

Fact/Value

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Whether he wants it or not, or whether he is aware of it or not, anyone who spends his life studying society . . . is acting morally and usually politically as well.

C.W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (1970: 90)

The fact/value dichotomy is one of the most fundamental in the social sciences: it enters into the issues of objectivity and commitment at all levels of methodological, theoretical and moral practice of social science. Sociologists are interested in accurate, unbiased descriptions of social phenomena, in a theoretical framework that reveals the social world in its true nature. To present one's own values as fact is bias, if not propaganda, whilst to confuse fact with value is prejudicial to the interests of objective research. Sociologists are concerned about the moral implications of their outlook and practice. Does their research support illegitimate regimes? Does their theory support the status quo and justify sexism and racism? It is clear that the issue of value and fact raises questions central to a human science: those of **objectivity** in scientific knowledge and the basis of critique and practical activity.

A PRELIMINARY DEFINITION

But what is meant by fact and what is meant by value? It is important in this area to start with a simple definition that can help us in the discussion.

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A classic factual statement is 'It is raining outside.' This statement is either true or false according to a certain state of affairs, which is independent of the statement and which can **confirm** or disconfirm it. It is an observational statement: it is based on evidence that is observable. Further it is **empirical**: the state of affairs, the rain outside, is evident to our senses; we can see the rain, and if we were to go outside we would get wet. This state of affairs is neutral *vis-à-vis* my feelings about it. It just is so: it is what the philosopher Hume called a brute fact. I could be glad about it after a long period of drought, or I could be annoyed because I wanted to play tennis. Neither of these make any difference to the truth of the statement. Most importantly, it is independent of any decisions I may make about rain. Give or take the value of raindances, it doesn't actually make any sense to say that I have decided that it should rain this afternoon; one may hope, but one's decision cannot bring about the rain. Finally this state of affairs is shared and public: we are all getting wet in the bus queue. The nature of a fact is shown by these features of a factual statement: it is observational, empirical, independent of feelings, decisions and choice, and is public and shared.

These are in contrast to certain features of values and value judgements. Values range from simple preferences, through aesthetic judgements, to supreme moral and political choices that are crucial both to our life and to the maintenance of society. A preference could be, for example, 'I prefer cherries to apples.' This refers to a liking for one fruit rather than another; I like cherries, but Jane loathes them. There is nothing inherent in the nature of cherries that entails that one person loves them and another person hates them. This variability of taste preferences leads to the adage *de gustibus non est disputandum*, 'there can be no dispute about taste.' Many believe that this can be generalized to cover all value judgements. Already we can see that there is a difference from a fact here. No one would doubt the judgement of someone who hated cherries, in the way they would doubt the judgement or indeed sight of someone who denied that it was raining when it was. There would appear to be nothing in the nature of the object referred to that authorizes or legitimizes only one valid response to it.

This quality becomes more problematic when we move on to aesthetic judgements. I may say that Picasso is the greatest of painters or that Bach is the greatest of composers. I may cite certain features of *Guernica* – the lines, the form, its political and moral strength – as support for my judgement. Equally I may cite certain features of the 'St John Passion' as evidence of Bach's compositional skills. Indeed many people would agree with me. But there is nothing to prove that someone who holds the opposite view is quite simply wrong or needs to visit a doctor. Disputation about the greatness of artists is a central part of disputation about the nature of aesthetic values and ideals. David Hume said:

Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle, but has not in any proposition said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a

quality of the circle. It is only the effect which the figure produces upon the mind, whose peculiar structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. (1961: 291)

I have a right to my opinion, which has something to do with my outlook, my judgement and the choices which I make. So when we come to what Max Weber called ultimate evaluations there is a strong element of choice: if I decide that life is worth living, I have chosen to hold the value of optimism. If I have decided that I would rather die than submit to tyranny or oppression, then I have chosen the values of freedom and democracy over life itself. This element of choice is central to moral and political choice. I choose whether to vote Labour or Conservative – and if I can choose then I must be free in some way. But there is a further element of moral and political values that some have argued is their defining feature. We think here that something ought to be the case: governments ought not to oppress their people, democratic values ought to prevail in the world. I think that I ought to tell the truth and I ought to repay debts. This quality of ‘oughtness’ about moral values means that the logic of moral values is quite distinct from empirical judgements and indeed aesthetic values. It is the quality of obligation that for the philosopher Kant in the eighteenth century indicated the area of morality and is proof of its reality. So for Durkheim obligation is a defining feature of morality.

