How is Sociological Knowledge Possible? Influences of Kantian Epistemology in Max Weber's 'Verstehende Soziologie' and the Problem of Objectivity

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Abstract

Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' has caused a radical change in the common-sense theory of knowledge. The subject became the centre and the necessary premise for the validity of the objective world. This change in the understanding of knowledge has best manifested itself in Weber's 'Verstehende Soziologie'. Therefore, in order to understand the Weberian sociological method and to be able to detect the possible problems that may arise from his sociology, a better grasp of what Kantian epistemology is and in what ways it has influenced Weberian sociology is needed. Accordingly, this paper will firstly analyse Kantian epistemology with a special emphasis on transcendental idealism, and will expand and explain in detail Weber's 'Verstehende Soziologie'. Next, the paper will show how Weberian sociology relates to Kantian epistemology through the construction of ideal types. Before concluding, the focus moves to the objectivity claim of both Kantian epistemology and Weberian sociology and shows how objectivity arises from subjectivity through the establishment of causality. Finally, the paper will propose an objection to the objectivity claim of Weberian sociology and will argue that Kantian epistemology, when adopted as a method of sociology, becomes reflexive and threatens to deprive sociology of its objectivity claim.

Keywords: Kantian epistemology embedded in Weber's 'Verstehende Soziologie', Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' and transcendental idealism, Weberian methodology, Weberian ideal-type construction, Ideal types and understanding, ideal types and objectivity, causality in social sciences, the problem of objectivity.

Introduction

German idealism in general, and Kantian epistemology in particular, have haunted German sociology since the late-nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Samples, 1987: 246). The epistemological shift from 'mechanical philosophy', where the subjective is defined in terms of the objective, towards a Kantian 'Copernican Revolution', where the objective is defined in terms of the subjective cognition, has found its reflections in the social sciences as well (Shalin, 1990: 2). The revival of Kantian epistemology in German social sciences has led to a new kind of re-enlightenment in which the individual became once more the focus of the sciences. Out of this epistemological transformation in German philosophy, the question 'How is sociological knowledge possible?' emerged. In a lively search for a response to this question, positivist Comtean sociology has been replaced by the interpretive sociology of Weber (Shalin, 1990).[1] It can be argued, thus, that this epistemological shift in German philosophy towards Kantian epistemology has constituted the building blocks of Weberian sociology. Therefore, in order to understand the Weberian sociological method and to detect the possible problems that may arise from his sociology, first and foremost, what is needed is a better grasp of what Kantian epistemology is and in what ways it has influenced Weberian sociology.

In the first section of the paper, transcendental idealism will be introduced as the Kantian 'Copernican Revolution' in epistemology that surpasses both rationalism and empiricism. In this section, the paper will aim to show how knowledge becomes possible in Kantian transcendental idealism. In other words, the paper will try to demonstrate what the mechanism is under the transcendental idealist construction of knowledge. In the second section, the paper will ask the question 'How is sociological knowledge possible?' It will expand on Weberian sociology and explain in detail what Weber's 'Verstehende Soziologie' is. While doing that, the paper will compare 'Verstehende Soziologie' with the Durkheimian sociological method with a claim that, since they constitute the exact opposite ways of approaching sociology, the comparison will make 'Verstehende Soziologie' more understandable. Later, in the third section, it will be argued that Weber's ideal types constitute the most Kantian character of his sociology. Accordingly, the paper will show how ideal types are used to relate Weberian sociology to Kantian epistemology. In the fourth section, the paper will focus on the objectivity claim of both Kantian epistemology and Weberian sociology. In this section, the paper will aim to show how objectivity arises from subjectivity in both Kant and Weber, with specific attention to causality. In the fifth and final section, the paper will propose an objection to the objectivity claim of Weberian sociology. In this section, the paper will argue that Kantian epistemology, when adopted as a method of sociology, becomes reflexive, relativises the sociological conduct and, thus, threatens to deprive sociology of its objectivity claim.

Kantian epistemology: The transcendental shift

> [T]he object, severed from the subject, is dead.
> — (Hegel, 1975: 303)

Epistemology witnessed an immense shift with the introduction of Kantian epistemology. This shift can be termed the 'transcendental turn in epistemology' (Kitcher, 1995: 286). Knowledge can no longer be possible either from a rationalist foundationalist perspective as one sees its most powerful manifestation in Descartes' 'clear and distinct perception' (Sternfeld, 1958: 49) or from an 'empiricist idealist' perspective that is manifested fundamentally in Berkeley's theory of knowledge.[2] Now, a new theory of the possibility of knowledge that surpasses both rationalism and empiricism is on the stage: Transcendental idealism. But what exactly is transcendental idealism?

