/*GPS*, pp. 144-45, where Weber maintains that the Gospels condemn *any* participation in or connection with gainful economic activity.

70 *LSPW*, p. 362/*GPS*, pp. 553-54. Such a reflection on the *consequences* of a certain kind of behaviour is already in itself a violation of the demands of religious acosmicity.

Unlike the religious-acosmistic variant of the ethic of conviction, but like the pacifist-political one, the radical-revolutionary tendency accepts the “world” and regards activity directed towards worldly ends as legitimate. It is described in *Wertfreiheit* as a “radical revolutionary political attitude”, and illustrated by the example of consistent syndicalism;<sup>71</sup> in other discussions, too, Weber constantly brings in examples relevant to politics.<sup>72</sup> Unlike *both* the other variants, it is moreover clear that radical revolutionaries do not condemn the use of physical violence on the grounds of its ethically negative value, but rather have a predilection for employing it themselves. Here, unlike the case of the other variants, the problem of power is not negative but *positive*: what Weber sees as the problem is not the rejection, but the *use* of force according to this conception of the ethics of conviction.

In *Value Freedom*, the chain of reasoning, with the modifications set out above, is more or less parallel to the one concerning the religious-acosmistic variant; the syndicalist’s goal is exclusively *internal*: he wants to demonstrate and prove again and again by his actions the sincerity of his convictions. The teleological system is ignored in the sense that the syndicalist completely abstracts from the *external* practical effects of his action.

In *Pol.Voc.*, Weber, probably under the influence of the current political chaos,<sup>73</sup> discusses a different kind of radical revolutionary attitude, that involving an *external* goal. The radical revolutionaries in question strive to attain this goal, however, on the basis of “teleological” premises of the same crypto-axiological kind as those demonstrated in the case of the pacifists described above. Where Professor Foerster believed that evil means can only lead to evil results, the radical revolutionaries described in *Pol.Voc.* – often pacifists who have failed the test of patience that a consistent pacifist policy imposed upon them – act on the supposition that evil means employed in a good cause will, by virtue of the character of the latter, be cleansed of their bad side effects.<sup>74</sup> Such people believe that a war waged in the cause of peace has the quality of being final, “the war to end all wars”. The consistent pacifist politician assumes that the intrinsic axiological value of the means communicates itself to the effects and consequently to the end; the consistent radical revolutionary, on the other hand, believes that the intrinsic axiological value of the end will also colour the means conducive to it and their side effects. In both cases, the teleological system is merged with the axiological one.

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<sup>71</sup> *MSS*, pp. 16, 24/*GAW*, pp. 505, 514-15. See also letters from Weber to Robert Michels of 4 August 1908 (*MWG II/5*) and 12 May 1909 (*MWG II/6*) and to E. J. Lesser of 18 August 1913 (*MWG II/8*).

<sup>72</sup> *LSPW*, pp. 357, 360-61; *FMW*, pp. 336-37/*GPS*, pp. 550, 552-53; *GARS I*, pp. 549-50.

<sup>73</sup> The lecture *Pol.Voc.* was given in Munich in January 1919, at a time when left-wing extremism had the upper hand in the city. It may be added, though, that Weber had considered, as early as 1916 (in *Intermed.Refl.*), the similar case of religious movements which want to remedy the evils of this world by its own evil means.

<sup>74</sup> *LSPW*, p. 361/*GPS*, p. 553.

Common to these three tendencies, however, is their sceptical view of teleological considerations. Either they regard such considerations as quite illegitimate, and reject them absolutely; or they replace the real teleological value analysis, the computation of the chance of reaching a given goal, by some kind of axiological consideration, not so much in the belief that causation does not function in the world, but rather on the basis of the view that they have no right, or at least no duty, to justify their actions by their consequences. The logical complement to this view is the denial by persons of these persuasions of any responsibility for the *consequences* which might result from their actions. According to the ethic of conviction, responsibility is purely axiological.<sup>75</sup>

### *The ethic of responsibility*

In opposition to the ethic of conviction, one can, particularly in relation to problems of politics, define an attitude corresponding to the "ethic of consequences". Weber normally<sup>76</sup> uses the term "*ethic of responsibility*" to describe this attitude.

From a formal point of view, this term – like so many other important terms that Weber uses – is unfortunate, since it does not adequately indicate where the difference from the ethic of conviction lies. A person committed to an ethic of conviction also in a certain sense feels responsible, to an "inner" goal or an "inner" axiological principle. Weber clearly sees this: "... the ethic of conviction is [not] identical with irresponsibility", as he writes in *Pol.Voc.*<sup>77</sup> But what matters to him is the fact that the individual accepting the ethic of responsibility acknowledges a responsibility for the *consequences* of his actions; this everywhere forms the core of his definition of the ethic of responsibility.<sup>78</sup>

It is possible to interpret this ethic of responsibility as purely "passive", i.e., as giving no indication as to the *behaviour* which can be expected from persons committed to this attitude. In this case, the scope of the ethic is limited to the acceptance in theory of the right of others to judge one's actions according to their "external", "worldly" consequences; the teleological system is acknowledged, in principle, to be relevant to the act of judgment.

In this "passive" sense, the model of the ethic of responsibility is not in practice opposed to all the variants of the ethic of conviction discussed above. It is theoretically

75 Beetham (1974, pp. 175-76) is of course right in saying that what Weber presents as a dichotomy of "ethics" may *in practice* turn out to be a disagreement about long-term consequences within a teleological context. But this does not invalidate Weber's discussion of the *principles* underlying the dichotomy.

76 For instance *LSPW*, p. 359/*GPS*, pp. 551-52. The term "ethic of responsibility" obviously forms quite late in Weber's mind; it is only found in *Pol.Voc.* (1919), whereas the corresponding term "ethic of conviction" can be found as early as 1913 (*Memorandum*, p. 170) (*I07*, pp. 50, 52).

77 *LSPW*, p. 359/*GPS*, p. 551; see also *LSPW*, p. 360/*GPS*, p. 552.

78 *LSPW*, pp. 359-60; *MSS*, p. 16; *FMW*, p. 339/*GPS*, pp. 551-52; *GAW*, p. 505; *GARS I*, p. 552.

possible that a person accepting a “passive” ethic of responsibility does not act at all, but acquiesces in his passivity being judged on the basis of its consequences. From a teleological point of view, he would seem to have an attitude parallel to the religious-acosmistic ethic of conviction, or to that variety of the revolutionary one which is guided by a purely *inner* goal.<sup>79</sup>

Certain of Weber’s formulations seem, on the face of it, to be limited to this “passive” aspect.<sup>80</sup> The acknowledgement of a *passive* “external” responsibility of the kind referred to, however, quickly seems to lead to the acceptance of an *active* “external” responsibility for the state of the “world” (to the extent that it is possible to influence it). This active aspect is quite regularly included in Weber’s formulations, sometimes even in explicit conjunction with the passive one: “Future generations ... would not hold the Danes, the Swiss, the Dutch or the Norwegians responsible ... They would hold *us* responsible ... – [T]hat is why we, and not they, have a bounden duty towards history ...”<sup>81</sup> Weber strongly stresses that those politicians who have the means to act thereby also have a responsibility towards *history* and future generations for the world which they leave behind.<sup>82</sup>

The active ethic of responsibility thus implies a demand for action, guided by knowledge of external consequences. In the political field, this, as we have seen, involves a willingness to include force, possibly even physical violence, among the means to be employed if necessary (for instance, when force is used against oneself). In this case, therefore, the maxim applied is quite the opposite one to that of the religious ethic of conviction: “You *shall* help right to triumph, even if this entails the use of *force*, otherwise you will be responsible for injustice”.<sup>83</sup> The teleological system is acknowledged to be relevant not only for judging one’s actions, but also for the planning of these actions: the ethic of responsibility carries with it the duty of striving for the goals which one has set oneself, for making use of all means adequate to the given end, and moreover for *taking into account the actual consequences of the means and the relation of these consequences to the end*. What is repudiated here is not only the principle of acosmism, but also the identification of the teleological with the axiological system performed by the pacifist and the crusading revolutionary. The active ethic of responsibility stands in absolute contrast to the ethic of conviction.

