History, agency, structure and objectivity in the work of Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci

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By Katharina Sass

 "For each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations, but of the history of these relations. He is a précis of all the past." (Antonio Gramsci, 1972, p. 353)

Introduction

How historically-oriented should sociology be? This is a question that was recently taken up by Inglis (2014), who claims that contemporary sociology is lacking historical vision, with diverse harmful results. The author analyzes this deficiency in light of both current debates on the usefulness of social science, and the historical development of the discipline in a political context. While Inglis' (2014) analysis is both highly relevant and interesting, this essay shall not delve further into his critical discussion of contemporary sociology. However it shall address some major questions related to his call for historically-sensitive sociology, which are relevant both for proponents of the sub-discipline of historical sociology[1] and for the discipline as whole. Since not all of the many challenges and merits of the historical-sociological approach can be taken up here, the focus shall rest on two related aspects. The first one is the classic dilemma of the micro-macro dichotomy. The questions arise how the focus on macro-historical processes and 'group variables' can be justified and to what extent agency can and should be taken into account (cf. Archer, 2013, pp. 6ff). In the first part of the essay, a short introduction to this problem shall be given and some typical criticisms of pure micro- or macro-approaches will be discussed. Secondly, the dilemma of objectivity in social science research shall be examined from different angles. It should be noted that the micro-macro dilemma resurfaces here as the question of how to navigate between the analysis of individuals' subjectivity and structures' objectivity. Objectivity is a specifically relevant topic for historical sociologists, because distance in time and space additionally complicates the always subjective process of interpretation (cf. Jenkins, 2003). Finally, the essay shall examine to what degree the historical approach can also have advantages with respect to how the micro-macro and the objectivity dilemma are treated. In the

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[1] It is interesting to note that Inglis (2014, p. 110) is partly critical to the development of a separate sub-field for sociological-historical analysis, since institutionalization can lead to sequestration and elitist tendencies, making this type of research a matter for a "sociological aristocracy" only. However, he also points out that the absence of such a sub-field in the UK has contributed even more to the development of ahistoricism.

second and main part of the paper, the writings of Max Weber (1864-1920) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) shall be analyzed with a view to how they approached these two issues. These classic authors were chosen, firstly, because they both employ a clearly historical approach. It is also believed that a comparison of Weber and Gramsci will be fruitful, because their writings display interesting similarities as well as differences regarding their answers to the micro-macro and the objectivity dilemma. As contemporaries, they experienced in part the same societal changes and events, such as huge advances in industrialization, technology and science, the First World War and the political struggles and eventually revolutions in Russia and Germany. While Weber died before fascism grew strong enough to take power in Germany, Gramsci had to witness Mussolini's coming to power in Italy, with disastrous consequences also for his own life. As the leader of the Italian Communist Party, he was arrested and spent the last 11 years of his life in prison, where he wrote his famous Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 1972). Weber on the other hand was a nationalist liberal, and his political activities were less committed to a specific party (Mommsen, 2004; cf. footnotes 5 and 6). However, both men tried to make sense of the massive changes which they saw occurring, and of the history which had led to those changes.

In this essay, overlaps and contrasts between the two authors' writings, as well as contradictions and ambiguities within their work, shall be analyzed. In particular, it shall be shown how they have linked micro- and macro-dimensions in their analysis of historical processes and configurations. The notion of objectivity shall also be discussed in relation to the historical perspective inherent in their writings. Inglis (2014, p. 103) claims that historically-oriented sociology could and should be "an important driving force in the cultivation of any given social order's reflexive consciousness of itself, its nature, its past, and its possible futures". This essay shall discuss to what extent those two classic authors would have agreed with the idea that reflexivity and "strong objectivity" should be aimed at by researchers (Harding, 1993). Clearly, their conclusions are related to their personal social and political values – an issue that shall also be taken up.

The micro-macro dilemma

First of all, it should be clear that neither Gramsci nor Weber ever spoke of the relation between 'micro' and 'macro' approaches. The debate on the 'micro-macro link' and the corresponding terminology originated within sociology at a much later date (cf. Alexander/Giesen, 1987; Archer, 2013). Nonetheless, the question of how to conceptualize the relation between individual and society has appeared many times in different forms and with different terminology within social science. For example, during the 18th and 19th century, there were debates on whether or not society follows natural laws. It was also discussed whether large-scale social structures and processes can be studied at all, and if so how, or whether one should rather focus on individuals' subjective interpretations and avoid causal explanations (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012, p. 81f, 129). As we will see,

these debates influenced both Gramsci's and Weber's work and prompted them to formulate their own answers to the problem.