The concept of value thus covers a wide range of cases, from simple and unimportant preferences to supreme moral and political choices that lie at the heart of one’s life. The quality of value is indicated by the nature of moral judgement. Here we are apparently in the presence of a judgement rather than a statement. And this judgement expresses either a preference or a choice. This means that in contrast to a classic observation statement, these judgements are subjective in the sense that they have something to do with me as a person – my tastes and my choices – and therefore they are not necessarily public or shared in the same sense as an observation statement. Not everyone likes cherries, admires Picasso or is a democrat. That is, values are in some sense connected to my subjectivity, my individuality and to choices and decision in a way that factual matters are not. Lastly and most importantly there is a strong emotive component to values that is absent from factual areas. We care passionately about moral and political values.

The difference between these two types of things means that we should really keep them separate in our thought and reasoning. But do we?

In every system . . . which I have hitherto met with . . . I have always remark’d, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning . . . when of a sudden I am surpriz’d to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not concerned with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible, but it

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is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. (Hume 1967: 469)

This statement from the eighteenth-century philosopher, has acquired axiological status in almost all discussions of the relation between fact and value. It has become known as Hume's law. It tells us two things. Firstly, we must not confuse fact and value: they are two quite different things in relation to propositions and reality. Secondly, we cannot derive values from facts. These raise two quite separate problems for the social sciences. The first is part of the problem of objectivity. It raises the question of what are facts and what are values and how they can be kept separate in theory and research. The second relates to the problem of **commitment** – theoretical, moral or political. But if values are not to be derived from facts, where do they come from and how do we justify them?

Is the relation between fact and value dichotomous? Dichotomy means an unbridgeable logical gap. Here, it indicates a logical gap that is crossed at one's scientific and moral peril. But, as such, it is a dichotomy that many philosophers and social theorists have attempted to at least justify, if not modify or even transcend, in the interests of morality and social science. The issues raised are these. If fact and value are not connected, why do we point to certain states of affairs to justify our moral beliefs? Can any one seriously look at the Holocaust and its untold suffering and its millions of deaths and not morally condemn fascism? Is there not here demonstrated an essential connection with certain facts (the condition of people in concentration camps) and certain moral judgements (that this is to be condemned as inhuman and barbaric)? Are there no values associated with the empirical practice of social science? Are there any further moral and political values to being a sociologist? Or should sociology be value-free? That is, it raises the problem of the relation between values and social research in its broadest aspect.

MAX WEBER: FACT/VALUE AND VALUE FREEDOM

Max Weber established the classic position of the dichotomous nature of fact and value in the elaboration of his doctrine of value freedom (*Wertfreiheit*), in 'The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics' (1917). Weber holds that there are two distinct spheres: that of facts and that of values. This is for him a metaphysical position which entails a logical disjunction between statements of fact and statements of value. The sphere of facts, whether relating to the physical or the social, is

the subject matter of science, because it can only be dealt with by the observational methods of science. Questions relating to the sphere of facts and therefore the empirical sphere of science include: what phenomena exist in the world, what law-like relations exist between them, and what explains them? On the contrary, 'Value judgements are to be understood, where nothing else is implied or expressly stated, as practical evaluations of the unsatisfactory or satisfactory character of phenomena subject to our influence' (Weber 1949: 1). What follows from this

is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts (including the value orientated conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and his own practical evaluations i.e. his evaluation of those facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (including among those facts evaluations made by the empirical persons who are the objects of investigation). (1949: 11)

This follows because 'These two things are entirely and logically different and to deal with them as though they were the same represents a confusion of entirely heterogeneous problems' (1949: 11). All evaluations about the facts must be excluded from the sphere of science; all recommendations for action must be presented as extra-scientific.