The active ethic of responsibility comprises a duty to strive for external goals and to take into account the actual consequences of the means employed, that is, to perform teleological calculations before acting; and this in turn implies that a politician committed to the ethic of responsibility needs *factual knowledge*. This is emphasized by Weber in the terse, repeated phrase: “For politics, you need to use

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79 This partial identity between the passive ethic of responsibility and aspects of the ethic of conviction acquires importance later in this discussion, p. 272.

80 For instance *LSPW*, p. 360/*GPS*, p. 552: “... that one must answer for the (foreseeable) consequences of one’s actions”.

81 *LSPW*, p. 76/*GPS*, p. 143.

82 *LSPW*, pp. 75-76, 78, 356/*GPS*, pp. 142, 145, 549.

83 *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547; similarly, *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604.

your head ..."<sup>84</sup> Consequently, it may be useful to examine the points on which such a politician must, in Weber's view, be quite clear: the *knowledge* that he must possess in order to act.

Unlike persons committed to the ethic of conviction, those accepting the ethic of responsibility need to know the facts as they are, since they may have an influence on their decisions. To quote Weber's simple and at the same time curiously weighty phrase, they need to know things "as they *are*" (*was ist*).<sup>85</sup>

In the most elementary sense, this of course means that the ethic of responsibility imposes a duty to know the circumstances surrounding the intended action, and to assess their actual weight correctly, unmoved by hopes or fears. This not only refers to isolated facts, but involves a complete and correct teleological value analysis: certain knowledge concerning the appropriate means to reach a given end and the side effects of these means. This analysis is not only cumbersome; it may also yield uncomfortable results – for instance the realization that a goal to which one is attached cannot in fact be attained.

What gives this form of analysis its special significance, however, is the fact that it not only includes empirical facts and the chain of causation relevant to a particular goal, but also an acknowledgement of the relationship between such facts and the relevant values – the relation, that is, between the teleological and the axiological system. In short, the teleological value analysis must be integrated into a complete value analysis. The value premise of the latter is precisely, as we saw,<sup>86</sup> the value of *responsibility*. And the combined value analysis implies a recognition of the tension between the empirical sphere and a given value sphere, of the *value irrationality* of the world. Whereas "a man who espouses the ethic of conviction cannot bear the ethical irrationality of the world",<sup>87</sup> and consequently suppresses it (by refusing to acknowledge it or by assimilating it to the axiological structure), the ethic of responsibility accepts empirical knowledge as relevant to political action.

In principle, the recognition of the value irrationality of the world only implies a theoretical willingness to acknowledge the possibility of tensions arising between the attainment of political goals, that is, the political sphere, and other value spheres, particularly that of ethics. In practice, it may have a number of different consequences.

Thus, under the ethic of responsibility, one must refrain from *identifying* an actual, for instance a political, advance or defeat with an ethical one. In this connection, Weber, inspired no doubt by the situation in Germany immediately after the war, refers to the tendency of the victorious side to ascribe its victory to the justice of its

84 LSPW, p. 353, cf. p. 367/GPS, p. 546, cf. p. 558.

85 Weber seems to have borrowed this phrase from Ferdinand Lassalle's *Was nun*, where it is used in a passage that is particularly pertinent in the present connection: "All great political action consists of, and begins with, saying things as they are" (quoted in MWG II/5, p. 693). See Weber's letter of 15 July 1909 to Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne (MWG II/6): "My most deeply felt need is that of 'intellectual honesty': I say things 'as they are'".

86 Above, p. 186.

87 LSPW, p. 361/GPS, p. 553.

cause, and the parallel trend among the defeated to search for *moral* culprits in the hour of defeat.<sup>88</sup> This view of Weber's, however, is not simply a reflection of current events, but is found in the same form already in *GARS I*: "... naturally, the *success* of force or of the threat of force ultimately depends on power relations and *not* on ethical 'right' ..." <sup>89</sup>

This also means that persons acting according to the ethic of responsibility should recognize that the teleological and the axiological analysis of ends and means may conflict. Weber occasionally mentions that ethically *good* means may have ethically bad consequences: pacifism may, he points out, allow the side using physical force to get the upper hand.<sup>90</sup> But naturally, the main part of his discussion in this connection is devoted to the complementary fact: that the use of ethically *negative* means may have ethically *positive* results.

In *Pol.Voc.*, the emphasis is on the negative component, the ethical "costs" of implementing a goal by all necessary means: here, the Weber's reflections on the good effects of evil means sometimes appear with a different emphasis: on the positive *goal*. In this connection, it is worth quoting an interesting letter of 8 May 1917 from Weber to Fr. Naumann, in which Weber quite deliberately, so to speak in a "Machiavellian" way, points out that it may sometimes be wiser to lie than to tell the truth:

At the time, during the Boer War, Lord Salisbury said: "We don't want *any* diamond or gold mines". This statement had a very positive effect. When eventually the military and diplomatic situation put him *in possession* of them, and he could *keep* them without danger, he *kept* them. So far, we have done exactly the opposite. We believe that to be the "honest" way. But surely, it must be possible to make clear to the military and the sensible leaders of the Centre and the Right that Lord Salisbury's method was *cleverer* than ours.<sup>91</sup>

What is important here is not Weber's positive political *suggestion* – which belongs to the realm of his political activity – but his demonstration of a *fact* which must be taken into account by politicians who want to act according to the ethic of responsibility.

A special circumstance connected with political activity, which is pointed out by Weber, is the so-called "power pragma", which has already been mentioned:<sup>92</sup> "According to an inescapable pragma that attaches to all action, force and the threat of force unavoidably breed more violence".<sup>93</sup> This view, which is stressed

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88 *GPS*, pp. 548-49.

89 *FMW*, p. 334/*GARS I*, p. 547. See also Weber's letter of 17 October 1918 to Fr. Naumann (*GPS I*, p. 479), where Weber, while calling for the abdication of the Kaiser, carefully distinguishes between the political blame and the – hypothetical – ethical guilt attaching to Wilhelm II.

90 *FMW*, p. 148/*GAW*, p. 604.

91 *GPS I*, pp. 471-72.

92 Above, pp. 251-52.

93 *FMW*, p. 334, cf. p. 340/*GARS I*, p. 547, cf. *GARS I*, p. 553.

both in *Two Laws* and in *Pol.Voc.*,<sup>94</sup> apparently in Weber's opinion has the status of objective *knowledge* of empirical regularities.<sup>95</sup> One may, however, ask whether it is compatible with Weber's emphasis on value irrationality as an eternal condition of political activity. Since power is the ethically negative instrument which is normally seen as being at the root of the tension between the political and the ethical sphere, the theory that "force always breeds force" is apparently identical with the thought, which Weber normally rejects, that "evil means can only lead to evil results"; this identity seems particularly prominent in cases where Weber, as in *Pol.Voc.*, employs the language of the Bible to express the "power pragma": "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword".<sup>96</sup>

Weber *himself* does not appear to have found any inconsistency between the "power pragma" and the theory of value irrationality, since he links the two concepts closely together in *Pol.Voc.* In one instance, he even emphasizes *in the same sentence* the "diabolical" nature of power as an instrument (a view which seems to point to the actual consequences of using power, and particularly to the "power pragma") and the possibility of reaching good ends by evil means.<sup>97</sup>

Another question is whether Weber's theory of the "power pragma" is *correct*; but a falsification of it would not weaken his fundamental thesis of the value irrationality of the world.

