

The Question of Objectivity in the Social Sciences

Terfa Kahaga Anjov, PhD

and

Moses Terwase Bebatso

Abstract

This paper aims at espousing on the question of objectivity in the social sciences. Like the natural sciences and all other scientific enterprise, objectivity is one of the greatest requirements of any form of investigation. Contrary to objectivity is subjectivity which is one of the bane of social science investigations and inquiries. This is because of the difficulty that exists in the attempt at successfully getting the individual investigator to drop his/her biases and to engage in an objective study of any phenomenon and to be value neutral. To achieve its aim, the paper adopts the critical and evaluative methods of data analysis. This paper found out that regardless of the factors that have been advanced as those affecting value neutrality and the near absence of complete objectivity in the social sciences, the precursors of the social sciences have argued for the value neutrality as well as the fact that objectivity can be reached in the social science. It is sequel to the above that Webber, through his distinction between cultural values and the values that are important for social science inquiry, argued that objectivity can be obtained or arrived at in the social sciences. To this end, the paper concludes that as the most cherish value in any scientific investigation, objectivity is possible in social science investigation if and only if, the investigator is able to decipher the Webberian distinction and to be mindful of the distinction in the process of any social science inquiry.

Keywords: Philosophy, Social Sciences, Objectivity, Values, Philosophy of Social Science

Introduction

Objectivity has been argued to be the most cherished value of scientific (be it natural or social science) research. The essence of

objectivity is to make a given research free from researcher's biases. The bias can be caused by a variety of reasons and not all the reasons are always controllable by the researcher. This is true especially when the subject matter of study is human beings. Traditional empiricist epistemology tells us that to be objective is to represent the world the way it really is. This is sometimes referred to as 'the view from nowhere'¹, which entails looking at the world in a way that transcends individual experience, perception, or perspective. The underlying assumption is that our mind is such that, by either association of ideas as Locke would say, or by means of innate rules of reasoning as Descartes held, it is able 'mechanically' and without any creative additions to reproduce existing states of affairs. A crucial corollary to this assumption is, of course, that there is a way that the world is, independently of how we view it, or what we make of it, a way that our mind can faithfully capture.

The domain of inquiry that best suits this scenario has long appeared to be the natural sciences. There is a long tradition from Bacon to Hume to Galileo and Descartes that claims that there are facts in nature that natural science is well equipped to investigate. The empirical methods of science successfully lead to the discovery of the natural laws that describe those facts with accuracy and explain them. The results of scientific inquiry are then the closest kin to offering a 'view from nowhere'². So called 'mechanical objectivity' established itself as the ideal image of scientific representation: "the image, as standard bearer of objectivity, is tied to a relentless search to replace individual volition and discretion in depiction by the invariable routines of

1. Nagel quoted in Eleonora Montuschi "Objectivity" *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Social Science*. Lee McIntyre and Alex Rosenberg (Ed.). (London: Routledge, 2017), Pg. 281 .

2. Eleonora Montuschi, "Objectivity" *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Social Science*, Pg. 282.

mechanical reproduction”³. Mechanical objectivity also entailed a particular type of scientist: “long on diligence and self-restraint, scant on genial interpretation,” someone who is willing to “let nature speak for itself”⁴.

Historically, traditional empiricist epistemology and the natural sciences have become the models for defining objectivity in the sense just suggested, as well as for dictating the standards by which to assess whether, and how far, domains and procedures of inquiry are (or can be) objective. The social sciences, a later addition to the field of science, are enmeshed in this joint scenario. They were evaluated in comparison with the natural sciences, and this portrayed them from the start as 'lesser' sciences, bound to imitate the well-established paradigm of the natural sciences. In particular, by modeling social facts on natural facts, they were asked to embrace an epistemological view of objectivity that does not necessarily or appropriately fit the social domain. Indeed, the social sciences, besides being penalized by this comparison, were also somehow cheated: the traditional epistemological framework of knowledge as embraced by scientific method was put under severe critical scrutiny in the second half of the 20th century, and at least by its most radical critics it was declared altogether untenable. The image of science that social science was meant to imitate gradually lost at least some of its paradigmatic appeal.

This paper concerns itself with the question of Objectivity in the social science and to do this, the paper moves from a preliminary discourse on the question of what constitutes the social science and the philosophy of social science to the discourse on the question of objectivity in the social sciences. In the final third, the paper evaluates the discourse before drawing a conclusion.

