

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY MAX WEBER'S PARLIAMENTARY REDESCRIPTION OF A NORMATIVE CONCEPT

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Few concepts enjoy a better reputation than 'objectivity'. However, when we consider the rhetorical force of the speech acts appealing to 'objectivity', their *oxymoronic* character becomes clear. They are simultaneously attempts to support one's own standpoint and to surpass partisan standpoints.

To scholars of academic rhetorical practices, 'objectivity' thus appears as a rather dubious concept. Max Weber is, among other things, a scholar of just such rhetorical practices. Why, for example, does Weber use quotation marks when he refers to the 'objectivity' of knowledge in social science and social political knowledge in his 1904 essay *Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis* from 1904?<sup>1</sup>

There have been no detailed studies to date on Weber's debt to classical rhetoric. Nonetheless, his use of quotation marks alludes to the fact that he clearly seems to be well aware of the oxymoronic character of 'objectivity'. In his essay, Weber offers a rhetorical re-description of the concept of 'objectivity', through which he revises its conceptual point and range of reference. What steps did Weber follow in constructing his new concept?

My thesis is that the Weberian concept of 'objectivity' alludes to dealing with the treatment of scholarly controversies, as he explicates in the following passage:

Daß das Problem als solches besteht und hier nicht spintisierend geschaffen wird, kann niemandem entgehen, der den Kampf um Methode, »Grundbegriffe« und Voraussetzungen, den steten Wechsel der »Gesichtspunkte« und die stete Neubestimmung der »Begriffe«, die verwendet werden, beobachtet und sieht, wie theoretische und historische Betrachtungsform noch immer durch eine scheinbar unüberbrückbare Kluft getrennt sind: »zwei Nationalökonomien«, wie ein verzweifelnder Wiener Examinand seinerzeit jammernd klagte. Was heißt hier Objektivität? Lediglich diese Frage wollen die nachfolgenden Ausführungen erörtern. (*Archiv*, 36; GAW, 160- 161; EW, 367-368)

The background of this view lies in Weber's rhetorical reinterpretation of the concept of knowledge itself, which is mediated through the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche had a high degree of academic contempt for day-to-day politics, whereas Weber, a life-long *homo politicus*, connects his regulative idea of objectivity, namely fair play, to a definite historical paradigm of rhetoric, to the parliamentary mode of dealing with political struggles, as it was exemplified by the English Parliament. How could he plausibly argue at the beginning of the twentieth century that his revised concept was still that of 'objectivity'?

### 'Objectivity' - What Is It Not?

Weber replied to one of the critics of his *Protestantische Ethik* by saying that he was not concerned with the conventional meaning of his key concept: "Was der 'übliche Sinn' des 'kapitalistischen Geistes' ist, kümmert mich nicht..." (Weber 1910, 176). The same can be said about his concept of 'objectivity'; the quotation marks should be enough to warn Weber's readers direct a careful attention to the concept and to be prepared to reconsider its meaning and point.

Weber never actually explicitly 'defines' what he means by 'objectivity' in the essay. Nonetheless, by analysing the 23 singular uses of 'objective' and 'objectivity' in the essay, we are able to gain a clear insight into what Weber does *not* mean by them. The analysis of Weber's reinterpretation of the concept should start with his demarcations of the concept from their conventional meaning.

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

There still exists a textbook view that scientific objectivity may be reached by eliminating all subjectivity, by extinguishing everything personal from the research process. For Weber, it is, however, clear that the 'objectivity' of knowledge is not the inherent property of the 'object' under analysis: "Die Qualität eines Vorganges als »sozial-ökonomischer« Erscheinung ist nun nicht etwas, was ihm als solchem »objektiv« anhaftet." (*Archiv*, 37; GAW, 161; EW, 368.)

Weber is a sworn adversary of the so-called mirror theory of knowledge, which insists on the emanation of knowledge from the object to the subject. He defends a perspectivistic view that is clearly indebted to the work of Nietzsche, particularly to this formula from *Zur Genealogie der Moral*:

Es gibt nur ein perspektivisches Sehen, nur ein perspektivisches »Erkennen«; und je mehr Affekte wir über eine Sache zu Worte kommen lassen, je mehr Augen, verschiedene Augen wir uns für dieselbe Sache einzusetzen wissen, um so vollständiger wird unser »Begriff« dieser Sache, unsre »Objektivität« sein. (Nietzsche 1887, 860-861)

Accordingly, Weber not only follows Nietzsche in putting 'Objektivität' into quotation marks, he also militantly denies that the 'objectivity' of knowledge is independent of the perspective of the scholars in question:

Es gibt keine schlechthin »objektive« wissenschaftliche Analyse des Kulturlebens oder – was vielleicht etwas Engeres, für unsern Zweck aber sicher nichts wesentlich anderes bedeutet – der »sozialen Erscheinungen« *unabhängig* von speziellen und »einseitigen« Gesichtspunkten, nach denen sie – ausdrücklich oder stillschweigend, bewußt oder unbewußt – als Forschungsobjekt ausgewählt, analysiert und darstellend gegliedert werden. (*Archiv*, 45; GAW, 170; EW, 374)

However, for Weber, 'objectivity' is not a quality possessed by scholars themselves. No scholar can ever be in the position of a 'neutral' judge or referee of academic disputes. Weber is even less willing to accept the Hegelian ideal of a state official as representing the 'objective spirit' of the historical period. Against the objectivity claims of one of his most prominent colleagues, the leading neo-Cameralist

professor of national economy, Gustav Schmoller, Weber insists that such claims are moves of escape from the personal responsibility of the scholar:

Indem man die Gesamtheit aller möglichen Kulturideale mit dem Stempel des »Sittlichen« versah, verflüchtigte man die spezifische Dignität der ethischen Imperative, ohne doch für die »Objektivität« der Geltung jener Ideale irgend etwas zu gewinnen. (*Archiv*, 24-25; GAW, 148; EW, 360-361)

For Weber, scholars are necessarily involved in the research process, and are thus in a constant situation of competition and controversy with all other scholars. A precondition for the understanding of Weber's point regarding 'objectivity' lies in the insight that it is the research process itself, in particular the human aspect of presenting opposing and contesting perspectives, which is the focus of his essay.