To sum up: The knowledge that the ethic of responsibility demands of those who respect it seems to be twofold: first, it includes empirical facts, knowledge of the existence of things and of causal connections relevant to the goal which one is trying to attain; and, secondly, it involves knowledge of the axiological structure of the empirical facts, that is, the way in which the means, their side effects and the goal itself will be judged according to different value axioms. Accordingly, both these categories seem to be limited to the *predictable* consequences of political actions. Apparently, Weber (as one might expect, in view of his legal training) sees responsibility as similarly limited:<sup>98</sup> what a person cannot reasonably predict, he cannot reasonably be held responsible for. Thus it would seem that a politician committed to the ethic of responsibility, who has carried out the necessary analysis and who has found the negative side effects and consequences of the intended behaviour to be minimal compared to the positive value of the activity, might with a good conscience set about implementing his goal.

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94 *LSPW*, pp. 75, 357, 362/*GPS*, pp. 142, 550, 554.

95 Cf. *FMW*, p. 340/*GARS I*, p. 553, where the "power pragma" is called a "permanent quality of the world of all creatures".

96 *LSPW*, p. 357/*GPS*, p. 550.

97 *LSPW*, p. 362/*GPS*, p. 554..Cf. *LSPW*, pp. 365-66/*GPS*, p. 557, where the two concepts are also used in close connection with each other.

98 *MSS*, p. 16/*GAW*, p. 505; for the formulation of a similar limitation, cf. *LSPW*, p. 360/*GPS*, p. 552. Weber's whole idea of "causal adequacy" in fact rests on this kind of legal reasoning; cf. Turner and Factor (1981).

In one sense, this conclusion is correct; but a further complication arises because Weber's theory of the *paradox of consequences*<sup>99</sup> also affects the political act. According to this theory, every action stands at the beginning of an infinite chain of consequences which can never be properly foreseen; *a fortiori*, it is even more impossible to assess whether these *actual* consequences have a positive or negative relationship to the *intended* effects. Thus, the fund of knowledge required of those respecting the ethic of responsibility necessarily includes the recognition that any action will have consequences *beyond the limits of predictability*.

In itself, this recognition remains a general condition, which might be ignored precisely because it is so general and indeterminate. But the problem grows acute because it is possible *after the event* to assess, at least provisionally, the actual chains of causation that came into play, and their axiological value. According to Weber, such *ex post* examinations will often show that "the eventual outcome of political action frequently – indeed, almost as a rule – stands in a completely inadequate, even paradoxical relation to its original, intended meaning and purpose (Sinn)".<sup>100</sup> The paradox of consequences means that any person committed to the ethic of responsibility must realize that his action may, without his knowledge and against his wish, set in motion chains of causation destroying the possibility of attaining the very goal which his action was calculated to achieve.

### **The ethic of conviction, the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of politics**

As Weber sees it, the antagonism between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility is fundamentally insoluble by scientific means; only an act of personal *choice* leads to the acceptance of one rather than of the other as a standard of concrete behaviour. On the other hand, there are strong indications that Weber, in discussing the alternative between the two ethical orientations in the field of *politics*, accords a special prominence to the ethic of responsibility. It is therefore particularly interesting to examine to what extent, in what sense, and with what justification the ethic of responsibility is claimed by Weber to be the specific standard of political behaviour, the *ethic of politics* (107, pp. 49-55).

The essential, if not the only, source for the examination of this problem is *Pol. Voc.*, particularly the last fifteen pages of the lecture, where Weber turns from a discussion, in terms of political sociology, of the *external* conditions of work of politicians in older and modern times to the *internal* component of politics as an *inner vocation*.

A difficulty in relation to the general aim of the present study is the fact that Weber in this lecture oscillates between the level of scientific discourse and the level of personal (political or ethical) commitment. The methodologically relevant passages in it are often formulated in personal terms, as subjective ethical judgments. Consequently, the following sections will undoubtedly, to a larger extent than

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99 See above, p. 188.

100 LSPW, p. 355/GPS, p. 547.

elsewhere in the present account, bear witness to the unity between Weber's work and his personality.

At first glance, many passages in Weber's work seem to support the claim that the ethic of responsibility is the correct or legitimate norm of political behaviour. For instance, the concept of "responsibility" is often used in the first part of *Pol.Voc.* to distinguish the politician from the administrator.<sup>101</sup> In his later characterization of the necessary inner qualities of the politician, Weber puts the "feeling of responsibility" between "passion" (*Leidenschaft*) and "judgment" (*Augenmass*),<sup>102</sup> and in his subsequent treatment of the three concepts makes it clear that the sense of responsibility is in his view not only a central point of reference for the two other qualities, but represents a kind of *synthesis* of them and in that sense constitutes the true ethic of politics.<sup>103</sup>

However, the term "responsibility", without further specification, is rather vague. More particularly, as mentioned earlier, Weber admits that *both* the ethic of conviction *and* the ethic of responsibility contain an element of responsibility; but while the responsibility implied by the ethic of conviction is purely axiological, the responsibility involved in the ethic of responsibility is also in some sense teleological, extending to the *consequences* of the action. In the following, I shall try to show how the concept of "responsibility", as a specific quality of the Weber's view of ethic of politics, should be interpreted, and particularly to what extent its characteristics are found in the ethic of conviction and in the ethic of responsibility.

*The "power responsibility": the politician's responsibility for the result of his actions*

A first hypothetical interpretation of the "responsibility" of the politician would of course be one in which this "responsibility" was seen as the essential element distinguishing the ethic of responsibility from the ethic of conviction. The core of the concept in terms of this interpretation would be the inclusion of the teleological system in the process of planning political actions: the responsibility becomes the responsibility for the empirical calculation of the possibility of reaching a given goal, for the means as means, as causal elements.

A reading of *Pol.Voc.* makes it quite clear that this interpretation covers essential aspects of the problem as Weber sees it. He does describe the "feeling of responsibility" as a synthesis of the complementary qualities "passion" and "judgment"; but although the two qualities are formally equal, to a considerable extent the sense of judgment

101 For instance *LSPW*, pp. 330-31, 333/*GPS*, pp. 524-25, 527. This contrast will be the subject of further discussion below, pp. 266-70.

102 In *B72*, "*Leidenschaft*" and "*Augenmass*" were translated as "commitment" and "a sense of realities". I now feel that the terms "passion" and "judgment" render the literal sense of the original German more accurately; but the overtones of the "old" translations should not be ignored: behind the "passion" lies the will to commit oneself to a goal, a value or a cause; and the quality of "judgment" implies a sense of the realities of the situation. (As certain letters show, Weber is quite fond of using "*Augenmass*" with this connotation.) The conceptual pair still matches the basic dichotomy between values and science in Weber's thought.

