

W . G . R U N C I M A N

Was Weber a Methodological Weberian?

Abstract

The recent publication of the entirety of Max Weber's methodological writings in an English translation by Bruun and Whimster offers an opportunity to reassess the question how far he himself consistently adhered to his own precepts about *Wertfreiheit* and the construction and deployment of ideal types. It is argued that Weber himself saw the problem not as a logical but as a purely psychological one, and that he could therefore justify the apparent contradictions between his precepts and his practice as either deliberate exercises in something other than *Wissenschaft* or, in his *wissenschaftlich* writings, as lapses capable in principle of correction. In conclusion, it is briefly suggested that Weber would regard the major advances made in the human behavioural sciences since his lifetime as generally consistent with his own methodology.

Keywords: Weber; Methodology; Methodological precepts in behavioural sciences.

I

THE RECENT PUBLICATION in an original English translation of the virtual entirety of Max Weber's methodological writings¹, including as it does copious end-notes and a 27-page glossary, affords an occasion to reappraise both their continuing relevance to current sociological practice and the continuing difficulties posed by the terms in which they set out the criteria to which an authentically *wissenschaftlich* sociology must conform. As Bruun and Whimster remind their readers, Weber never set out systematically, as Durkheim did, his own rules of sociological method, and he was explicitly dismissive of unnecessary methodological embellishment of empirical findings. Only by way of his critical, not to say insulting, treatment of the writings of others is it possible to put together his own *Wissenschaftslehre*, and then consider

¹ Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, eds., *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings* (London, Routledge, 2012), to which page references are given by numbers in brackets.

how far he himself or any other sociologist did, or could, live up to it. There is of course a Weberian sociology in the sense that his writings set a wide-ranging substantive agenda for successive generations of comparative and historical sociologists to follow, as they have. But there have always been commentators ready to cast doubt on his own consistency with his own methodological precepts. From this perspective, the question asked in a colloquium organized in 2008 by Raymond Boudon about Durkheim² can equally pertinently be asked about Weber: was he himself Weberian?

On any reading of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, a Weberian sociology is an explanatory sociology whose primary aim is to ascertain the causes and consequences of whatever distinctive complexes of collective human behaviour the researcher has chosen to study. It is not a descriptive or hermeneutic sociology whose aim is to recreate in the reader's mind the subjective experience of representative members of the group, community, association, institution, or society being studied. Nor is it a normative sociology whose aim is to pronounce on what a member of any of these ought to do, as opposed to "what he *can* do, and – possibly – what he *wants to do*" (103). Still less is it a utopian sociology setting out how an ideal society would function, or an optative sociology articulating the hope that the right rulers might one day come to power and the world become a better place in consequence. But although both *Sozialwissenschaft[en]* and *Naturwissenschaft[en]* depend on the empirical validation of hypotheses of cause and effect, in the sciences of human behaviour the causes include, and cannot but include, the mental states of self-conscious agents. On this point, Weber and his critics have always been in agreement. But whatever the psychological causes contingently sufficient to account for observed sociological effects, the explanation of the effects is valid only if it can be acknowledged to be so by all observers including Weber's hypothetical Chinese who is not "attuned" to our ethical imperatives' (105). The conclusions to which Weber seeks his readers' assent are, for all the influence on him of Nietzsche³, more than instances of what Nietzsche called "*meine Wahrheiten*".

² Published as *Durkheim fut-il Durkheimien?* (Actes du colloque organisé les 4 et 5 Novembre 2008 par l'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Paris, 2011).

³ Although the extent of this influence continues to be debated, it has been impossible since the publication in this journal of Fleischmann (1964) to ignore or gloss over it

in the way that American commentators in particular had been prone to do. Mommsen (1974, 183 n.9) claimed that Fleischmann exaggerated it "a great deal", but he himself pointed to the affinity between Weber's "charismatic personalities" and Nietzsche's "great individuals who set new values for themselves" (79).

It is, perhaps, surprising that the methodological writings have been as influential as they have among Anglophone sociologists, given not only the sporadic history of earlier and less satisfactory translations but Weber's own dismissiveness of methodology. But no reader of the Bruun and Whimster volume can be left in any doubt about just how strongly held were Weber's views about how *Sozialwissenschaft[en]* should (or shouldn't) be practised. His insistence that, as in the *Naturwissenschaften*, the chosen questions must be *wissenswert* and the researcher seeking to answer them committed to the values of *Redlichkeit* and *Rechtshaftigkeit* goes side by side with his outspoken disapproval, on the one side, of the way that *Technologen* schooled in the natural sciences "do violence" to sociology (253), and his well-known contempt for 'conceited "literati"' (334) on the other. His denial that the explananda of sociology can be subsumed under covering laws (as opposed to being supported by statistical generalizations) is no less unambiguous than his affirmation that the concepts in whose terms sociological hypotheses are framed must include ideal-typical constructions which the sociologist cannot derive from, but brings to, the empirical evidence against which the chosen hypotheses will be tested. But it is his own way of doing this that gives his readers reason to be sceptical about his injunctions to his fellow-sociologists to keep their moral and political value-judgements separate from their academic research. Whatever he says in his methodological writings, isn't it obvious that he wants to persuade his readers to approve of entrepreneurial capitalism and the Puritan work-ethic and to disapprove of bureaucracy and socialism? Doesn't there clearly underlie his analysis of democracy an admiration for charismatic leaders and disdain for utopian reformers which his readers are being invited to share?

