

Culture and perspectivism in Nietzsche's and Weber's view

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ABSTRACT

This essay draws a comparison of perspectivism in Friederich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) and in Max Weber's intellectual framework (1864-1920), aiming at demonstrating that, despite the affinity between both authors in thinking culture and life as a profusion of meanings and multiple values, that is, lacking any systemic unity, they radically differ when dealing with perspectivism. Such difference leads to distinct conceptions of knowledge, and critical evaluations concerning the "culture of reason" and history.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Knowledge, Rationality, Modernity

"Culture" is equally comprehended by Nietzsche (1844-1900) and by Weber (1864-1921) as the field in which man realizes himself, fundamentally, as a creator of meanings or as an interpreter of his own existence. Around the theme of culture are situated solid assumptions shared by those two authors, which open spaces to the exploration of important affinities and differences between them. One of these assumptions is the "perspectivist" vision about culture and existence, as a whole. From now on, I will strive to grasp how this vision shows itself imbricated in each author's thought.

For both thinkers, man is a being who lives pursuant to "perspectives of values" that definitely cannot be hierarchically classified or logically ordered. That consideration exposes the intellectual impropriety of the belief in absolute or universal values. There is no such thing as a law or superior will underneath human valorizations. Man being the only animal who holds values, every cultural sense must be considered – as an expression used by Nietzsche but applicable to Weber – necessarily "Human, all too Human", which does not imply "Rational, all too Rational". In Weber's work, the cultural basis of

existence can be identified in the following excerpt: “The transcendental premise of any science of culture is (...) in the circumstance that we are man of culture, endowed with the capacity and the will of assuming a conscious position in the face of the world conferring sense to it” (Weber 1991: 61 [1989: 97]). In Nietzsche, we can analogically read: “Man confers values to things, in the first place, to preserve himself; that is the meaning of things, a human meaning. That is why he is called Man, id est, that one who values” (Nietzsche 1984)¹. Along with the radical notion of perspectivism of values or meanings conferred to existence, the authors agree in disagreeing with any concept that postulates a transcendent or logic basis to values, as well as with linear opinions on culture and history, including religions and some important philosophical chains. In that case, it is valid to recall classics such as Hegel and Marx, with their dialectics of historical synthesis, along with Kant, and his defense of a formal and universal ethical “imperative” reaching beyond history and particular norms.

On that radical immanency and fragmentation of the human phenomena, Weber is wholly attuned to Nietzsche’s thought. Both of them are part of an interpretative tendency that conceived history as culture and culture as a profusion of meanings, both irreconcilable in their core foundations and never clearly delimited between them. Man, as a holder of meanings and a meaningful agent of reality, can only be investigated through the cultural “load” that he carries. That fact implies that any knowledge about man will be always related to meaning. It will always be entangled in interpretation, to evaluate means to put value in. None of this is synonymous either to “law” (approached from the point of view of actions) or to “truth” (approached from the point of view of knowledge). Man, as both producer and product of meanings, can only be understood through his own cultural representations. Even when he asks for the foundations of cultural valorizations (social, historical, physiological, etc.), he is guided by values. Indifferent to how each author conceives that reference, it is always taken as interpretative.

Against objectivist positions such as the Spirit on history (Hegel) and the historical logic of economic materiality (Marx), an interpretative tradition is affirmed, underlining the subjectivity of spirit, the work of the representations and the polissemic nature of cultural reality, disintegrated and unstable. Nevertheless, the most radical criticism to “objectivists” visions is in the denial of the ideas of “totality” and “substance”. Denying them, Nietzsche and Weber adopt criteria like “multiplicity” and “perspective”, revealing in both of them a grudging unwillingness towards Kantian transcendentalism that can be perceived on the postulation of the radical immanence and particularity of human values in both authors. In Nietzsche’s work, that denial can be seen in many moments, as in the unmasking of the principles of

¹ About the correspondence between the substantive “man” (Mensch) and the verb “evaluate” (schätzen) in German, see Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho’s observation (1983: 233, note 4).

“finality”, “totality” and “truth” when those are applied to the world or to history and the characterization of the negligence with history as an “hereditary defect of the philosophers” (Nietzsche 2000a: §2). Weber was also emphatic on his attack on universal and totalizing visions, as can be seen in his critique of the monocausal and “prophetic” nature of historical materialism (Weber 1991: 45 [1989: 84]; Gertz 1997: 263ss), or, in a more propositional way, in his insistent approach to history through its meaningful individualities and not through its “most general laws” (Weber 1991: 60 [1989: 95-96]). It is valid to observe, however, that there are traces which bear witness to the existence of an “universal organizative principle” in both works, such as the compulsion to rationalization or toward a rational system², in Weber, or the combination between a “principle of strength” (the “will to power”) and a “principle of time”, both omnipresent in Nietzsche. Nevertheless, even when those authors fall into metaphysical temptations, the perspectivist scope of their thought is not placed at risk.