It might be conceivable to attempt to search for an Archimedean point as regards to the controversy itself, which could be referred to as 'objectivity'. The scholarly disputes would then be resolved by a criterion beyond the reach of its participants. However, nothing could be farther from Max Weber's intention.

In his essay, Weber parodies all conceivable candidates for such a bird's eye view. Weber cannot expect from the scholarly language itself any 'objective' criteria for judging scholarly disputes. The appeal to scientific 'laws' or the concept of 'system' refers to nothing more than some occasionally applicable but by no means indispensable heuristic instruments that are at the disposal of the scholars (*Archiv*, 53-55; GAW, 178-180, EW, 380-381).

Weber definitely rejects the combination of 'objectivity' with the middle way: "Die »mittlere Linie« ist *um kein Haarbreit mehr wissenschaftliche Wahrheit* als die extremsten Parteiideale von rechts oder links." (*Archiv*, 30; GAW, 154; EW, 364) The middle way refers to a kind of zero-option which enables the avoidance of committing to a definite perspective. For Weber, on the contrary, the boldness of presenting a consciously void of boldness of consciously presenting a one-sided perspective, its "einseitige Steigerung" (*Archiv*, 65; GAW, 191; EW, 388), is to be judged as a major strength of a scholarly work.

It is equally clear that the Weberian concept of objectivity has nothing to do with the inter-subjective consensus among scholars. The

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

young Carl Schmitt, writing some years after Weber's essay, spoke on an assumed consensus among competent lawyers as a criterion of the 'right' (*richtig*) judgment in a court: "Eine richterliche Entscheidung ist dann richtig, wenn anzunehmen ist, dass ein anderer Richter ebenso entschieden hätte. 'Ein anderer Richter' bedeutet hier den empirischen Typus eines modernen, rechtsgelehrten Juristen." (Schmitt 1912, 71)

In terms of academic disputes, we cannot imagine the existence of any pool of trained scholars who could set themselves apart from the competition in their own field. No such agenda exists in the sphere of academic controversies. It is impossible to determine the 'objective' weight and significance of an issue for the scholarly world. On the contrary, Weber claims that agenda disputes are inherently dependent on the perspectives that are part of the controversy itself.

Ein System der Kulturwissenschaften auch nur in dem Sinne einer definitiven, objektiv gültigen, systematisierenden Fixierung der *Fragen* und *Gebiete*, von denen sie zu handeln berufen sein sollen, wäre ein Unsinn in sich: stets kann bei einem solchen Versuch nur eine Aneinanderreihung von mehreren, spezifisch besonderten, untereinander vielfach heterogenen und disparaten Gesichtspunkten herauskommen, unter denen die Wirklichkeit. (*Archiv*, 59; *GAW*, 184; *EW*, 383)

Weber's use of 'objectivity' alludes instead to the need to *regulate* the disputes which arise among the scholars in the research process itself. How, thus, do we organise and systematise the process of dealing with scholarly disputes in a formal and not *a priori* partisan manner?

In academic jargon, the appeal to 'objectivity' is most frequently used as one of the rhetorical means aimed at indicating that scholarly disputes will ultimately be settled over the course of the 'scientific progress'. For Weber, nothing could be more misleading. Nothing is farther from the realities of the research process: controversies on theories, concepts and the disputes between schools and approaches are a permanent part of the research process. Every phase of the research process contains 'subjective' elements. For Weber, this subjectivity plays an invaluable heuristic role as a necessary condition of scholarly innovations and this subjectivity is an heuristically invaluable part of the process of making scholarly innovations.

There are no grounds for assuming that scholarly disputes would diminish over the course of an intense and thorough research process. For Weber, a consensus among scholars could even be seen as a sign of ossification, of "Chinese stationeriness," as Weber (*Archiv*, 59; GAW, 184, EW, 383) puts it with an expression borrowed from John Stuart Mill.<sup>2</sup> For Weber, the value of an open discussion with opposing points of view on all levels of the research process lies in the fact that controversies keeps scholarly activity alive. All claims that an end to history can be reached through scientific progress are misleading and dangerous:

Stets wiederholen sich die Versuche, den »eentlichen«, »wahren« Sinn historischer Begriffe festzustellen, und niemals gelangen sie zu Ende. Ganz regelmäßig bleiben infolgedessen die Synthesen, mit denen die Geschichte fortwährend arbeitet, entweder nur relativ bestimmte Begriffe, oder, sobald Eindeutigkeit des Begriffsinhaltes erzwungen werden soll, wird der Begriff zum abstrakten Idealtypus und enthüllt sich damit als ein theoretischer, also »einseitiger« Gesichtspunkt, unter dem die Wirklichkeit beleuchtet, auf den sie bezogen werden kann, der aber zum Schema, in das sie restlos eingeordnet werden könnte, sich selbstverständlich als ungeeignet erweist. (*Archiv*, 80, GAW, 206-207, EW, 398)

Weber's point in calling for 'objectivity' must be seen in relation to the value of the struggles and confrontations between scholars over the course of the research process itself. The core of the '*Objektivität*' essay lies in shifting the problem of 'objectivity' to the question of how to properly deal with scholarly controversies. Weber reformulated his key problem almost in passing in my first aforementioned extensive quote from his essay.