Weber himself never addressed these questions in quite these terms. But he never denied the meaningfulness of what Anglophone analytical philosophers call "thick" concepts in which fact and value are fused. Indeed, he himself remarks at one point that it can be easier to reach agreement that someone is to be taken for a "scoundrel" than about "how to interpret a damaged inscription" (311). The "value-relevance" (or, as Bruun and Whimster prefer for *Wertbeziehung*, "value-relatedness") of the concepts out of which ideal types are constructed is taken as given. But *Wertfreiheit* is not thereby compromised because the Weberian sociologist, while recognizing the different moral, political, and aesthetic standards that different researchers will bring to the study of the same complex or sequence of behaviour, is concerned only with the investigation of the

agents' motives, whatever they are, through "causal interpretation in absolutely the same *logical* sense as the causal interpretation of any individual natural event" (86). The exercise of *Verstehen* may disclose erroneous calculations, inconsistent beliefs, irrational decisions, "order-infringing" (285) purposes like stealing and cheating, mystical or contemplative religiosity (278), or even reactions that are "downright pathological" (44). But all that matters to the Weberian sociologist is the strength of the empirical evidence for a relationship of "adequate causation" which can account for a "resultant outcome" (181). The "significant component parts" (127) of an ideal type are chosen by reference only to how far they "facilitate an empirically valid interpretation" (84). Whatever the "degree to which such results *interest* one person but not another" (121), a causal explanation is "valid" as "truth" if – but only if – "in cases of dispute it has passed the test [described above] of isolating and generalizing the individual causal components, utilizing the category of objective possibility, and [performing] the synthesis of causal imputation which then becomes possible" (177). Opinions about right and wrong, or sentiments of approval or disapproval, have nothing to do with it.

It follows from this (I hope) uncontroversial synopsis taken from Bruun and Whimster that for Weber the difficulty in keeping sociology *wertfrei* is not a logical but a psychological one.⁴ To read the Bruun and Whimster volume through is to be reminded how thoroughly he disapproves of those who fall short in the "*elementary duty of scholarly self-control*" (130), whether by yielding to the temptation to pass ethical judgements while disavowing responsibility for them or by failing to distinguish clearly between ideal types and ideals. His admission that it is difficult to "separate empirical statements of fact from valuations" and that "all of us", including himself, "offend against [that principle], time and again" (309) is given added point by the episode at the meeting of the German Sociological Association in 1910 reported by Bruun and Whimster where, to "great merriment", he took back his incautious use of the word "magnificent" (363). The Weberian sociologist is not one who has no moral, political, or aesthetic convictions but one who keeps them out of the lecture-room for propagation in the "marketplace of life" (349). "Personally coloured' *professorial prophecy*" is "intolerable" (306) not only because professors are no better qualified as prophets

⁴ For a similar personal statement with a similar implication, cf. Lipset (1996: 14): "I believe that I draw scholarly conclusions, although I will confess that I write also as a proud American".

than anybody else but because they are exploiting audiences not in a position to contradict them. Bruun and Whimster include a revealing extract from a letter from Max to Marianne of 1909 in which he describes his attempt to wring out of a General Meeting of University Teachers “the acceptance [of the view] that, in university teaching, one may not force ‘value judgements’ on one’s students” – which was, however, “too difficult for that bunch, and nobody lifted a hand to applaud” (402).

To some of Weber’s readers, the pretence (as they see it) that the value-judgements which unashamedly permeate his journalism – to say nothing of the celebrated Inaugural Lecture at Freiburg of 1896 – are kept out of his academic sociology is as unconvincing as his face-saving confession of occasional lapses on his own part. Some such readers are likely to be more censorious than others, whether because they are particularly irritated by the disjunctions they detect between his principles and his practice or because their own evaluations of “*bourgeois*” capitalism and democracy are at variance with his. But for many, the case against him is proven by his evident inability, no matter how hard he claims to be trying, to keep his personal value-judgements out of his scholarship. In what follows, I am not concerned to pass judgement on his substantive conclusions, but only to argue that it is possible, by taking seriously his own admission of the difficulty involved, to reconcile his sociology of both capitalism and democracy with his methodological precepts. I then conclude by briefly suggesting that he would not only have welcomed the advances which have been made in the human behavioural sciences since his lifetime but that he could plausibly claim that they provide an endorsement of his *Wissenschaftslehre*.