³. Daston, L. and Galison, P. “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, 40 (Special Issue: Seeing Science), Pg.98.

⁴. Daston, L. and Galison, P. “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, 120–21.

The Social Sciences and the Philosophy of Social Sciences: A Conceptual Labyrinth

The social sciences are those sciences that study man's action in the society.⁵ What this means is that the basic preoccupation of the social sciences as well as its subject matter is man's action within the society and how those actions influence his/her life and others. Such subjects as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, comparative study of human behaviour, social history, social psychiatry, criminology, the science of communication, ecology, social works and community development according to Asouzu readily comes to mind when the social sciences is mentioned.⁶ Akpan corroborated the above when he defined the social sciences “as a web of inter-related courses whose subject matter is the human social behaviour”⁷. He further argued that each social science aims at understanding behaviour in connection with the area of human behaviour covered by such a science⁸ and hence, distinguished the six distinct subjects that constitute the social sciences to be political science, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology and geography.⁹ To this end Asouzu summarizes the various science disciplines within the context of their concern with man's action in the society thus:

Ecology studies environmental behaviour, that is to say man in space, and geo-physical components insofar as they relate to man. Ethology as the

^{5.} Asouzu, I. I. *IKWA OGWE: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflections, A Systemic Methodological Approach*. (Calabar: Saeprints Publishers, 2017), Pg. 21.

^{6.} Asouzu, I. I. *IKWA OGWE: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflections, A Systemic Methodological Approach*, Pg. 21-22.

^{7.} Akpan, C. O. “Philosophy of Social Science” in Ozumba, G.O and Ojong, K. A (Ed.) *The Mirror of Philosophy* (Uyo: El-Johns Publisher, 2014), Pg. 288.

^{8.} Akpan, C. O. “Philosophy of Social Science” in Ozumba, G.O and Ojong, K. A (Ed.) *The Mirror of Philosophy*, Pg. 288.

^{9.} Akpan, C. O. “Philosophy of Social Science” in Ozumba, G.O and Ojong, K. A (Ed.) *The Mirror of Philosophy*, Pg. 293.

science of character formation in human behaviour, concerns itself with psycho-physical behaviours, with stimulus-response relationship and neuro-physiological process. Social history studies diachronic behaviour, cultural manifestation, temporal components. Social psychiatry considers deviant behaviour, spiritual and mental disorder. Political science studies political behaviour, government, ruling, control, votes, etc. Criminology studies equally deviant behaviours, contravening of laws and norms. Economics studies economic behaviour, production, distribution, consumption of goods and services. Comparative study of behaviours: this branch of the social science studies the comparison between man and animal. Science of communication studies non-verbal and verbal behaviours.¹⁰

Having answered the question of what the sciences are and that of their basic preoccupation, it remains to say what constitutes the philosophy of social sciences. The philosophy of social sciences belongs to a genre that includes the philosophy of physics, biology, psychology, language, philosophy of logic, of mathematics, etc. According to Shapiro, this genre “deal with philosophical questions that concerns an academic discipline, issues about the metaphysics, epistemology, semantics, logic and methodology of the discipline. The philosophy of X is pursued by those and only those who care about X and wants to illuminate its place in the overall intellectual enterprise”¹¹. X in the present case is the social sciences.

¹⁰. Asouzu, I. I. *IKWA OGWE: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflections, A Systemic Methodological Approach*, Pg. 22.

¹¹. Shapiro, S. *Thinking about Mathematics: The Philosophy of Mathematics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Pg. vii.

For Asouzu, a philosophy of social sciences lays down rules for a critical enquiry into the norms governing explanation and understanding of actions in society. Philosophy imposes such rules on other branches of study that study human action in the society with the aim of regulating these theories and methods of approach of these sciences. Thereby, it ensures that firm and explicable grounds for the epistemological assumptions of these sciences are guaranteed. In this, it aims at establishing a creditable sound metaphysics of science. Put differently, a philosophy of social sciences asks the questions concerning the condition of possibility of the social sciences.¹²