Over time, disagreement led to the development of a whole range of more or less micro- and macro-, or agency- and structure-oriented approaches. Hollis (2002: 5) is of the opinion that the former try to analyze social change in a 'bottom up'-way, taking "the actions of individuals to be the stuff of history" and regarding "structures as the outcome of previous actions", while the latter are said to proceed 'top down', attempting "to account for the action by reference to movement in an encompassing social structure". It could be said that this distinction is somewhat artificial and becomes less relevant once history is taken into account (Archer, 2013). It has also been suggested that an analytical micro-macro link should be aimed at, and that the overly strong opposition of proponents of micro- and macro-approaches at least in part results from political conflicts (cf. Alexander/Giesen, 1987; Esser, 1999). Those claims notwithstanding, proponents of macro- and micro-approaches still have very different ideas about whether structure or agency "holds the final ace", and have therefore tended to accuse each other of neglecting the respective other side of the problem (Hollis, 2002: 202).

Esser (1999, p. 587ff) gives an overview over the most typical criticisms. Classical macro-sociology, represented for example by the work of Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and – as some would claim – the late Karl Marx, has commonly been accused of ignoring social action and turning individuals into the 'personnel' of history and providence. This type of 'historicism' has been said to be prone to "collectivistic fallacies", meaning that it considers society as a being sui generis, subject to objective laws of development, historical plans and social dynamics independent of human action (Esser, 1999, p. 593). On the other hand, micro-sociological approaches such as symbolic interactionism or behavioral sociology are accused of being unable to solve the problem of aggregation. By focusing only on the interpretative dimension of individual human behavior, and assuming that history is the result of mostly unintended individual action, these approaches are prone to what Esser (1999, p. 593ff) terms "psychological" and "autopoietic fallacies". In the first case, it is assumed that human beings' existential orientation ('Befindlichkeit') is conditioned only by their internal psychological development, instead of being constituted continually through social processes. In the other case, it is assumed that action bears action, or communication bears communication, without intermediation through situations and actors. Large-scale social processes cannot be explained this way. Of course, answers to these criticisms have been formulated in order to defend the various approaches. Space doesn't permit a further analysis of the debate at this point.[2] Instead another, albeit related, debate shall be introduced – the debate on objectivity.

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[2] The micro-macro debate is also related to a debate between and among historians and sociologists on how historical-comparative work should be done (cf. Carr, 1993; Elton, 1967; Jenkins, 2003; Kocka/Haupt, 2009). Topics of debate are for example how close one should stay to the sources, how many cases one should include, and how/if objectivity can be attained. There is also disagreement on the possibility of generalization versus the necessity to treat each case sui generis. Weber has taken up some of these questions, but a further introduction of this debate cannot be given here due to lack of space.

The objectivity dilemma

According to the Oxford Dictionaries, the adjective 'objective' can mean that a person or a judgment is "not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts", but it can also refer to a matter which is "[n]ot dependent on the mind for existence" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). These meanings are of course related. For researchers, they raise the fundamental questions of whether objective truth – independent of researchers' minds – exists, and if so, whether researchers are capable of finding and presenting it in an objective, unbiased way.

Within different research paradigms, the notion of objectivity is treated very differently. This is because paradigms operate on the basis of radically different ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, without very much common ground (cf. Kuhn, 1970). Hatch (2002, p. 11ff) identifies and defines five major research paradigms, which he terms positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist and poststructuralist research paradigms. These shall be shortly introduced here – not because they necessarily present the best description of contemporary science, but merely in order to illustrate that there is by no means a consensus on whether objective science is possible. In the positivist research paradigm, it is assumed that the world has an objective order, which is driven by universal laws, and whose components can be studied separately by carefully objective researchers. Immutable truth exists and can be discovered with the help of empiricist method, such as measurement, experiments, and the collection of 'facts' as 'evidence' (Hatch, 2002, p. 12ff; Jenkins, 2003). Postpositivists also believe in the existence of one 'true' reality, but they assume that human beings can never fully grasp it. Scientific findings can only and should try to be good approximations of reality. By using a range of carefully devised methods based on rigorous use of empirical data, postpositivists aim at being as objective as possible vis-à-vis their object of study (Hatch, 2002, p. 14f). Within the constructivist paradigm, on the other hand, objective knowledge or objective researchers do not exist. Absolute reality is assumed to be unknowable, and the desirable aim is instead to co-construct interpretations with research participants, in order to better understand the multiple realities of individuals (Hatch, 2002, p. 15f). The critical/feminist paradigm shares with constructivists the emphasis on the idea that knowledge is always subjective. Knowledge is also assumed to be political, and research is never value-neutral, but always politically positioned. However, critical/feminist researchers are more interested than constructivists in the existence of "historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals", and therefore must be considered "real" (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). Their declared aim is to develop consciousness, in order to contribute to practical resistance and to making structural changes possible. The least clear of the paradigms introduced by Hatch (2002) is what he terms the poststructuralist paradigm. The focus here lies on deconstruction of previous, especially textual, interpretations, such as the notion of universal truth. While there are many different branches of poststructuralist research, which makes it difficult to frame them in terms of a single paradigm, what is

important here is the reflexive emphasis on the researcher's role as a creator of only one of many multiple, subjective realities.