One can argue that there are three fundamental claims of Kant's transcendental idealism: Firstly, things that appear to us (the phenomenal appearances of objects) and things in themselves (the noumena) are distinct;[3] secondly, one cannot have the knowledge of the things in themselves, but can only know what their appearances are; and thirdly, phenomenal appearances of objects are (mind-dependent) phenomenal representations of the objects cognised by the existing spatiotemporal innate structures (categories of sensation) of the mind, and thus, can only be perceived by the innate spatiotemporal categories of the mind (Allais, 2004: 656).[4] It should be emphasised here that the objects of our knowledge are the external world. That is, although we can only have access to their phenomenal representations in our minds, we still know that they exist mind-independently because, if we are able to cognise sensations, this implies that there must be something independent of ourselves that influences our 'sensibility'. Hence, being *representations* implies that they are the a priori abstractions gathered from the underlying noumena (the empirical reality) itself. in other words, appearances are in-mind representations of the objects existing outside us. On this point, Kant argues as follows:

> I say, [...] that things are given to us as objects of our senses existing outside us [...] things which,
> though quite unknown to us as to what they are in themselves, we yet know by the representations
> which their influence on our sensibility creates for us.
> — (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 734–35 [Ak. 4:289]; emphasis added)

These being said, now, one can argue that Kant's transcendental idealism is idealist in the sense that it necessitates the 'forms of sensibility' (the mind-dependent categories of sensation – i.e. space and time) for the cognition of the sensation to occur but, at the same time, it is transcendental in the sense that it transcends the Berkeleyan type of idealism by rejecting Berkeley's assumption that 'empirically real objects exist merely as collections of mental states (organised according to a priori principles and a priori forms of intuition)' (Allais, 2011: 93), and by proposing the necessary existence of mind-independent external objects (which are responsible for the incoming stimuli) that can only be cognised according to the mind-dependent phenomenal representations of them.

Consequently, one can say that Kant's transcendental idealism, in a way, combines empiricism and rationalism. It firstly claims that we are dependent on the stimuli coming from the external world to be able to have an interpretation of something, and, secondly – more importantly for the purposes of this paper – that *we interpret* the world by relying on *our way of understanding* it, according to the inborn filters we have in our mind. Thus, we use abstractions, mind-dependent phenomenal representations to interpret the world, and so cannot directly know the empirical reality in its collective cohesion. This final point can be seen in one of Kant's most famous statements:

> [T]here is *only one* way in which my intuition can anticipate the actuality of the object and be an a
> priori cognition, *namely if my intuition contains nothing but the form of sensibility that precedes in*
> *me as a subject all the actual impressions through which I am affected by objects.* For I can *know* a
> priori that *objects of the senses can be intuited only according to this form of sensibility.*
> — (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 731–32 [Ak. 4:282–83]; emphasis added)

It should be noted here that it is not the individual per se that 'understands' the world as if every individual has a different structure in her mind, but rather it is the universal structure of the human mind that understands and interprets. That is, the 'understanding' does not refer to the ensemble of particularities but to the 'human' mind whose particularity resides in its universality. In other words, the filters are universal yet particular to humans. Despite their universality, we say that they are particular because it is not the human mind that conforms to objects; rather, it is the objects that conform to the human mind (Kant, 1998: 110 [Bxiii]). They exist in the mind and serve to filter the world. Without them, objectivity cannot be established. This is the basis on which the Weberian methodology would establish itself. As will be seen, Weber, similar to Kant, puts the subject (or cognition, in Kantian terms) at the centre and considers the knowledge of the 'social' reality as conforming to cognition (or, in other words, as conforming to analytic constructs – i.e. to ideal types).

'Verstehende Soziologie': How is sociological knowledge possible?

> [S]ubjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge
> — (Weber, 1978: 15)

Now that the fundamental tenets of Kantian epistemology have been discussed, the crucial question that will eventually lead the paper towards Weberian sociology should be asked: 'How is sociological knowledge possible?'

This question has long been (and still is) a debate among sociologists. This debate is manifested best in the methodological differences between Durkheim and Weber. Hence, in order to understand Weber's methodology fully, a comparison between Durkheim and Weber will be useful.

