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Organon 31, 95-111

2002

Artykuł umieszczony jest w kolekcji cyfrowej Bazhum, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych tworzonej przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego.

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie ze środków specjalnych MNiSW dzięki Wydziałowi Historycznemu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



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ON THE SUBJECTIVE FUNCTION OF THE SOCIAL BEING.
MAX WEBER'S AND ERNST CASSIRER'S CATEGORY OF *VERSTEHEN*

*Ist uns nur der Wille das Ding an sich,
die Idee aber die unmittelbare Objektivität jenes Willens auf einer bestimmten Stufe;
so finden wir Kants Ding an sich und Platons Idee, die ihm allein $\delta\nu\tau\omega\varsigma\ \delta\nu$ ist,
diese beiden großen dunkeln Paradoxen, der beiden größten Philosophen der Occidents,
– zwar nicht als identisch,
aber doch als sehr nahe verwandt und nur durch eine einzige Bestimmung unterschieden.*
Arthur Schopenhauer¹

Neither Max Weber (1864–1920) nor Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) are capable of overcoming the social or epistemical relation of object – subject, remaining within the limits of one plane of *Verstehen*. A purely linear, cause–and–effect understanding – within the limits of purposively rational actions (*zweckrational Handeln*) of the subject. In this way the research field is being constrained to one plane of what is possible to express by the use of basic symbolization, which is giving to the being the name of a subject². On ground of the social placement of an individual, a person (not anymore an experiencing subject), is the way of experiencing social space possible? Suspension of judgment in case of the subjective understanding of social action in the event of a *stricte* emotional action. Reference to social space in a border situation of a person living in his or her surrounding, not of the subject of action.

How can we thus overcome the being's limitations in experiencing, resulting from the relation of being a subject oriented to satisfying its understanding of social space by action?

The individual in an act of emotional action is comprehensible only to the observer who does not separate himself from the role of an experiencing subject; similarly, the performer of an emotional action is able to understand it only in retrospective, referring to symbolization, that is being the subject of the action. The emotional action, similarly to the purposively rational action, is logically coherent. The subject is not able to *project his own ego or his own emotional experience* in a clear way, just in one look, nor is he able to *empathically apprehend the emotional context*³. Any retrospection entangles the

¹ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Philipp Reclam, Leipzig 1891, t. 1, 2, § 31.

² Cf. K. Jaspers's considerations on the Encompassing (*das Umgreifende*) and Whitehead's surplus conception (*superject*). A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, The University Press, Cambridge 1953, forcing itself into the epistemic relation of subject – object.

³ Cf. E. Hałas, *Etyczne dylematy Verstehen w socjologii. Teodora Abła spotkanie z nazizmem* (under print), § 1: *The Problems of Understanding*.

locutive carrier, and thus two further aspects (illocution and symbolic perlocution). The assessment of emotional acting is thus rational for the sake of the symbolic references of the person analyzing the subject, or else is not rational (extrarationality), entailing further actions of the same character. However, we never reach the insight into the emotionality of the action, it always remains beyond our cognitive capabilities. It neither determines the being. Thus it is merely that, what is inaccessible to the subject. And so is the suspension of the limiting, bipolar relation of subject – object. It is the Greek who were the first to conclude, that a human being is the much more perfect, the less needs he or she manifests, in other words, the less object-wise, but not cognitively, he reaches beyond himself. The domination over the inspection conditions and pure thinking are, according to Cassirer, the basic conditions for a plastic configuration of the being's objectiveness. Whereas symbolizations serve also to express that, what can be expressed only non-verbally. This is where Plato's¹ category of the *in-between* (μεταξύ) reappears, the principle of the hermeneutics, serving in this moment not only the understanding of the internal relation adequately binding the factuality and rationality within the sphere of science, which comes naturally, but – as I will try to demonstrate further on – it serves the humanistic analysis (*Verstehen* – *understanding*) of the social action supporting in disadvantage the empathic (*Einfühlung* – *empathy*) way of understanding social phenomena.

1. Reference to the Sozialwissenschaften Method

Neither sensorial perception, nor intuition give us reliable knowledge on the universe and culture. In both cases we grasp only that, what is close to us. Natural science has discovered experiments and laws; the humanities, after discovering the anthropoconcrete, have defined the limits of perception. The synthesis of occurrences appearing in a so anthropocentrically and anthropomorphically sketched world presents the goal for perception and understanding, the filling of which becomes the symbolization of meanings, incidents and actions of a human being. In this spirit characterizes Cassirer's the sense of *Geisteswissenschaften*². Cassirer's thesis on the symbolic character of culture includes the thought, that all cultural occurrences create an image of the world, to which a meaning can be given, and which thus may be understood. He consequently claims that when we want to describe a cultural phenomenon in its anthropological context, we do not ask for its reasons, but concentrate instead on the understanding of the activity in its symbols, in its meaning. However, this is not an opinion suspended in an epistemic void, but another attempt of merging the artificially split reality. Θεωρία, because this is what we are referring to, is an already pre-Plato whole of perception of the nature's order, part of which is the social reality, achieved by thought speculation. Πραξίς, empiricism, does not comprise in this conception the opposite.

A similar approach has been applied by Weber. The basic assumptions of

¹ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 204 a–b.

² E. Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften. Fünf Studien in: Götesborgs Högskolas Årsskrift*, t. 47, Wettergren & Kerbers, Göteborg 1942.