These issues were developed in his earlier article "'Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy' (1904). This article was written partly in relation to questions of editorial policy of the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, which raised the question of the relation between value judgements and empirical material. He supports 'The logical distinction between "existential knowledge" i.e. knowledge of what "is" and "normative knowledge" i.e. knowledge of "what should be"' (1949: 51). In this Weber opposes objectivism in general and historicism in particular. The first is a general position that is maintained by a number of thinkers in various ways. It holds that what is 'normatively right' is identical with 'the immutably existent' (1949: 51). The second holds that what is right is identical with what emerges in the historical process. Giddens (1993) maintains that Weber was in particular attacking theories of natural right and Marxist theories of history. These two positions confuse fact and value. And further they derive values from facts: that is, they believe that principles of right action should be derived from facts. For Weber, 'It can never be the task of an empirical science to provide binding norms and ideals from which directives for immediate practical activity can be derived' (1949: 52). Theories of natural right and Marxist theories of history each involve an illegitimate extension of empirical knowledge. The distinction between fact and value is associated with the distinction between means and ends. Empirical knowledge can help us determine which means might be the best way to achieve any end: it can help us to decide on the practicality of any means or indeed the consequences of following any particular line of

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action. It can never determine ends of action for us. Final or ultimate evaluations can only be the lonely and subjective decision of each individual thinker.

The distinction between fact and value is especially important in the social sciences, for Weber, because these concern human action. Whatever our preferences we must acknowledge the existence or truth of certain forms of social life. The study of human action rapidly becomes political when moral judgement is applied to it, and in the interest of the dispassionate study of the social we must avoid the emotional pressures involved in the political. This was particularly important in the German universities during the First World War when Weber's article was written. Gouldner (1973) argued that Weber was concerned with the freedom of action and integrity of the state and particularly the university, as part of Western rationalism. The state might be impelled into censoring the university, and therefore compromising its autonomy, if political judgements were expressed from the university platform. It is interesting to note that Weber, who might otherwise appear a liberal in moral and political views, argues, according to Gouldner, that professors are not entitled to freedom from state control in matters of values, because these do not rest on academic specialism (1973: 9).

Weber is keen to distinguish himself from 'pseudo-ethical neutrality'. He does not hold that the teacher or the thinker should have no values: unfortunately he is often portrayed in this fashion. Ethical neutrality in the strictest sense would indicate a thinker who had not developed an ethical position, and for Weber this would be a person who had forfeited the necessity for rational moral self-determination. This latter concept is an important element of Weber's position. He believed that real ethical decision is private, individual and lonely. In other words, showing that all evaluation is extra-scientific for Weber does not entail moral indifference: 'An attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific objectivity' (1949: 60). It does follow from his views that someone with no principles or values and with an indifference to suffering or the great importance of human life, for example, is going to be a more objective researcher. Indeed for him the logical separation between facts is the precondition of both meaningful moral argument and scientific objectivity. It is because morality is so important to him that it must be kept separate: it is a matter of individual subjective choice, for the thinker concerned.

Rather, the factual and the evaluative must be kept clearly separate, because only the sphere of fact is capable of objectivity and can therefore be part of science. Weber insists that evaluations, in both teaching and research, must be shown to be the choice and determination of the thinker concerned. Good teaching and research involve the clearest exposition of the empirical material and clearest representation of the values of the thinker and the 'value relevance' that governed the choice of empirical material.

There are certain issues that clearly immediately stem from this. Firstly, is Weber's characterization of moral decision accurate: does it imply the irrationality of ethics? Secondly, how sociological is the separation? And thirdly, is there really a strictly empirical, value-neutral realm of fact that constitutes the kernel of a science and is the cornerstone of its objectivity?

VALUES AS IRRATIONAL?