We can say that “subjectivity”, “polissemia” and “perspectivism” are attributes highlighted by both thinkers as immanent proprieties of the “culture world”. They remind us of a decisive fact: on its most intimate foundation, the flux of meaning is absolutely arbitrary, even when realized as “cultural effectuations” (understandings, socializations, legitimacy, imposition, etc). It is not supported on a logical background. There is no way to define precisely where starts nor where is consummated a “becoming”. Arbitrariness as an embryonic condition of life, the inevitable background of intentionality, the presence of randomness in existence, the drama of unpredictability of every becoming, the abstract and precarious quality of all unity: those are conception that circulate in part of German intellectuality in which Weber and Nietzsche took part, although not with the same emphasis and not deriving the same propositions.

A clear characterization of perspectivism makes necessary to underline the absence of an absolute meaning, since what prevails in both thinkers is the image of fluidity of significance and the fact that what is frequently seen in a phenomenon is the presence of many meanings. The recognition of a pure meaning is rare. That fact justifies the necessary appealing to typification as a mechanism used on construction of unities of sense looking forward to classification and understanding. Nietzsche and Weber knew how the types are unreal. However, they were avid constructors of typifications, used to defy the dominant meanings, emphasized as physio-psychological dominions or as socio-historical regularities. Below, there follows the exposition on the conception of perspectivism in each author with the objective of defining some differences between them.

² Both Habermas, who strives for a Weberian “system” handling with the “rationalization of the Western world”(1994: 197-350) and Benbruck, who seeks rationalism as an “unified thematic” (1980), are examples of interpreters that

NIETZSCHE AND PERSPECTIVISM

I

According to Nolte, Nietzsche would have borrowed the term “perspectivism” from his friend Gustav Teichmüller, with whom he had lived in Basel (1995: 18). To deal with that theme on Nietzsche’s thought, it is worth to remember that, above the realms of culture, history and civilization is life itself. This means that beyond the socio-historical crystallizations are the vital impulses which conscience is not able to perceive *in natura*, but that act permanently over the existence of individuals, societies and people in a transfigured way. That’s the main determinant of human meanings. As Giacoia says:

(...) the history of culture is, for Nietzsche, nothing but the mimetic expression of a subterranean energy, where drives [in confrontation] ... intend to overweight their perspectives as supreme references on value, and finally to constitute the provisory hierarchies of their adjustments in domination relationships (1995: 84-85).

Nietzsche took with certitude that the main interpretative and evaluative dominions are forged in a pre-conscious level. The perspectivism of the vital forces prevails, acting underneath the perspectivism of conscious interpretation. If it was necessary to separate the plane of “culture” from that one of “nature”, we could say that this separation deals with a distinction between a perspectivism of cultural basis, represented by the myriad of invented targets and interpretations that, more or less consciously, men add to their acts, and a perspectivism of impulsive basis, represented by a “quantum of repressed energy”, available to be liberated as the primary cause of every action. On the one side, there is the illusory, the casual and the useful. On the other side, there is the act, the necessary, the arbitrary (Nietzsche 2000: §360; 1998: III§12). Nevertheless, that distinction must not be too enforced, since culture does not restrain itself to what is made consciously and to forces that can only be interpreted through their symbolic figuration.

Nietzsche integrates both dimensions employed to present us the phenomenon of life, interpreting culture as natural dispositions re-signified and redirected to ends of conscious use. His central proposal was to affirm that there is perspectivism underneath conscious valorizations – the Weberian “value-ideas”, for instance. That is the perspectivism of vital forces. Natural impulses are the greatest interpreters of life, the solidest yet most forgotten sources of valorization, even when that fact disagrees with what man sees and thinks. If they elude us, it is because “if the form is fluid, the meaning is even more fluid...” (Nietzsche 1998: II§12). Aiming to relativize conscious interpretations – the same ones which are going to be so well evaluated by Weber – we must first retain those words of Nietzsche:

point out to totalizing aspects of Weber’s analysis.

That is the authentic phenomenism and perspectivism, such as I comprehend them: the nature of animal consciousness makes the world of which we can be aware of just a world of surfaces and signs, a generalized, vulgarized world (2000: §354).

The multifaceted flux of conscious and intelligible significations corresponds to a more general perspective on the constitution and singularization of man, which deals with the particular way that he presents himself as a special animal, able to construct culture, to produce knowledge and to color the world with signs and images. Thanks to their nature of cultural symbol producers, men are capable of conscious affective sublimations, supporting over them, in a good measure, their acts and their own recognition. There is no alternative: we are perspectivists by necessity and we are doomed to live according to interpretations. That is the maxim of our own nature. Among men, the perspectivism of strengths translates itself necessarily into a perspectivism of valuations, which entangles them in the superficiality of a cultural life based on conscious, rude, secondary and false images. But how Nietzsche himself has questioned: “(...) if it was through mistake and confusion that humanity raised itself gradually to this level of self-illumination and liberation – who could despise those instruments?” (Nietzsche 2000a: §107). Here, the focus rests square on the articulation between perspectivism and falsehoods. The question which arises is the following: If the perspectivism of consciousness is a synonym to error and falseness, what about the “perspectivist nature of existence”? or the concept of “perspectivism of forces”? Would all perspectivism be a synonym to error?