103 *LSPW*, p. 352/*GPS*, pp. 545-46.

in fact seems to be the dominating one: it is described as “the decisive psychological quality of the politician”;<sup>104</sup> and a major part of the ensuing discussion is devoted to the discussion of the importance to the politician of precisely this quality: “distance” (*Distanz*), the ability calmly to assess and assimilate knowledge of the situation in which one is acting, is in Weber’s view a political necessity, and “lack of distance” accordingly “one of the deadly sins for any politician”.<sup>105</sup>

In itself, the reality which the politician must be able to “judge”, in other words, the knowledge which he must be able to assimilate with a sufficient degree of objectivizing distance, can extend beyond what is empirical and teleological; it may, as we have seen, include axiological relations, values, as well. However, a number of instances in Weber’s work seem to indicate that his idea of this reality is dominated by the teleological and causal aspects of the situation. This becomes particularly clear when Weber criticizes politicians whose love of the influence and prestige bestowed by the *semblance* of power leads them to confuse apparent with real power.<sup>106</sup> This kind of vanity deprives them of the ability to exercise a cool judgment of the power relations in a given situation. Weber later directs a similar criticism at those politicians who refuse to or are not able to calculate the effects of their political actions, backed up by force:

... if [the political goal] is pursued in a war of faith and purely out of an ethic of conviction, [this goal] may be damaged and discredited for generations to come, because responsibility for the *consequences* is lacking. In such cases [the political actors] remain unaware of the diabolical powers at work. These powers are inexorable, and will bring about consequences of [the political action] ... which [the actors] will be the helpless victims of, if they remain blind to them.<sup>107</sup>

It is important to determine *to what extent* Weber is able to maintain – more or less explicitly – that the ethic of responsibility is *the* legitimate ethic of politics. As long as the principle of value freedom is to be respected, Weber cannot *demand* that the politician should accept this and no other ethic. In fact, he nowhere formulates such a demand,<sup>108</sup> but on the contrary writes that “... whether one *ought* to act on the basis of the ethic of conviction or the ethic of responsibility ... is something which cannot be dictated to anybody”.<sup>109</sup> The reason for the apparent dominance of

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104 *LSPW*, p. 353/*GPS*, p. 546.

105 *LSPW*, p. 353/*GPS*, p. 546.

106 *LSPW*, p. 354/*GPS*, p. 547. See also *LSPW*, p. 146/*GPS*, p. 339, where the Kaiser is indirectly criticized for lacking a sense of the realities of power (in a letter, *GPS I*, p. 456, the criticism is perfectly explicit). In *GASS*, p. 515, Weber, from similar premises, criticizes Trotski’s attempt to start a revolution in Germany.

107 *LSPW*, p. 366/*GPS*, p. 558.

108 Ferber (1970, p. 53) claims that Weber, in elaborating his views of the ethic of politics, is “untroubled by the demand for value freedom”. This is, at the very least, an inadequate description.

109 *LSPW*, p. 367/*GPS*, p. 558. The scope of this passage is not quite clear; it will be discussed further below, pp. 271-74.

the ethic of responsibility in Weber's thoughts on politics should rather be sought in his characterization of politics, as it was discussed above and in the theoretical consequences of this characterization.

According to Weber, science cannot legitimate choices between goals, values or standards of behaviour. But it does have the right and ability to clarify the actual causal relations connected with such values and standards. When the goal implied by a value belonging to a particular value sphere is defined by some situation of fact, scientific inquiry can determine, with general validity, whether a certain kind of behaviour is "correct" in relation to the achievement of that goal, and therefore fulfils the conditions of belonging to the value sphere in question. This procedure is a variant of the "teleological valuations" discussed earlier,<sup>110</sup> which can describe a situation, act, etc., as more or less "correct" *in relation to an unambiguous and given goal* (and on the condition that a wish actually exists to try to achieve this goal in a technically rational way). In this sense, science may define the "ethic" of different value spheres (cf. the discussion 107, pp. 34-36).

In Chapter 1, we saw how it was possible for Weber to establish the principle of value freedom as the ethic of scientific inquiry: nobody can be forced to respect the principle in practice, or even to acknowledge in theory the value of value-free scientific inquiry and of its results. But *if* we acknowledge the value of, and consequently wish for, a certain *kind* of knowledge, "the intellectual ordering of empirical reality", *then* the principle of value freedom is the ethic of the sphere of objectively true knowledge.

In a similar sense, one may designate the ethic of responsibility, as described above, as being the ethic of the *political* sphere.

In its broadest form, politics was characterized by the attempt to attain external goals. Therefore the ways that lead towards this attainment must also run outside the person and his axiological principles: by definition, the road to a political goal passes through the "world" and is conditioned by its regularities. Consequently, the politician's attainment of the goal is dependent on his knowledge of the teleological structure and on his wish to let his actions be guided by this knowledge. The possibility of reaching the goal he has set himself, by an act of non-scientific choice, depends on his ability to recognize and make use of the facts established through the teleological value analysis.

This demand, for intellectual discipline in the service of the will, can in a larger context be seen as parallel to the demand for the value freedom of scientific inquiry. If the teleological value analysis by which political action is guided is to claim objective validity, all practical valuations other than those constituting scientific inquiry as a value sphere must be excluded from the scientific process and the scientific results. We can in fact draw the paradoxical general conclusion that *the implementation of science-free values is dependent on the existence of a value-free science*. Science may thus acquire a legitimation for its own ascetic ethic by virtue of the fact that it is a necessary basis for practical (here, political) action. The duty of the politician

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110 See p. 184.

to make use of or accept this knowledge cannot be *demonstrated* scientifically; but science may show that the possibilities of attaining the desired goal are diminished by a lack of “distance”. In *this* sense, the ethic of responsibility may be said to be the ethic of the political sphere.

The emphasis laid in *Pol.Voc.* on the “technical”, teleological aspects of the politician’s responsibility normally appears as, and always implies, a rejection of the ethic of conviction, which either ignores the teleological value analysis or identifies it with the axiological one. Under the interpretation adopted above, a person committed to the ethic of conviction would consequently be a bad politician, or at any rate a worse one than if he acted according to the ethic of responsibility.

It is natural that this view was especially strong in Weber’s mind when he wrote *Pol.Voc.* To the painful consciousness of the dilettantism of Wilhelm II had been added the experience of the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary agitation in Germany after the abdication of the Kaiser. The fact that Weber *gave* the lecture at all should probably be ascribed to his ingrained dislike of politicians committed to the ethic of conviction: having refused to speak on the subject, Weber immediately changed his mind when he was informed that the students’ association was considering passing on the invitation to the leader of the provisional Bavarian National Council, Kurt Eisner, who was an idealistic but extremely unrealistic left-wing intellectual.<sup>111</sup> The very fact that Weber’s attack in *Pol.Voc.* seems to owe so much to the concrete historical and political situation in which it was delivered, seems to call for a certain caution, and to stand as a warning against adopting without further analysis the interpretation which one often meets, and according to which the ethic of responsibility is proclaimed, on the basis of *Pol.Voc.*, as Weber’s ethic of politics.

This caution is all the more warranted since Weber in *Pol.Voc.* in fact only to a comparatively small degree emphasizes the teleological aspect. The treatment of the importance of the sense of “judgment” quickly grows rather blurred; and out of the somewhat hazy discussion rises a *second* concept of “responsibility” which is no longer exclusively linked with “judgment”.