Weber alludes in the quote to the internal disputes on the 'national economy' in the German-speaking countries around 1900. The two schools in question are, of course, the historical school and the marginal utility school, nowadays frequently referred to as 'Austrian economics'. In this specific passage, however, Weber defines in more general terms the regulation of struggles between competing perspectives as the key problem of the objectivity essay.

Behind Weber's reformulation of the problem of 'objectivity' lies his criticism of academics' general lack of willingness to accept that controversies on theories and concepts are an inherent part of the re-

search process itself. In practice, such reluctance means that the controversies are dealt with in an unregulated fashion. Nothing prevents academic institutions from 'solving' scholarly disputes by the simple recourse to the institutional authority within the existing hierarchies of the academic world, using the scholars in the lower ranks of the hierarchy as the applauding audience. In practice, this can easily lead to the exclusion of many of the dissenting and innovative voices within the academic profession (see Weber's statements on professorships in his letters from 1906 to 1910 in MWG/II, V and VI from 1990 and 1994).

Weber's response to this unsatisfactory situation is to search for a model of how to *fairly* deal with controversies outside the academic world itself. He recognises that 'objectivity' toward alternative proposals is much more prevalent in the political context, in which controversies are not only allowed but directly encouraged. The British Parliament, in particular, has extensive experience with the practices and procedures of dealing with parliamentary disputes as the main component of its *modus operandi* (see for example Redlich 1905). Weber's tacit point in the essay is to extend the application of the parliamentary paradigm to the equally omnipresent yet much less recognised scholarly controversies.

### Scholarly Activity As An Incomplete Form Of Politics

Among the professors in Wilhelmine Germany, it is fairly safe to say that only Max Weber could have even suggested discussing academic struggles on theories and concepts in the rhetorical terms of parliamentary politics. He only hints at what he considers to be the correct procedure of how to deal with the scholarly disputes by borrowing practices from politics. Still, it is astonishing to note that to date, nobody has engaged in a more systematic examination of these hints.

If we look at the vocabulary of the 'Objektivität' essay, we notice that Weber does not hesitate to apply, as the online search indicates,<sup>3</sup> concepts such as struggle (*Kampf*) and controversy (*Auseinandersetzung*) to the research process and scholarly institutions. The vocabulary refers to the performative character of the activities themselves and the processes and institutions that regulate them. At this level, *Wissenschaft* and *Politik* are not opposite concepts. On the contrary,

Weber's vocabulary can be taken as a sign of the inclusion of the scholarly activity into the activity of politics itself.

Compared with the parliamentary paradigm of politics, the academic process is, nonetheless, both incomplete (crucial decisions regarding the life of other persons are largely missing) and simplified (the constant competition for votes in the electoral, partisan and parliamentary arena is lacking in the 'meritocratic' academic world of appointments). Both the limits of academic, as opposed to parliamentary, politics and the similarities in their performance are clearly expressed in the '*Objektivität*' essay, for example when Weber speaks on the necessity to make decisions.

Jene Abwägung selbst nun aber zur Entscheidung zu bringen, ist freilich nicht mehr eine mögliche Aufgabe der Wissenschaft, sondern des wollenden Menschen: er wägt und wählt nach seinem eigenen Gewissen und seiner persönlichen Weltanschauung zwischen den Werten, um die es sich handelt. Die Wissenschaft kann ihm zu dem Bewußtsein verhelfen, daß alles Handeln, und natürlich auch, je nach den Umständen, das Nicht-Handeln, in seinen Konsequenzen eine Parteinahme zugunsten bestimmter Werte bedeutet, und damit – was heute so besonders gern verkannt wird – regelmäßig gegen andere. Die Wahl zu treffen, ist seine Sache (*Archiv*, 26; GAW, 150; EW, 361-362).

The point of this paragraph is not only the emphasis of differences. In the research process, scholars must also make decisions on subject matter, research strategy, the mode of interpreting results and so on. As such, the research process itself can also be understood as an activity (*Handeln*).

In the preceding passage, Weber's commitment to an action perspective, which shapes the entire '*Objektivität*' essay, offers us yet another example of the performative similarity between politics and research as activities. It is not the results of research but the scholarly activities themselves that serve as the point or reference for Weber's discussion of the human sciences and their 'objectivity'. The passage on human action is equally indispensable to the understanding of Weber's vision of politics as an activity. The perspective of activity is shaped by contingency and contestation, which is what gives it its inherently political dimension, which, accordingly, also concerns the scholarly version of human activity.

### 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

Jede denkende Besinnung auf die letzten Elemente sinnvollen menschlichen Handelns ist zunächst gebunden an die Kategorien »Zweck« und »Mittel«. Wir wollen etwas in concreto entweder »um seines eigenen Wertes willen« oder als Mittel im Dienste des in letzter Linie Gewollten. Der wissenschaftlichen Betrachtung zugänglich ist nun zunächst unbedingt die Frage der Geeignetheit der Mittel bei gegebenem Zwecke. Da wir (innerhalb der jeweiligen Grenzen unseres Wissens) gültig feststellen vermögen, *welche* Mittel zu einem vorgestellten Zwecke zu führen geeignet oder ungeeignet sind, so können wir auf diesem Wege die Chancen, mit bestimmten zur Verfügung stehenden Mitteln einen bestimmten Zweck überhaupt zu erreichen, abwägen und mithin indirekt die Zwecksetzung selbst, auf Grund der jeweiligen historischen Situation, als praktisch sinnvoll oder aber als nach Lage der gegebenen Verhältnisse sinnlos kritisieren. Wir können weiter, wenn die Möglichkeit der Erreichung eines vorgestellten Zweckes gegeben erscheint, natürlich immer innerhalb der Grenzen unseres jeweiligen Wissens, die *Folgen* feststellen, welche die Anwendung der erforderlichen Mittel *neben* der eventuellen Erreichung des beabsichtigten Zweckes, infolge des Allzusammenhanges alles Geschehens, haben würde. Wir bieten alsdann dem Handeln den die Möglichkeit der Abwägung dieser ungewollten gegen die gewollten Folgen seines Handelns und damit die Antwort auf die Frage: was »kostet« die Erreichung des gewollten Zweckes in Gestalt der voraussichtlich eintretenden Verletzung *anderer* Werte? (*Archiv*, 25-26; GAW, 149-150, EW, 361).