Many are the moments where Nietzsche takes the idea of “error” as a constitutive principle of life. That is an idea which seems to be referred to in both planes distinguished above, but with different connotations. On the one hand, there is the notion of “life” as a manifestation of forces, as unending flux of impulses, many of them absolutely alien to the intellectual proposals of man, to whom error sounds as a synonym of necessary event. Forces commit errors, in the sense that they roam, disobeying any determination or logical order³. They do not follow any goal, since their objective is their own flowing, simultaneously unconditioned and necessary (Safranski 2001: 103), necessary here taken as a synonym of arbitrary, pointing outward the realm of laws or mechanical orders. Concerning the level of vital forces, Nietzsche put his efforts in the destruction of the illusion that sustains their production of realities, defending otherwise the apparentness of every life’s manifestation. “What do I mean by appearance? Indeed, it is not the opposite of any essence (...). What I mean by appearance is something which acts and lives” (Nietzsche 2000: §54). Therefore, in the most vital level, error is a synonym to appearance and the phenomenism of strengths.

³ Translator’s note: The author uses “error” here (as “erro”, in Portuguese) indicating also something “erratic”, which

In that vital level, man is situated as embodiment and spirit, as an animal who needs to experience himself. There rest both man and his knowledge, measured in conformation to the kind of embodiment which corresponds to his vital nature. Under that influence, all the human productions are inescapably “errors”, meaning perspectives of a specific way of life which presents itself as a tissue of sensibilities: “the habits of our senses entangle us in lie and fraud of sensation; those are, again, the foundations of any of our judgments and acquaintances. There is no escaping, there are no trails or shortcuts to the real world! We live inside our web, we spiders, and everything we capture in it is just something which leaves itself there to be caught”. We are dealing here with necessary perspectivism, which distinguish itself from Kantism by its emphasis on the vital character (against transcendentalism) and by its instability and transitivity (as opposed to universalism).

In a different vein, we have the notion of “man” as an intelligent animal, able to forge interpretations, or, if we want, “man” as a field of forces that act as an interpretative principle. Man as a cultivator and a cultivation of values in which he is involved in the first place because they are useful to him as ways of recognition and as references to orientations, where the idea of “error” figures as a synonym to belief, habits and certainties, composing the perspectivism inherent to human nature. Human consciousness “errs”, in a sense that its productions are not similes or images of nothing, but only masks, fictions, prejudices. Summarizing that double connotation: when error refers to the perspectivism of forces, it is thought of as a necessity; when error refers to the perspectivism of values, it is thought of as illusion. As a common basis, the inexorable condition of life as occurrence, fluidity, discontinuity, transformation. Man, taken as the form of life refined by the most subtle and imaginative illusions, as a compulsive evaluator, is understood by the philosopher as a “non fixed animal”. Between the unconsciousness of forces and its human conscious configurations, there is a fragile bond, forgotten, even lost, and the final reason to that is: the condition of life itself is strength and the condition of depth is appearance, since “everything that is deep loves the mask” (Nietzsche 1988: §40).

Conscious life is a succession of necessary errors that ratify themselves mainly because they are useful. About that theme: “True as *Circe* — Errors [illusions] made animals men; would truth be able to make man become an animal again?” (Nietzsche 2000a: §519). Nietzsche specified the perspectivism of strengths as far as the level which interested him to analyze it, that is: the critique of human values as useful illusions of an animal compelled to make sense of things and of existence, as an expression of primary necessities that are buried underneath the non-stopping web of significations and re-significations.

moves in a non-oriented way.

To Nietzsche, man is much more of an artist or actor than he thinks, because social life is based in disguises and rude representation (Nietzsche 2000: §365), because the artistic representations and the myths are in the downside of history, because consciousness and language are based on “fundamental errors, for a longtime embodied” (Idem 2000: §110), at last, because any human recognition always carries the trace of creativity. In the scope of consciousness, creativity presents itself mostly as finality and utility.

II

To the philosopher of vitality, the fundamental difference among “things” is not in any existential criterion (some of them exist and some do not), since all things that present themselves as perception, sensibility or consciousness *do exist*. The difference is emphasized on strength, since the really relevant elements are always the power of evaluation and the forces moved by the greatest interpreters of life. To think the world as a set of forces and to think forces as power in action is to abandon the essentialist significations, because power in itself has no meaning. It is pure quantum, pure intensity, pure will, which makes the human sense always a mask of power. Power is implied in signs, symbols, images that constitute human consciousness. Based on that, those who envision man as producer of values and meanings of the world highly value their perspectives, since is through them that he is able to interpret the course of the forces. We are condemned to error also because we are doomed to interpretation and to appropriations of strengths as cultural meaning. Any strength as “will to power” effectuate itself as appearance, error, perspective. It is the nature of any will to express itself as masked – that is a Nietzschean maxim. While referred to the vital level, appearance and error are not synonyms to illusion; otherwise they are effectiveness and necessity. Along with that, Nietzsche intended to go beyond the belief in essences, however, without falling into idealism or into epiphenomenalism. Since necessary means arbitrary in an ultimate sense, the manifestation of forces is always realized under the sign of arbitrariness, which consolidate life’s image as an “error”.