Weber's methodology of social sciences can be outlined as follows: (a) the action of an individual cannot be described by the use of legal and speculative mechanistical terminology. Because of its infinite complexity and reference to the same context, actions undertaken by the subject cannot be framed in the categories of the experimental method of natural science¹. Social activities (*soziale Handeln*) of individuals are central categories of sociology and methodology of sciences. He emphasizes the theological character of human actions. It seems to be essential, that actions are considered here in two meanings: either in relation to a concrete meaning for the subject, or in an ideal–typological understanding, having a subjective meaning for another participant. (b) One cannot overlook in the perception the meaning of motivation attributed to the action by the individual performer². It is thus not possible to cognize a human being as such without referring to history. (c) *Ipsa facto* Weber postulates to create, on the basis of the imagination of purely rational occurrences, mental images, isolated from this infinite diversity. Weber's *Sozialwissenschaften* allow the subject of social activities the understanding of his or her needs and their translation into the language of practical moves, however – what is evident – they cannot indicate what he or she should be wanting. Based on the analysis of the *rational purposefulness* of action – the axis of the whole system – the ideal–typological constructions become suspended in the ontological void. The subject's activity is not convincingly anchored in the historical being.

Thus the concept of *understanding* appears – superior to all cognitive concepts: *Es gibt keine schlechthin «objektive» wissenschaftliche Analyse des Kulturlebens oder – was vielleicht etwas Engeres, für unsern Zweck aber sicher nichts wesentlich anderes bedeutet – der «sozialen Erscheinungen» unabhängig von speziellen und «einseitigen» Gesichtspunkten, nach denen sie – ausdrücklich oder stillschweigend, bewußt oder unbewußt – als Forschungsobjekt ausgewählt, analysiert und darstellend gegliedert werden. Der Grund liegt in der Eigenart des Erkenntnisziels einer jeden sozialwissenschaftlichen Arbeit, die über eine rein formale Betrachtung der Normen rechtlichen oder konventionellen – des sozialen Beieinanderseins hinausgehen will.*

Die Sozialwissenschaft, die wir treiben wollen, ist eine Wirklichkeitswissenschaft. Wir wollen die uns umgebende Wirklichkeit des Lebens, in welches wir hineingestellt sind, in ihrer Eigenart verstehen – den Zusammenhang und die Kultur bedeutung ihrer einzelnen Erscheinungen in ihrer heutigen Gestaltung einerseits, die Gründe ihres geschichtlichen So–und–nicht–anders–Gewordenseins andererseits. Nun bietet uns das Leben, sobald wir uns auf die Art, in der es uns unmittelbar entgegentritt, zu besinnen suchen, eine schlechthin unendliche Mannigfaltigkeit von nach– und nebe–

¹ Weber follows here the tradition of the German scientific knowledge school, treating the real being – whether in the natural, subjective or social layer – as a homogeneous ontological being, intercepting only the conviction about the distinctness of the methods used by the nomotetic approach on one hand, and the idiographic approach of *Geisteswissenschaften* on the other.

² The *before–understood* character of the world of the active subject has been noticed by Weber, and later Schütz, Sartori, Bryant.

neinander auftauchenden und vergehenden Vorgängen, «in» uns und «außer» uns. Und die absolute Unendlichkeit dieser Mannigfaltigkeit bleibt intensiv durchaus ungemindert auch dann bestehen, wenn wir ein einzelnes «Objekt» – etwa einen konkreten Tauschakt isoliert ins Auge fassen, – sobald wir nämlich ernstlich versuchen wollen, dies «Einzelne» erschöpfend in allen seinen individuellen Bestandteilen auch nur zu beschreiben, geschweige denn es in seiner kausalen Bedingtheit zu erfassen. (...) Ausgangspunkt des sozialwissenschaftlichen Interesses ist nun zweifellos die wirkliche, also individuelle Gestaltung des uns umgebenden sozialen Kulturlebens in seinem universellen, aber deshalb natürlich nicht minder individuell gestalteten, Zusammenhange und in seinem Gewordensein aus anderen, selbstverständlich wiederum individuell gearteten, sozialen Kulturzuständen heraus.¹

Thus Weber anticipates N. Hartmann's view, expressed in *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, accepting that one cannot understand the subject's action without referring to the social space, in which it is found. One should therefore start from the comprehensive structure of the world of social phenomena. Weber does not consider the testing of the subject's *pure consciousness* to be a sufficient condition, nor even a necessary one, for learning – understanding – the constellation of events, neither does he consider history to be one. However, it is difficult to find in Weber's works an element firmly linking the subject with the social space, not so much from the point of view of the observer – researcher, as from the point of view of the actor. *Verstehen* is a good methodological tool used as an element of the instrument for ideal–typological understanding, it is in itself a specific ideal type, but it does not tuned out to be useful whilst plunged in the actor's flux of life. The ideal type is a model of reality we think of (cf. Wittgenstein), thus it does not guarantee the understanding of the subject's actions *en bloc*. We need a tool enabling us to find unity in the pataraxy of linguistic forms or the common coexistence of phenomena, which is not equivalent to finding the internal goal of the constellation, at which it would aim. To Hegel the development, being a free process in nature, in the spiritual domain seemed to be a tough, never–ending fight with oneself. Weber, similarly, remains at the level of opposing – although at the level of choosing the testing methods only – the physical being to the thought; also the psychical being to the spiritual one. This is because of the rooting of *ratio* in the purposefulness of the subject's action and the transfer of this purposeful character to the layer of over–individual *consciousness*. It is only Cassirer who, renouncing the one–sided vision of the *homo rationalis*, creates the universal *homo symbolicus*, not existing anymore in the dualistically conditioned world. According to Cassirer, the conception and problem of the symbol – which is the subject here – arises exactly there, where the relation of the sensorial and the intelligible worlds is defined, the contact point for the phenomenon and the idea *before the intellectual work of conceiving und understanding of phenomena can set in, the work of naming must have preceded it, and have reached a certain point of elaboration (...) All theoretical*