*The “goal responsibility“: the politician’s responsibility for the maintenance of the goal* The two duties of the politician – “passion” and “judgment” – are in Weber’s view matched by two “deadly sins” of politics. One of these, “lack of distance”, is mentioned almost at the outset,<sup>112</sup> and is obviously a violation of the demand for “judgment”. A little later, Weber mentions both the “deadly sins” together, and here describes them as “Unsachlichkeit” and “Verantwortungslosigkeit” respectively.<sup>113</sup> Since “Sachlichkeit” is explicated by Weber as “the passionate commitment to a

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111 *MWG I/17*, pp. 117-21. The ethic of conviction practised by Kurt Eisner seems to have made a strong impression on Weber: in the first part of *ES* (written in 1918–20), Eisner’s name is included in a list of “dubious” charismatic personalities (*ES*, p. 242/*WG*, p. 140).

112 *LSPW*, p. 353/*GPS*, p. 546.

113 *LSPW*, p. 354/*GPS*, p. 547.

'cause'",<sup>114</sup> it would seem evident that "Unsachlichkeit" must be interpreted as "lack of passion" and "Verantwortungslosigkeit" – in accordance with the ethic of responsibility discussed above – as "lack of judgment". This is not the case, however. On the contrary, Weber amplifies the concepts as follows: "The politician's [Unsachlichkeit] leads him to strive for the glittering appearance of power instead of real power, while his [Verantwortungslosigkeit] leads him to enjoy power simply for its own sake, without any substantive purpose".<sup>115</sup> In terms of this interpretation, "Unsachlichkeit" seems to be distinguished by a neglect of means as means, an absence of judgment, of respect for the realities of the situation; whereas "Verantwortungslosigkeit" characterizes the complementary neglect of "the substantive purpose" which the means were supposed to bring about or attain. While the quotations given earlier stressed the politician's responsibility for the teleological elements in the chain of means and ends, this is now completed by a responsibility for the end pursued, for the nexus between the axiological and the teleological system: what we might call a "goal responsibility".<sup>116</sup>

Whereas the "power responsibility" was specific to the ethic of responsibility, the "goal responsibility", as defined here, is *common* to the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility: the attainment of the goal is defined differently in the two ethics; but both of them have in common the idea of a goal which the individual seeks to reach. Consequently, the emphasis on the "goal responsibility" does not, as in the case of the "power responsibility", serve to contrast the ethic of responsibility with the ethic of conviction, or to attack the latter; instead, it is theoretically aimed against "Realpolitik" in its extreme form: the political attitude which completely overrates the importance of the means and, in concentrating on them, neglects the end which they are supposed to serve.

*The danger of "power politics"* Weber's interest in the "goal responsibility" is most obvious in his discussion of what he calls "power politics".<sup>117</sup>

The phenomenon of legitimacy means that domestic politics often turn into a fight *for* power as a prelude to political action *by means of* power; the *means* of politics in many cases becomes the *goal* of the politician.

Of course, Weber must accept the fundamental necessity of this change of focus; he mentions, in a neutral tone, the "feeling of power" as the first "inner joy" which politics may afford those engaged in it,<sup>118</sup> and the "instinct for power" as a normal quality of politicians.<sup>119</sup> But he is also conscious of the possible consequences of

114 LSPW, p. 353/GPS, p. 545.

115 LSPW, p. 354/GPS, p. 547.

116 Hättich (1967, pp. 47-49) makes the interesting point that the goal *neutrality* of Weber's definition of politics, by removing the goals from the sphere of the *a priori* given, invites conscious reflection on the nature of political goals, and so becomes an important precondition of goal *responsibility*.

117 LSPW, p. 354/GPS, p. 547.

118 LSPW, p. 352/GPS, p. 545.

119 LSPW, p. 354/GPS, p. 546.

the actual and theoretical predominance of the concept of power: the original goal, the attainment of which is the politician's first motive for seeking to obtain power, recedes into the background, while the acquisition and expansion of power becomes an increasingly long-term goal for the politician.

In *Pol.Voc.*, Weber describes this as an empirical tendency: "In politics, you strive for power, either power as a means to attain other goals ... or power 'for its own sake', that is, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power";<sup>120</sup> but he also condemns such a hypostatization of political means into political ends, and describes it as contrary to the ethic of the political sphere: "There is no more pernicious distortion of political energy than when someone, after the fashion of the parvenu (parvenümässig), boasts of his power and vainly mirrors himself in the feeling of power – or indeed any and every worship of power for its own sake".<sup>121</sup>

Just as Weber is *able to* describe the tendency in question in a value-free way, he applies the same conscious neutrality to his description of the type of person who concentrates on the means of power and lacks all "goal responsibility". Already in *Parl.Gov.*, he mentions the American political "boss" as a paradigm of this type,<sup>122</sup> and examines the "boss" system more closely in *Pol.Voc.*<sup>123</sup> He emphasizes that the "boss" is wholly guided by considerations of power: "The boss has no firm political 'principles'. He has no convictions at all ..."<sup>124</sup> It seems clear – although the neutral character of the account prevents it from being expressed openly – that Weber regards this lack of political principles as disqualifying the "boss" from the title of politician by "vocation"; but it is interesting that Weber still draws attention to the *usefulness* of "bosses" as supporters of real political leaders: a system in which the "bosses" accept their limitations as politicians and do not to any significant degree pursue their own ambitions of holding public office may be more propitious to politicians in the proper sense of the word, who have a strong sense of "goal responsibility", than for instance the classical system of "dignitaries". The complete indifference of the "boss" to political goals makes him an extraordinarily useful *instrument* of political innovation.<sup>125</sup>

The example which is constantly in Weber's mind when he attacks and rejects the "power political" attitude is doubtlessly that of Wilhelm II. The Kaiser's deficient judgment is in Weber's view accompanied by a fundamental dislike of committing himself to any long-term line of policy: "adapting, when choosing from among the possible ultimate ends themselves, to the real or apparent momentary chances of success that one of them seems to have".<sup>126</sup> Weber's dissatisfaction with Wilhelm II was as long-lived as it was deep-rooted: a bitter remark concerning the Kaiser in a

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120 *LSPW*, p. 311/GPS, p. 507.

121 *LSPW*, p. 354/GPS, p. 547.

122 *LSPW*, p. 229/GPS, p. 402.

123 *LSPW*, pp. 345-47/GPS, pp. 539-40.

124 *LSPW*, p. 347/GPS, p. 540.

125 *LSPW*, p. 347/GPS, p. 540.

126 *MSS*, p. 25/GAW, p. 515. The passage is a direct reference to German foreign policy since 1890.

letter from 1908<sup>127</sup> is found in almost the same form, but more generally worded, in *Pol.Voc.* (1919).<sup>128</sup>

This identification of a concrete counterpart to the theoretical tension between political means and political ends is, however, only a special case. Far more general, but in principle expressing the same tension, is Weber's discussion of the relationship between bureaucracy and political leadership.

*The danger of bureaucracy* For the individual politician, the problem remains that of striking a balance between "goal responsibility" and "power responsibility", between the loyalty towards the goal and the knowledge of the means necessary to reach the desired result. Viewed quite generally, this problem may be seen as reflecting the elementary tension between the undemonstrable and the demonstrable, faith and knowledge, irrationality and rationality. In Weber's work, this antagonism is incorporated in huge contrasts. In his typology of sociological concepts, it is reflected in the fundamental difference between charismatic and legal authority (*Herrschaft*).<sup>129</sup> On the level of concrete politics, we may similarly distinguish between, on the one hand, the politician who sets his goals freely and, on the other, the rational bureaucracy: the former acquires his political importance and power through his – more or less – charismatic qualities, his ability to communicate his belief in undemonstrable ideals to a band of supporters;<sup>130</sup> the political power of the latter, as Weber sees it, depends on its fund of knowledge.<sup>131</sup>

The basic tenor of Weber's approach in his political writings to the problem of the power and the role of bureaucracy in the modern state is given concisely in a letter (of April 1917) to Professor Ehrenberg: "Officials ... are *technicians*. And in a parliamentary state, their power remains exactly as great as elsewhere – but it is in the place where it *belongs*".<sup>132</sup> Weber repeatedly emphasizes in *Parl.Gov.* and in *Pol.Voc.* that bureaucrats, in spite of their indispensability in modern society, lack the elementary political qualifications: a government official possesses a particular,

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127 "... the German Emperor, with his vanity, is content with the *semblance* of power ..." (*GPS I*, p. 456).