Contributing to the discourse on what constitutes the philosophy of social sciences, Akpan stressed that following the correct description of philosophy as the mother of all disciplines, philosophy does not take its eyes off its children regardless of whether they have become independent. He argued that philosophy seeks to reflect on and appraise the achievements, methods of achievements, claims and conclusion of the social science in this context. This attempt as he further argues,

sets the tone for philosophical inquiry concerning the social sciences. Hence, the rise of interrelated questions such as what is the method of social sciences; does it use the same method as the natural sciences given its own subject matter which is different from the natural sciences? If it does, to what extent could this method be successful? Can social laws be discovered in the manner of laws in the natural science? Can social science be objective and value neutral or should it thrive to be? Are there regularities in the social world as in the natural world? These and so many other related questions are the traditional or

^{12.} Asouzu, I. I. *IKWA OGWE: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflections, A Systemic Methodological Approach*, Pg. 31.

customary questions and issues in the philosophy of science.¹³

From the foregoing, it feels safe to argue that the philosophy of social sciences is the problematisation of the social sciences using the tool and instrumentality of philosophy. It questions the basic assumptions of the social sciences with the intent of keeping them on their toes and preventing them from drifting into dogmatism while at the same time, enhancing and deepening their explanation and interpretation of the society.

The Question of Objectivity in the Social Sciences

The first question that this section should address as one will expect is, what is objectivity? Objectivity means judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices. According to Green as quoted by Kritarth Pandey, "Objectivity is the willingness and ability to examine evidence dispassionately"¹⁴. In the same vein, Carr argues that, "Objectivity of truth means that the phenomenon would be a reality independent of beliefs, hopes or fears of any individual, all of which we find out not by intuition and speculation but by actual observations"¹⁵. Objectivity means that the conclusions arrived at as the result of inquiry and investigation are independent of the race, colour, creed, occupation, nationality, religion, moral preference, and political predisposition of the investigator. If his research is truly objective, it is independent of any subjective

¹³. Akpan, C. O. "Philosophy of Social Science" in Ozumba, G.O and Ojong, K. A (Ed.) *The Mirror of Philosophy*, Pg. 288-289.

¹⁴. Green quoted in Ross. M. "The Problem of Tainted Evidence –The Problem of Insufficient Evidence- The Problem of Assessment-Who is Telling the Myth?" In P. Helm (Ed.) *Objective Knowledge: A Christian Perspective* (pp. 131-146). Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, Pg. 1.

¹⁵. Carr quoted in Ross. M. "The Problem of Tainted Evidence –The Problem of Insufficient Evidence- The Problem of Assessment-Who is Telling the Myth?" In P. Helm (Ed.) *Objective Knowledge: A Christian Perspective* (pp. 131-146). Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, Pg. 1.

elements; any personal desires that he may have". Objectivity thus, means that the conclusions arrived at as the result of inquiry and investigations are independent.

According to Martyn Hammersley, the central meaning of the term "objectivity" concerns whether inquiry is pursued in a way that maximizes the chances that the conclusions reached will be true. However, the word has a number of other related meanings. The various meanings of "objectivity" can be clarified by distinguishing its adjectival and adverbial forms. First, "objective" can be applied as an adjective to phenomena in the world. In this sense, it is sometimes taken to imply that a thing exists, rather than being a mere appearance or figment of imagination. Alternately, "objectivity" can mean that a thing belongs to the "external" world, not to the "internal", psychological world of a subject. In this sense, whereas table and chairs are objective, thoughts and feelings are not, even though they both may be real rather than mere appearances.¹⁶

In her contribution to the discourse on the question of objectivity in the social science, Judith Agassi argued that complete objectivity is impossible. She stressed that the general obstacles to scientific objectivity in any field concern the fact that every human is heir to some intellectual preferences and standpoints. The individual is also heir to a social and cultural tradition as a result of his being a member of a specific group of national, religious, and ethnic characteristics.¹⁷ I do not wish to dwell on man's limitations qua man, since this is the topic of much philosophic disquisition. Rather, I wish now to move from the obstacles to all human attempts at objectivity, to the obstacles specific to the social sciences. These are, we are told, she referred to the values of the individual researchers, values meaning here preferences and

¹⁶. Martyn Hammersley, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Research Methods*. (SAGE Publications 2004), Pg. 750.