The apparent state in which the world shows itself has nothing to do with superficiality, artificiality and emptiness. The Nietzschean appearance is not a deflated simulacrum. In tackling this topic, it is useful to quote Rosset’s underlining of the “real” nature of the appearance world in Nietzsche (maybe “effective” would be exacter): “For sure Nietzsche always focused on surfaces, appearance, representation, not diminishing the deepness of the real, but at the expenses of the elusive depth and the lie associated to the notion of “real world” defended by traditional metaphysics, criticized by him “in favor of reality, not in favor of an appearance conceived as a testimony of the world’s inconsistency (Rosset 2000: 58-59). Important in this excerpt is its attention to the idea of reality (effectiveness) in Nietzsche’s thought, which

renders problematic the current association between him and post-modernity, not realized by Vattimo (1996). Nietzsche took the apparent as a set of effective forces. The philosopher's argument that the "true world" has become a fable does not imply a judgment of reality as a fable. On the contrary, along with the abolition of the "true world" is also suppressed the "world of appearances" (Nietzsche 1984: How the true-world has become a fable; Rosset: 61-62). There is the illusion of the true world and there is the manifestation of the effective world, a world of arbitrarily-imposed necessities. Again the two faces of error appear: the fable and the effective. If Nietzsche insisted that man, as an artist, must like to fable, to lie, to play, to mask, he also defended that he never must do these in the name of truth, but always aware of the apparent reality of all that is necessary. The quest for truth inserts a moral trace in illusions, denied by Nietzsche for the sake of artistic taste. For the Greeks, the artistic trace was provided precisely by the fact that they were, in Nietzsche's words, superficial "by depth" (Nietzsche 2000: *Prologue* §4). To be superficial "by depth" means to hang onto the apparent character of all existence, against the desire of "truth at any cost" (Nietzsche: *Epilogue* §2). Against the "true world", the tragic artist knows that surfaces and masks are like skin, "they reveal something but they mostly hide" (Nietzsche, 1988: §32). "Surfaces" are necessary. Also are necessary hiding and circumvention. But it is important to comprehend that what hides itself is not something that was there, in some lost place or register, signaling a reality that cannot be known. What is hidden rests in the arbitrariness of the occurrence, in the fact that the eventual cannot have past nor future. Hiding is an inherent condition of what occurs as presence and finitude without final meaning. Hiding is an act of strength, while oblivion is an active principle (Nietzsche 1998: II §1). They are not just moral or consciousness that hide themselves; also life hides itself as an act of transfiguration which moves all the occurrence of force, with its many breaks on time and space.

III

To Nietzsche, appearance means movement of forces and the everlasting affluence of configurations, a concept represented metaphorically by Dionysian themes such as the game of masks and the transfiguration of passions. Also, what is the most authentic and the deepest is submitted to the "law" of appearing and disappearing. Nietzschean hermeneutics goes against moral convictions and scientific certainties, but also against the superficiality of modern life. The new values aspired by the philosopher should express both the sense of becoming and the sense of dedication to action as an unconditional affirmation of life. The critical trace of Nietzsche's philosophy is subordinated to its affirmative nature. That is another way to express the Nietzschean "seriousness" before his image of reality, which does not intend to be superficial, but wander through the surfaces, experiencing the deepest and the highest on them.

Greatest wisdom is precisely in the acceptance of the inevitable phenomenalism of every knowledge as “re-cognition” [*Wiedererkennen*] of impulses (Nietzsche 1988: §20), knowing how to play well with masks, since: “all deep spirit needs a mask, even more, around each one of the deep spirits grows continually a mask, thanks to the perpetually false or shallow interpretation of each word, each step, each sign that life provides” (Idem: §40). Defending that “the mask is the mark of depth and wealth” (Rosset 2000: 64), the interpreter would have been more precise if he had said that the mask is the mark of surface and transitivity that everything deep needs. Every depth demands surface, as emphasizes Foucault in his vision on Nietzsche’s philosophy:

... and the deep becomes a secret absolutely superficial, in a way like the flight of the eagle, the climbing of the mountain, all that verticality so important to Zarathustra turns to be nothing but the inverse of depth, the discovery that depth is nothing but a game, just a fold on a surface (1980: 11-12).