II

No reader of the peroration of the “Protestant Ethic” can be left in any doubt about Weber’s distaste at the prospect of a “steel-hard housing” (mistranslated by Talcott Parsons as “iron cage”) within which *Fachmenschen ohne Geist* and *Genußmenschen ohne Herz* lead lives of *mechanistische Versteinerung* embroidered with an *Art von krampfhaftem Sich-wichtig-nehmen*. So explicit is the abandonment of any pretence of *Wertfreiheit* that it can hardly be interpreted as a momentary lapse in scholarly self-control. Weber’s complaint against Otto Ritschl that he allows his personal antipathy to ascetic forms of religion to compromise the *Unbefangenheit* of his *Darstellung* (1922:

128 n.3) thus looks uncomfortably like a classic example of the proverbial pot calling the kettle black. How can Weber prescribe for the practising sociologist that “*er wird gut tun, seine kleinen persönlichen Kommentare für sich zu behalten*” (1922: 14) when he so signally fails to do so himself? But since he ends with an explicit insistence on the independence of his “*rein historische[n] Darstellung*” from the “*Gebiet der Wert- und Glaubensurteile*” (1922: 204), he can presumably ask to be construed as making a deliberate but parenthetical excursion into the “marketplace of life” from his *wissenschaftlich* exercise in the assessment of the causal impact of religious ideas on the course of human history. This exercise, whatever may be shown to be its evidential weaknesses, is nonetheless conducted in accordance with the injunction that the “significant component parts” of ideal types must be chosen by reference to how far they “facilitate an empirically valid interpretation”. Once the relation of “adequate causation” between the “historical individual” and the “resultant outcome” has been established in the “same *logical* sense as the causal interpretation of any individual natural event”, it makes no difference whether he, or you, or I, or his hypothetical Chinaman, or anybody else either deplores or welcomes the unintended long-term consequences. The tirade against bureaucracy might just as well have been published separately in the sort of speech or newspaper article in which Weber was always ready to step out of the lecture-hall to propound his personal views about what was, as opposed to what ought to be, happening in the contemporary world.

There is no need to recapitulate here the arguments by which the critics of the “Weber thesis” have shown it to be untenable in its initial formulation. It is true that many of the criticisms, both in Weber’s lifetime and since, have been based on what he himself as well as others have shown to be misreadings of his text. But a distinctively Protestant (or, more specifically, Puritan) asceticism did not have the causal significance in the history of capitalism that Weber attributes to it, whether in relation to a Lutheran conception of vocation or to a Calvinist conception of predestination. In that sense, and to that extent, there is no escaping the verdict that the thesis fails. But that is because it fails the test which his own methodological principles impose, not because he evades the test by compromising them.

The construction of an ideal type of “inner-worldly asceticism” (or “ascetic rationalism”) is neither an illegitimate nor an inappropriate starting-point from which to formulate a causal hypothesis linking distinctive *Kulturvorgänge* to distinctive behaviour-patterns. It is what

cultural and social historians are doing all the time when they seek to elucidate the reciprocal relationship between novel complexes of religious, philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, or political ideas and their institutional context. The necessary precondition is that the beliefs and attitudes constitutive of an “ethic” by which the behaviour is claimed to be guided have been correctly identified in the straightforward sense of *verstehen* – that is, their meaning to the agents correctly understood by the researcher however far the researcher may be from sharing them. Weber’s critics have never denied that there is detectable in post-Reformation Europe, and thence North America, a Protestant mind-set in which a reinterpretation of the relationship between the believer and God was combined with a repudiation of the spiritual and liturgical excesses and failings, as they were seen to be, of Roman Catholicism. Weber knew as well as his critics that it took various forms which need to be carefully distinguished from one another. He cannot be charged with ignoring or oversimplifying the doctrinal and practical disputes and contradictions within the Protestant communion. But what is lacking is the evidence which would link the textual quotations and biographical anecdotes on which he relies to the self-understanding, motives, and practical conduct of the generality of Protestant businessmen who would not otherwise (if his hypothesis was valid) have reinvested their profits, honoured their contracts, eschewed extravagant personal consumption or display, rationalized their employment practices, and committed themselves to unremitting hard work in what they conceived of as a *Beruf* in a way that their Catholic or Jewish counterparts did not.