There has been a long-standing debate both within the historical and the sociological disciplines on whether or not the notion of objectivity should be retained (cf. Jenkins, 2003). In this essay, the classical writings of Weber and Gramsci shall be examined with a view to their insights regarding the issues at hand.

Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci on the links between history, structure, agency and objectivity

Of course the space in this essay would not suffice to give an extensive account of Weber's and Gramsci's theoretical approaches. The focus will therefore lie on how they positioned themselves on the micro-macro dilemma and on the question of objectivity. We will see that they conceptualized processes of social change as historical micro-macro-processes, and that they both had ideas about how structures, as well as values and ideas, are embodied, or mirrored, in individuals – with consequences for the objectivity of research. Nonetheless, there are of course major differences between Weber's and Gramsci's perspectives. This essay shall analyze overlaps and contrasts between the two authors, as well as contradictions and ambiguities within their work.

Max Weber on the micro-macro dilemma

It should be noted that Weber wrote at a time when the historical and sociological disciplines where not yet fully separated. For him, the study of society was quintessentially historical (cf. Delanty/Isin, 2003: 9). And this historical lens also formed his approach regarding the micro-macro and the objectivity dilemma. As many contemporary commentators have pointed out, Max Weber's sociology can be said to transcend what today is termed the micro-macro dichotomy (Archer, 2013: 7; Alexander/Giesen, 1987: 15ff; Esser, 1999; Holton, 2003). Weber's position is that a proper sociological analysis should not only *explain* a factual relationship *correctly*, but also be based on an *understanding* of the meaning of the explanandum:

> "Eine *richtige* kausale *Deutung* eines konkreten Handelns bedeutet: daß der äußere Ablauf und das Motiv *zutreffend* und zugleich in ihrem Zusammenhang sinnhaft *verständlich* erkannt sind." (Max Weber, 1980: 5)

In other words, Weber does not deny the possibility of causal explanation of macro-historical processes, but neither does he consider it possible to study the social world in the same way as the natural world. On the contrary, Weber believes that the social sciences need to take the interpretative dimension seriously (cf. Weber, 1980, pp.1ff). To 'understand' social action means to understand the meaning of action for individuals. According to Weber, inquiring into the motivation behind action is exactly what distinguishes social from natural science (Weber, 1980, p. 7; cf. Esser, 1999, p. 597).

And even if a sociological analysis correctly explains a relationship, the analysis is not complete unless it explains it in the right terms with respect to the internal meaning. As Holton (2002, p. 35) points out, Weber's understanding of meaning is a rather "monologic" one, emphasizing "the driving personal force of the individual virtuoso performing leadership roles, rather than the inter-subjective negotiation of meaning between individuals". Nonetheless, Weber clearly suggests that the meaningfulness of social action of individuals should be the starting point for sociological analysis (Weber, 1980, p. 9).

However, for Weber, this does not mean that one has to deny the possibility of abstraction and generalization (cf. Weber, 1980, p.1ff; 1985). The fact that individual action is meaningful does not mean that the patterns which it tends to create on the macro-level cannot be studied (cf. Holton, 2003, p. 32). So even if causal relations cannot be determined with certainty in social processes in the same way as in natural science, one can nonetheless try "to establish the *probability* that a series of actions or events are related or have an *elective affinity*" (Appelrouth/Edles, 2012, p. 130; cf. Weber, 1980, p. 5f, 9). To this end, Weber (1980, p. 9f; 1985, p. 191ff) considers concept formation to be essential (cf. Holton, 2003, p. 29). In fact, much of Weber's work is devoted to the development of ideal types, understood by Weber as abstract concepts not meant to describe reality, but rather to describe the pure essence of different forms of appearance within the social world (Weber, 1980, p. 9f). These ideal types should then help to develop more general arguments about possible causal relationships.