Firstly, this view of the nature of moral decision was influenced by different philosophies. Giddens (1993) believes that it was Kant rather than Hume who influenced Weber. On the contrary, I suggest that it was neo-Kantian German thought that influenced him, rather than Kant himself. It was a tendency of neo-Kantian thought in Germany to more greatly emphasize the split between science and values than Kant. Both science and ethics were aspects of reason for Kant. Reason was not limited to science; he did not make morality the matter of subjective choice and faith that is finally irrational for Weber. He held that certain ethical positions could be established objectively, i.e. as universally shared by all rational beings. For him this follows from the nature of practical reason (Kant 1964). This is quite different from Weber's position which holds to the subjectivity of values and their irreconcilable nature.

Brubaker in *The Limits of Rationality* (1984) shows that Weber's position leads to 'the ethical irrationality of the world'. The subjectivity and relativity of value orientations leads to a value clash, because values are inner to individuals: they are subjectively generated and therefore can only claim subjective validity. This clash of value orientations is part of the struggle for meaning in the modern world. That there is no rational resolution of value conflict is part of Weber's dark vision of the modern world. Giddens points out that value conflict is in turn associated with his stress on the primacy of power and power struggles in social development. Different systems of cultural values cannot be resolved by a demonstration of the rational superiority of one over the other, but only by the power of a group to impose its will on those different from itself. This conception of ethical irrationality is for certain thinkers (Kant and Durkheim, for example) a major problem, not the solution to modern moral and political dilemmas.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS DEFINITION OF VALUE

The other features of Weber's thought were certain elements of empiricist and positivist thought. From Hume in the eighteenth century to the

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twentieth century, a characteristic of this is that only logical and empirical statements are capable of any verification and therefore of objectivity. Values are therefore subjective and non-verifiable. Added to these influences is that of Nietzsche and existentialist thought, where it is held that morality is a matter of individual faith or affirmation. Wilhelm Hennis argues that Weber was influenced by Nietzsche's 'ethic of distinction' (1988: 150). If it is indeed the case that Weber was influenced by Nietzsche's 'genealogy of morals', then he cannot have failed to note the distinction between slave morality and the free affirmations of those who have lost guilt and bad conscience.

Under this interpretation, there is a huge difference between Weber and Kant and Durkheim. Weber, like Kant, believes that we must be free when we decide on a moral action. However for Kant this freedom is rational in the sense that the action must be compatible with a rule that could be undertaken by all: it must make sense as a general rule of behaviour. On this basis, lying cannot make sense as a general rule of action for it cannot be consistently acted on. Further for Durkheim all morality must be considered in terms of solidarity. The total moral relations between persons in society make up the 'objective sphere' in which all moral judgements must be finally assessed. Here then heroic affirmations must be subject to a wider court of appeal. This consideration must limit features of subjectivity and loneliness that characterize Weber's account of moral decision-making. Further if there are considerations that go beyond the subjective loneliness of the moral agent, then we have to consider whether the radical split between value and fact can be maintained, in the sense that value is subjective and fact is objective.

From a philosophical point of view, much work in modern moral philosophy has denied the logical gulf between fact and value that Weber's distinction so relies upon. Certain general lines of argument establish that there can be no absolute gap between what is evaluative and what is factual – particularly in relation to morality. Morality concerns some fundamental conceptions, like goodness or welfare or even happiness, that are not reducible to the private choice of the individual. These constitute limits on what can plausibly be called moral action. These thus constitute 'bridge notions' between values and facts, and allow one to derive values from facts in certain instances.

HOW SOCIOLOGICAL IS THE DISTINCTION?

It is important to consider just how sociological this account of value is. It is characteristic of a Protestant culture, which stresses the individual conscience as the arbiter of values at the expense of wider institutional frameworks of value authentication. If Weber's account bears such cultural

baggage, it would be simply ethnocentric to take this as the arbiter of all accounts of value and its social relations. For Durkheim values are part of a wider framework – the totality of social relations – and as such the validity of each value decision must to some extent be arbitrated in terms of a wider framework than my own private choices. For this reason, he disputes the separation of fact from value in his paper ‘Value Judgements and Judgements of Reality’ (1911): ‘There is not one way of thinking and judging for dealing with existence and another for estimating value’ (1974b: 95). Both are aspects of judgement and all judgement involves ideals. ‘The function of some is to express the reality to which they adhere. These are properly called concepts. The function of others is, on the contrary, to transfigure the realities to which they relate, and these are the ideals of value’ (1974b: 95). Ideals are not cold abstractions which the individual determines alone, for behind them lies the power of the collective. For this reason they are dynamic and capable of transforming reality (1974b: 93).