Durkheim claimed that sociology should be established as an objective social science that focuses on *social facts external to the individual agents* (Durkheim, 1982: 52). In his study of *Suicide*, Durkheim discussed that, despite the different individual motivations for a person to take her own life (i.e. despite all the different feelings, thoughts and experiences individual agents go through, the statistical data/rates for suicide within a given territory and time interval always stays the same; Durkheim, 1951: 269). This is called the 'uniformity of effect' (Durkheim, 1951: 274), and it establishes the biggest evidence for Durkheim that suicide is not an individual phenomenon but a collective social fact. Hence, for Durkheim, even the very act of suicide is not psychological but a social phenomenon. It is a collective social fact that has various kinds of representations in the individual subjects. Therefore, Durkheim believes that if one wants to know the reason why any social phenomenon is happening, the first thing one should do is to identify the objective social facts externally from the individuals.[5]

Weber, on the other hand, positions himself on the opposite side of the spectrum and claims that it is through the *subjectively meaningful social actions* of the individuals who are constantly interacting with one another that the society is constructed (Weber, 1949). For Weber, the reality is 'the endless flux of the infinite multiplicity' (as cited in John, 1991: 245). Accordingly, sociology as a social science should aim to *understand* the social actions of these individuals where they constantly reconstruct their social environment with their subjectivity. He even gives a definition of it: 'Sociology [...] is a science concerning itself with the *interpretive understanding of social action*' (Weber, 1978: 4; emphasis added). It follows that, for Weber – contrary to Durkheim – the individual is the basis of society. The statistical data, or the 'uniformity of effect', says nothing about the complex subjective meanings the individuals attributed while engaging in social action; they are silent on the motivations lying behind specific social actions. For Weber, without the subjective interpretation of individuals' orientation towards specific social actions, the statistical analysis by itself is nothing more than what natural scientists do (Weber, 1978: 15), whereas a social scientist should worry herself with the individuation of the phenomena. Regarding this point, Weber criticises Durkheim (anonymously) in the following ways:

> There are statistics of processes devoid of subjective meaning, such as *death rates* [...] But only when the phenomena are meaningful do we speak of sociological statistics.
> — (Weber, 1978: 12; emphasis added)

> [I]t may be useful or necessary to consider the individual, for instance, as a collection of cells, as a complex of bio-chemical reactions [...] [T]he behavior of these elements, as expressed in such *uniformities*, is *not subjectively understandable* [...] For sociology [...] the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action.
> — (Weber, 1978: 13; emphasis added)

Above, it is obvious that Weber has Durkheim in mind because he specifically chooses the example of 'death rates'; he probably had read Durkheim's *Suicide* when it was published in 1897. Moreover, he uses the words Durkheim used, such as 'uniformities'. Also, here, he criticises Durkheim's organism analogies.[6] Now, consequently, it can be said that subjectively *understanding* and *interpreting* the complexities of individuals' motivations while they are engaging in day-to-day social actions is the key to Weber's methodology. He calls

this method the 'Verstehende Soziologie'. This is the Verstehen method of doing sociology. For Weber, sociological knowledge can only be gained through Verstehen.

Ideal types and understanding: Kantian influences in Weberian methodology

The next question that should be asked is how this understanding relates to Kantian epistemology? At this point, Weber introduces the most important methodological tool of his sociology – the ideal types (Eliaeson, 2000: 250; Ringer, 2002: 173). One can argue that the construction of ideal types is what makes Weberian sociology Kantian in its essence. They constitute the most fundamental Kantian character of his 'Verstehende Soziologie' (Oakes, 1987; Weber, 1949). In this section, the paper will try to show how Weberian methodology in general, and ideal types in particular, is related to Kantian epistemology.