The point here at issue is not how far Weber misread (if he did) Benjamin Franklin or Richard Baxter or any other Protestant author, but whether the behaviour of the generality of Protestant capitalists was significantly influenced, either consciously or (more probably) unconsciously, by a categorically distinctive ethic which originated and was replicated within, and only within, one or another Protestant sub-culture. If the thesis were so entirely unsupported by the historical evidence that there never was at any time in any sector of the economy in any society any such causal connection, the volume and duration of the scholarly debate which it has generated would be inexplicable. But as set out in the “Protestant Ethic” it fails because it overstates its claim to have furnished evidence adequate to sustain the posited relationships between psychological cause and social behaviour. The supposed influence of Calvinism, in particular, is never adequately substantiated. A belief in predestination is not, and cannot be, shown to have been acted out in the behaviour of Protestant capitalists in

the way that Weber supposed. Indeed, as his commentators have not failed to notice, it appears nowhere in the posthumously published lectures translated in English as the *General Economic History*, where the conditions necessary for the evolution of “modern” capitalism are set out in detail. Weber’s “*irgendein junger Mann*” (1922: 52) from a family of putters-out who turns his chosen *Bauern* into wage-earning *Arbeiter*, rationalizes their production, cuts out the middlemen, and follows the principle of “*billiger Preis, großer Umsatz*” is imitated by his competitors for the simple reason that if they fail to follow his example they will be forced out of business.

The same holds for Weber’s treatment of Judaism and the contrast which he draws between the contribution of Protestants and Jews to the evolution of capitalism. There is no methodological flaw in the formulation of the hypothesis that the distinctive mentality of a people who regard themselves as “set apart” influences the extent and nature of their participation in the economies of the societies in which they live. Some explanations in that form are demonstrably valid in their given cultural and social context, including Weber’s own of the reactions of “traditionally”-minded workers who fail to respond to piece-rate incentives. Weber was mistaken about the Jews because it was not their religious beliefs which inhibited their involvement in capitalist enterprises of the kind that he has in mind but the combination of discriminatory institutional practices and cultural prejudices by which they were faced. Some of his critics have detected what they see as a methodological flaw in his use of ideal types of alternative mentalities to construct an explanandum framed in terms of failure to follow an alternative historical trajectory. But all causal explanations imply counterfactual conditionals. The entire agenda of comparative sociology is dictated by the contrast between observed institutional differences and differences that might have evolved but didn’t. “Why did the Jews not play more of a part than they did in determining the form taken by Western capitalist institutions?” is not a *question mal posée*, but one to which Weber’s answer failed on empirical grounds to pass his own test of causal adequacy.

This still leaves open the charge of Eurocentric bias to which the Introduction to the “Protestant Ethic” has long seemed to many readers to be inescapably vulnerable. It is one thing to look for the causes of what differentiates the culture and social institutions of the “modern” (*i.e.* 19th- and early-20th-century) West from those of other regions of the world, but quite another to attribute, as Weber does in his opening sentence, to the *Kulturwelt* of the West universal *Bedeutung* and *Gültigkeit*. How can this be construed otherwise than as an assertion not

merely of difference from but of superiority over the *Kulturwelt* of Islam, India, China, and the “Orient” in general? But the imputation is one to which Weber himself gives his rejoinder when in the same passage where he counsels against the expression of personal commentary he says that “*Welches Wertverhältnis zwischen den hier vergleichend behandelten Kulturen besteht, wird hier mit keinem Wort erörtert*”. To anyone looking around the world in 1900, it was incontestable that for the time being, at any rate, the science, the technology, the armaments, the manufactures, and the forms of economic and political organization of the societies of the West dominated those of societies elsewhere. But that did not mean that they were to be admired or praised on that account, any more than it meant that they had always in the past, or would always in the future, be dominant to the same degree. Expecting as he always did that his, like any other scholar’s, researches would be superseded in at most fifty years’ time, and respectful as he always was of specialists in the fields into which he ventured, Weber would have no reason not to accept the findings of his successors about the skills and achievements of Islamic merchants or Indian intellectuals or Chinese entrepreneurs. But an explanation has still to be found for why, at the time when he was writing, the societies of the West did visibly dominate those of the East (and of the African continent) rather than the other way round. It is the same question whether put in the form that Weber does or in the form of what Jared Diamond calls “Yali’s Question” – Yali being a New Guinea politician who one day in 1972 asked Diamond “Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?” (Diamond 1997: 14). However different Yali’s *Kulturwelt* and *Ethik* from Weber’s, the question can only be answered by linking hypothesized causes to observed effects in a way that Weber, Yali, Diamond, you, I, and Weber’s notional Chinaman can all accept as better supported than any competing alternative by evidence available to us all.