¹ M. Weber, *Die «Objektivität» sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis* in: M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen [4 ed.] 1973, pp. 170–173.

cognition takes its departure from a world already preformed by language. (...) This immediate dependence is harder to realize than anything that the mind creates mediately, by conscious thought processes.¹ This can be referred to the language and myth, as well as art, religion and science: *The original bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as also mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate.*²

Cassirer's opinion however, deriving from the Marburg neo-kantism, is not only a more detailed Weber's consideration – of Baden and Rickert in its essence. The main difference deciding on the different approach to the sense of *Verstehen* is the completely distinct anchorage of the humanities' cognition in values. Weber, following the path set by Rickert, makes *Verstehen* a method of the philosophy of values, creating a construction referring to value, with a simultaneous liberation from the valuation of the discourse. Whereas Cassirer expresses cognition as a new method of perceiving reality, being a theory and analysis of symbolic forms. Cassirer's apriority assumes, similarly to Weber's *verstehende Soziologie*, the existence of a logic structure of reality. For Cassirer an important thing is creation (from the point of view of the actor) and the search in symbolizations for specific, individual actions of the actor (from the point of view of the researcher)³. Whereas for Weber what counts is the discovering of the *pure* sense of the action, entangled in the value. Cassirer thus seems to step more surely, dismissing values, for which the methodological tools fail at the first attempts to place reality in the common system of values, until now remaining undiscovered. Thus by overcoming *the error of voluntarism*⁴, it gives values a secondary meaning.

2. The Symbol and its Understanding

Factual and theoretical, particular and universal, the appearing relations gain a special meaning in the Weber's methodology. But *Verstehen* relates to the interpretation of meanings in the society in a particular way, as social situations are built from meanings carried in by the individual participants – subjects, but not always subjects intentionally present in the social space limited by specific constellations of actions and social individuals.

Weber, similarly to Cassirer, perceived the world of social actions as being derived from chaos. However, according to him it gains shape through understanding, and thus it comes close to the social determinism and the extreme teleologism. The former goal conception – justified in the interpretation of the subject's actions – totally fails in the macro scale. The development of

¹ E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, transl. S. K. Langer, Harper & Brothers, New York 1946, p. 28.

² E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, pp. 43–45.

³ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, t. 1: *Die Sprache*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt [2 ed.] 1973, p. 11.

⁴ Cf. Ch. G. A. Bryant, *Conceptual Variations and Conceptual Relativism in the Social Sciences* in: *Conceptual relativism in Social Science*, (ed.) D. Raven, B. F. van Vucht Tijssen, University of Utrecht, Utrecht 1987, pp. 83–89.

capitalistic behaviours of individual subjects corresponds in no way to the development of the European capitalism. Still, this is the assumption behind Weber's conviction on the correctness of the ambition to understand the world – also in its social life dimension – and reaching this desired goal by reflections upon chosen aspects of reality in their holistic conception. For Weber writes in the year 1906: *Unsere eigentliche Frage ist ja nun aber: durch welche logischen Operationen gewinnen wir die Einsicht und vermögen wir sie demonstrierend zu begründen, daß eine solche Kausalbeziehung zwischen jenen «wesentlichen» Bestandteilen des Erfolges und bestimmten Bestandteilen aus der Unendlichkeit determinierender Momente vorliegt. Offenbar nicht durch einfache «Beobachtung» des Herganges, – dann jedenfalls nicht, wenn man darunter ein «voraussetzungsloses», geistiges «Photographieren» aller in dem fraglichen Raum- und Zeitabschnitt vorgefallenen physischen und psychischen Hergänge versteht, selbst wenn ein solches möglich wäre. Sondern die kausale Zurechnung vollzieht sich in Gestalt eines Gedankenprozesses, welcher eine Serie von Abstraktionen enthält. Die erste und entscheidende ist nun eben die, daß wir von den tatsächlichen kausalen Komponenten des Verlaufs eine oder einige in bestimmter Richtung abgeändert denken und uns fragen, ob unter den dergestalt abgeänderten Bedingungen des Hergangs der (in den «wesentlichen» Punkten) gleiche Erfolg oder welcher andere «zu erwarten gewesen» wäre.*¹

Interesting in the Weber's system is the fact of composition. Despite his emphasis on rationality at every step – the growing rationalization of the social space, his own system is not composed in a way to emphasize and confirm this rationality. It is hard not to notice, that Weber seems to have the consciousness that something different are theoretical considerations on the reference to the value and the reference itself, and something else are the hard facts of life, in which the individual conducts his or her socially important actions usually deprived of reference to the wider, social, not even speaking of the historical scale of phenomena². Weber follows in his works the notion, that social life cannot be explained by conceptions of those, who participate in it, but by deeper reasons escaping consciousness³.

These for sure can be Cassirer's logical structures, which can be reached through the tangle of individual facts and phenomena. These logical structures, systems of symbolic forms create a twofold *universum* of culture: (a) liberation from the verification of values, (b) covering by its scope the whole of culturally meaningful facts and phenomena. It is no longer an ontological unity, but a functional one. They gain a cultural sense by a functional reference to *physis*. It does not mean, however, that their natural accessibility of

¹ M. Weber, *Objektive Möglichkeit und adäquate Verursachung in der historischen Kausalbetrachtung* in: M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 273.