This crucial quotation enables us to distinguish Weber's revision of thinking in terms of action, which transcends any simple ends-means scheme. He refers to the omnipresent unanticipated consequences, *Nebenfolgen*, which are not mere side effects but components of the situation which may actually render the significance of the action into something entirely different than what the ends and means alone would indicate. Weber's point is to render the role of consequences intelligible. Furthermore, the ends, means and consequences refer to Weber's key concept, *Chance*, in the interpretation of the situation. In terms of Weber's work, we can only speak of ends, means and effects in relation to a certain interpretation of the chances available to the agents in a given situation, their horizon of the possible and their use as occasions for acting differently (see also Palonen 1998).

The decisive role of the *Chancen* in the Weberian conceptual horizon renders action in general and politics in particular contingent. For

Weber, unlike the hazardous contingency of the *fortuna*, the contingency of chances is a condition of the intelligibility of action itself. There are always some chances, catastrophic ones included, and speaking about them does not require any optimistic interpretation of the situation at hand. Choosing ends and means must always be related to the interpretation of the specific profile of the chances available – or lack thereof – in the situation. The *Nebenfolgen* are also a contingent product of a situation that nobody acting in the situation can properly judge. Individual agents can only thematise a section of the horizon of the possible, which does not necessarily represent the most important aspects of the analysis of the situation (see Weber 1919, 80-81).

In terms of the understanding of scholarly activity itself, this Weberian revision of the ends-means-scheme in terms of chances and consequences is a first rank move. The research process also requires deliberations and choices, the assessment of the chances in various situations, as well as the connection of the ends, means and the expected yet unknown *Nebenfolgen* to these chances. Moreover, all of these aspects must be compared with the possible action of others, particularly one's scholarly critics and adversaries.

Politicians have more experience than scholars in dealing openly with controversies and making an approximate judgment on (*Augenmaß* in Weber 1919). Scholars have to admit that they have a lot to learn from politicians when it comes to engaging in disputes. In terms of the performative aspects of struggles, academic controversies – including theoretical, personal and institutional power shares – can best be analysed as a micro-level version of politics.

## The Parliamentary Paradigm

For Weber, the political element is, of course, always present in the subject matter of the human sciences:

Das Kennzeichen des sozialpolitischen Charakters eines Problems ist es ja geradezu, daß es nicht auf Grund bloß technischer Erwägungen aus feststehenden Zwecken heraus zu erledigen ist, daß um die regulativen Wertmaßstäbe selbst *gestritten* werden kann und muß, weil das Problem in die Region der allgemeinen *Kulturfragen* hineinragt (*Archiv*, 29; GAW 152; EW, 363).

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

For him, the parliament is the *locus* in which everything 'can and must be disputed'. The parliamentary procedure is built on the rhetorical assumption that a proper judgment of any proposal can only be made if it is confronted with opposing views, as is the case in the parliamentary process of discussing *pro et contra*, both in the plenum and in the committee stage. What types of objections arise spontaneously? Which objections and advantages can be detected or constructed when viewed more carefully when the proposal is confronted with alternatives? If one has no pre-prepared objections, one can always come up with new ones and possible grounds for contesting other aspects of the government proposals. The parliamentary conflict between government and opposition as well as a number of other dividing lines among MPs will both serve as an impetus to construct objections and alternatives and enable the discussion of their merits and demerits.

This idea of speaking *pro et contra* has a long history in British parliamentary procedure. In the sixteenth century, Sir Thomas Smith expressed this idea in (the English translation of) *De republica anglorum*:

For all that commeth in consultation either in the upper house or in the neather house, is put in writing first in paper, which being once read, he that will, riseth up and speaketh with it or against it: and so one after another so long as they shall thinke good. That doone they goe to another, and so an other bill. After it hath bin once or twice read, and doth appeare that it is somewhat liked as reasonable, with such amendment in wordes and peradventure some sentences as by disputation seemeth to be amended. (Smith 1583 [1563] <http://www.constitution.org/eng/repang.htm>).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Max Weber was almost the only contemporary German academic to defend parliamentary regimes (see Weber 1904b, 1908, see Palonen 2004). In his 1917 *Wahlrecht* essay, he described the specific advantages of the parliamentarian in terms of the comparative political judgments of the merits and demerits that an MP learns better than anyone: "dass... ein Parlamentarier im *Kampf* der Parteien zu lernen vermag, die *Tragweite des Wortes* zu wägen" (Weber 1917b, 187). The point is that a parliamentarian must learn to judge in ambiguous situations and assess the relative political weight and range of competing proposals.