Weber states that one cannot comprehend the complexity of the empirical reality in its collective cohesion. Instead, one must have ideal types (analytic concepts) that guide one in understanding the interactions between people and establishing causal relations between individual social phenomena (Weber, 1949). Now, what are the ideal types? It can be argued that the ideal types, for Weber, are the representations, analytic abstractions, from the totality of the empirical social facts that are used in order to form an understanding of the particular issue on point (Weber, 1978: 15). In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Weber defines ideal types as follows:

> [O]ne-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct *(Gedankenbild)*. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct *(Gedankenbild)* cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia*.
> — (Weber, 1949: 90)

Here, one can think of the process of 'concrete individual phenomena' being subsumed under an 'analytic construct' as the process of abstraction from the concrete whole. At the end of this process of abstraction, it seems that one arrives at the 'mental construct', which for Weber is a 'utopia'. This means that the result is no longer the reality itself but only a representation of it. From that point on, it is these conceptualisations of the empirical reality (and the relationship of one concept with another) and not the reality itself that will guide one in her understanding of social phenomena. Does not this resemble what one sees in Kant? Similar to Kant, here, empirical facts are only interpreted through the evaluation, classification and representations of the ideal concepts in understanding. Weber argues as follows:

> If one perceives the implications of the fundamental idea of modern epistemology which ultimately derives from Kant; *namely, that concepts are primarily analytic instruments for the intellectual mastery of empirical data* and can be only that, the fact that precise genetic concepts are necessarily ideal-types will not cause him to desist from constructing them.
> — (Weber, 1949: 106; emphasis added)

As seen, Weber himself is associating his ideal types with Kant's epistemology, where the understanding is 'constructed' from concepts of the mind (hence, the 'interpretation'). So, both in Kant and Weber, understanding acts on the representations of the 'thing' that is unreachable. In both Kant and Weber, there is a difference between the understandable and the unreachable. Hence, we must rely on interpretations of the complexity, and ideal types serve exactly this purpose.[7]

Now, one can argue against the above-mentioned comparison between Kant and Weber by saying that although the process seems similar, they are of different categories: In this context, the 'empirical reality' for Weber and Kant is, indeed, of different kinds. When talking about externality, Weber is talking about the 'social' empirical reality – that is, the outside reality was not the reality described by the natural sciences but the social sciences. On the other hand, Kant's 'externality' is about the 'natural' empirical reality. However, one should not forget that the similarity that this paper argues is on an epistemological level. In both Kant and Weber, the paper argues, there is a similar approach to knowledge. It is the methodology that is put under comparison. Both argue that one cannot *know* things in their totality. Whether the 'things' are social facts or the noumenal objects do not matter, the epistemological method remains still. Abstractions from the totality and subjective interpretations of the phenomena by the mind are necessary for both Weber and Kant to know things.

Establishing objective and causal relationships from the subjective

Another claim one sees in both Kant and Weber is that, from subjectivity, the objective emerges. Now, one should ask how subjective *understanding* can create objectivity? What is the mechanism that somehow combines the understanding of the particular phenomenon with objectivity? Both in Kant and Weber, one sees a similar approach to the questions above: identifying the cause-and-effect relationship between events. The crucial point here is that both Kant and Weber claim that cause-and-effect relationships cannot be found in the empirical reality standing by themselves; rather, they are established by the active subjective interpretation of the phenomenon by the mind and, more importantly, it is this subjective interpretation that creates the objective validity of the phenomenon.

In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant asks how we come to *know* the universal and necessary natural laws existing outside of ourselves. In other words, he wonders '[h]ow is it possible to cognize a priori that experience itself necessarily conforms to law with respect to all its objects in general?' (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 738 [Ak. 4:296–97]). He continues that it is because the phenomenal representations of the sensible objects in the categories of sensibility subsumed under the specific *universal and necessary concept* of the understanding – cause and effect (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 740 [Ak. 4:301]). That is, cause and effect is an innate a priori concept of the category of understanding. It is this necessary universality of the concept of cause and effect that gives the objective character to the phenomena that are being associated (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 739 [Ak. 4:298]; Brand, 1979: 8). For instance, if one sees an event A associated with an event B at time *t,* what really happens for Kant is that both events A and B are phenomenally (and separately) represented in the sensibility and later subsumed under the specific universal and necessary concept of the category of understanding: cause and effect. At that point, the temporal association of events A and B occurred. Meaning that, causality is not something existing externally in things themselves, but rather is the product of the human mind. However, once the association occurs, one makes an objective claim: A caused B. [8] Whereas in reality, the objectivity of this observation comes from the subjective interpretation of the events processed by the mind.