¹⁷. Judith Agassi, Pg. 4.

judgments in the very field of human endeavour which is the topic or the subject-matter under investigation as obstacles specific to the social science that stands against objectivity.¹⁸ For example, a social anthropologist may easily tend to evaluate and judge the practices and mores of people belonging to alien cultures in terms of his own. This is the well-known danger of ethnocentrism, so-called. There is no inherent difference between ethnic and class centrality.

The investigator's individual experience may result in either negative or positive dispositions towards all sorts of groupings of people. He may identify with a group of people, which seem to him to resemble his own group or, on the contrary, especially free of his own people's shortcomings to which he is most sensitive. The prejudices resulting from politico-ideological convictions are, of course, commonplace; they occur in the natural sciences too, but are less serious there. Here we have both authorities demanding certain preconceptions, and scientists who represent these authorities either voluntarily or out of terror, especially in monolithic cultures. Even in pluralist societies, however, politico-ideological convictions play a significant role in distorting social realities. It is a common place that personal economic self-interest or the economic interest of the scientist's group may bias his judgment. It is not possible to overcome these obstacles once and for all. Yet it is of the greatest importance that each individual investigator should make the effort to become aware, as much as he reasonably can, of those of his value judgments that are relevant to his studies.

In the same vein, it must be stated that social science research has always emphasized on the establishment of objectivity. From the renowned sociologist Emile Durkheim, to Weber's emphasis that 'sociology must be value free' amongst others, it is crystal clear that social scientists also seek to establish the same 'universal

^{18.} Judith Agassi, Pg. 4-5

validation', which is used by natural scientists, but it is not as easy for them as for the natural scientists. This is because the natural sciences study 'objects', which have no consciousness and are not dynamic while social sciences study human mind, actions and behaviours, which are ever changing and not universal. We cannot reduce human mind to object experiment. Therefore, the universal validation cannot be attained in social sciences.¹⁹

The difficulty with having objectivity in the social sciences stems from the fact that the subjectivity of the knower/researcher cannot be eliminated because of the many factors such as researcher's feelings, emotions, cultural values and sympathies with observed community/group. Emergence of various theories and approaches in social sciences provided a wider space for the discussion and debate over 'objectivity' in social sciences and various schools of thought came with their different conclusions.

Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar, further advanced factors affecting objectivity in the social sciences to be the researcher's interest in selection of research topic, the researcher's cultural beliefs and values, the observed community's cultural values and beliefs, the researcher's compassion and consideration to the observing community, the researcher's observation and interpretation in personal cultural context, the fact that there is no peculiar method of research in social sciences, the problem of tainted and insufficient evidence and problem of assessment of evidence. This paper considers them germane and hence, a synopsis of the above factor is here presented in the paragraphs that follow.

I. Researcher's Interest in Selection of Research Topic

The first and the foremost obstacle or problem to establish

¹⁹. Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar, "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis" *Asia Pacific*, (2019, Vol. 37), Pg. 130.

objectivity in social science is researcher's particular involvement in topic of choice that relates to both his/her research interest and emotional make-up. On what grounds did the researcher choose his/her research topic? Is there any cultural, religious or ethnic similarity between the observing community and the community of investigator? What degree of researcher's attachment is with that observing community? These questions are common in social research and are directly related to investigator's personal wishes and feelings. For example, a researcher, who is physically disabled, conducts research to know the socio-economic problems of the disabled persons. Is it possible for that researcher to be 'objective' in his/her research study? Does the researcher keep control over his/her personal emotions and experience being a disabled person? Obviously, it could be hard, if not impossible, for keeping his/her feelings, emotions and experiences aside. Surely, he/she considers the problems of the disabled as his/her own and does favour to the group (disabled persons) of which he/she belongs to.

ii. Researcher's Cultural Beliefs and Values

It is, of course, true that complete objectivity in social inquiry is an impossibility, but accomplishing as much of it as reasonably possible, is mandatory for a scientific inquiry. It is widely believed that researcher's values affect research. To avoid this one should follow scientific values, however; according to epistemological relativism, scientific values are just values and are unable to protect researcher from others values and they do not deserve special privilege.²⁰ Furthermore, man is a social animal and lives in a particular group. He/she possesses cultural traditions, values, mores, religious beliefs, etc; and is a member of particular group. He /she has a strong attachment/involvement with these traditions and values and he/she also considers these traditions superior to all others throughout the world. This natural tendency

²⁰ *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*, "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 134.