There is, however, one other perspective from which there can be levelled a criticism of Weber’s claim to *Wertfreiheit* of which, if he considered it at all, there is no reflection in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It derives from the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech-acts. Granted, it may be said, that the effect (if there was one) on the behaviour of Weber’s Protestant capitalists of the (or a) Protestant (or Puritan) ethnic is independent of Weber’s (or anyone else’s) approval or disapproval of their behaviour, is it not still the case that Weber presents it in such a way that his readers cannot but sense that they are being encouraged to admire them? In the way that Weber

attributes the success of his ascetic and hardworking capitalists to their distinctive ethic, he is not only (it might be said) claiming that there is a demonstrable relation of cause and effect between the two. His depiction of the distinctive features of their character and conduct is also an open invitation to the reader to approve of them. They are depicted as men who, having grown up “*in harter Lebensschule*”, are above all “*nüchtern und stetig, scharf und völlig der Sache hingegeben*” (1922: 53-54). This is not a parenthetical interjection of a personal value-judgement made in a momentary lapse of self-control. It is because of their religious convictions that Weber’s Puritan entrepreneurs are temperate, reliable, shrewd, and fully committed to business, and it is because they are these things that their businesses prosper over the longer term more than do the businesses of their Catholic or Jewish competitors. Does Weber not want his readers to think well of them on that account?

Perhaps he does. But the most effective reply to that question is to invoke the rhetorical device of paradiastole. In the illocutionary context of a causal explanation, it makes no difference if the typical Puritan businessman’s behaviour is presented not as temperate but as miserly, not as reliable but as self-protective, not as shrewd but as cunning, and not as committed but as obsessive. Weber himself makes the point that by the criteria of the pre-Protestant era of European history the single-minded pursuit of profit is at the same time offensive in the eyes of clerical moralists and contemptible in the eyes of free-spending adventurers and aristocrats whose lifestyle is one of conspicuous consumption. It neither strengthens nor weakens the argument for the effect of the (or a) Protestant ethic on the evolution, diffusion, and in due course worldwide domination of *westeuropäisch-amerikanisch[en] Kapitalismus* if its carriers are regarded as sanctimonious, unfeeling, exploitative, mean, and altogether odious. Once given that it is a central principle of Weber’s *Wissenschaftslehre* that the conclusions of *wissenschaftlich* sociology, whatever they are, leave the choice of moral, political, and aesthetic value-judgements completely free, the perlocutionary effect of those conclusions is, from the Weberian sociologist’s perspective, a matter of complete indifference.

Yet even if Weber can in this regard be successfully defended against his critics, there remains, in hindsight, an inescapable irony both in his preference for businessmen of the kind he admires over the bureaucrats he doesn’t and in his related preference in the sphere of *Politik* for charismatic leaders. The bureaucrats of the capitalist democracies of the late-20th and early-21st century world have turned out not to be as powerful, or their influence as stifling, as in his early-20th-century vision

of a disenchanting and routinized future. But during the 20th century, charismatic leaders were directly responsible for the suffering and death of millions through the unchecked pursuit of policies of which it is difficult to imagine that Weber himself would personally have approved.

III

However fruitless, it remains perennially tempting to speculate what Weber's reaction would have been to the course of German history in the thirty years after his death. Marianne's Delphic remark, when interviewed by Else Dronberger after the Second World War, that "*Jeder Mensch ist ein Geheimnis*" (Dronberger 1971: 284, 341), has not been construed by any of his commentators as a confident claim that he would be bound to have opposed Hitler's "National Socialism" from its beginnings. Nor can there be any doubt about the strength of his commitment to the cause of German nationalism, however much he disapproved of some of the ways in which Germany's interests were pursued by the holders of political power. His scholarly writings on politics accordingly give his readers grounds for a similar degree of scepticism about their *Wertfreiheit* as do his scholarly writings on religion. But again, it does not follow that there cannot be a recognizably Weberian sociology of politics which is consistent with the precepts of his *Wissenschaftslehre*. If some of the attitudes which are given explicit expression in the journalistic writings can be shown to have intruded into the ostensibly dispassionate hypotheses in the scholarly writings about the causes and effects of distinctive forms of political organization and behaviour, that does not mean, any more than in the *Religionssoziologie*, that it could not have been put right by Weber himself.

It is only to be expected that different commentators should hold different views about whether, and if so how far, Weber ever moderated the outspoken, not to say strident, nationalism of the Freiburg Inaugural. But the later writings cannot be construed as other than continuing to champion Germany's right to defend its international interests in the world of *Machtpolitik*. The same question therefore arises once again. When in the *Vorbemerkung* to "*Parliament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland*" he says: "*es deckt sich aber auch nicht mit der Autorität einer Wissenschaft*" (1958: 294), or in that to the newspaper article "*Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*" of December 1918 he explicitly disavows any "*Anspruch auf 'wissenschaftliche' Geltung*", (1958: 436), he is scrupulously

adhering to his own injunctions. But his *wissenschaftlich* exposition of political sociology in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* reflects the same presuppositions about the ubiquity of the struggle for power in human societies and implies the same disparagement of the “eudaimonistic” advocates of the ideals of equality, fraternity, and peace. Bruun and Whimster include a letter of 1908 to Robert Michels about an article that Michels had submitted to the *Archiv* in which Weber berates Michels for the way in which he mixes up “a ‘profession of faith’ and an ‘appeal’” with a “scientific analysis” (395) – a response in which many readers are likely to see another hint – or more than a hint – of pots and kettles.