² More on the twofold function of value cf. Z. Krasnodębski; *M. Weber*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1999, pp. 42–48 *et passim*.

³ E. Durkheim, review of Labrioli's book *Essais sur la conception materialiste de l'histoire*. Cf. Z. Krasnodębski, *Rozumienie ludzkiego zachowania. Rozważania o filozoficznych podstawach nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1986, p. 22.

view, the physical, natural being on exclusive basis, determines the sense of existence. The perception of the subject attaches it to the cultural *universum*. Cassirer's *Verstehen* is based on placing the humanities beyond facts, phenomena and their description; it is based on the symbol, the culture – products of the human brain.

The first one to have used the terms of explanation and understanding in differentiating the methods of natural sciences and the humanities was Droysen¹, in 1851. Weber contributed in uniting and arranging the methodological concepts into a single coherent system and inducing a substantial participation of this tool in social science. Weber validated the presence of *Verstehen* on grounds of the science of culture, introducing a daring attempt of bridging the social boundlessness with limitations of the individual. Weber's methodology of social sciences derives from the as much popular as exploited in the past partition of science into natural sciences and social sciences. Two worlds, *two cultures* competing one with another for the recognition of their precedence. The difference between natural sciences and the humanities is caused by a different approach to form scientific conceptions, and not a distinct experience characterizing the internal historicity, and therefore makes the foundation for the construction of the world's history in the humanities. *Verstehen* was in a sense a consequence of Weber's universal approach to culture, and, despite many interpretations², it was not only a procedure of disclosing what hides under the naturally observable surface of the human world.

This situation makes visible the methodological substantiation of the statement's truthfulness by the use of methodological tools, methodological constellation, based not only on understanding, but being a constellation of several interlinked factors. I am referring here before all to *Verstehen* as such, to an ideal–typological auxiliary method and the action, that all together lead to the perception of fragments of the social space; *create objective reality* anew. Whereas Dilthey stipulates that through understanding one can better understand the subject than he understood himself, Weber, following directly the Baden trend of neo–kantism (specifically Rickert), does not make any reference to bonds with the acting subject – in his *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* Weber relates directly to Simmel, who distinguished the understanding of the meaning of an expression or statement from the understanding of reasons, lying behind the subject's action. The latter meaning has a subjective touch. This context of the question does not concern him, but he concentrates on the objectivity of seeing values in the acting subject (*Wertbeziehung*), that is leading the perception results to a universal meaning, for every conscious subject, referring at least to the operation of *Verstehen*. However, the bonds (cf. Dilthey) are retained³. Because *Verstehen* appears in two layers, it is at the

¹ Cf. J. G. Droysen, *Grundriß der Historik*, Leipzig 1851, § 8, pp. 10 sq. and J. G. Droysen, *Die Erhebung der Geschichte zum Rang einer Wissenschaft*.

² Cf. J. P. Diggins, *Max Weber, Politics and Spirit of Tragedy*, BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, London 1996, p. 483.

³ Weber, modeling on Tönnies, distinguishes a community (*Gemeinschaft*), which during the process of rationalization, or rather capitalization of the Western world, transforms into the society (*Gesellschaft*) – socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) versus communization (*Vergemeinschaftung*). Weber emphasizes the decay

same time a method – here appears its objectivity and the *methodological* subjectivity – and the result of perception, and thus it is a feature of the historical individual. Weber states: *Der Unterschied ist nur dieser: der handelnde Mensch erwägt, soweit er streng «rational» handelt – was wir hier annehmen –, die «außerhalb» seiner liegenden, nach Maßgabe seiner Kenntnis in der Wirklichkeit gegebenen, «Bedingungen» der ihn interessierenden Zukunftsentwicklung und schaltet nun gedanklich verschiedene «mögliche Arten» seines eigenen Verhaltens und deren, in Verbindung mit jenen «äußeren» Bedingungen, zu erwartende Erfolge in den Kausalnexus ein, um dann je nach den dergestalt (gedanklich) ermittelten «möglichen» Ergebnissen sich für die eine oder die andere Verhaltensweise, als die seinem «Zweck» entsprechende, zu entscheiden. Der Historiker nun ist seinem Helden zunächst darin überlegen, daß er jedenfalls a posteriori weiß, ob die Abschätzung der gegebenen, «außerhalb» desselben vorhanden gewesenen Bedingungen [gemäß] den Kenntnissen und Erwartungen, welche der Handelnde hegte, auch tatsächlich [der wirklichen damaligen Sachlage] entsprach: dies lehrt ja der faktische «Erfolg» des Handelns.¹*

Thus to understand an action is to correlate certain motives with it; ones which would lead us to an answer to the question: what values provided foundation for such and not a different social action? For the understanding finds its initial field of application in the humanities, where knowledge is linked to the experience of a different mind or a subject similar to ourselves. It takes for its grounds the important character of forms of expression such as physiognomic signs, gestures, spoken or written signs, as well as on documents and relics which, same as the writing, have a character of an inscription. Direct variations of expression are of importance, because they refer straight to the experience of a different mind, for which they provide expression².