128 *LSPW*, p. 354/*GPS*, p. 547.

129 For the charismatic type, see, for instance, *EssW*, pp. 138-45; *ES*, pp. 241-54/*GAW*, pp. 481-88; *WG*, pp. 140-48. For the legal type, see, for instance, *EssW*, pp. 133-35; *ES*, pp. 217-26/*GAW*, pp. 475-78; *WG*, pp. 124-30.

130 See, for instance, *LSPW*, pp. 312-13/*GPS*, p. 508, where the "vocational" politician is assigned to the category of charismatic legitimacy.

131 "The purest type of legal authority is that exercised by means of a *bureaucratic administrative staff*" (*ES*, p. 220/*WG*, p. 126). Cf. *ES*, p. 225/*WG*, p. 129, where the specific advantages of bureaucracy are put down to its store of "technical knowledge" (*Fachwissen*), and where Weber shows that the *political* power of bureaucracy rests on its possession of "technical knowledge" and "knowledge growing out of experience in the [bureaucratic] service" (*Dienstwissen*), and particularly on the transformation of the latter into "official secrets" (*Geheimwissen*).

132 *GPS I*, p. 470.

and particularly useful, form of *knowledge*, and the specific dignity of his station rests on his ability and willingness to put this knowledge at the disposal of changing depositaries of political power, without distinction. But his activity does not and cannot demand of him that he should also *set* the goals which his knowledge serves to implement;<sup>133</sup> and consequently, he does not, in his role as member of the state bureaucracy, carry any kind of *responsibility*.<sup>134</sup> The “honour” of the bureaucratic order, its dignity, resides precisely in its *lack* of independent political commitment and independent opinions, and in the consequent lack of responsibility for such opinions: “If his superior ... insists on his instruction, it is not merely the duty of the official, it is also a point of *honour* for him to carry out the instruction as if it corresponded to his own innermost conviction ...”<sup>135</sup>

Accordingly, Weber sharply criticizes any tendency towards letting the administration work without control: the “*uncontrolled* rule by officials” must be avoided at any price.<sup>136</sup> But he adds to this criticism a positive discussion of the persons or organs which might effect the desired control.

Theoretically, Weber believes that the bureaucratic administration will accept orders from and submit to the control of any superior, whether this superior be elected or appointed, a single person or a collective body.<sup>137</sup> However, he does not doubt that “... *politicians* must provide a counterbalance to the rule of officialdom”.<sup>138</sup> “Politicians” in this context thus turn out to be those persons who agree to set political goals and to take personal responsibility, not only for the side effects resulting from the implementation of the goal but also for the choice of the goal as such.

Weber’s political proposals on this point are derived wholly from the premises set out above: “I don’t care two hoots about the constitutional arrangements, provided that *politicians* ... are the ones who rule”, as he says in the letter quoted above.<sup>139</sup> In practice, though, only two possibilities seem to present themselves as effective counterweights to bureaucracy: a head of state (monarch or president), or a parliament<sup>140</sup> (or possibly some combination of the two).

The traditional *monarch* or *emperor* as a bulwark of political power in the state is viewed by Weber with profound distrust, partly because the monarchs in such a system are in a weak position and unfamiliar with the field of political conflict, partly

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133 *LSPW*, p. 180/*GPS*, p. 354.

134 *LSPW*, pp. 204, 330-31/*GPS*, pp. 377, 524-25.

135 *LSPW*, p. 160/*GPS*, p. 335; cf. *LSPW*, pp. 177-78, 204/*GPS*, pp. 351-52, 377.

136 *LSPW*, p. 180/*GPS*, p. 354; cf. *LSPW*, pp. 269-70/*GPS*, p. 442.

137 *LSPW*, p. 160/*GPS*, p. 335.

138 *LSPW*, p. 178/*GPS*, p. 352.

139 *GPS I*, pp. 469-70.

140 *LSPW*, p. 162/*GPS*, p. 336.

because they are *irresponsible* in law.<sup>141</sup> His distrust is fuelled by his experience of “stupid, conceited dilettanti like Wilhelm II and his kind”.<sup>142</sup>

The most reasonable solution therefore seems to be to invest an elected *parliament* with the political power; and Weber, in spite of certain misgivings, propagates this view in his political essays and pamphlets from the years 1917–18. In *Parl. Gov.*, he emphatically states: “If you ask any other question about the future ordering of the state in Germany than *how parliament can be made capable of holding power*, you are already on the wrong track, since anything else is a side issue”.<sup>143</sup> In *Suffr. Dem. Germ.*, we find similar passages.<sup>144</sup>

Later events, however, disappointed Weber in his faith in parliament as a politically conscious, goal-setting state organ and, as such, as a counterweight to the bureaucratic administration.<sup>145</sup> He had hoped that what he terms the “caesarist” element of the process of political selection, the *choice* of a leader on account of his charismatic (demagogic, etc.) qualities, would continue to be present within each of the political parties. Instead, he finds that the parties exhibit a steady tendency towards stifling any such charismatic element, and that the party organization tends to be introduced as an *intermediate link* between the electorate and the politicians: in short, the party machine is not an instrument serving the charismatic politician in his attempts to subject the government bureaucracy to political control, but has instead become an instrument for the bureaucratic or traditionalist control *of* the charismatic politician. Instead of “leadership democracy (Führerdemokratie) with a ‘machine’”, one gets “leaderless democracy (führerlose Demokratie)”.<sup>146</sup>

In a later phase, therefore, Weber concentrates on getting the charismatic-caesaristic element incorporated in some other part of the government structure; and he accordingly advocates, during the elaboration of the Weimar constitution, giving more political importance to the office of the President of the Reich, and particularly tries to ensure that it is filled by *popular election*. In the Constitutional Committee, which calls him in as an expert, he uses all his influence to this end,<sup>147</sup> and in a newspaper article, after the election of the first president, Ebert, by the National Assembly, he repeats his demand for the popular election of the President of the

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141 “...the ‘personal rule’ of the *responsible minister* [is] something *fundamentally different* from the meddling of the irresponsible *monarch* ...” (Letter from Weber to his brother Alfred, 22 May 1907, *MWGA II/5*).

142 *GPS I*, p. 470.

143 *LSPW*, p. 190/*GPS*, p. 363; similarly, *LSPW*, p. 180/*GPS*, p. 354.

144 *LSPW*, pp. 126-29/*GPS*, pp. 289-91.

145 Cf. his letter to Paul Siebeck of 10 July 1916: “... today, the ‘danger’ of ‘democracy’ resides ... in the fact that it very easily leads to ‘bureaucratization’ (“... die ‘Gefahr’ der ‘Demokratie’ liegt heute ... darin, dass sie sehr leicht zur ‘Bürokratisierung’ führt” – BSB, Ana 446, Paul Siebeck (Düss.)). See also Mommsen 1974 (1959), pp. 198-99 and Beetham 1974, pp. 233-34.