The parliamentary analogy between government and opposition can also be applied to a certain degree to the scholarly world, as we can see from the following formula. "Mit anderen Worten: was Gegenstand der Untersuchung wird, und wie weit diese Untersuchung sich in die Unendlichkeit der Kausalzusammenhänge erstreckt, das bestimmen die den Forscher und seine Zeit beherrschenden Wertideen." (*Archiv*, 58; GAW, 184; EW, 383) The reference to the relationship between the scholar and the 'ruling ideas of the time' offers a kind of analogy to the parliamentary majority, backed with government and administration, to which the scholar must rhetorically address herself in order to be able to dispute the 'ruling ideas' themselves. The 'normal scientist' who subscribes to the conventions of the time is like a *Realpolitiker* who is content to strive for whatever is possible or attainable within the existing conditions. In his early letters, Weber refuses to accept this kind of *Realpolitik* (see a letter to Hermann Baumgarten from 1887 in Weber 1936, 232). He later came to see politics as a *Kunst des Unmöglichen*, in which we have to set bold aims from which the horizon of the chances also looks different from that of an adaptative *Realpolitik*, or, as he also puts it, *Bureaukratenmoral des Konfuzianismus* (Weber 1917a, 514-515).

This historical problematisation of the basic assumptions of the ruling schools and trends in the scholarly world are explicit in Weber's interpretation of the history of economics in Germany. In this context, he proposes an approach that recognises the historicity of the human sciences to a degree that his programme might be called a conceptual history of the human sciences *avant la lettre* (see Palonen 2000). This view is perhaps best formulated in the following passage:

Der Gedankenapparat, welchen die Vergangenheit durch denkende Bearbeitung, das heißt aber in Wahrheit: denkende Umbildung, der unmittelbar gegebenen Wirklichkeit und durch Einordnung in diejenigen Begriffe, die dem Stande ihrer Erkenntnis und der Richtung ihres Interesses entsprachen, entwickelt hat, steht in steter Auseinandersetzung mit dem, was wir an neuer Erkenntnis aus der Wirklichkeit gewinnen können und wollen. In diesem Kampf vollzieht sich der Fortschritt der kulturwissenschaftlichen Arbeit. Ihr Ergebnis ist ein steter Umbildungsprozeß jener Begriffe, in denen wir die Wirklichkeit zu erfassen suchen. Die Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom sozialen Leben ist und bleibt daher ein steter

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

Wechsel zwischen dem Versuch, durch Begriffsbildung Tatsachen gedanklich zu ordnen, – der Auflösung der so gewonnenen Gedankenbilder durch Erweiterung und Verschiebung des wissenschaftlichen Horizontes, – und der Neubildung von Begriffen auf der so veränderten Grundlage. (*Archiv*, 80: GAW, 207; EW, 398-399)

In other words, the scholarly activity consists of the continuous rebuilding of its conceptual apparatus. This change is not 'progress' in any definite direction, but rather a break with the past that opens up a new horizon of action that can be used in many different ways. This break is not a mere shift in unintentional and ever-changing trends. The triad between the formation, dissolution and reformation of concepts can be clearly viewed against the politics of the alternation of parliamentary majorities and governments as a key aspect of democratic politics. Similarly to the political struggle, the academic dispute is not only a dispute between theories and concepts but also between those who subscribe to them and consciously advocate them.

The procedures and mechanisms by which the concepts and theories change in scholarly activity can be understood in parliamentary terms. The rhetorical struggle, which is built into the parliamentary procedure, offers a paradigm for the recognition of the historical and controversial character of academic knowledge. The procedures of parliamentary deliberations are much more comprehensively institutionalised than the introduction and acceptance of changes in the scholarly world. The parliamentary paradigm allows scholars to use controversies not only to prevent stagnation but also to shift the task of dealing with scholarly disputes from the periphery to the core of the research process itself.

### **Fair Play As The Regulative Idea Of Scholarly Controversies**

The parliamentary procedure of speaking *pro et contra* serves as the conceptual and historical paradigm of the rhetorical principle of *fair play*. The fairness of the parliamentary game, as a regulative idea, refers to the equality of the chances that are available for a broad number of conceivable perspectives on a given phenomenon, particularly for alternative proposals for action.

In our present understanding, the concept of fair play is most commonly connected to sports and the newfound popularity of sports in nineteenth-century Britain. This is the same context in which we saw the rise of parliamentary government as “government by speaking” (Macaulay 1857) or “government by discussion” (Bagehot 1872). Weber was a great admirer of the British style of parliamentary government, as it served as the contemporary model of severe yet civilised disputes *pro et contra*.

The ideal of *fair play* refers, however, to a broader context which Quentin Skinner (1996) has referred to as the rhetorical culture of the English Renaissance. To illustrate its presence in this context, I did an Internet search and found six references to “fair play” in the Oxford Shakespeare edition.<sup>4</sup>

Although there are still quite few detailed studies on the parliamentary procedures and practices from the rhetorical perspective (see Mack 2002), it is clear that the parliament was a new type of political arena with its own specific procedures and practices of deliberation (see Redlich 1905, Hexter [ed] 1992). During the scholarly decline of rhetorical culture since the second half of the seventeenth century, this culture was upheld and further cultivated in the parliament, as we can see as is evident, for example, in William Gerald Hamilton’s maxims for parliamentary speakers from the late eighteenth century, published as *Parliamentary Logick* (1808).

Today, many of the practices and procedures inherited from the early modern English Parliament may seem quite anachronistic. Some scholars also regard the parliamentary immunity and free mandate of MPs in modern party-based parliamentary regimes as anachronistic (see Leibholz 1957). From a rhetorical point of view, however, such ‘individualistic’ elements of the parliamentary regime are indispensable to the understanding of its singularity. Parliamentary debates and votes are based on the deliberation between individual members and not on quasi-diplomatic negotiation between parties (see Weber 1917b, 169 on the opposition between the parliamentary principle of the majority vote as the last resort and compromise as the principle of feudal assemblies). At every stage of the parliamentary process, the ‘individualistic’ basis of activities is indispensable for provoking objections and revisions, as well as for adding new items to the agenda, despite the need for compromise in parliamentary practice (for a proposal in favour of invigorating the parliamentary powers

by forbidding the whips of parliamentary groups and similar reforms see Tomkins 2005).