Conceiving “what exists” in the order of “what appears”, Nietzsche was able to confront metaphysics decisively, just as he defined it: “the belief in opposition of values” (Nietzsche 1988: §2). He did not face the paradox that exposes itself when is denied to what exists as the “privileges” of “being” and “nothing” (Rosset 2000: 96). Indeed, he denied specifically the pertinence of such a paradox, reducing it to a product, hostage of logical categories. Nietzsche dissolved the imaginary frontiers which separate the values of Being and Nothing, mixing them in a same meaningful vein: the one of the metaphysics and, as a consequence, that one of moral. As a belief in absolute values and its oppositions, any metaphysics is a moralization, taken moral in that case as the field of idealizations, which, carrying a reactive sense, are effectivities that create nothing. Idealizations are reactive when they express meanings which deny life. The conceptions of Being and Nothing are two great illusions that Nietzsche replaced by thought-action, conceiving all existent being as necessarily apparent and unstable. Existence never is, because it is always being. Only as recognition of surface, as the effect of acts of strength, things seem to be evident and stable. But *Alles ist im fluss!* [*Everything is in flux!*], and the movement can only be “apprehended” according to forces that appropriate one another. That is how they signal their own happening.

Forces do “err” because their eruption does not obey any law. They just reveal their nature of an energetic *quantum*. But, as they do exist only when they manifest themselves (and as every manifestation tends always to be realized as utility and value), it is inevitable to Nietzsche that the supposed “origin” is definitely lost, what renders useless the very idea of origin, dragging with it ideas like “essence”, “substance” and “final sense”. The belief in origins or in a true cause behind things is nothing but a metaphysical illusion. Moving from that axiom, every Nietzschean effort to value the “return to the origins”, known as genealogical procedure, is limited by the contingency that only through an

interpretative meaning can be constructed secondary meanings which prescribes value. All interpretation enduringly projects itself as an act of strength and valuation. That is the only way we can comprehend how, to the philosopher, genealogical investigation is presented as the ratification of a destiny, of new meanings, of new forces, as a creation in the true sense. Even philosophy is seen as a “tyrannical impulse, the most spiritual willpower, to world’s creation, to *causa prima* (Nietzsche 1988: §9).

WEBER AND PERSPECTIVISM

I

Weber also had a perspectivist image of existence. This was more narrowly applied to his vision of culture and history. History is basically culture, and culture is basically founded on value; hence, any historical reflection is subordinated to the perspectivist maxim. At a methodological level, this is specified by the analytical typologies and, at the historical level, by the polytheism of ends. But from the outset it should be noted that, for the sake of knowledge, Weberian perspectivism is subsumed within rationalism as a modality of true knowledge which cannot be replaced, and has no competitor. It is an analytic perspectivism within an epistemic-methodological unity; different, therefore, than Nietzschean perspectivism. It is subsumed within the very idea of knowledge, which straightforwardly denies any absolute foundation for the performance of perspectivism; its method is perspectivism.

Originally, Weberian perspectivism refers to a view of human action as subjectively-oriented conduct. The fact that these are "orientations" indicates that agents only can attribute meaning to actions, and the fact that they are "subjective" unveils the eminently representative character of meanings. (Cohn in ESI: XIV), no matter how rationalized action conditions seem to be, no matter how conscious and definite are the elements composing the representation which guides the action (especially when thought in terms of means and ends). This cannot but be an act, at once interiorized (it is not a mere expression of objective facts, as in Durkheim) and partial (it does not follow from general or universal laws). The meaning aimed at is always relative to the interested agent(s) and to the societal context in which this/these agent(s) act. It is never a given or *a priori* reality. At a foundational level, Weber always regarded cultural life's exteriority or objectivity as subjective dispositions; hence the "subjectivist" vein of its sociology. It should be noted that subjective, in sociological analysis, is not synonymous to personal or intimate. Subjectivities are only made explicit in inter-subjectivity contexts; hence the definition of social action as behavior referred to the "other's" conduct. (Weber 1947: 1 [1991a: 3]). Subjective is synonymous to conscious representation of values and ends.

It is worth recalling that, for both Nietzsche and Weber, what may be true for the couple

rational/irrational is seemingly true for the pair exterior/interior. Both are planes which can only be distinguished by some point of view. Only Nietzsche did not want to do it, while Weber assumed a "formal" – rational and exterior – point of view. Such a point of view is sustained not only because Weber conferred to cultural "externality" meanings and determination degrees compatible with the treatment given to conscience, but mainly because he took it as a level of analysis and validation of the most intimate or extraordinary motivations. Such is the case, for instance, of his studies on the charismatic personalities' influence on social life. On the contrary, Nietzsche insisted upon subjective experiences, irreducible to the *socius*. However, for him also the subjective does not imply a reduction to the "self" or to interiority. From a strictly artistic point of view – "where there are masks only" and where Apollo composes together with Dionysius – "exteriority" is all there is (Santos 1999: 53-55).

It could be said that, if Nietzsche took the "interior world as a kind of internal exterior [the vital forces] world, which also we glimpse only as appearance" (Safranski 2001: 191), Weber regarded the outer world as a kind of interior world (subjectivity) objectified as culture. This differentiation refers to the radical opposition between the sociologist who considered the agent's representation always in relation to "others" (as concrete or abstract persons), and the psychologist-philosopher who gazed at transpersonal affection pursuant to representations most deeply rooted in a person or in an individual. By the way, it is certain that the foundations of the incompatibility I pursue here are more extensively illuminated by the difference between the sociologist and the psychologist than by the difference between the scientist and the philosopher.