As with nationalism, so with democracy. When Weber talks about “echt” democracy, which “*nicht ohnmächtige Preisgabe an Klüngel, sondern Unterordnung unter selbstgewählte Führer bedeute*” (1958: 489), he is not just constructing an ideal type whose usefulness will depend solely on the empirical validation of a causal hypothesis framed in terms of it. He is also advocating “*eine cäsaristische Wendung der Führerauslese*” (1958: 381). So when in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* he talks of the *Bauernschaft* of the time of Kleisthenses as “*Träger der ‘Demokratie’*” (1958: 809), how is the reader to interpret the quotation-marks? Debate continues to this day among both philosophers and historians about whether a political system which denied voting rights to women and slaves (not to mention a resident metic like Aristotle) can properly be called “democratic”. So how can “echt” be construed other than as making a value-judgement?

The answer, however, is there once more in the precepts concerning the construction and application of ideal types. “Democracy” is a textbook example of a culturally constructed, value-relevant (or “related”), historically contested, intersocietally variable concept. But that does not prevent its use in “causal imputation” and “empirically valid interpretation” provided that the relevant hypothesis is sufficiently carefully framed to conform to the “absolute requirement that the concepts used must be (relatively) precise” (71). To remain with the example of Athens, the rules which determined the power of all free adult males to vote on issues of public policy, choose between rival candidates for political office, and pass judgement if selected as jurors on matters that come before a court of law are not disputed between authors who may hold very different views about how far the Athenian model is or is not to be admired – as did both participants and observers at the time. That model can be related to an ideal type of citizen participation, including the right to hold elected politicians to retrospective account for their conduct in office, without any implication that other Greek

poleis which approximated less closely to it were necessarily less well governed on that account. Weber makes the point unambiguously clearly in “*Wissenschaft als Beruf*” when he says, as translated by Bruun and Whimster, “In those [academic] settings, if someone is speaking on the subject of, say, ‘democracy’, he will take its different forms, analyse how they function, determine the consequence of this or that [form] with the other, non-democratic forms of political order, and attempt to get so far that *the student* will be able to find the point from which he can adopt a position towards [those forms of government] on the basis of *his own* ultimate ideals” (346).

The same holds for Wilhelmine Germany as for Periclean Athens. Weber’s own particular interest was in a form of democracy as impossible under the conditions of a Greek *polis* as would be an Athenian-type democracy under the conditions of a large, populous, modern state with universal adult suffrage, organized political parties, and a professional bureaucracy. But the consequences for Germany of being a parliamentary democracy of a kind in which elected representatives are debarred from holding political office as opposed to one in which the holders of political office are chosen from, and answerable to, parliament were what they were whatever the degree of Weber’s personal commitment to an ideal of informed participation by enfranchised citizens in the formulation and execution of national policy. As he was well aware, the question raises counterfactual speculations which are difficult if not impossible to test. England’s form of parliamentary democracy was the outcome of antecedent circumstances, events, and dispositions which could not be replicated in Germany even if its constitution were to be remodeled on English lines. But if the attempt were made, the outcome would be the same whether or not it accorded with either his expectations or his wishes.

The dismissiveness of Weber’s pejorative verdicts on his political opponents on both the Right and the Left is not in question. Nor is his contempt for the susceptibility of the irrational and undisciplined “mass” to unscrupulous propagandists. His personal value-judgements are, moreover, as much on display in his writings about Russian as about German politics: the disdain voiced in the articles of 1906 for Russian Social Democracy (including an aside about Puritanism, which at least had to its credit “*recht respektable Leistungen im Dienste der diesseitigen Freiheit*” (1958: 62)), is particularly outspoken. But to any commentator seeking to reproach him for violating his own methodological principles, the same reply can be given. If he is deliberately expressing his own values then he is not speaking as a practitioner of *Wissenschaft* but as a

competitor in the “marketplace of life”. If, when speaking as a practitioner of *Wissenschaft*, he allows his own values to intrude, he is guilty of a loss of scholarly self-control and stands to be corrected accordingly, as at the meeting of the German Sociological Association in 1910. But if the ideal type in terms of which his hypotheses are framed has been correctly constructed for the purpose of causal explanation, his values are logically irrelevant to the validity of the hypotheses (whether or not there is available evidence adequate to put them to conclusive test).