The acceptance of the parliamentary paradigm in dealing with scholarly controversies demands the recognition that all innovations, revisions and breakthroughs are also short-lived in the scholarly world. Novel theories and the revision of concepts may gain a *momentum* that can be evoked well before it will be turned into an element of stagnation. It is for precisely this reason that Weber strongly opposes the 'middle way' and opts for the one-sided accentuation of a particular point of view. Just as the parliamentarian knows that no elections will be won twice with the same election strategy, the scholar should not rely on their past merits, but should always be ready and willing to change.

However, Weber also turns against the hunt for novelty for novelty's sake alone, "eine stete Hetzjagd nach neuen Gesichtspunkten und begrifflichen Konstruktionen" (*Archiv*, 86-87; GAW, 214; EW, 403). Here we can also detect an analogy to the formal equality between standpoints and alternatives in the parliamentary procedure. The rhetorical principle of speaking *pro et contra* about all items on the agenda is a guarantee against vested interests and over-eager enthusiasm for the new. Similarly, in the academic world, the resistance of trends is well founded and the recourse to older and even overthrown theories and concepts is frequently a clever strategy. It allows scholars to stick to their position in the face of novelties and even claim a *Verfremdungseffekt* in order to relativise the alleged innovations.

The parliamentary style of politics is inherently incompatible with the one-dimensional opposition between progress and reaction. When examined through the Weberian *Umbildungsprozess*, the recurrent events of unexpected breaks and turns at more or less regular intervals, it becomes clear that all standpoints and proposals in the scholarly debate should be given a fair chance, as it is the case in the parliamentary process. In a more radical sense, speaking *pro et contra*, which characterises the parliamentary procedure, operates by devaluating virtues and attenuating vices, according to the classical schema of *paradiastole* (see Skinner 1996).

The rhetorical vision of parliamentary deliberation is much more radical than that to which Jürgen Habermas and his adepts refer to as 'deliberative democracy'. Indeed, we can detect a debt to the rhetorical tradition even in Habermas's insistence on the constant de-

liberation between "Argument und Gegenargument" against fixed commitments (Habermas 1962, 252). For him, however, this rhetorical moment of deliberation and debate remains nothing more than a passing phase in the process toward a higher consensus. In other words, the debate serves as a moment of catharsis that will be superseded by the superior moment of consensus.

In contrast to this instrumental role of deliberation, the ideal of *fair play* corresponds to the rhetorical principle that is characteristic of political situations, namely that good grounds can always be offered in defence of either side. It may even be wise to attempt to make the weaker *logos* stronger, in the sense of the Sophist Protagoras, for whom "[o]n every subject there are two *logoi* speeches or arguments] opposed to one another" (Diogenes Laertius in Gagarin & Woodroff 1995, 187). The singularity of the parliamentary procedure lies in its being a kind of institutionalisation of the *fair play* principle.

The Weberian parliamentary vision of the research process is not completely free of the pathos of truth either. This is, for example, the case when he writes: "Denn wissenschaftliche Wahrheit ist nur, was für alle gelten *will*, die Wahrheit wollen." (*Archiv*, 58; GAW, 183-184, EW, 383) Upon closer examination it becomes clear, however, that for Weber, judgments on truth are related to perspectives as opposed to judgments about facts. As such, all factual judgments remain controversial, and momentary agreements on them among scholars are not a sign of the superiority of consensus. Weber insists that an academic journal should be a place, "wo Wahrheit gesucht wird, die ... auch für den Chinesen die Geltung einer denkenden Ordnung der empirischen Wirklichkeit beansprucht" (*Archiv*, 32, GAW, 156; EW, 365). His claim is directed against the relativism of fixed standpoints that are essentially incompatible with one another. In other words, Weber turns against the arbitrary fixation of standpoints with the 'truth'.

Moreover, Weber uses this move as a rhetorical redescription of the concept of the truth. For him, the search for truth appears, above all, as a metaphor for the idea that the dispute should be maintained and everyone should be ready to alter their standpoint in the course of debate. This is clearly compatible with the rhetorical principle of speaking *in utramque partem* and by no means requires that opposing standpoints should be abolished or merely will approach each other in the course of deliberations.

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

No less rhetorical is Weber's revision of the understanding of 'scientific progress'. As we can see from the passage on the constant rebuilding of the conceptual apparatus, to Weber, the *Fortschritt* is not a kind of march 'forward'. Rather, it refers to the moves of breaking with established beliefs, conventions, long-term trends and so on, to taking *steps away from something* but leaving the future direction open. Again, we can detect at least certain analogies with the parliamentary vote of no confidence or the alternation in government due to the electoral defeat of the current majority. Any such a shift contains an instance of chance, openness and novelty that can be used in various manners, including the new strength that a party may gain in the opposition.

This priority of the rupture with the past as a moment of change is famously illustrated in the '*Objektivität*' essay by Weber's thesis on the 'eternal youthfulness' of all historical sciences:

... es gibt Wissenschaften, denen ewige Jugendlichkeit beschieden ist, und das sind alle historischen Disziplinen, alle die, denen der ewig fortschreitende Fluß der Kultur stets neue Problemstellungen zuführt. Bei ihnen liegt die Vergänglichkeit aller, aber zugleich die Unvermeidlichkeit immer neuer idealtypischer Konstruktionen im Wesen der Aufgabe (*Archiv*, 79-80, GAW, 206, EW, 398).

