A Meta-Theoretical Approach to the Sociology of Change: The Case of Max Weber

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Abstract: The main topic in the sociology of change is social change. But the subject begins to deepen and expand when we ask about the keywords indicated by society as a word, variables such as nature, level, or process of change and the methodological answers given to this question of how to study change. Adding the classifications developed for differentiating the various approaches in the history of sociology of change to this framework will reveal the groundwork on which this study's problem is based. Our issue is not the problems in the sociology of change, but the sociology of change as a problem. In other words, our issue is the philosophical or methodological problems that exist within the sociological analysis of change. In this respect, problems corresponding to the fields of being, knowledge, and values will be examined such as object, knowledge, methodology, and objectivity. On the other hand, despite having such a collection of problems related to the sociology of change, the number of studies approaching the issue at the meta-theoretical level in Turkey is quite low. This study is considered to contribute to eliminating this gap identified in the literature. The study is limited to the assumption of the discrepancy between Max Weber's methodology and analysis. The aim of the study is to point out that meta-theoretical problems cannot be solved if we do not provide an overall approach to the history of the philosophy of sociology and the social sciences. Thus, the transition from the philosophical theory of change to the scientific sociology of change will be indicated by the metaphysical problems that ensue in this process. As can be seen towards the end of the study, neither Weber's critique nor those from different theoretical positions directed at one another can solely be subjectively evaluated. They are also markers of meta-theoretical issues. Each critique is an event of the story it is a part of; this story transcends the alternative theoretical positions and relates to the logical and metaphysical problems in the fields of being, knowledge, and values.

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The nature of the meta-theoretical analysis can be determined based on the question "How can it be studied over the sociology of change?" This analysis can be viewed as a philosophical analysis of the theoretical and empirical studies that are an extension of the positivist-formalist-historicalist distinction in the classical age of sociology by using the findings from monographic studies as data in a way that transcends it. Although determining the meta-theoretical analysis' various orientations is possible, the problem of the study concerns the problems of existence, knowledge, and values in the process of establishing sociology as a science. This situation carries us to the distinction that exists between establishing sociology and performing sociology. While the first activity is inevitably expected to be philosophical, the second is expected to be sociological; the meta-theoretical analysis is based on the results from this activity. Therefore, we will first try to see the main traces of the philosophical, scientific, and sociological theory of change in order to view the possibility of classifying the *metaphysical character* (through the trio of existence-knowledge-values) on which the sociology of change is based. In this context, the study is based on the idea that classical sociology has four alternative institutions: (*a*) relationalism (Marx), (*b*) interactionism (Simmel), (*c*) holism (Durkheim), and (*d*) individualism (Weber).

The difficulty of adding Weber's sociology to a classification has been evaluated in connection with the great versatility, complexity, and publishing process of his studies (Aron, 2017; Callinicos, 2004, pp. 246–247; Jensen, 2018, p. 15). Moreover, the gaps or ambiguities that resist classification in his studies appear so systematic that they are considered to have been deliberately left. Still, two main trends can be identified in Weber classifications. First, Weber can be seen to have been included in classifications in studies concentrating on the field of the philosophy of the social sciences, such atomic individualism, methodological individualism, voluntarism, and nominalism as general trends or individualist-substantialism based on Dewey's formulation (Benton, 2016, p. 118; Bhaskar, 2015, pp. 111–142; Emirbayer, 2012, pp. 26–35; Vandenberghe, 2016, pp. 408–419). In contrast with this, classifications based on direct sociological analyses and his series of studies have been included in the history of sociology, or comparative historical studies and the trends or versatility of the sociology of economics have been emphasized (Aron, 2017; Callinicos, 2004, p. 225; Kalberg, 2017, p. 58; Mills, 2007, p. 44). As is seen, variations such as the fact that giving a final classification is not possible derive from the selection of variables. On the other hand, due to the data-intensive nature of works from the history of sociology or of sociological analysis, we have the tendency to understand in a descriptive style the criticisms each theory has brought to the fore. However, these criticisms rather embody the methodological problems sociology has carried within itself since its beginning. In other words, the criticism a thinker brings to the forefront indicates the problems inherent in sociology as much as it is particular and clearly stated criticism that one develops based on one's methodological position. These problems are: the problems of (*a*) object, (*b*) knowledge/science, (*c*) methodology, and (*d*) objectivity.