In this situation there evolves another question: how far does understanding reach? In other words, how deep one may refer to an understanding in the past, thanks to which our ideal–typological and thinking tools are enriched, one thus needs to ask a question about the understanding's limit. Weber, noticing this difficulty, used to say that the limit of understanding are traditional actions. Yet he did not provide answer to the main question. For we do not ask about the limit of social actions – a concretized description of another individual's experience regards also the irrational motives, but about the limit of understanding social actions in its conscious valuing. Weber emphasizes the importance of values in philosophical cognition in relation to culture. The domain of values, to which reality is entitled, is the social space, in which social actions are taking place of individuals following values; their recognition and understanding is subject to *Kulturwissenschaften*. Using the example

of certain values in the capitalistic world, although he does not draw going too far conclusions like Tönnies and he evaluates neither the common nor the social character of the social space.

¹ M. Weber, *Objektive Möglichkeit und ...*, p. 267.

² Cf. P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth 1976, *passim*.

of the relation of exchange between two subjects, Weber is interested in a response to the question about the way in which within frames of the values they subscribed to, an idea was born about their correlations, in which one object, being an object of such an exchange, has some value as an *equivalent* of another object belonging to the partner to whom it was presented and who had used to be the object's previous owner; the value changes by the relation of exchange in the research social space¹.

However, to be able to understand the values, one may not consider the phenomena separately. Although cultural sciences are idiographic sciences, the researcher is not interested in the constellation of events pointing at the values, thus allowing the grouping of similar events as regards the features of values they carry, as regards their meaning in a certain culture and in a certain period of its development. Weber shows that the researcher's work is never able to cross some barriers, those constrains being: the events' vanishing and the method of creating ideal–typological constructions, ascribing to the researcher the role of an events *historian*, not of an explorer of real (topical) social phenomena. Referring to H. Vaihinger one may, simplifying, call the researcher a philosopher of fiction; useful, because containing a grain of truth. Cassirer solves the problem of understanding the actions of the actor by completely resigning from the reference to the values².

Weber remains by the knowledge about objective possibility and probability, which he draws both from history and ordinary life. It should be admitted to him that real existence is not a proof for the valuing judgments being rational and logically coherent. The feeling of certainty lies not in this case in the power of proof; its ambiguity is not subject to discussion; Weber, affirming an objective character of judgments, is assured in this sensation. Maybe this is where his mistake lies, in basing his argument on the feeling of certainty in regard to this *omnicorrelation*. The author of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* begins his reflections with getting closer to the essence of rationality and picking out its elements providing the chance for a methodological application of the social sciences' tools. Rationality itself, generating social structures and transforming along with their change³, is not so easy to express, even more because it exists not only as a factor granting sense, but also as the standard of action. Weber approaches this problem as from the end, meaning that he assumes that many disciplines and rationalizations requiring various value systems exist in the area of a wrong placement of activity. Such a situation takes place for example when problems of economical or social character are tried to be solved by means characteristic of the power relation. There appears a tension disclosing the real shape of the object. But from the very beginning there appears a problem, because cultural sciences now have to deal with an object ontologically different: with people acting in a rational way, giving rea-

¹ Cf. M. Weber, *R. Stammers „Ueberwindung“ der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung* in: M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 335.

² Cf. E. Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften ...*, *passim*.

³ Cf. P. Skeris, *Od racjonalności do racjonalizacji* in: *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych* 10, 1982, pp. 247–270, especially p. 250.

son to the world around them, and together with this world, now ordered¹. Their job is thus to disclose this order, to understand the given sense. The methodological constellation² of *Verstehen* enriched by the ideal–typological method is an object which *generates virtual tensions* of the social space–time. Embroiling the values in the cognitive process thus boils it down to a multi-level, hybrid construction, gradually and consequently relinquishing the real, logical, and thus functional image of social reality. The function of symbolization proposed by Cassirer solves this problem. Symbolical forms are the *a priori* structures of cognition. Only the *a priori* structure of cognition is directed by the subject towards the world of phenomena, which he shapes. However, the process of cognition proceeds in a way similar both in the case of the engaged subject as the observer, but it does not mean that the content of cognition is identical. Thanks to what does the diversity of cognitive contents falling to individual subjects obtained in the community of the process itself, enable a mutual cultural understanding? Light is cast on this issue by Kant's *Copernican revolution*. In this cognitive model the *subject* and the *object* are elements of empiric cognition (Cassirer), the *act of cognition* of the subject, with the complicity of the object not so much as an acquainted element – it would then be reduced to a passive mass, only reflecting the *light of cognition* – but rather as a phenomenon *dependent and conditioned by cognition*³. Cassirer writes to this subject: *Jedes solche Weltbild ist nur möglich durch eigenartige Akte der Objektivierung, der Umprägung der bloßen Eindrücke zu in sich bestimmten und gestalteten Vorstellungen. Aber wenn auf diese Weise das Ziel der Objektivierung bis in Schichten zurückverfolgt werden kann, die dem theoretischen Gegenstandsbewußtsein unserer Erfahrung, unseres wissenschaftlichen Weltbilders vorausliegen, so ändern sich, wenn wir in diese Schichten hinabsteigen, doch der Weg und der Mittel der Objektivierungsprozesses*⁴.

The value itself becomes one of the symbolical forms, failing to achieve the level of a metameaning embroiling either an actor or a scientist researching the cultural reality. Each and every act of cognition takes place by the help of symbolical forms.

3. The Main Cognitive Problem

Differentiating the *character of being layers* from the *creations of grade consequence* (Hartmann) we reach the categorial structure, the latest and most complicated domain of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Going further after Hartmann,

¹ Cf. Z. Krasnodebski, *Rozumienie ludzkiego zachowania. Rozważania o filozoficznych podstawach nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1986, p. 101.