The shifting character of the problems related to standpoints as a means of altering them can also be seen as an analogy to parliamentary politics. This is characterised by the addition of new items on the agenda, some of which arise spontaneously from the changing constellations in the world around it, while others are more intentionally set as an issue to be debated in the parliament. The situation corresponds to the shift in political controversies from that between different answers to the same questions to the struggle over which issues should be debated, in what order and why, i.e. their status on the parliamentary agenda. Similarly, the academic world has also experienced the increased diversification of issues and the vanishing of a wide range of allegedly common grounds within individual disciplines. The one-sided construction of new perspectives marks the recognition of this situation already in Weber's lifetime.

## The Parliamentary Opposition To Expert Rule

Weber differs from his contemporary German colleagues in his open idealisation of the British style of parliamentary government as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (see Palonen 2004). Weber insists on the procedural superiority of the parliamentary regime over a monarchy, whose foreign policy is not under the control of a parliament. Against the possibility of the Emperor to intervene in German foreign policy, he writes:

Alles in allem: einen Parlamentarismus braucht Deutschland, denn es sei reif dafür. Und wenn von bestimmter Seite jüngst droben in Freiburg gesagt wurde, eine Erweiterung parlamentarischer Rechte führe Zersetzung herbei, so sei es unbegreiflich, wie sich die deutsche Nation so etwas gefallen lassen kann. (Weber 1908, 134)

In his wartime essay *Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland* (1918), Weber describes the parliament above all as a counter-power against bureaucracy. An efficient bureaucracy is indispensable in every modern state. In the German Empire, however, the rule of officialdom, *Beamtenherrschaft*, prevailed without real counter forces in terms of parliamentary power and a government that was responsible to the parliament. Weber saw this as fatal, because he considered officials to be dilettantish politicians.

Gänzlich versagt hat die Beamtenherrschaft da, wo sie mit *politischen* Fragen befaßt wurde... *Es ist, wie gesagt, nicht Sache des Beamten*, nach seinen eigenen Überzeugungen mitkämpfend in den politischen Streit einzutreten und, in diesem Sinn, Politik zu treiben, die immer: Kampf ist. (Weber 1918, 235)

Weber sees a monocratic understanding of knowledge as inherent to the rule of the officialdom. He confronts it with a parliamentary view which corresponds to the rhetorical vision he sketched in the '*Objektivität*' essay more than ten years earlier. The 'possession' of knowledge is the main power share available to officials. Their power is based primarily on factual knowledge, "einem durch Fachschulung erworbenen im weitesten Sinne des Wortes 'technischen' *Fachwissen*" (ibid., 236). Furthermore, the officials gain a *Dienstwissen* in carrying

out their tasks within the state apparatus, "die durch die Mittel des amtlichen Apparates nur dem Beamten zugängliche Kenntnis der für sein Verhalten maßgebenden konkreten Tatsachen: das *Dienstwissen*" (ibid.). The decisive form of knowledge lies, however, in the secrecy of the knowledge they possess and the secrecy of their knowledge: "das wichtigste Machtmittel des Beamtentums die Verwandlung des Dienstwissens in ein *Geheimwissen* durch den berüchtigten Begriff des 'Dienstgeheimnisses' bildet: letztlich lediglich ein Mittel, die Verwaltung gegen *Kontrolle* zu sichern." (ibid.)

The power of the officialdom is thus inherently linked to its expert knowledge, to which not even the parliament had access in Germany. The link between Weber's defence of the parliamentary regime and his rejection of the monocratic view of knowledge lies in his numerous proposals to form parliamentary counter-powers in order to limit the officialdom's monopoly on knowledge as a source of uncontrollable power. In other words, Weber wants to alter the procedures of the *Reichstag* in order to allow it to control the officialdom just as the British Parliament had.

Weber's proposals for reforming *Reichstag* procedure refer to the rhetorical practice of speaking *pro et contra*. One example of this is the oath-based cross-examination of experts in the parliamentary commissions: "die Verwaltungskontrolle das systematische (eidliche) Kreuzverhör von *Sachverständigen* vor einer Parlamentskommission unter Zuziehung der betreffenden Ressortbeamten, welches allein Kontrolle und Allseitigkeit der Befragung garantiert." (ibid.) In Weber's view, by opposing officials' specialised *Sachwissen* to one another, the parliamentarians are able to see that the knowledge of officials is inherently bound to the perspective of their offices. Parliamentary deliberation must overcome the perspectives of these offices by judging the work of the ministries from a political point of view.

The control of the *Dienstwissen* also requires other measures: "Akteneinsicht, Augenscheineinnahme, äußerstenfalls aber wiederum: das eidliche Kreuzverhör der Beteiligten als Zeugen vor einer Parlamentskommission in Betracht" (ibid.). For the control of the secrecy Weber proposes a stronger measure, namely parliamentary enquête-commissions, which he considered to be an English practice: "durch Handhabung des sogenannten "Enqueterechts" jederzeit jene Kenntnis der Tatsachen und der technischen Fachgesichtspunkte zu ver-

schaffen, welche allein ihm fortlaufende Mitarbeit und Einfluß auf die Richtung der Verwaltung ermöglichen würde" (ibid.).

All these measures allude to the rhetorical view that 'facts' and 'knowledge' can be seen as such only in relation to a certain perspective. In such situations, the parliamentary paradigm of knowledge is the surest guarantee against an uncritical belief in given facts. The powers of the parliament are decisively dependent on the systematic character of the use of opposing perspectives in the parliamentary and governmental process (see also Palonen 2004).

Weber's defence of the English style of *Arbeitsparlament* over the French style of *Redeparlament* also corresponds to this view. Only through the work of the commissions' members on substantial issues can they become conscious of the need to control and means of controlling expert powers (Weber 1918, 234-237). This vision is no less rhetorical than the French emphasis on speeches in the plenary sessions, which tend to increase the powers of the parliament at the cost of the government, in particular by shortening their life-span. The Weberian perspective is perhaps an oversimplification of the French practice (see Roussellier 1997), but he does have a point in insisting that the strength of the parliament over the government in the Third Republic tended to leave the strong French bureaucracy largely outside the sphere of parliamentary control; the parliamentarians tended to misjudge the situation by regarding the incumbent government and not the permanent officials as their main adversaries.