In general, however, the fundamental assumption which made Weber conceive social life as a field of actions, and action as behavior endowed with particular meanings, is very close to the Nietzschean view which inserts meanings into subjectivity and historic practice – hence, contrary to any postulate of transcendence, universalism, or determinism of meanings. The approach becomes more radical because Weber recognized in the subjective encoding of meanings the anchor for arbitrary and irrational motivations, which are their ultimate foundation. As for the philosopher, a distance is established when Weber chose to think meaning according to its conscious dispositions. From this followed the search for an objective knowledge, with no interest, at least directly, in more irrational motivation. But in spite of this chief difference, there is the common emphasis in culture as polysemous, not only in terms of the interpretations men produce and the ends they set for themselves, but also of the range of quite imprecise motives which guide their intentions. Cultural possibilities are wide-ranging, and history is chiefly an open field for meanings. That is why all efforts to confer determinations of an extra-human or extra-subjective nature to life, history, culture or action as such meet head-on an "acknowledgement of absolute

polytheism” of values (Weber 1991: 197 [1995: 374]).

Values and causes, meanings and motives, ends and means: all these basic terms, constitutive of Weberian analytical frame, refer to the underlying principle of men being endowed with the ability and will to confer conscious meaning to their actions. The idea that men make choices and create ends is the bedrock lynchpin the Weberian image of culture, around which all his intellectual enterprise revolves. Special attention should be given, however, to the "conscious" adjective qualifying cultural "meanings". It is not an ontological or structural reference: man is not a predominantly conscious being in his dispositions, nor is the reality created by him predominantly a product of his conscience. In analytical terms, it amounts to saying that actual historical meanings oftentimes escape human intention, as actions involve impersonal conditions, unconscious motives, and unpredictable consequences. Weber was certain that many actions' and courses of actions' chief reasons pass as conscience; many of them are too plural, so that men can cluster them into a significant web. (Weber 1947: 4 [1991: 7]) That is why the emphasis placed in consciousness by Weberian perspectivism does not imply that knowledge refers to conscious realities only (which would be a regretful limitation), but stems from the fact that conscience is the only valid source of empirical knowledge due to its properties of abstraction and systematization. Because of the limitations of practical or theoretical use of conscience, reference to it as qualifier of meaningful actions will have a *strategic* value, so to say, as a fundamental plane in which the scientist dealing with culture operates for knowledge purposes, for the sake of knowledge. Likewise, to bring meanings to the plane of consciousness is, above all, a cognitive demand and a methodological strategy. When Weber referred to a cultural existence endowed with conscious meanings as his "basic assumption", he did so in order to highlight that, exclusively for purposes of significant and valid knowledge, one should consider meanings "as if" they were consciously oriented. This idea leads to and legitimates the "methodological resource" of thinking the course of human actions from a rationalist *perspective*. It is clear that, differently from Nietzsche, Weber regards the equation between consciousness and action as given and unquestionable, and tried to extract its fine fruits.

If there is an idea, parallel to the notion of awareness, which synthesizes the nature of reason's power, it is precisely that of assigning a "consequent", in the sense of coherent, attitude (Weber 1995a: 364 [1992: 528]). If the awareness shelter is responsible for cultural-anthropological potentiality of reason, the attribute of coherence defines its potentiality as an empirical plot and, chiefly, as abstract knowledge. Weber did not think in terms of a unitary reason, but each time he spoke about rationalization in culture, history and society, the two potentialities above are assumed. He did not want to be a philosopher of reason, but a scientist of rationalizations who, however, appropriates reason as his unitary method. The

fact that analytical perspectivism is faced from a methodological perspective demonstrates this point.

II

Another element should be added to these core ideas of Weberian thought. Both the conscious qualification for meaningful cultural actions and the possibility of a rational knowledge of their flow are anchored in historical experience. As an expression of human potentiality to confer meaning to life, rationality appears as an anthropological premise. But another Weberian premise for cultural studies is that rationality needs always to be historically situated, and that historical interests – synthesized in the expression value-oriented – appear as the last frontier of culture as conscious experience. It is worth noting that, if cultural phenomena are those which have history, then their historicity is defined by the relation between knowledge and values, for the very "concept of culture is a *value concept*" [*Wertbegriff*]. (Weber 1991: 54 [1989: 92])

For Weber, reference to history sets the ground for knowledge as something which goes always from the past towards the future, from which future trends are situated. To this corresponds the maxim that the "interests" based on which culture scientists formulate their problematic are detached from the historical epoch in which they are situated. This because the objects of inquiry and the limits of causal links established are, ultimately, bounded by value-ideas [*Wertideen*] which prevail in the researcher and his era. (Weber 1991: 65 [1989: 100]) And, more precisely, a rationalized image of "his time" – as a time which has already experienced the "fruit from the knowledge tree" and whose actions as society are carried out in a more conscious and regular way (Weber 1991: 197 [1993: 374]) – involves knowledge rationality as much as it directs spirit towards a consequent ethics. From that follows an effort to rebuild the pathway leading from the metaphysical assumption underlying Weber's perspectivism of men as signifiers of their own existence to the historical-cultural foundation of his thought.

