

## Weber and the Apriori of Science and Freedom

### Summary

The present study investigates the importance of empirical social science for the interpretation of human existence. I am concerned with the meaning of social science for the understanding of human existence as a basis of rationality and freedom. The analysis of Max Weber's philosophy of science, his ethics and his cultural philosophy contributes to finding an answer to this question. The philosophical question at issue in the present study is not far removed from the inspiration of Weber's thought. That inspiration is to be found in the question about the fate of the freedom of individuals on condition of a rationalized world.

In this study the attention is mainly drawn to the philosophical foundations of Weber's methodological and ethical thought. The central key of my interpretation is the opposition of facticity and validity, and of immanence and transcendence. This opens a possibility to reveal a number of important motives of Weber's thought with reference to rationality and freedom, which are connected with its philosophical foundations. Weber maintained that the only intellectually pure way to thematize the problem of rationality and freedom is on the basis of an empirically scientific approach of reality. Such an analysis should dissociate itself from the prejudices of a speculative philosophy of history. Weber's social scientific thinking lays claim to empirical validity, which, in his opinion, gives it an anti-metaphysical tenor. Yet his thought remains tied down to very specific presuppositions of a philosophical nature, which he owes to the logic of science of his day. It is one of the theses of this study that Weber clarifies the philosophical foundations of his conception of social science by resorting to the neo-Kantianism of H. Rickert and the phenomenology of E. Husserl.

The interpretation of Weber against the background of Rickert's thought is an integral part of literature. But the historical relation of Weber to Husserl's thought has scarcely been investigated. The present study contributes to the historical investigation by formulating a number of theses about Weber's reception of the first edition of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*. Rickert and Husserl have created the philosophical framework in which Weber's thought takes place. My interpretation of Rickert and Husserl is confined to that phase of development of each of these two which influenced Weber. Weber does not only benefit by Rickert's and Husserl's insights; he also inherits the problems the two philosophers have with the relation of validity and facticity. The distinction between apriori and aposteriori, between validity and facticity always turns into a separation, whereas it is the internal connection of these two, which is the necessary presupposition to thought.

Rickert's formalistic conception of validity is the philosophical expression of his intuition about the transcendence of absolute values. If values are to direct the current of actual thought and action, they themselves should have a meaning that is absolute and outside time (§§ 5, 6). At the same time the intuition of validity must be based on a concrete, factually given experience of appropriateness (*Sollen*) or validity in the ethical or theoretical sphere. For without such

experience Rickert's whole philosophy about the apriori has no foundation (§ 8). Therefore Rickert is forced both to hold on to the transcendence of absolute values and to the fact that they are factually given in the historical experience. If he were to give up the transcendence of the absolute values, he would give actual human existence an absolute, infinite meaning (§ 6). This thought he rejects, and rightly so. However, if he were to deny their immanence, holding on to their transcendence, his philosophy would no longer have a real foundation. Rickert has not been able to find a way out of these problems.

Weber didn't adopt Rickert's attempt to base the validity of value-relevance on absolute values. That's why Weber's thought was again and again put to the task of finding a basis for the objectivity of value-relevance. For value-relevance can only keep its theoretical character, if it can be distinguished from decisions on value questions. In order to keep value-relevance and decisions on value questions apart, Weber brought the logical aspect of value-relevance into prominence. Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* helped Weber to think about the apriori in a logical sense and to dissociate himself from the ethical framework within which Rickert bases his values.

In Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* the relation between apriori and aposteriori is also an unsolved problem. In Husserl the self-evidence of the aprioric perception is based on instances given by the senses, which can be interpreted apriorically (§ 11). The validity of intuition of essence for empirical reality remains problematic, though (§§ 10, 12). Husserl's defence of the specific nature of intuition of essences and his objectivistic conception of aprioric intuition (*Wesensschau*) tempt him to adopt the thesis that 'essences' are a kind of special objects, apart and separate from objects perceived by the senses. The same applies to values as objects of logical thought. On account of the fact that Husserl considers the apriori to be a separate domain of objects, he cannot think of the connection of facticity and validity. Still it is necessary to do so, because intuitions of essences can only be acquired by means of concrete instances, given by the senses.

Weber borrows from Husserl the strictly logical interpretation of the separation of factual ascertainment and decisions on value questions. Husserl's strict separation of empirical and aprioric thought and, analogously, of empirical and aprioric disciplines is also to be found in Weber. In this way Weber inherits Husserl's interpretation of the apriori, founded on mathematical thought.