Now, what about Weber? How does he conceptualise causality? For Weber, social reality consists of innumerable complex events that have innumerable causes (Wagner and Zipprian, 1986: 27). Hence, a causal attribution cannot be done without abstracting from the totality. It follows that, firstly, ideal types are created – that is, the social-empirical reality is represented in terms of abstract conceptualisations. Then, these conceptualisations will be used to infer causal deductions. In other words, 'causal "moments" are not

simply given in experience; they are constructs [...] we analyse the given into "components," "isolating" possible causes from the surrounding antecedent conditions' (Ringer, 2002: 166). Weber argues as follows:

> [W]e are helpless in the face of the question: how is the *causal explanation* of an individual fact possible – since a description of even the smallest slice of reality can never be exhaustive? [...] [T]here is nothing in the things themselves to set some of them apart as alone meriting attention.
> — (Weber, 1949: 78; emphasis added)

Here it is obvious that, for Weber, causality cannot exist in the complex, 'exhaustive' empirical reality in its totality (for he explicitly says that 'nothing in the things themselves'), but it must be abstracted from the 'social' reality (through the construction of ideal types) and should be interpreted in its context (May, 1998: 12). *Thus, for Weber, the objective causal explanation of the empirical social reality is subjectively derived* (Goddard, 1973: 12). Weber states as follows: 'The objective validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively upon the ordering of the given reality according to categories which are subjective' (1949: 110). That is, without abstraction from the totality through ideal types, without the conceptual representations of reality, causal deduction is not possible. Again, like Kant, it is through subjectivity that objective causal relationships are constructed.

Problematising the Kantian epistemology embedded in 'Verstehende Soziologie': Ideal types and objectivity

This paper has thus far demonstrated how the *knowledge* of the empirical reality is constructed similarly in Kant and Weber through subjectivity. While doing this, it has also shown how objectivity based on cause-and-effect relationships is created out of this subjectivity. However, although Kant's transcendental idealism explains how '*subjective conditions of thought* could have *objective validity*' (Ariew and Watkins, 2019: 801 [A90]), despite Weber's claim, can one say the same for his 'Verstehende Soziologie'? In this section, the paper will argue that Kantian epistemology, when adopted as a method of sociology, becomes reflexive, relativises the sociological conduct and, therefore, threatens to deprive sociology of its objectivity claim.[9]

It is mentioned in the previous section that Weber's objectivity claim comes from a Kantian perspective: the subjective understanding and interpretation (of social actions). This objectivity, which is derived from the subjective has a specific name in Weber's terminology: *Value freedom*. For Weber, although it is subjective, sociology should be value-free. That is, in its subjective understanding of the complexities of individual motivations towards social actions, it should have the aim of explanation and not the validation of the normativity of individual meanings and actions (Morrice, 1996: 143). As Weber puts it:

> When the normatively valid is the object of empirical investigation, its normative validity is disregarded. Its 'existence' and not its 'validity' is what concerns the investigator.
> — (Weber, 1949: 39)

Following this, one can ask, 'What about the selection procedure of the observer?' Weber anticipates this question and gives an answer to it. He claims that the selection of what to study can be subjective and calls it the *value relevance* of sociology: He says: '[T]he problems of the social sciences are selected by the value-relevance of the phenomena treated' (Weber, 1949: 21). Thus for him, sociology should be value-free, although it can be value-relevant. That is, it is subjective in its selection of phenomena to study but, once selected, it should be objective in its analysis: Hence, sociology is the objective study of people's normative subjectivity.

This being said, it should be emphasised that there still remains a crucial problem about the value freedom principle of Weber's sociology. How can a sociologist abstract herself from the one-sided analytical conceptualisations (ideal types) that are used to make adequate, objective causal deductions if, for instance, ideal types are biased? In such a case, how can a Kantian approach based on ideal-type construction (the *core principle* of Weberian methodology) yield an objective, out-of-oneself look towards the social reality? In other words, how can the sociologist *know* that the subjective understanding and interpretations of the complexities of individuals' motivations (Verstehen) have objective validity? After all, if this would be the case, ideal types will make the explanation-value dichotomy problematic, and the supposedly value-free explanation of the fact will be influenced by the observer's own subjectivity – because, as Guy Oakes (1990) also puts it, in 'Verstehende Soziologie', '[t]he principle that determines how far an explanation should proceed is […] one of the desiderata that defines its validity' (1990: 148–49).