COMMITMENT AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

One of the most important conclusions of Weber’s position is that considerations of justice in society must be excluded from the objective and empirical aspect of sociology, which must be value-free. In this Weber is in direct contrast to Durkheim, who in *The Division of Labour in Society* argues that the search for justice must be a primary task of modern societies. Charles Taylor (1994) in ‘Neutrality in Political Science’ argues against the conception of value neutrality, and therefore the separation between facts and values, because to say that something fulfils human wants and needs is a *prima facie* reason to call it good. That is, goodness cannot rely solely on my decision which is arbitrary in relation to facts. A central fact that governs my choice must be certain considerations about the human condition. That is, the concept of good has an objective connection with human welfare, and cannot be reduced to my individual choice. What Taylor argued for political science we can adapt to social science: ‘A sociological (political) framework cannot fail to contain some, even implicit conception of human needs, wants, purposes’ (1994: 568). This would commit sociology to value commitment and not value freedom.

THE NEUTRALITY OF FACTS AND SOCIOLOGY

The other aspect of Weber’s position implies that there is a value-neutral area of facts, discoverable as empirical regularities, and this constitutes the scientific kernel of any science. It is this claim that is particularly

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contentious in the social sciences. Whether there are any absolutely value-neutral facts is the key issue of the social sciences. The example of an empirical proposition is simple and clear: unfortunately there are few examples of such value-neutral empirical material in the social sciences. This follows not because of the biased nature of sociology, but because of the material it studies. It concerns reality as given to different conceptual systems and different value schemes. Reality as it is 'in itself' is not sociologically significant, because what is important is the belief system, the code, the representation that each particular group or culture makes of the world, and how this affects their behaviour and social action. What is important is that an unbiased account of this is given. Of course Weber recognized the problems here and established classic positions in relation to concept formation both at the level of agent and culture and at the theoretical level. Can we achieve a description of these 'forms of life', as Wittgenstein called them, in a value-free and empirical way? Can we get inside other cultures and value systems in a value-free way? Can we represent action and systems of action in our own culture or society in a value-free way?

MORAL OBJECTIVISM AGAINST WEBER

This raises the question of whether there is any set of facts whose truth logically compels a certain set of value responses, and which is central to a human science. That is, could the social sciences counter Weber with a new-found objectivism? For Weber the essentially subjective nature of moral judgement means that there is nothing inherent in the facts to logically compel us to hold a particular view: for him we are here in the sphere of ultimate evaluations, and these are a matter of faith and not reason (Weber 1949: 14, 55). Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History* (1953) argued for a position of moral objectivism against Weber's subjectivist view of ultimate evaluations. He argues that this theory is a central component of Weber's value-free doctrine. If we can establish that this ethical subjectivism is wrong then a central component of his value-free doctrine will fall, and with it Weber's claim that we can only have objective knowledge of empirical value-free facts. Thus Strauss challenges Weber's implication that there can be no knowledge, only faith about ultimate evaluations. We know that tyranny and cruelty are wrong, and we have no difficulty in recognizing them when we see them. Indeed he goes further and claims that it is simply unscientific to not describe them as such: to avoid these judgements is to be unscientific. To do so is to fail to see the social phenomena for what they are. Thus the Nazi concentration camps, as a matter of science and sociological truth, must be described as evil. One of the consequences of Weber's position is that all evaluations must be excluded from the sphere

of science. It follows that questions of justice in society must be excluded from all objective considerations in social science. For Strauss objective moral descriptions of moral phenomena should be central to a morally committed social science.