Rationality acquires a universal trait when associated to men's ability to confer conscious meaning to their actions. Weber did not want to question meaning creation's underlying motives. Instead, he focused on the forms of objectivation (relations, associations, struggles, ideas, interests) and on connections between meanings. He preferred to think of rationalization as historical-cultural effectuation instead of as ontological property. However, the multiple ways of rationalizing and connecting, associated to the ultimate arbitrariness of the production of meaning and courses of action, make their study unfeasible without a guiding parameter. It was not about making a strategic choice for knowledge purposes only. Above all, perspectivism and arbitrariness in cultural life impose, for the sake of

knowledge, the need to start from a particular point of view, to have a unique perspective on knowledge – in this case, methodological rationalism.

Weber then established a parameter according to which he could "evaluate" meanings and degrees of rationalization in cultural life, including in order to better control irrational interferences. This parameter should be "pure" rational meaning. He mastered this primary reference to "rationality referring to ends", turning the principle of historic objectivation of meanings into the mechanism of coherence between means and ends. Such a reference should stake out the limits of all historical knowledge, as an abstract tool with which action course's typologies could be constructed, and afterwards, submitted to empirical examination. Hence, the inquirer could also highlight incoherence, inconsistencies or irrationalities through the model's inadequacies. With the parameter of "pure" rationality, Weber reasserted rationalism as his cognitive perspective and demonstrated that, in order to achieve valid knowledge, it is science which should artificially rationalize reality from the outset.

But where did Weber take his superior cognition parameter from? Based on the idea that the student of culture has historical reality as the source of his value references and research interests, cultural anchorage of Weberian methodological rationalism would be Western modernity and its historical meaning as "rationalism of world mastery". The abstract parameter adopted will be strengthened by its prevailing role as guiding principle of action at the main rationalized areas of modern West. The ultimate barrier to Weberian perspectivism or rationalism is historical. Western modernity appears as the historical epoch in which the inquirer's subjectivity is inscribed, and from which his main research interests stem. Holding a stout reference to values to which he clings on to, as a knowledgeable man, is in touch with the "modern European man's interests" (Weber 1991: 213 [1995: 384]). Modern culture and social life figure as an ultimate "point of view" for Weber, which defines rationalism as the perspective for correct knowledge. Henceforth, all his study goals will be "situated" in relation to the issue of rationality, and assessed according to the degree and direction of their rationalization.

The so-called "rationalism sociology", as the production and historical framing of typologies of social relations and orientations, is chiefly directed towards understanding rational processes of having "cultural values" in different places and times. Modern West is, however, always considered as maximum expression of the rational possession of culture, where rationalized meanings present a more explicit, definite, and coherent outline. (Weber 1995a: 364, 402-403 [1992: 528, 557-558]) If it is the sciences of culture's share to interpret the meanings of phenomena, frequently enough modern rationalized meanings appear as typologies guiding the effort of historical comparison. If concepts refer to the way in which

research problems are proposed, these "vary according to cultural content". (Weber 1991: 93 [1989: 121]) The scope reached by Weberian historical sociology has nothing to do with a general philosophy of history, nor with any evolutionist view encompassing different cultural facets turned into phases of a logical development. It hinges on rationalism, or, to be more specific, on applying a general typology – rational action referring to ends – as methodological parameter and touchstone for classifying the other action types. As modern West is the scenario for rationalizations based on this type of action, it is understandable that the universal meaning of its orders appears as the image of the world which supports rationalism typology as comparative reference.

Weber asserted that, when studying "any problem of universal history", a "son of modern Western civilization" would be always subject to inquire on the universality of modern cultural phenomena (Weber 1969: 9), for these phenomena exert a psychological pressure in being oriented by them, and directed towards them." In another text, Weber declared that the social science he wished to practice prioritized the understanding of current configurations of cultural phenomena and their historical foundation (Weber 1991: 49-50 [1989: 88]). In fact, the whole Weberian sociology, by focusing on conceptualizing cultural rationalizations, is rooted on Western modernity environment, which is the context of rationalism as world mastery, both in form and in spirit. Modernity provides the cultural images supporting scientific imaginary, and the images of rationalized modernity, quite appropriate to a worthy son of disenchantment, "maneuver" the interests of knowledgeable man.

III

In synthesis, Weber is a thinker of culture who ascribed priority to understanding the processes singularizing and staking out its historical epoch. Likewise, he made use of these processes as parameters for establishing the cultural meanings of the most different times and places, showing a pertinent relation to his time. However, this appears not only at a theoretical level, in terms of methodological rationalism and research interests, but also at an ethical level, in terms of the idea that one should have consciousness of the operating forces in order to handle one's own destiny.