of being human, impels investigators to put personal feelings in their research. Every human has some intellectual preferences and standpoints which affect objectivity in social research. Objectivity may be an impossible ideal, but along the way of seeking objectivity one may become less subjective. To seek objectivity (or a lessening of subjectivity) researchers must compensate for their own subjective experiences. They should compensate for what they've been subjected to. If one encounters a white person who hates blacks, he must accept that this doesn't mean all white people hate black people. Thus, it is crucial that the researcher must detach himself/herself from cultural values, beliefs, presuppositions and personal bad experiences to make results of the study more objective and bias free.²¹

iii. Observed Community's Cultural Values and Beliefs

It is believed that cultural values and beliefs are deeply rooted and that particular community has a strong attachment with these cultural values and beliefs, and that strong attachment gives birth to 'ethnocentrism' (one's own cultural values and beliefs are superior to all others). Thus, cultural values and beliefs of researcher and researched community affect objectivity in social science. All knowledge of cultural reality, as may be seen, is always knowledge from particular points of view, but the key requirement for maintaining objectivity in research study, is that the social scientists must abandon or transcend his ethnocentric and egocentric biases while carrying out researches. When social scientists study the social issues then they would have to deal with sensation, emotion and values of that particular community, of course, which are subjective, so it is not only difficult but impossible to be objective about the subjective matters. As the cultural values and beliefs are not universal but vary from society to society, community to community and group to group, this variation of meaning and sense of cultural values and beliefs create

²¹. *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*, "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 135.

hurdles for researcher to understand the proper meaning and sense of these cultural traditions and values of observed community.²² Here most of the researchers observe cultural values and traditions of observed community in the context of their own cultural values and traditions, which further lessens the objectivity.

iv. Researcher's Compassion and Consideration to the Observing Community

Our very human, social, and historical ability to comprehend, to understand, and to interpret is important hurdle in establishing objectivity in social research. For example, the emergence of criticism on 'objectivity' and the conclusions of social scientists that white sociologists cannot objectively study the black people, richer scientists cannot study more objectively about the problems of poor community, men social scientists could not be bias free when they conduct research on social problems of women.²³

v. Researcher's Observation and Interpretation in Personal Cultural Context

Observation, perception and interpretation are of crucial significance in social research and the ability of researcher to observe, perceive and interpret the phenomenon also maximises or minimises the objectivity. Observation is a technique in social research to receive knowledge of the outside world through senses or record data by using scientific instrument. It could be a particular way we look at things or something. Observation plays important role in testing hypothesis and coming to conclusion with data gathered in research. 'Scientific observation is always aimed at making sense of information that exists independently of our beliefs', and this non-epistemic information is the input from

^{22.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*; "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis",Pg. 136.

^{23.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*; "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 136.

non-epistemic perception. It is also believed that personal traits affect scientific observation. But again the problem is that the researcher observes in context of his or her cultural background and he or she hardly can avoid that.

vi. No Peculiar Method of Research in Social Sciences

In contrast to natural sciences there is no peculiar method for conducting research in social sciences because natural scientists deal with 'objects' while social scientists deal with 'human actions, behaviour and their social problems'. In the early phase of evolution of social sciences, it was emphasized that social scientists must apply the method (quantitative) which is, used by the natural scientists in their studies, but with the development of social sciences, debate started among social scientists on the method of research in social science and various methods and approaches were suggested by social scientists. The problem of heterogeneous material also minimises objectivity in social science.²⁴

vii. Problem of Tainted and Insufficient Evidence

Marks Ross presents three major obstacles in establishing objectivity in social sciences, one of them is 'tainted evidence'. Given the evident success of modern science it is understandable that scientific knowledge has become the paradigm of objective knowledge. Significantly, it is with respect to scientific knowledge that the problems of objectivity have been most extensively discussed in recent years.²⁵

The problem of tainted evidence mostly arises in social research; while there is a popular notion/conception in science that hypothesis is assessed/tested on gathered facts. Thus, if the gathered evidences are tainted then definitely the research could

^{24.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*; "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 138.