Weber's discussions in the *Parlament* pamphlet on *Fachwissen*, *Di-  
enstwissen* and *Geheimwissen* are relevant to the understanding of the tendencies of closure in the academic world. The monopolistic tendencies, the exclusion of competitors, students, amateurs and outsiders, the processes of co-optation and so on are also behind the inherent threat of stagnation in the use of theories and concepts. The need and possibilities to gain external parliamentary control of the research process itself is not as evident here as it is in the case of bureaucratic knowledge. For this reason, parliament-analogical internal procedures should be applied to deliberation and debate in universities. This presupposes, however, that scholars not only acknowledge that they must learn the procedures related to their internal disputes from politicians but that they be prepared to turn themselves into figures reminiscent of parliamentarians in the context of academic controversies.

## Why Does Weber Speak Of 'Objectivity'?

Max Weber himself seems not use the expression *fair play* in his methodological or political writings. Attributing it to Weber, as a regulative principle allowing us to gain a better understanding of the very singular and distinctive point he is making in the essay, is, of course, conjecture. Nonetheless, my intention here is to answer my initial question of why he claimed the controversial concept of 'objectivity' as his own.

My interpretation is, of course, another example of the Weberian rhetorical tactics of *einseitige Steigerung*, this time applied to Weber's own work. A minimum condition for making this kind of interpretation is shifting one's emphasis to the research process itself, to the controversial character of its results, to the conflicts between scholars and the possibilities to regulate the relationships between scholars offering contrasting interpretations. Regulations are needed precisely because the controversies on theories and concepts, as well as the corresponding conflicts between scholars, are always present in scholarly activities. Those who adhere to the scientific process remain extremely reluctant to recognise this situation, whereas the life-long *homo politicus* Max Weber understood the inherent political element in the scholarly activity better than any of his contemporaries.

This concept is no longer complexly unrecognised among some recent 'Weberologists'. Joachim Vahland writes that for Weber, it is "der Dissens, nicht der Konsens, der die Wissenschaft wie alle anderen Lebensbereiche bestimmt und vorantreibt" and that "Weber hat keinen Zweifel daran gelassen, daß für ihn Wissenschaft in letzter Instanz Manifestation des Politischen ist – wie alle anderen kulturellen Objektivationen auch: Alle Kulturarbeit ist zweckbestimmtes Stellungnehmen." (Vahland 2001, 113). Despite this, Vahland does not discuss the Weberian concept of 'objectivity' in terms approaching to my perspective.

One of the programmatic aims of Weber's essay was to present the *Archiv* neither as a party organ in the academic world nor as a journal in which anything goes. He wanted to offer the academic world something that was lacking in German politics, namely "die Möglichkeit, mit politischen Gegnern sich auf neutralem Boden – geselligem oder ideellem – unbefangenen zusammenzufinden" (*Archiv*, 34; GAW, 158, EW, 367). In other words, the *Archiv* itself was seen as a forum

analogous to the (British) Parliament, with civilised deliberation and the debate between opposing perspectives as its *raison d'être*.

This passage is perhaps as close as Weber comes to offering us an explicit analogy of parliamentary politics and its rhetorical vision of knowledge and action. He uses it to indicate the model of parliamentary politics that should be applied to scholarly disputes. Examples of Weber's vocabulary and his spontaneous use of political analogies for scholarly controversies support this. The main point lies in the extension of the rhetorical paradigm of parliamentary procedures and practices to the regulation of scholarly controversies.

According to Weber, there were no satisfactory regulations for engaging in scholarly disputes on theories and concepts in his day. Convinced of the omnipresence and heuristic value of such disputes, he intended to transfer regulations from the institutionalised and reasonably well-functioning parliamentary context to the scholarly disputes. Weber was not interested in the details of constructing an exact alternative for such a conceptual transfer. For him, it was sufficient to point out that there was indeed a parliamentary paradigm for a thorough discussion of objections and alternatives in a civilised manner that could also be applied in the scholarly world.

Referring to the application of a parliamentary paradigm for scholarly conflicts as 'objectivity' made the idea more acceptable. Before an audience of German academics, Weber's most provocative move was to claim that 'objectivity' was in fact more applicable in political than academic conflicts. This was part of Weber's comprehensive programme of reinterpreting the very concepts of knowledge and the human sciences in rhetorical terms, for which the English Parliament served as the historical paradigm. Such terms turned the scholarly activity of research itself into an activity of politics.

## NOTES

1. When referring to the essay, I shall quote the original edition from the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 1904 (*Archiv*), Johannes Winckelmann's 1973 edition of the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (GAW), which is in the pagination for the 'Objectivity' essay and identical to Marianne Weber's first edition from 1922, which is now available on the Internet as the *Potsdamer Internetausgabe*, and Keith Tribe's recent retranslation, published in the volume *The Essential Weber*, ed. by Sam Whimster in 2004 (EW).

## 'OBJECTIVITY' AS FAIR PLAY...

2. In his essay 'Bentham' from 1838, see [http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php&title=241&search=%22Chinese+Stationariness%22&layout=html#a\\_762125](http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php&title=241&search=%22Chinese+Stationariness%22&layout=html#a_762125)
3. See <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/paed/Flitner/Flitner/Weber/WL.pdf>
4. See <http://www.bartleby.com/cgi-bin/texis/webinator/sitesearch?query=%22fair+play%22&filter=col70&Submit=Go>

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Tübingen: Mohr 1973 (GAW).

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