Let's note that, with regard to the issue of object, Weber's emotional, traditional, and rational distinction corresponds to the distinction between Kant's individual and cultural subjectivity with reason and the distinction among Aristotle's pathos, ethos, and logos (Doğan, 2018). Weber is seen to have continued this ancient distinction; however, he was seen to not be satisfied with the solution Kant had brought to the distinction after the concussion that the Aristotelian framework had experienced for several centuries or with the solutions Marx, Simmel, and Durkheim brought *in collaboration with Kant despite Kant*. When considering that these tensions still continue in contemporary sociology, the narrowing by pruning the problems detected in the antecedents will be seen to continue instead of trying to arrive at the broadest and deepest understanding where the problem relates to the comprehension of object itself and has the possibility of remaining unsolved. Indeed, a question such as "What is the object of social analysis?" cannot be answered before the question of how the pre-modern firmly established forms related to object in a process where Weber was also involved had developed against the comprehension of a non-constructed object.

The main problem on the topic of information is how can the measure of objectivity be provided from a subjective point of departure? This problem had previously been a great pain for Kant himself; by preserving an individualist position, however, Weber had only one way to prove the adequacy of how he had brought explanatory understanding to a state compatible with the scientific criterion for that day. The utilitarian concept of *sympathy*, by virtue of *similarity*, functioned in economic theory and policy analogous to Kant's concept of *common sense*. On this topic, Weber can be considered to have reconciled the utilitarian option, which had been considerably slimmed in the hands of the neo-Kantian heritage and the marginal school of economics. However, here is where the problem didn't end but where it started, because the concept of similarity itself possesses an insight where nominalizations of this type can face serious problems. In the case of having to grasp the category of similarity as a whole, upon whose nature utilitarianism probably had not dwelled enough, Weber's argument would become quite stressed; after all, similarity is not an ideal type either. Consequently, subject has a direct relationship with the problem of object. Weber ultimately intended to overcome the distinction between the natural sciences and cultural sciences. In this case, obtaining information on just an empirical path or just a rational path is seen to be impossible. The distinction between the natural and cultural sciences also had emerged on this basis. This means the following: Whether or not Weber had been a synthesizer or a methodological pluralist, he had tried to bring Kant, who had solved the crisis in the past through one of the aspects of the information crisis, side by side with the methodological followers. Therefore, every criticism that Weber would receive on the issue of information consists of the embodiment in Weber of the criticism of historical moments where the category of interaction and relationship essentially became the alternative to object. The

justifications for this are how information had begun to be understood as a result of the disposition subject has over object, as well as the basing of information to be a mental construct as a result of the idea of modern subject, which had not been rescued from the metaphysical load that the notion of object had brought as a *thing-in-itself*, being encapsulated by Kant.

Another question beyond the discussions on methodology has to be asked: Despite Weber having arrived at an analytical result in the final stage similar to Marx, Simmel, and Durkheim, why did he insist on setting the initial principle of sociology on the individual subject? No answer to this question can be found within arrangements containing only ontological or epistemological issues; "the problem of object" can provide data for this. From the perspective of technique, (a) The "selective predispositions" having been determined according to which criteria (for example, according to Weber's selective predispositions?) and (b) rationalization being defined within originality to Western societies as the main characteristic of all analyses pose problems. From the moral-political perspective, even though Weber generally is brought into confrontation with Marx, the two of them expressed similarities on the topic of instrumentalizing Eastern and Islamic societies using the non-objective character of the resources they had used to explain these societies just for explaining European society (Said, 2013; Turner, 1991).

As a result, the starting point of sociological analysis for Weber at the meta-theoretical level is clearly the individual subject, and the specific object is the individual's social activity. However, the individual subject is seen to progressively evaporate and disappear both in the methodology and analyses in his sociology. The term *iron cage* is the expression of contraction that happens against the possibilities of the subject in Western thought only in Weber's grammar; his same story can be seen in the concepts of estrangement, anomie, tragedy, or reification from other theorists. Indeed, the subsequent development of sociology can be said to be formed over the basic principles from the structure-subject type, and contemporary sociology can be said to have largely dealt with solving this problem. Despite all its apparent contradictions, however, indicating that no field remains to humans even in the case that has been reduced to the individual in conjunction with the theories that have emerged expresses a layer of further narrowing with relation to Kant. That is to say, we find the same thing expressed within different arrangements in the history of Western social thought in terms of the initial and final recommendations that are embodied in Weber.

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