The alliance between *thinker* and *historicity* appears at the methodological, analytical and ethical levels. "Rationalism" as a strategy for objective knowledge, in itself, owes much to the intellectualization of thought and establishment of modern science. As any other *point of view*, methodological rationalism refers to knowledgeable men's interests, and these refer to his cultural life context. On the other hand, modern stages of cultural rationalization figure as the "meanings" in relation to which all other rationalization contexts are assessed, and have their degree of coherence "measured". Finally, it is only

after cultural rationalizations' most coherent meanings are made explicit that man can acquire consciousness of the more general character of cultural life: the absence of superior meanings and the polytheism of values.

Hence, Weber made use of the image of a rationalized modernity as a master idea of his cultural studies and of his main ethical guideline. At the plane of knowledge, he took the most rational action as base for methodological instrumentalization, because the historic path of actions showed that the most conscious actions are the most understandable and controllable. At an ethical level, the ideal of a responsible attitude committed to ultimate values which are patently irrational but prone to becoming a consequent choice, is a possibility brought about by the (rational) cultivation of values. The postulate of "coherence" (which applies directly to method but, in terms of ethic, is specified as the ideal of "responsibility") achieves its best expression in cultural modernity, given its intense and unparalleled rationalization of means and ends.

The fact that modernity appears as both a heuristic and ethical reference results, curiously, in the crossing of these two dimensions in Weberian thought – even though he tried to dissociate them. This imbrication appears clearly when the "transcendent premises" of the sciences of culture are compared to the ethical ideal of "responsible" man: both assume the idea of conscious experiencing of the meanings of actions. What unifies them is an inexorable fact presented in cultural modernity: the understanding that life has no absolute meanings, but that concrete and relative meanings are different and opposite (Weber 1991: 197-198 [1995: 374-375]) The ethical prescription of this understanding is that the soul should have the courage to "choose" the "meaning of its acting and of its being", and handle the consequences and renouncements implied in this choice. The epistemological assumption thereof is of culture as contexts of agents guided by meanings of which they are conscious. Modernity was the cultural source from which – and from which *only* – Weber thought about spirit and history. The Weberian relation with Western civilization has a prescriptive and a reflexive outcome. In both, the meaningful mark of civilized versus natural, rational versus traditional and affective, is affirmed. All these considerations stress the umbilical pertinence Weber accorded to modernity and to its deep implications for his thought – something that was once regarded as his "ethnocentrism" (Colliot-Thélène 1990: 89)

Schluchter reported these implications amongst Weberian levels of thought by means of a triple pinpointing the idea of "conscious personality". At a first level, by the assumption that men are endowed with the ability to attribute meaning to the world, and act consciously. The "personality's conceptually assumed consciousness is a kind of transcendent pre-condition for interpretive sociology". At a second level, the potential for being a signifying agent is also put as underlying condition for ethics as

"responsibility". And, at a third level, there is the institutional reinforcement of conscious action by his view of "[modern] personality as consequence of a behavioral typifying resulting from the nature of a value system and the way in which people are socialized" (2000: 63-65). These are, undoubtedly, distinct levels and "personalities". However, there is a common defining element: the reference to consciousness. So, Schluchter failed in not concluding that the premise of conscious action, the practice of a methodological rationalism, and the conception of an aware personality were made valid by the Weberian acknowledgement of growing historical masteries of consciousness over cultural ideas and practices – such an acknowledgement underlying methodological rationalism and responsibility ethics.

As Weber's analytical perspectivism is rooted on the anthropological premise of men as agents signifiers of existence, such a premise is anchored on the historicity of a cultural modernity made homogeneous by meaningfully-defined action spheres. Anthropology and history meet, showing the extent to which Weber was heir to "his time", to which modernity not only legitimized his cognitive procedures but, more deeply, provided him with the very image of culture and ethical ideal. Perspectivism, suggested in the transcendent premise on culture, is validated by the polytheism which is understandable by means of value rationalizations. The ethical issue is included, when it is understood, as Kontos (1994: 237ss) did, that responsibility towards ultimate ends and consequences of the acts stemming from the positioning within the value world (while made optional by the modern process of intellectualization and ends clarification) is an invitation for man to affirm his "cultural essence" – that is, the ability to make conscious choices. Weber relied on the same scenario of a world substantiated by the perspectivism of rationalizations – to which is added the formalism and instrumentalism of a "rationalism of world mastery" – in which men are subjectivated and also challenged to act consciously in order to establish the ensemble of all his assumptions and stances. And he did so by placing himself at an observation point detached and better defined rationally within the modern scenario: the intellectual point of view.

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Translated by Bruno M .N. Reinhardt

Revised by Luiz H. L. Abrahão

Translation from *Teoria & Sociedade*[on line]. 2005, n°.se, pp.50-67. ISSN 1518-4471.