The interpretation of Weber's thought aims at giving an immanent exposition of the structure of his methodology and ethics, in the light of the opposition of facticity and validity, of subjectivity and evidence. In their own way both Rickert and Husserl achieved the philosophical explication of the apriori. It is my thesis that Weber's theory of science and his ethics may be understood as an attempt to turn this explication to account, with an eye to the understanding of the structure and method of social sciences and to a better insight into the aprioric foundation of action. An immanent interpretation of Weber's thought may demonstrate that the intention of his social science, ethics and cultural philosophy surpasses the philosophical framework in which he gives expression to his philosophy. The phenomena Weber discloses, are not to be made explicit

in a satisfactory way within the philosophical framework at his disposal.

Chapter IV is an interpretation of the aprioric foundation of Weber's conception of social sciences. Weber borrows from Husserl the logical meaning of the concept of 'self-evidence' ('*Evidenz*'). The value analysis, which is the basis of empirical scientific investigation, presupposes a deeper understanding of the multiplicity and distinct identity of 'values'. These values guide social-scientific thought, because they are reflected in the souls of the practitioners of these sciences. Naturally, this reflection is always conditioned by the time in which these scientists live. Weber's thought about the foundation of science in values has a Platonic tendency. Self-evidence is also the basis of causal understanding. The ideal-type is an idealization of social reality, which forms a hermeneutical analogy of the mathematical idealization of reality in the natural sciences.

Weber inherits the problems about validity and facticity from Rickert's and Husserl's thought. The foundation of the understanding of empirical social science appears not to be found empirically, whereas a rational conception of understanding does not do justice to the historical and empirical character of social science (§ 17). The fact that the methodological relation of understanding and explanation has an ontological background in the separation of logic of meaning and causally determined facticity, is a statement of the same problematics (§§ 18, 19). Therefore Weber's logic of science shows too little understanding for the historical social realization of meaning, which forms the central theme of his social science. His realization of ideas in the historical process surpasses the dualism of facts and logical structures.

In Chapter V Weber's philosophy with regard to the aprioric foundation of action is analysed. In his ethics the separation of validity and facticity emerges as a separation between values as logical possibilities and causal factors (§§ 22, 23). On the one hand Weber presents them as theoretical constructions, on the other hand, as appears from historical experience, it lies in their very nature to influence the will (§ 24). Weber's mythical language about the battling of the gods reveals his attempt to interpret the real historical meaning of values without dissociating them from their ideal character. But this does not mean that the conceptual separation between validity and facticity has been solved. Nevertheless there are certain passages in Weber's work where the intuition of the connection between validity and facticity emerges in a philosophical sense. Weber's thesis concerning the experience of antagonism among values presupposes their validity for thought and action. The experience of antagonism refers to a proper unity of values, which is not to be realized, on account of human finiteness. The presupposition of this experience of opposition is the unity which lies at the root of our own existence.

Chapter VI summarizes and elaborates my criticism of Weber in the light of his conception of rationality and freedom. In the reflection on empirical social science (§ 26) and on ethical questions raised by modern society (§ 27), Weber remained tied down to an objectifying view, which regards reality as one case within a scope of logical possibilities. Hence the non-objectivistic basis of rationality in the theoretical and practical sphere disappeared out of sight. On the one hand he saw the facticity of the historical process as fate (*Schicksal*)

and on the other hand as a realization of rationality. His personal ambivalence with regard to the western process of rationalization is the existential expression of this view (§ 28). Weber's ambivalence is an indication that rationality may not be identified with mathematical and empirical scientific thought.

These complexities invite the question of the source of the problem with which Rickert, Husserl and Weber struggled. I search for that source in the collision of the experience of the embodied, historical character of human existence with the experience of the validity to be found in the tenor of human thinking and acting. That collision leads to a way of thinking in which the separation of facticity and validity, and hence the mathematization of the world-picture, is central. However, the objectivation of human existence in many shapes of facticity does not enfeeble the experience that human existence as factual existence is involved in validity. Weber's thought refers to a non-objectivistic dimension of validity as the foundation of rationality and freedom.

Chapter VII sets forth the philosophical presupposition which is implicitly to be found in my interpretation and criticism of Weber's thought. The perspective, which is both the result and the horizon of my confrontation with Weber, gives priority to the connection of apriori and aposteriori in the theoretical and practical relation to reality. This connection is what I call 'the transcendence of human being' (Germ. *Sein*; Fr. *l'être*). The transcendence of human being is the foundation of rationality of empirical science. And it is also the foundation of practical rationality. The fact that in our thinking and acting we are concerned with validity, signifies the non-objectivistic character of the foundation of human existence. The constitution of the concrete, individual subject is possible by virtue of the involvement of thinking and acting in validity. To conclude, I situate my approach of Weber among other philosophical interpretations of his work and I summarize my interpretation and my criticism.

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