However strong, therefore, his personal preference for a *cäsaristische Wendung der Führerauslese*, Weber’s construction and application of the ideal type of charismatic *Herrschaft* cannot be impugned as a violation of his own criterion of *Wertfreiheit*. In *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, his insistence that the concept of charisma is and must be independent of any “*ethischen, ästhetischen oder sonstigen Standpunkt*” (1956: 140) is sufficiently vindicated by the range of examples which he himself gives. There is no need here for recourse to the rhetorical device of paradiastole to make the point. In the pure ideal type, the source and agency of *Herrschaft* are totally fused in the person of the *Führer*. In practice, the charismatic ruler cannot operate any more than can any other without some form of organized supporting staff, even if they are neither bureaucratic officials nor patrimonial servants but followers or disciples whose loyalty depends on renewed manifestations by the ruler of extraordinary powers. Hence the inescapable problem of succession, to which Weber devotes some of his subtlest and most influential pages. But the explanation of its resolution, or the failure to resolve it, in any given case must be grounded in an empirical demonstration of causal adequacy in which it is the formulation of the ideal type and the hypotheses framed in its terms which account for the outcome observed.

The point holds equally in the context of the journalistic writings where Weber’s positive evaluation of charismatic leadership is made explicit. It is succinctly put in the remark that “*Das Nachfolgerproblem ist überall die Achillesferse aller rein cäsaristischen Herrschaft gewesen*” (1958: 389). It follows that anyone who shares the view that the emergence of a charismatic leader endowed with the necessary talent, ambition, and sense of responsibility to counter the insidious effects of increasing bureaucratization has to address the need for the leader’s charisma to be not merely reaffirmed by acclamation or plebescite or the continued performance of exemplary deeds but routinized, whether by attachment to the office rather than the person or by the transfer to a replacement capable of retaining the allegiance of the soldiery, the

electorate, or the faithful adherents to the leader's beliefs or prophecies. This will necessarily involve an assessment of the suitability of a potential successor to exercise the gifts of leadership without which the combination of inescapably self-serving officials and irredeemably mediocre politicians will again inhibit or distort the furtherance of the national interest. But the nature of the problem of succession and the consequences of the attempt to resolve it by one means rather than another will be the same for those who deplore as for those who welcome the emergence of a charismatic leader in the first place.

There remains once again the issue of the perlocutionary effect of a *wissenschaftlich* analysis of a distinctive form of *Herrschaft* which, even if *wertfrei* as an illocutionary speech-act, can nevertheless be construed as encouraging the reader to share Weber's enthusiasm for the kind of leader of a democracy like that of Germany that he would like to see. But the answer is the same as in the case of Weber's admiration for ascetic Protestant capitalists. If the causal analysis is empirically valid, it does not matter if the reader is disturbed, encouraged, reassured, intrigued, infuriated, or even scandalized. In this, there is no difference between the *Sozialwissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften*. Many of the well-validated findings of the natural sciences have provoked responses of relief or dismay, as the case may be, in accordance with the hopes or fears of those to whom they are communicated. There may still be scope for debate among philosophers of science over whether, on second-order epistemological grounds, the ideal of *wertfrei* knowledge is coherent or attainable. But Weber himself, for all his awareness of the extent to which the forms as well as the methods of *wissenschaftlich* research are dictated by the personal choices of the researcher, never took seriously the kind of radical scepticism which denies the meaningfulness of the distinction between truth and falsehood or the reality of relations of cause and effect. His own sociological practice is consistent with the methodology expounded in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, not (as he freely admits) in the sense that he always adheres to it but in the sense that where he does not he can be corrected in his own terms.

IV

The century since the publication of "*Über einige Kategorien der verstehende Soziologie*" in 1913 is twice the fifty-year maximum that

Weber thought that his or any scholar's *wissenschaftlich* contribution to a chosen subject can last without being superseded. He was right in the sense that his own most influential publications, while still studied, debated and assigned on student reading-lists, have all been subjected to varying degrees of criticism and revision. But to read the *Wissenschaftslehre* as set out in the Bruun and Whimster edition is to be struck not only by the continuing relevance of his strictures against the charlatans who lay spurious claim to *wissenschaftlich* authority but also by the number of substantive topics of interest to him across the full range of *Wissenschaft[en]* on which he would be among the first to appreciate the progress made since his death. He would, for example, have been ready at once to equate the achievement of Crick and Watson in deciphering the double helix with the achievement of Ventris and Chadwick in deciphering the Minoan script known as Linear B. But he would have been equally ready to recognize how far 20th-century archaeology has advanced the sociology of the Graeco-Roman economy, 20th-century biology the Darwinian theory of natural selection, 20th-century primatology what to him and his contemporaries was *Tierpsychologie*, 20th-century brain science what to him and his contemporaries was *Hirnanatomie*, and 20th-century game theory the analysis of collaborative and adversarial behaviour-patterns in both animal and human populations. In none of these fields has the validity of the findings which have redrawn the agenda as it was in his lifetime been compromised by the researchers' value-judgements.