² I use here the term constellation and not construction to emphasize the changeability and fluidity of the tool constantly referring to social action. The method's humanism is thus not based only on the reference to the values, but it also consists in real and ideal–typological social acting of the researcher; since it is hard to differentiate in the *ideal–typological* way *Verstehen* as a method from the *understanding* of the cognitive process.

³ Cf. H. Buczyńska–Garewicz, *Ernst Cassirer*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1963, p. 34.

⁴ E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, t. 2: *Das Mythische Denken*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt [2 ed.] 1973, p. 39.

Weber explains the similarities between a thing, a plant, an animal and a human being, as clearly as we point out the endless dissimilarities of those vital layers. Weber, treating society and history as vital layers, whose basic element is an act, social action, tries – in a not totally convincing way – to lift the difference between the subject's consciousness itself in favor of the reference to an intelligible world, which in this case is the social space. This construction would not be developed earlier than by Cassirer, in his philosophy of symbolical forms. A reunion of the vital layers in symbol, constituted within limits of the most complicated vital layer, dependent on the others. The evolution of the vital layers is not determined here by the goal – the lower layer is fully autonomic from the upper one (but not the opposite) – the goal just doesn't exist. It cannot be mistaken with the diversity as the function of a change. The harness of the lower vital layers does not consist in the dependence determined in a natural way, but rather in the increase of the social space's diversity, the widening of the fields of *understanding* along with the expansion of natural science discoveries within the confines of *explaining*. To *understand* is in this moment to give or discover a social sense of action oriented on the symbolization of *physis*. The *empirical reality* (Kant) is independent from the autonomically created *social reality* of the given vital layer's natural acting. The breeding of hunting dogs does not influence in any way the life of an Australian dingo. Common and unpredictable earthquakes influence the way of symbolization in the Greek culture. Cloning will not create an *ideal human being* or *society* but it may stop the development of social space and the diversity of symbolizations on a previously determined stage.

Weber, bestowing on an individual (cf. Kant) the valor of intransferable validity, intensifying the role of rationality not only as the central category of social sciences, but he also measures by the help of it the changes in the social space, treating it, from the logical point of view, as a diverse whole. For Weber, as for Kant, each and every human being has his own time and space in the physical world: *Jede Deutung strebt zwar nach Evidenz. Aber eine sinnhaft noch so evidente Deutung kann als solche und um dieses Evidenzcharakters willen noch nicht beanspruchen: auch die kausal gültige Deutung zu sein. Sie ist stets an sich nur eine besonders evidente kausale Hypothese*¹.

P. Winch recalls the characteristic fragment of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, presenting at the same time his own interpretation on *Verstehen*, similar to the Weber's conception of the ideal type. He thus recognizes that *Verstehen* is an utter thing, not requiring fulfillment by a statistical method, even if the interpretation is incorrect. The conformity of interpretation and statistics does not prove the interpretation's legitimacy². In my opinion the methodological conception of *Verstehen* cannot be considered individually without taking into consideration the ideal–typological method and action. *Verstehen* itself – similarly to the mere creation of ideal–typological constructions – is just a more or less sophisticated technique of directing the discovered sense of the

¹ M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen [5 ed.] 1976, t. 1, p. 4.

² Cf. P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1970, p. 112.

social space. The researcher, being aware of the constraints evolving not so much from his method, as rather from the infinity of the object of cognition, must adjust his method *holistically* to the subject he wishes to acquaint. Thus I personally would not ascribe such importance to the definition of *Verstehen* from the first chapter of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*; instead, I would express this issue in a broader context of the Weber's methodology. One should remember – because it seems that Winch expresses this issue in this moment too narrowly – that an interpretation leading to obviousness extricates itself from the influence of an ideal–typological construction, which it has been working on, to find itself in the social space's reality – this is what its reliability is based on; however it doesn't disturb the ideal type to completely miss the reality.

Weber does not share the opinion, that understanding and explanation are two completely independent, not adjoining methods of behavior¹, he holds however the specific character of understanding, not having its equivalent in natural sciences; sociology as a type of *Geisteswissenschaften* was supposed to blend those two methods. Sociological actions should penetrate the human consciousness on the *level of meanings* – the evaluation, perception and the world's characterization by the use of *Verstehen*, the *rational introspection*. This is the goal at which the separation of the two levels of *understanding* was aiming².

The main cause for the *understanding condition's* imperfection is the disproportion between the infinity of reality and the finity of the *human spirit*. Cognition takes place from a certain point of view. In the terminology used by Weber it is an ideal type (*ideal Typ*). Full cognition or understanding is impossible, the reality's infinity and changeability places us in the face of the task's unfeasibility – an analysis from the point of view of an infinite amount of ideal types, abstraction of their correlations, normative and ideal models. An ideal type in order to absolutely capture a fragment of social reality, uses first of all the method of abstraction and isolation³. The ideal type is not a hypothesis, but it creates hypotheses. It is a *utopia* or *heuristic fiction*⁴. Weber manipulates with four meanings of this term. The ideal type is identified with: (a) the nature of the phenomenon as inspiration for its creation, on which we have no influence; (b) the phenomenon, on which in the stream of individual occurrences we do have influence; (c) an even different feature, evaluating in

¹ Cf. Z. Krasnodębski, *Socjologia rozumiejąca a fenomenologia. Max Weber a Alfred Schütz* in: *Studia Socjologiczne* 1, 1980 (76), p. 67.