Theodor Adorno, although from a different logic and politics, pursues a similar line of reasoning: 'Society, the knowledge of which is ultimately the aim of sociology if it is to be more than a mere technique, can only crystallize at all around a conception of the just society' (1976: 118). It follows that knowledge of society does not imply value-free knowledge. He disputes the disjunction between objectivity and value, and therefore the equation of the social scientific with value freedom. Indeed this disjunction, together with the distinction between means and ends, is part of a societal process. This split was not found at a certain moment of history and philosophy: it is not found in Kant and Hegel. Rather it is found in a type of society characterized above all by the exchange relation. This leads to 'dissections of abstraction'. All judgement about reality is made on the basis of certain essential features about that reality and is therefore tied to that reality; it is not based on an arbitrary standpoint or privately and absolutely autonomous choice of values. We are parts of a totality and therefore theory, action and value cannot be 'exhausted in a subjectively irrational decision' (1976: 119). Indeed he argues, with Karl Popper, that value-free sociology is not thereby objectivist, but is subjectivist because essentially psychologist. Sociology should establish knowledge of those institutions that surround the individual, it should focus on the 'socially active environment' which is found in institutions: these are independent of the choice of value relevances and the ultimate evaluations of the individuals concerned or even the sociologists and their framework of interpretation. He thus denies the philosophy and the sociology of the standpoint. 'The experience of the contradictory character of societal reality is not an arbitrary standpoint, but rather the motive which first constitutes the first possibility of sociology' (1976: 120). Thus value-free sociology conceals the antagonistic character of reality.

Popper (1976) from a different position argues that the science of sociology actually requires not value freedom but the implementation of a certain type of value. It is a mistake to assume that the objectivity of science rests on the objectivity of the scientist: on this basis the natural scientist must always be more objective than a social scientist, because by definition s/he is more 'detached' from the subject matter, and therefore more value-free. For Popper the objectivity of science rests on the 'critical method'. This he contrasts to inductivism which assumes that science must start with neutral, empirical observations, and progress from there to the accumulation of data through induction to generalizations and to the establishment of a law. On this model only in the rarest cases can scientists detach themselves from the values of their class and culture, and therefore establish a 'value-free' social science. The critical approach admits that we must

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always start with a hypothesis and that our approach to the facts is always dictated by this: there are no theory-neutral or value-free facts *per se*. Rather what we must ensure is that our hypothesis is subject to all possible disconfirmation at the hands of experience. In particular we must search for criticism within the tradition of scientific research. For Popper objectivity rests solely on pertinent mutual criticism. With Weber, he recognizes the paradoxical nature of value freedom – that it is itself a value. What we must search for are social values that enable the critical tradition to flourish. We can then isolate the social values that help foster objectivity. These are competition (of individual scientists and various schools), tradition (namely the critical tradition), social institution (publication, congresses), and lastly the power of the state (its tolerance of free discussion). Thus there are values of the highest order which are associated with relevance, significance and the search for truth.

WEBER'S DOCTRINE IN SOCIOLOGY

Nevertheless Weber's position on value freedom has been taken in a particular way in sociology – not simply in the illusion of purely empirical objectivist sociology that ignores his reminder that all empirical material is gathered in terms of 'value relevance', but mostly in terms of a morally neutral apolitical theory. As Gouldner said in 'Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of Value-Free Sociology':

What to Weber was an agonizing expression of a highly personal faith, intensely felt and painstakingly argued, has today become a hollow catechism, a password, and a good excuse for no longer thinking seriously. It has become increasingly the trivial token of professional respectability . . . the gentleman's promise that boats will not be rocked. (1973: 6)

The doctrine has had good as well as bad effects on sociology. On the plus side it benefited the autonomy of sociology: it freed it from Church and state, and gave the subject the freedom to pursue its own theoretical concerns. And it freed sociologists from the 'moral compulsiveness' of their own locality or 'tribe'. On the negative side it contributed to the increasing professionalization of the subject as just one more element to be sold to the highest bidder in the marketplace. 'Thou shalt not commit a critical or negative value-judgement – especially of one's own society' (1973: 14). It is associated with the sociological 'classicists' who are committed to the rituals of the craft to the extent of emptying it of significant truth. In contrast to these are the Romantics who prefer the 'vivid ethnographic' and 'sensuously expressive' to 'dull taxonomy' and 'formal questionnaires' (1973: 18). Further Gouldner points out that the value-free doctrine is

subject to political pressures: whilst many were prepared to adopt it before Hiroshima, after they were not so sure.