The relation of sociology to biology is, admittedly, hardly less contentious now than it was then. But Weber would be well aware that the "new synthesis" linking evolutionary theory to population genetics, together with the subsequent discoveries of molecular biology, have effectively dealt with his reservations about the concepts of *Auslese* and *Anpassung*. It is no longer possible to argue that the theory of natural selection has not been empirically validated or that the reproductive fitness of a population implies superiority in any sense other than a demographically successful response to selective environmental pressure. Weber would have no difficulty in grasping how neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory has conclusively refuted the kind of *Rassensoziologie* by which he himself was never persuaded. He would be unsurprised by the failure of reductionist sociobiology to provide causally adequate explanations of cultural change and the ability of dual inheritance theory, as it has come to be called, to account for the reciprocal interaction between natural and cultural selection. He would

appreciate the transformation in the *wissenschaftlich* study of *Kampf* brought about by interdisciplinary collaboration between biologists, psychologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and game theorists. And he would recognize how well their findings conform to his criterion of empirical validation of causal adequacy.

There is only one concept central to his *Wissenschaftslehre* which he might be reluctant to accept as having been superseded, in the definition which he gave to it, and that is the concept of *Kultur* itself. It is not surprising that Bruun and Whimster, like other translators before them, have found it peculiarly difficult to render in English without recourse to either ambiguity or paraphrase. "Culture" is, to be sure, no less disputed a concept in the usage of Anglophone sociologists than *Kultur* in the usage of Weber and his German contemporaries. But he could not fail to appreciate the usefulness, in the generation of hypotheses linking antecedent causes to subsequent outcomes, of the definition of culture in terms of information affecting phenotypic behaviour transmitted from mind to mind by imitation and learning as opposed to information affecting phenotype transmitted genetically. He would be quick to detect what he would regard as failures of scholarly self-control among sociologists who continue to allow their personal value-judgements to intrude into their explanations of observed behaviour-patterns, both cultural and social. But he would find no reason to qualify, let alone to retract, his conviction that causal explanation of human behaviour is at the same time dependent for the possibility of empirical validation on ideal-typical concept formation but logically independent of judgements of moral, aesthetic, or political value.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- DIAMOND Jared, 1997. *Guns, Germs and Steel. The Fates of Human Societies* (London, Jonathan Cape).
- DRONBERGER Ilse, 1971. *The Political Thought of Max Weber: in Quest of Statesmanship* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts).
- FLEISCHMANN Eugène, 1964. "De Weber à Nietzsche", *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 5 (2): 190-238.
- LIPSET Seymour Martin, 1996. *American Exceptionalism: a Double-Edged Sword* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company).
- MOMMSEN Wolfgang J., 1974. *The Age of Bureaucracy. Perspectives on the Sociology of Max Weber* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).
- WEBER Max, 1922. *Gesammelte Aufsätze Zur Religionssoziologie I* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr).
- , 1956. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr).
- , 1958. *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr).

Résumé

La publication récente de la traduction anglaise par Bruun et Whimster de l'ensemble des écrits méthodologiques de Max Weber offre l'occasion de revenir sur la question de savoir dans quelle mesure il s'est lui-même plié à la suspension des jugements de valeur et à la construction d'idéaux-types. On entend démontrer que Weber voyait un problème non pas logique mais purement psychologique et qu'il pouvait donc justifier les contradictions apparentes entre ses préceptes et sa pratique, soit comme choix délibérés quand il ne s'agissait pas de science, soit, dans ses écrits scientifiques, comme des légèretés corrigibles. En conclusion on avancera que Weber considérerait le gros des avancées que nous connaissons des sciences du comportement humain comme globalement en accord avec sa méthodologie.

Mots clés: Weber ; Méthodologie ; Préceptes méthodologiques dans les sciences du comportement.

Zusammenfassung

Die kürzlich erschienene Gesamtausgabe der methodologischen Texte Max Webers, in der englischen Übersetzung von Bruun und Whimster, ermöglicht es, sich erneut mit der Frage auseinanderzusetzen, ob Weber hinter seinen eigenen Lehrsätzen von Wertfreiheit und Verbreitung des Idealtypus gestanden ist. Des Weiteren soll gezeigt werden, dass es sich für Weber nicht um ein logisches, sondern um ein rein psychologisches Problem gehandelt hat und dass er die scheinbaren Widersprüche zwischen Lehrsatz und Praxis als bewusste Entscheidung bei nicht-wissenschaftlichen Texten oder als Nichtigkeiten bei wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten abgetan hat. Schlussfolgernd wird behauptet, Weber hätte meinen können, dass die bedeutenden Fortschritte, die die Verhaltenswissenschaften seit seiner Zeit gemacht haben, mit seiner Methode übereinstimmen.

Schlagwörter: Weber; Methode; Methodologische Lehrsätze der Verhaltenswissenschaft.