At this point, focusing on some of Weber's ideal types will be useful to show how he, as an observer himself, is very much influenced by his own conceptualisation of reality. For instance, consider the ideal types he has constructed while investigating the religions of the East. That is, 'inner-worldly asceticism', 'world-rejecting asceticism', and 'world-flying asceticism' (Weber, 1978). Now, from what source are these abstract conceptions derived? They are derived from the presupposition, firstly, that there must be a general category of 'ethic' that guides the behaviours of the people in the East and, secondly, that this 'ethic' must be evaluated in comparison to 'rationality' (Runciman, 2013: 219). And since ideal types are abstract representations of the social reality that will help the observer to identify possible objective causal relationships and, in this case, since they are based on 'rational ethic', it implies that this causality will be established on Western standards of rationalisation as well. Thus, the *explanations of the social actions* (facts) are based on the Western standards of rationalisation processes of countries (Buss, 1987: 272). Is this a value-free approach? On the contrary, this reveals the *Eurocentrism* embedded in the supposedly value-free observer. After all, how can the (religious) history of India, for instance, be explained without even mentioning Western colonial politics? (Schmidt-Glintzer, 2018: 108). One can argue against the paper here by saying that these ideal types reflect value relevance, and not necessarily a bias. However, this is not the case because they do not simply reflect a matter of 'choosing what to study'. It is one thing to choose to study the East and compare it with the West; it is completely another thing to base this comparison (and the evaluation) on an 'ethic' – and a very distinctive kind of ethic (i.e. a 'rational ethic'; Runciman, 2013). Why suppose actions are being guided by a specific category of ethic at all? Or why think of it in comparison to rationality? Hence, the construction of the ideal types to evaluate religious behaviour are *reflexive* and is based on the *bias* such that they *should be* categorised under some 'ethic', and that they *should be* investigated in comparison to Western rationalisation. As perfectly stated by Edward Said:

> Weber's studies of Protestantism, Judaism, and Buddhism blew him […] into the very territory originally charted and claimed by the Orientalists. There he found […] a sort of ontological difference between Eastern and Western economic (as well as religious) 'mentalities'.
> — (Said, 2003: 259)

Moreover, another example would be Weber's *characterisation* of the capitalist mode of production by taking the 'investment of private capital' as the analytic construct (the ideal type), the one-sided '"idea" of capitalistic culture' from which the objective explanation of the economic activity that is unique to the capitalist mode of production would proceed (Weber, 1949: 91). He argues as follows:

> [O]ne can delineate the utopia of a 'capitalistic' culture, i.e, one in which the *governing principle* is the investment of private capital. This procedure would accentuate certain individual concretely

diverse traits of modern material and intellectual culture in its unique aspects into an ideal construct
[...] This would then be the delineation of an *'idea'* of capitalistic culture.
— (Weber, 1949: 91; emphasis added)

Now, here, we should ask that *if* 'investment of private capital' is taken as '*the'* 'governing principle', – that is, as *'the'* filter to understand the diverse *motives of* economic activity that are unique to capitalism – would not that make invisible the ways in which profits are made long before they are realised as investments in the market? That is, for instance, is it not necessary, also, to investigate the relationship between living labour and surplus creation in the production process as one of the governing principles of the capitalist mode of production in order to better understand the 'motives' of economic activity that are unique to the system? (Mészáros, 1972: 41). Here, it seems the *market transaction* is prioritised over the *production process* in explaining the subject matter. *Although it is not incorrect*, *some concrete and significant parts* of the causal explanation regarding the phenomenon (which are necessary for causal and objectively valid analysis) are omitted. Hence, it follows that, in this example, the analytic construct ('investment of private capital'), when taken as *the* '"idea" of capitalistic culture' (i.e. as the ideal-typical accentuation of *'the'* governing principle), again, threatens the objective, scientific and causal explanation.

Overall, as seen, reflexivism is embedded in the *most important and main* Kantian aspect of Weberian sociology – namely, the ideal-type construction. Therefore, the ideal-type construction – which Weber fundamentally formed by relying on Kantian epistemology and supposedly should serve for objective causal deductions – cannot, in the end, be used to objectively 'master the empirical data' because ideal types are themselves reflexive. That is, reflexive in the sense that even after narrowing the sphere of investigation to be able to establish causal relations within a world of innumerable events and innumerable causes, it is still not *always* possible to establish objective causal relations by using these one-sided analytical conceptualisations (ideal types) because – as the above examples demonstrate – they may, *if biased*, become 'the ends, and not the means of [scientific] [...] inquiry' (Kolko, 1959: 32). Hence, the Kantian approach to sociology – that is, the subjective understanding of the complexities of individuals' motivations in their engagement in day-to-day social actions (due to the structure of ideal types) – cannot *always* give objective causal explanations of the social reality. It follows that Kantian epistemology, as applied in the 'Verstehende Soziologie' through the construction of ideal types, gives rise to reflexivism, which *problematises* establishing objective sociological causal relations between events, and thus *threatens* to deprive sociology of its objectivity claim.