It is quite clear that Weber has given a warning for social science that is of permanent value. Certain social theories that have presented themselves as the most objective can be seen to have concealed value premises that are presented as either factual or objective or scientific, when in fact they represent the value preferences or class outlook of the thinkers/system concerned. Marxism presented itself as an objective, scientific view of history and society. A central component of its theoretical equipment is the concept of contradiction. The philosophical background to Marxist thought is Hegelianism: here the concept of contradiction implies an insufficiency, an imperfection. Socialist society is non-contradictory, in contrast to capitalist. Capitalist society cannot survive because it is inherently contradictory; there are forces released which are mutually incompatible. For Engels the fundamental contradiction is that between socialized production and capitalist appropriation: that is, production is co-operative and social, but the fruits of this labour is appropriated by just a few individuals, the capitalists. As Lessnof (1974) shows, this cannot mean a logical contradiction. Rather it is a combination of two elements: firstly, this state of affairs is unjust (a value judgement); secondly, it leads to conflict between wage-earners and capitalists (a judgement of fact). For Weber the first, as a value judgement, should be presented as a value choice of the thinker and not as part of an objective process of history, and should not be confused with the second which is factual. To confuse these two different types of statement in a single term 'contradiction' offends against Weber's prescription.

Lessnof also rightly points out that functionalism also contains a concealed value premise that is dressed up as a factual statement. There are two types of function in relation to a social system: 'institutional relational functionalism' means that which contributes to maintaining the social system in its existing form; 'societal survival functionalism' means that which maintains the social system in any form whatever. Both are factual meanings, but there is implicit a value judgement that this is a desirable effect of a social practice, that this is the effect a social practice ought to produce. I will not discuss whether or not there is an essential link between conservatism and functionalism. Gouldner's 'Coming Crisis' has documented a link. We can at least raise the question of whether conservative thinkers conceal their political preferences under descriptions of 'objective' functional relations. Most recently, feminist thought has shown us that what is presented as an objective viewpoint on social relations can conceal a patriarchal view, which does not just imply the subordination of women, but takes its own masculinist bias as identical with the real. All of these are bad sociology: not only are they theoretically inadequate in relation to the empirical material, but the thinkers concerned are identifying the real with their own values. All would have benefited from the frank admission of the proponents of their own political preferences.

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Finally, as Gouldner shows in 'The Sociologist as Partisan' (1973), however much we reveal our commitments and empathies in sociological research, the problem of objectivity remains an essential goal in the pursuit of truth. And for this reason Weber's dichotomy, despite its difficulties, remains a heuristic, a dynamic ideal in the Durkheimian sense, which functions to stimulate research. It would seem to be a dichotomy we cannot live with, but cannot function without.

KEY CONCEPTS

FACT A fact is what is said to be the case and it is associated with observation and experiment. All high status forms of knowledge, like science, try to deal in facts. Facts are supposed not to be negotiable, they are lasting and they are not open to question. Science not only determines facts it also, at its best, challenges them.

VALUE Values are statements which are supposed to be much more tied up with judgement and subjectivity. Values are suppositions, they are not objective and they do not apply to all people. That 'this is a blue door' is a fact; that 'I like blue doors' is a value. However, if I say 'the Holocaust was evil' is that a fact or a value?

Objective This is a state of affairs having to do with the qualities of the object in reality or the object as perceived as opposed to qualities in the minds of the people perceiving them. Objectivity is another way of claiming status for a statement, if it is objective it is not open to interpretation.

Confirmation This is a method of science that seeks to show that a statement or a state of affairs is true. If I seek to confirm something then I seek to show that it is true, often by repeating an experiment.

Empirical Facts or beliefs that are usually based wholly on experiment and observation. Most sciences claim that their knowledge is empirical and thus based on practical scientific knowledge of the world.

Commitment A willing acknowledgement of an individual's faith or belief in another or in an idea. A commitment implies an unequivocal acceptance of a person, their theories, or a set of beliefs.