146 *GPS*, p. 544.

147 Mommsen 1974 (1959), pp. 380-96.

Reich.<sup>148</sup> His arguments in this article show that his main goal is still the same general one: to give *political leadership* better chances to develop. Whether the medium permitting the realization of these chances is a parliament or the post of a caesaristic President is a question of means and, as such, a subordinate one.

Weber's concrete political proposals are relevant in our context because they seem closely related to his theoretical reflections on the nature of politics, especially on the necessity of protecting the freely goal-setting, and *in that sense* responsible, element of the political process.

In the first place, it seems natural to regard Weber's thoughts on bureaucracy and charisma, and on their concrete political incarnations, in the light of the discussion<sup>149</sup> of the ideal type as a highly "charged" model. While it is hardly justified to accuse Weber of idealizing (in a normative sense) the two types, one may still feel that his analysis of the political facts, and the proposals based on this analysis, are too dependent on the fundamentally unreal, pure types of legitimacy.<sup>150</sup> The latent danger of neglecting the fundamentally partial character of the ideal type becomes manifest when Weber lets his strong emphasis on constitutional antagonisms, defined in terms of these types, guide his concrete political proposals.

In the light of this criticism, it is tempting to regard Weber's proposals as aiming at a deliberate *specialization* and *institutionalization* of the political functions: on the one side, the political leader, legitimated by his charisma, assuming the "goal responsibility"; on the other, the bureaucratic administration, the willing tool, assuming the "power responsibility"; and beneath them, the individual, under political tutelage, whose political function only amounts to the election of the leader. According to this interpretation, passion and judgment would no longer form a personal, but only a national union, each incorporated in a *different* organ of government. Weber's expression "leader with 'machine'" would be taken quite literally.

This conclusion does not seem warranted, however. True, Weber's political writings usually stay on the macro-analytical level; but his attention is still directed primarily at the *individual*. A general indication of this individualist focus is his rejection of any collectivist reification of concepts like "state" or "society"; but moreover, he deliberately *links up* the macro-analysis of society with the level of the individual, the micro-analytical level: "If one wishes to formulate a *value judgment* on any ordering (of whatever kind) of social relationships, one must in the last resort, without exception, also examine it with reference to *the type of human being* which it gives the best chances of becoming dominant", Weber writes in *Value Freedom*;<sup>151</sup> and the same view is formulated concretely in a number of the discussions of the tension between bureaucracy and political leadership.<sup>152</sup> If his proposals remain

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148 In *Pres.Reich* (*LSPW*, pp. 304-308/*GPS*, pp. 486-89).

149 Above, pp. 236-37.

150 Cf. Bendix 1962 (1960), pp. 459, 485-86; Schulz 1964, p. 344.

151 *MSS*, p. 27/*GAW*, p. 517. Hennis (1988, 2000) in fact, for his part, sees this question as the key to the whole of Weber's work.

152 For instance *LSPW*, pp. 168, 224-25, 228, 269, 306/*GPS*, pp. 342, 398, 401, 442, 499.

on the macro-analytical level, this can probably be explained by his recognition of the fact that one might in 1918 perhaps change this or that institution, but not the mentality of a whole nation:

There is of course no question that any ... paragraph [in this case, concerning the powers of parliament] ... would suddenly conjure up "leaders" out of thin air ... But it is quite possible to create the essential organizational *preconditions* for the emergence of leaders, and indeed everything now depends on this happening.<sup>153</sup>

Weber's interest in the close connection between social institutions and the qualities of the individual gives a wider perspective to the strong emphasis in his political writings on the charismatic element of politics.

Already in an intervention at the 1909 congress of the *Association*, Weber connects the advance of bureaucracy as an institution with the parallel growth of the orderly, bureaucratic mentality; and he similarly links up the question of the institutional counterweight to bureaucracy with the problem of how to save the individual from mental over-tidiness and narrowness: the main danger is "[the] compartmentalization of the soul".<sup>154</sup> Against this background, one can see Weber's political writings in the following years as attempts to create, by means of institutional demands, the precondition of a balance not only of organs but of attitudes, between "bureaucratic ideals of life" and "active political construction", concentration on means and concentration on ends, "power responsibility" and "goal responsibility". Weber's discussion of political problems, whether they occur in his practical or in his theoretical writings, can always be seen as tentative answers to the fundamental question: "... how can a burning passion and a cool judgment be forced together in a single soul?"<sup>155</sup>

### *The responsible ethic of conviction*

Until now, the discussion of the responsibility of the politician, as defined by some sort of balance between passion and judgment, has only moved within a teleological system: although the "goal responsibility" is the responsibility for the maintenance and implementation of the goal, it is discharged by the attainment of a certain factual, "external" situation which represents the implementation of this goal.

There are good grounds for this delimitation. The immanent ethic of the political sphere should be seen as the reflection of the broad characterization of politics discussed in the first section of this chapter. This characterization included the attainment of goals in an external context. The *goal* element does not in itself imply any divergence from an ordinary "technical" calculation of ends and means; what constitutes the essential difference from such a "technical" calculation, which only involves the value system of one individual or one conventionally fixed scale and

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153 *GPS*, p. 442.

154 *GASS*, p. 414.

155 *LSPW*, p. 353/*GPS*, p. 546.

ranking of values, is the *external* component through which an element of conflict is introduced into the discussion.

This element of conflict is neutralized, however, in the course of the argument. Weber does acknowledge its existence in the sense that he defines the specific instrument of politics, power, as the ability to implement a goal even against the will of other persons, i.e., in a situation of conflict between individuals. But in so doing, he transposes all axiological conflicts to the teleological plane. An axiological conflict between the values of the politician and those of other persons is only important to the former to the extent that it implies an empirical risk that he may have to resort to force to attain the goals he has set himself.

This again means that the politician, as characterized by Weber, cannot orient himself according to the ethic of conviction: the dilemma between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction only appears when the possibility of an axiological conflict is introduced; and by transforming this conflict into the definition of a specific *instrument*, Weber has already resolved the dilemma, since the essence of the ethic of conviction is precisely that it *refuses* to regard actions as means to external ends, and only judges them according to their intrinsic value. This transformation does not remove the tension between the political sphere and the value spheres constituting the normal value bases of the ethic of conviction, which are (mainly) the spheres of ethics and religion; but this tension *between* spheres cannot influence the definition of an ethic valid *inside* one such sphere (in this instance, the sphere of politics).

This chain of argument can be derived from Weber's own view of the nature of politics. Against this background, it appears downright confusing that Weber, towards the end of *Pol.Voc.*, categorically states that "... whether one *ought* to act on the basis of the ethic of conviction or the ethic of responsibility ... is something which cannot be dictated to anybody".<sup>156</sup> How are we to interpret this reappearance of a neutralized alternative, without jeopardizing the conclusions arrived at above?

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156 *LSPW*, p. 367/*GPS*, p. 546; Weber's printed statement does not explicitly apply only to the sphere of politics; and it would of course be easier to understand if we were allowed to suppose that it simply concerned individuals in general. However, this solution seems to be excluded by the context: in Weber's manuscript notes at this point of the lecture (see above *I07*, p. 51n229), he uses the terms "*politics* of conviction" and "*politics* of responsibility" (my italics). The fact that the printed text goes back to the "standard" ethical terminology cannot be taken as an indication that Weber wanted to distance himself from the "political" phraseology of the notes (and perhaps of the lecture itself – we do not, of course, know what he said, only what he accepted as the text of what he said) since there is immediately afterwards a reference to "politicians acting according to their convictions" (*Gesinnungspolitiker*), without any indication that Weber regards this attitude as illegitimate. A letter of 22 March 1916 from Weber to his wife Marianne points in the same direction (copy in *GStA I*, Rep. 92, Weber, No. 30/2): here Weber explains the difference between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction, and illustrates his point by the following example: "Now somebody might say: whether or not it wins, Germany should bare her teeth at the Americans, even if it [thereby] runs the danger of ruining itself. *This attitude cannot then be proved to be wrong*" (my italics).