Concluding remarks

Before concluding, it would be very useful to once more address the following possible questions: Even if we accept Weber's ideal types as biased, why do we have to conclude that there is a methodological problem? Why should there be a relationship between methodology and bias in the first place? As pointed out before, *the decisive point here lies within the character specific to ideal types.* Like transcendental deduction being the key assumption for Kantian transcendental philosophy (i.e. just like the possibility of knowledge being causally dependent on the structures of the mind), the ideal type is the key assumption for objectivity in Weberian methodology. They are like the Kantian filters that make the empirical reality meaningful. The very need and purpose of the construction of the ideal types (their analyticity) are *to filter* the immense plurality of meanings and perspectives existing in social reality to arrive at an 'objectively possible' evaluation of the social phenomenon (Weber, 1949: 92). Now, it is precisely because of this that (the paper argued) biases become central to methodological assumptions. It follows that if, as Weber believes, ideal-type construction

is the way to go for the social sciences, then, it is also *necessary* that objectivity claims should directly take their *justification* from *how* the ideal types are constructed. As it is impossible for Kantian sensibility to perceive something outside of space and time (since the very structure is alien to other forms of objectivity), if it is biased, it is similarly not possible for the ideal type to arrive at an 'objectively possible' deduction because it is through this filter that the conceptualisation of social reality occurs and becomes meaningful to the observer. So, the 'social facts' or the 'social laws' it refers to – that which, for instance, a positivist may believe good representations of what things really are – will always be the reflection of the 'act of conceptualization' (Goddard, 1973: 18).

All being said, it should also be noted that the fundamental purpose of the arguments presented in this paper was neither to defend any of the methodological schools (the positivist or the hermeneutic, for instance) nor to elaborate on different methodological approaches in the social sciences, but rather to demonstrate specifically that it is the Kantian epistemological project embedded in the very nature of Weber's ideal-type construction that could deprive sociology of its objectivity claim. In short, the aim was to show that it is when Kantian ideal-type construction is taken as the core method of social sciences that the possibility of having 'objectively possible' evaluative statements becomes problematic. That is, to point out (and argue) that, in Weberian ideal-typically driven sociology, objectivity cannot be separated from biases (if there are any).

Finally, the reader should be aware that it is *not* the ideal-type construction as a method per se but its claim to arrive at 'objectively possible' and causally explained social facts that is problematised throughout the last section of the paper. It would be unfair, indeed, to generalise the criticism addressed here to the entire discussion of objectivity in social sciences, and this was not the intention of the paper. The relationship between *explanation* and *value* has always been problematic and mysterious (Oakes, 1990: 152). It is always possible to further delve into the critical philosophy of social sciences and to question the possibility of objective knowledge and *how* this possibility relates to different methodological schools of thought. Although such questions are beyond the scope of this paper, they definitely deserve more attention from the existing social-science literature.

Notes

[1] Interpretive sociology is not of course only consisted of Weber. There were also very important names such as Windelband, Dilthey or Rickert. Weber, for instance, in his methodology is highly influenced from Wilhelm Rickert. However, for the purposes of this paper, these other names are omitted. For a further comparison between Weber's and Rickert's sociological method, see Wagner and Zipprian(1986: 21–42).

[2] Here it should be mentioned that idealism versus materialism debate is a debate about metaphysics, and rationalism versus empiricism debate is about epistemology. Hence, they are not mutually exclusive. One can be an idealist as well as empiricist as in Berkeley's case.

[3] The debate on whether Kantian noumenal and phenomenal objects are of two different kind of metaphysical entities or whether phenomena is only an aspect of the noumena, hence whether they are the different aspects of the same metaphysical entity still goes on in Kantian literature. For more detailed discussion of the subject, see, for instance, Schrader, (1949: 30–44).

[4] These categories of sensation are called the 'forms of sensibility'. 'Forms of sensibility' are the categories of space and time. They are the structures through which the cognition of all sense experience becomes possible.

[5] Identifying is not enough of course. For Durkheim, finding causal relationships between the social facts, analysing what function these social facts serve and then classifying them are also needed. But expanding on them is beyond the scope of this paper.