² Weber refers to: direct understanding (*aktuelles Verstehen*) and motivational understanding (*erklärendes Verstehen*). Cf. M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, transl. A. M. Henderson, T. Parsons, University Press, Oxford [2 ed.] 1957, p. 90, pp. 94 sq.

³ The ideal type is created by a one-sided acceptance of one or more points of view and by a synthesis of many diffused, isolated, more or less often present, from time to time absent, individual phenomena, which are ordered in accordance with the one-sided point of view in a uniform, analytical construct. M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 30. Weber tries in this moment to fulfill Kantian postulate of expressing the diversity, appearing to the mind to be a chaos, into general rules, thanks to which this diversity may appear to be a correlation, a unity.

⁴ Cf. J. Szczepeński, *Socjologia. Rozwój problematyki i metod*, PWN, Warszawa 1967, p. 341.

respect of tasks and goals; (d) the difference between the ideal type's denotation and reality, verifying in this way the results of cognition.

By Cassirer was the point of gravity, which is the basis for the model of cognition, transferred even stronger than by Weber from the object itself onto the subject presenting the basis of understanding contexts. Despite the method's distinctness, which we deal with in case of natural science and the humanities, the status of the nature of the action itself has not been overcome; it is not subjected to any full depiction. Human actions are infinite in their essence, they are *the only infinity given to speculation* (Schleiermacher), what Weber used thriftily.

However, being governed by the rule having for its foundation *heading towards rationally directed exploration-thirst (rationale Entdeckungsstreben)* he tries to include, not so much the whole of the social space in one system (he was convinced about the falseness of this assumption), but rather in one system – a huge constellation of purely ideal-typological formulae (*rein idealtypischer Formeln*) – to include as much as possible of the social space's emanations, and to understand their correlations. The goal of the Weber's system was thus a characteristic quality change, consisting, following the terminology after the author of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, in the passage from formal into substantial rationalization, being a *hidden goal of verstehende Soziologie*. However the overwhelming totality of the world (*Lebenstotalität*) and its infinity, first of all in the sphere of social actions, does not allow it. Life itself – quoting after Weber – surpasses everything but itself, endowing everything valuable with the stamp of its nature and sizes of its space¹. If *Verstehen* verifies the legality of methodological generalities – ideal types are after all nothing but means enabling their execution – then understanding sociology refers to social behavior of an individual in an *explaining understanding* of individual motives, a certain egoism, manifesting itself in an attempt of adjusting the social space to the declared values. Social actions are nothing but hypostasing of values – ideals, goals and interests influencing each other. However the statement that life is the broadest existence is a simple ontical conclusion and is not enough to universally express the cultural being in its ultravaluable existence. Cassirer renews the view on culture, he endows it with an ultraindividual reference to signs and meanings emancipated from under the influence of nature and natural methodology. It does not however signify that cognition gains a purely ideal character. The content and the vehicle, the spiritual and sensual content, matter and form, content and carrier; these relations are burdened with only a symbolical stamp of cognition.

Weber does not say that the testimony of senses is useless, but that the results of sensual cognition, the most elementary level of cognition deriving from the thing's outside phenomena, are completed with the imagination of purely rational phenomena, isolated from the infinite diversity. Moreover, he does not refer in his methodological works to the empirical reality itself, but instead he tried to express only its meaningful fragment – the culture, whose

¹ M. Weber, *Die «Objektivität» sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, p. 213.

domain in relation to the idea of value is only that, what becomes meaningful thanks to the reference. That very mental picture (the ideal type) and the method of approaching it present foundation for the Weber's methodology. This method, crossing over the diversity of observations and experience, reaches general rules, bestowing on the *infinite diversity of the phenomena's constellation* a uniform character. A type of law of special meaning seem to be, for social sciences, the rules of experience (*Erfahrungsregeln*), or rules of adequate causality (*Regeln adaequater Verursachtung*) – maxims of behavior. Limits of cognition are defined, on one hand by the free of all affiliation and foreign domination free will, dictating its laws to itself¹, and on the other by the autonomy of cognitive method, distancing itself from the material and valuing determining motives. Not anymore the blending of sensuality and intellect passes for the source of ambiguity, in which out of necessity the method of intelligible cognition of the humanities becomes embroiled, but the misleading of phenomena with things themselves, what is supposed to be prevented by the ideal–typological character of the humanities. This issue is characteristically expressed by J. Freund, who gives to the subject of action a better possibility of understanding his needs and his possibilities; however, he cannot show the subject what he should be wanting. Of course the fact that science is not able to choose finally, does not mean that the arbitral in their essence choices belong to the sphere of faith and beliefs; looking at the problem from a different angle, the theory of science is a reflection upon the theory of action². The empirical reality itself is not a subject of Weber's interest; that means, it does interest him in the holistic formulation. It is however perceived by him as a valuable research space, which the author of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* expresses in relation to the ideas of value³. And thus only a small part of the every time perceived and imagined social space has a valor of valuable cognitive ability. It means that between natural sciences and the humanistic reflection on reality there is no important difference, if it comes to the field of action. Weber also tried to reconcile the methodological apparatus of natural science with its humanistic equivalent, bestowing however on the latter the valor of ultraempirical – what does not mean: assumptionless – method, colored with an empathic reference to the ideas of social–historical phenomena, for: *Die Beziehung der Wirklichkeit auf Wertideen, die ihr Bedeutung verleihen, und die Heraushebung und Ordnung der dadurch gefärbten Bestandteile des Wirklichen unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihrer Kultur*

¹ Cf. I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (ed.) I. Heidemann, Philip Reclam, Stuttgart 1966, § 8.