In order to find an answer to this question, it is necessary to examine Weber's subsequent discussion a little more closely. Here, we find him narrowing down the alternative which he has just set out, by distinguishing *two* ethics of conviction. Adherents of the first type are distinguished by their *complete* refusal to accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions; their attitude corresponds to the ethic of conviction defined above, which rejects the teleological system as being fundamentally uninteresting. Weber dismisses this attitude with the words: "Such conduct holds little interest for me from a human perspective, and I am most certainly not moved by it",<sup>157</sup> a rejection on apparently subjective ethical grounds.

The description of the second type is so interesting that it is worth quoting in full:

On the other hand it is immensely moving when a *mature* person (whether old or young) who actually feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the consequences of his actions, and who acts on the basis of an ethic of responsibility, at some point says, "Here I stand, I can do no other". That is a genuine attitude for a human being, and profoundly moving. For it must be *possible* for *each* of us to find ourselves in such a situation at some point, if we are not inwardly dead. In this respect, the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility are not absolute opposites, but complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the genuine human being, who is *capable* of having a "vocation for politics".<sup>158</sup>

What is remarkable about this passage is first of all the fact that Weber now provides his personal and subjective estimate with a theoretical framework. The second type described is apparently, unlike the first one, viewed by Weber as a reflection of qualities which he regards as necessary, *over and above* the ethic of responsibility with its traditional combination of passion and judgment, for political behaviour to be a true expression of the ethic of politics. If we compare this type of the ethic of conviction – which will here be called the *responsible ethic of conviction* – with the traditional ethic of responsibility, we arrive at the following conclusions:

The responsible ethic of conviction is *like* the ethic of responsibility (and insofar *unlike* the types of the ethic of conviction discussed above) in that a person committed to it accepts his responsibility for the external consequences of his actions. On the other hand, it *differs* from the ethic of responsibility in that it does not invariably imply that the *actions* of the person in question are in accordance with this responsibility, since his behaviour is sometimes guided by axiological considerations. In fact, the attitude is a combination of the type referred to above as the *passive ethic of responsibility* with an *active ethic of conviction*.

Since the active ethic of conviction must be the complementary element which is in Weber's view necessary to the true politician, we can conclude that the

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In other words, the acceptance of the ethic of conviction as the political ethic cannot be proved wrong by scientific means.

157 LSPW, p. 367/GPS, p. 559.

158 LSPW, pp. 367-68/GPS, p. 559.

precondition which Weber establishes for action in conformity with the ethic of politics is the *fundamental willingness to let oneself be guided in certain cases by the value axioms of other spheres* than the political one. Only those can have the “vocation for politics” who do not *only* have this “vocation”, but who in particular situations are able and willing to submit to *other* value systems.

This precondition again implies that the political ethic as defined by Weber does not only demand knowledge of the laws and regularities of the political sphere; in other words, the “true” politician must not only be aware of the teleological system surrounding his political goal, but also of the *axiological* one. But this awareness again destroys the possibility referred to above of a relative harmony inside the political sphere. The possibilities of axiological conflict, which were in the first instance absorbed by the definition of power as an instrument of politics, are resuscitated by Weber’s demand that the politician should be aware of the relationship between the *political* calculation of ends and means and those of the *non-political* value spheres. Such a broad axiological value analysis becomes necessary to the “true” politician. On the other hand, Weber’s description of the responsible ethic of conviction implies a rejection of the *pure* ethic of conviction, where the axiological analysis is the *only* relevant one: the acceptance of the responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions demanded by the responsible ethic of conviction implies a knowledge of the consequences for which the responsibility is taken, and consequently a need for a *teleological* value analysis. A person committed to the responsible ethic of conviction, whether his actions be guided by the axioms of the political or of other value spheres, that is, whether they be guided by teleological or by purely axiological considerations, should know the “cost” of these actions (in the form of tensions arising in relation to other value spheres). He has to make it clear to himself what ethical (religious, aesthetic, etc.) norms he is violating by, for instance, declaring war in the name of (political) national interest; and conversely, he must know what political demands he neglects by refusing on (for instance) ethical grounds to declare war or to use force at all in the situation. Since he is a politician, it is natural to assume that his starting point is political, so that he is striving to attain an external goal. But even inside this chain of ends and means, he must constantly try to supplement the teleological value analysis with an axiological one. He must be aware of the means, of their side effects and of the further consequences of the goal; he must add to this an acknowledgement of the value irrationality of these teleological relations: he is not justified in assimilating the axiological system to the teleological one; this acknowledgement will force him to examine the intrinsic axiological value of the means, the side effects and the goal according to the value system or systems to which he also remains committed outside the political sphere; and finally, he must recognize that his knowledge cannot reach beyond a certain point: that the *paradox of consequences* attaches to both end and means. Only after having elucidated all these points may he decide whether he can still accept working within the political sphere and submitting to its demands; only then can he take the responsibility for his decision and claim to have fulfilled the demands of the responsible ethic of conviction.

Thus, the political ethic as defined by Weber turns out to be, in the last resort, neither the passionate commitment, nor the judgment which makes it possible to estimate correctly the means necessary to reach the goal to which one is passionately committed – nor even the combination of these two qualities – but, in addition to these, an *awareness* (Klarheit) of the “costs” of a concrete political commitment and of its realistic implementation, not only in relation to other political goals, but also in relation to other value spheres altogether. Political responsibility, under this construction, includes not only the political rationality of the actions, but also the decision whether to remain within the framework of political rationality at all. The politician who makes this decision *once and for all* excludes himself from a deeper dimension of awareness; he transforms himself into a political “technician”.

Weber's definition of the responsible ethic of conviction as the true ethic of politics acquires a particular significance because it endows the category of *knowledge*, and consequently science, with a double aspect, a fundamental ambivalence in relation to the political sphere. A maximum of relevant knowledge is *necessary* to the politician's attainment of his goal; but at the same time, it is *dangerous* to him in his political role because it also represents the full recognition of the tension between the political and other value spheres, of the “axiological costs” which his political actions carry with them, and therefore – if he is committed to the responsible ethic of conviction – brings him nearer to a possible breaking-point with the political sphere, a breaking-point of which he theoretically acknowledges the possibility. In a sense, there is an echo of this both defiant and pessimistic conclusion in Weber's own answer<sup>159</sup> to the question of what was his deepest motive for engaging in scholarship: “I want to see how much I can stand”.

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159 Marianne Weber (1950 (1926)), p. 731.

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# Subject Index

A number of central terms are so commonly used in this book that they are only listed in connections assumed to be of special interest to the reader. Max Weber is referred to throughout as MW. Noun headings normally also cover the occurrences of the adjectival form of the noun. **Bold-faced** references indicate the main discussion(s) of the listed topic. Many of the topics listed have numerous and complex interrelations; for ease of consultation, only a smaller number of less obvious cross-references are given. The alphabetical order of subheadings follows the significant word of the subheading in question.

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