[6] For detailed information on how Durkheim used organism analogies, see, Durkheim (1951: 287) and Durkheim (1982: 38–43).

[7] Apart from Weber's own statement, for a further investigation of the relationship between ideal types and Kantian epistemology, see also Barker (1980: 224–45), Oakes (1987: 434–46) and Shalin (1990: 1–29).

[8] It should be noted that this claim is objective not because it exist in the things themselves, but because the concept under which the association has occurred is universal and necessary for everyone; it is the structure of the mind that is universal. For a detailed discussion of how causality and objectivity are related, see, Ariew and Watkins,(2019: 737–48).

[9] Reflexivism, here, refers to the fact that reflectivity becoming the core structure of the relationship between ideal-type construction and bias of the observer that threatens the possibility of having adequate causal, objective deductions about social reality.

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Glossary

Berkeley's theory of knowledge: Refers to the theory of knowledge proposed by George Berkeley in the early-eighteenth century. It is a theory of knowledge which asserts that all knowledge comes from perception and all perception is the perception of ideas. A theory where the knowledge of the existence of sensible objects is determined by their being perceived by the mind. 'Esse est percipi'.

Durkheimian sociological method: Refers to the method of doing sociology fundamentally based on taking social facts as objective, external phenomena irrespective of individual agents performing them. Statistical analysis and generalisations rather than understanding and interpretation are preferred.

German idealism: A philosophical movement that originated mainly in Germany in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. It asserts that consciousness is the fundamental building block of reality. Nevertheless, idealists vary in their claims. Some argue that reality is entirely constructed by ideas and the mind, while others see reality as separate, yet think that reality is made comprehensible by the mediation of the mind. The most famous German idealists include Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Ideal-Type construction: Refers to the fundamental methodological tool of Weberian sociology. It is the method by which the sociologist abstracts from the totality of social empirical reality and comes up with analytical constructs in order to understand social phenomena and make causal explanations.

Interpretive sociology: Refers to the method of doing sociology best manifested by Max Weber, where the subjective understanding of the individual motivations behind social actions is the main purpose of sociological study. In order to understand the individual meanings attributed to social actions, sociologists use interpretations and not generalisations.

Kantian Copernican revolution: Refers to a radical change in the understanding of the relationship between the subject and object. Previously, it was believed that the subject should conform to the object in order for

the thing to be understood because the object in reality is a mind-independent object existing irrespective of the observer itself. Kant, on the other hand, argued that it is the object that should conform to the subject because understanding is a faculty of the mind, and irrespective of what the object really is in reality, it cannot be understood if it cannot be filtered through the structures of the mind. The word 'Copernican' is used by Kant himself. He draws similarities between him making the subject-object relationship upside down and Copernicus replacing the geocentric model of the cosmos with the heliocentric one, thus, reversing the relationship between the Sun and the Earth.

Kantian Epistemology: A theory of knowledge associated with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. It claims that knowledge is established through the incorporation of incoming stimuli under the categories of understanding in the mind. It is a theory of knowledge that merges empiricist and rationalist traditions by claiming that both the external world and the human mind are necessary for the construction of knowledge.

Mechanical philosophy: A reductionist natural philosophy which claims that the natural world is determined by machine-like, atomic processes and that all phenomena can be explained through matter and motion. Mostly popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Noumena: A concept in Kant's theory of knowledge. It refers to the objects that exist in themselves. As opposed to phenomena, they are unreachable by the human senses. They cannot be cognised and cannot be perceived. They are unknowable.

Positivist Comtean sociology: Refers to the positivist method of doing sociology embraced by August Comte, where social facts are taken as scientific, objective empirical laws and generalised to society. Positivists believe that social sciences should proceed like natural sciences in which empirical evidence, experiments, and statistics are used for the betterment of societies.

Reflexivity: Refers to a situation in which social explanations do not go beyond reflecting what is presupposed in the beginning.

Transcendental idealism: A theory on the possibility and limits of knowledge proposed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Firstly, it argues that there exists a mind-independent external world (things in themselves) as well as a mind-dependent world (things that appear to us). Secondly, it claims that all empirical objects that are cognised are mind-dependent (phenomenal) objects and that the mind-independent (noumenal) objects cannot be cognised by the human mind.

Verstehen: Meaning 'to understand in a deep way'; an approach in sociology where the researcher aims to understand another person's experience by putting him/herself in that person's shoes.