² Cf. J. Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, New York [2 ed.] 1968, pp. 6 sq. Weber himself says that *Und der uns allen in irgendeiner Form innewohnende Glaube an die überempirische Geltung letzter und höchster Wertideen, an denen wir den Sinn unseres Daseins verankern, schließt die unausgesetzte Wandelbarkeit der konkreten Gesichtspunkte, unter denen die empirische Wirklichkeit Bedeutung erhält, nicht etwa aus, sondern ein: das Leben in seiner irrationalen Wirklichkeit und sein Gehalt an möglichen Bedeutungen sind unausschöpfbar, die konkrete Gestaltung der Wertbeziehung bleibt daher fließend, dem Wandel unterworfen in die dunkle Zukunft der menschlichen Kultur hinein.* M. Weber, *Die «Objektivität» sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, p. 213.

³ According to Weber, ideas may have – and many a time do have – an independent and decisive influence on the course of historical events, whereas the class–conflicts are only one out of many forms of the never ending battle over power.

*bedeutung ist ein gänzlich heterogener und disparater Gesichtspunkt gegenüber der Analyse der Wirklichkeit auf Gesetze und ihrer Ordnung in generellen Begriffen*¹.

The search for the general essence of phenomena is for Weber an important, although initial effort, directed to searching for the phenomena's authenticity, whereas the cultural meaning of some historical individual possesses the valor of filling with its content, by bestowing on it the valuable sense of conscious social acting. Weber thus assumes a characteristic, complementary function of the natural science method in relation to the humanities. Thus the highest number of the from the logical point *correct* laws does not give us the possibility (not only because of the phenomena's infinity) to causally explain a single fact, and this is after all the goal of cognition: *Ein Chaos von «Existenzialurteilen» über unzählige einzelne Wahrnehmungen wäre das einzige, was der Versuch eines ernstlich «voraussetzungslosen» Erkennens der Wirklichkeit erzielen würde. Und selbst dieses Ergebnis wäre nur scheinbar möglich, denn die Wirklichkeit jeder einzelnen Wahrnehmung zeigt bei näherem Zusehen ja stets unendlich viele einzelne Bestandteile, die nie erschöpfend in Wahrnehmungsurteilen ausgesprochen werden können. In dieses Chaos bringt nur der Umstand Ordnung, daß in jedem Fall nur ein Teil der individuellen Wirklichkeit für uns Interesse und Bedeutung hat, weil nur er in Beziehung steht zu den Kulturwertideen, mit welchen wir an die Wirklichkeit herantreten*².

For natural sciences the laws are the more important and precious the more general they are; for the cognition of historical phenomena in their concrete grasp, the most general laws, as the most content–empty, are also usually least important. The broader is the range of importance of a specific conception – the more it dissuades us from the fullness of reality, because to be able to comprise common elements possible for the largest number of phenomena it must be abstract, and thus simple in its content. It does not mean that the cognition of the social–historical space is not a causal cognition, same as the cognition of sciences of a quantitative character. For each science of spiritual or social context is a science of human behavior, and it investigates all spiritual thinking acts and all psychic attitudes. It is desirable to understand this behavior and on this basis explainingly interpret its course³. The theoretical considerations on the subject of *Geisteswissenschaften* – the reflection upon the theory of action is but filled with specific content.

Cassirer is not trying to create a new system explaining the social reality in the manner of simple laws of causality. At least the three–stage character of symbolic forms (the function of expressing (*Ausdrucksfunktion*), representing (*Anschauungsfunktion*) and pure meaning (*reine Bedeutungsfunktion*) as well as their modal versions (explanation – justification – meaning) comprise a

¹ M. Weber, *Die «Objektivität» sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, p. 176.

² M. Weber, *Die «Objektivität» sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, pp. 177–178.

³ Cf. M. Weber, *Der Sinn der «Wertfreiheit» der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften* in: M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 232.

proposition for the dualistic intelligible–phenomenal way of presenting the world so far, and the *stricte* causal one¹. The historizing reference and positivistic involvement, which Weber has not totally overcome in frames of a totally different paradigm, become appropriated by the universal symbolizations. Weber, who was closest to this solution, linking to *Verstehen* a multi-level, not blurry and imprecise ideal–typological method by the lack of a direct reference of those methodological tools to his own research (at least the world religions), has not obtained an objective, as he postulated himself, understandable for everyone model, getting involved in values on the *presymbolic* level. Cassirer's *homo symbolicus* has this superiority over Weber's *homo rationalis*, that resigning from the illusions of intelligible values it follows the narrow path of the symbolic functions' theoretical knowledge. What unites the two thinkers is the conviction that there is no ambiguity in the rational impulse and ordered motion emerging from the existential disarray and chaos, showing at the same time a high level of pragmatic order, thus uniting the functional and substantial (material) rationality in one harmonic whole. This is where, on the point of contact of formal and substantial rationality there evolves the question of the action's goals and values on one hand, and the universal models on the other. They are also united by the conviction that in the subject's consciousness of social actions the culture is born, thus bestowing upon the thought of the social space of historical phenomena an open character, basing only on the reference to autonomy and the ability of creating values or functions by an individual.

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¹ Cf. to the topic among others in: C. H. Hamburg, *Symbol and Reality. Studies in philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1970, pp. 93 sq.

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