^{25.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*; "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 138.

not be considered objective. Further, the researcher's ability of observation, perception and interpretation do affect the results and here the personal involvement of the researcher is hard to be avoided. Therefore, it is believed, our evidence is tainted, and affected by the subjective elements. It is common that researchers gather more information for any investigation to make their conclusions or results more likely to be correct and objective. But the problem that arises is that huge information alters in their conclusions or results and hence, the more collected information gives various conclusions and even sometime totally different from the previous ones. This makes the investigator confused and simultaneously reduces objectivity.²⁶

viii. Problem of Assessment of Evidence

Besides the problems of tainted evidence and insufficient evidence, the assessment of evidence / data further reduces objectivity in social research. There is no neutral set of standards for assessing explanations.²⁷ Different people accept different explanations and definitions of the same terms in social sciences, which again create problems in proper assessment of evidence and explanation of theory and terms.

Evaluation

In the preceding paragraphs, attempts have been made to explicate on the problem of objectivity in the social sciences. It remains to reiterate that complete objectivity as we have argued is almost impossible in the social sciences. This is because of the subjectivity of the investigator. However, a critical evaluation of the preceding discourse in the light of the thoughts of Max Webber shows that objectivity is and can be possible in the social sciences. Max Weber as quoted in Eleonora Montuschi, attempted to solve

^{26.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*, "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 138-139.

^{27.} *Mukesh Kumar Khatwani and Farida Yasmin Panhwar*, "Objectivity in Social Research: A Critical Analysis", Pg. 139.

the puzzle by providing answer by analyzing how and where values play their role in social scientific inquiries, and even before that, by questioning whether altogether different types of values are present in those inquiries.²⁸ To quote Eleonora Montuschi,

an important distinction must be drawn, says Weber, between individual, practical evaluations or prejudices (what he calls value- judgments) and those values which attribute significance to, and reveal our interest in, what we investigate – that is, values, which make certain objects relevant for us to inquire about (cultural values) (Weber 1904).²⁹

It is with this distinction that Webber argued that values and the subjectivity of the investigator does not and cannot hinder objectivity. To this end, Eleonora Montuschi, stressed that “a value- dependent (or value- relevant) object of inquiry does not exclude the possibility of a value- free investigation. Indeed, once the object of a social inquiry has been identified by means of relevant values, the social scientist is free (and must be free) to proceed in the investigation of this object by making use of the empirical, testable methods of any science. Social science can, in other words, for Weber be 'objective' despite being informed by relevant Values.³⁰

The problem for Weber is not only to distinguish facts and values, but to distinguish between different categories of values, and allow research to be driven (at least initially) by the 'right kind'. The objects of inquiry for Weber (partially informed by a Kantian viewpoint) are by necessity 'perspectival' objects (he names them

^{28.} Eleonora Montuschi, “Objectivity” *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Social Science*, Pg. 285.

^{29.} Eleonora Montuschi, “Objectivity” *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Social Science*, Pg. 286.

^{30.} Eleonora Montuschi, “Objectivity” *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Social Science*, Pg. 286.

'ideal types'), assembled and identified according to what we value and what makes them interesting: "in the method of investigation, the guiding 'point of view' is of great importance for the construction of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation".³¹

Weber's position is important not only in opening a more nuanced debate about the nature and role of values in science, but also in allowing a re-evaluation of the concept of objectivity as traditionally constrained by empiricist epistemology. Against the backdrop of a strict fact/ value distinction the default position is that of keeping facts separate from values. On a Weberian framework we should keep facts separate only from certain types of values. This allows for a further step: deciding what values can stay in (e.g. how to define and control bias), and where in the scientific process they can exert their influence (e.g. "the construction of the conceptual scheme," as we have just read) without detracting from the objectivity of inquiry.

Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs and sections, attempts have been made to account for the question of objectivity in the social science. Objectivity is believed to be the most universal trait of the sciences, which differentiates them from unscientific points of view. Simply, objectivity, which means the elimination of all subjectivity, is not limited to science alone; but it is an attitude towards life which one can assume also in practical affairs. While it is true that complete objectivity in the social sciences is almost impossible, it remains to argue, following from Webber's distinction of values as we have argued in this paper, that objectivity is possible if an only if, the individual investigator is able to distinguish the values that hinder objectivity and avoid

³¹. Weber, M., "Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. E. Shils and H. Finch, New York: Free Press, 1949), Pg. 84.

them as much as possible and then hold onto the values that do not hinder objectivity. It is in this sense that one can argue for both objectivity and value neutrality of the social sciences.

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