The ideal types Weber developed to describe relations of domination (or 'authority') can serve to exemplify how he included a micro-dimension in his analysis of large-scale social processes. They shall be shortly introduced here, also because they resemble some of Gramsci's reasoning. In general, Weber (1980, p. 28) defines domination as the chance that a specific group of people will react with obedience to an order. For this, Weber holds that there needs to be some kind of interest to obey on the part of the individuals, for example resulting from material or instrumental-rational, affectual, traditional or value-rational motives. However, this is not sufficient. In addition, all kinds of stable authority relations need legitimacy (Weber, 1980, pp. 122ff). Weber's ideal types of authority are distinguished by the origin of their legitimacy: Legal authority is said to be based on the belief in the legality of the law, assigning the right to give orders to specific people. Traditional authority on the other hand results from the common belief in the sacredness of traditions, which legitimize specific authority relations. Finally, charismatic authority builds on the charismatic personality of an individual leader, giving his rule the legitimacy of holiness and heroism (Weber, 1980, pp.124ff).[3] What is more, the administrative staff ('Verwaltungsstab') of the ruler plays a central role, because authority is based on the staff's continuous enacting of it. So the ruler is dependent on the administrative staff's solidarity. According to Weber (1980, p. 154), anyone who wants to break and replace authority,

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[3] Weber holds that, in reality, authority relations can rarely be defined as being purely legal, traditional or charismatic. Legitimacy normally derives from several factors, and for example charismatic authority can easily turn into traditional or even legal authority (Weber, 1980, pp.144ff, 153ff).

needs to establish their own administrative staff, or else needs to convince the existing staff to switch sides. Weber (1980, p.154) holds that there is a constant, mostly latent struggle between rulers and their administrative staff, which has been decisive for almost all of the cultural development in history.[4] While the relevance of Weber's classification for contemporary research on domination is questionable (cf. Strauss, 1965, p. 57f), what is of interest here is how he conceptualizes the relation between individual and society. The concept of legitimacy is a micro-macro concept, which points towards a dialectical relationship linking the ruler and the ruled and thereby shaping the face of society.

A contradiction in Weber's work is that despite his critique of evolutionism, Weber's statements on the growing importance of legal authority, of rationalization and bureaucratization can be interpreted in an evolutionist way (cf. Holton, 2003, p. 32). However, this would mean to do Weber's emphasis on the open-endedness of historical development injustice. While some macro-social trends, movements and counter-movements can be discerned, the conflictual nature of society implies that the future is open (cf. Alexander/Giesen, 1987, p.18; Holton, 2003, p. 32f; Strauss, 1965). On the other hand, the claim that Weber was a methodological individualist, which for example Holton (2003, p. 31) and Strauss (1965, p. 37f) seem to be making, should also be disputed. Weber's work was macro-analytic, in that it was concerned not with individual action per se, but rather with typologies and classifications of action as well as of the structures resulting from it (cf. Alexander/Giesen, 1987, p. 16; Archer, 2013, p. 7). Admittedly, there is some ambiguity in Weber's writing, which leaves much space for interpretation.

What is clear, however, is that Weber considered historical context to be very important. His work was historical-comparative in nature and emphasized multi-causality (cf. Holton, 2003). This should also be remembered when reading his classic work on the protestant ethic of capitalism (Weber, 2009). Here, Weber describes how strong religious ideas embodied in individuals – in this case, Calvinism – can become manifest in new economic structures, which then can powerfully condition and shape the behavior of non-religious individuals also, instilling in them the capitalist spirit:

> "Der Puritaner *wollte* Berufsmensch sein, wir *müssen* es sein. Denn indem die Askese aus den Mönchszellen heraus in das Berufsleben übertragen wurde und die innerweltliche Sittlichkeit zu beherrschen begann, half sie ihren Teil mit daran, jenen mächtigen Kosmos der modernen, an die technischen und ökonomischen Voraussetzungen mechanisch-maschineller Produktion gebundenen, Wirtschaftsordnung erbauen, der heute den Lebensstil aller einzelnen, die in dies Triebwerk hineingeboren werden […] mit überwältigendem Zwang bestimmt und vielleicht bestimmen wird, bis der letzte Zentner fossilen Brennstoffs verglüht ist." (Weber, 2009, p. 164)

Again, the accuracy of Weber's historical argument can be disputed and it is well possible that he assigned too much importance to theological and too little importance to secular thought (cf. Strauss,

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[4] Interestingly, his formulations almost sound like a Weberian rephrasing the Communist Manifesto's claim that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx/Engels, 1910, p. 1).

1965, p. 60f). Nonetheless, this classic work of Weber is a fascinating example for how social change can be conceptualized as a dialectical, historical micro-macro process, which is influenced by an infinite number of factors, among them materialist and idealist ones (cf. Weber, 1985, p. 162).

Max Weber on objectivity

Weber (1985) has also examined the dilemma of objectivity thoroughly. He insists that, in principle, values and scientific knowledge should be separated as clearly as possible. But at the same time he concedes that this can never be fully achieved, since personal values, as well as the general values of the time and culture, will always influence scientists' work and make them rank and evaluate factors differently (Weber, 1985, pp. 150f, p. 169). He therefore suggests that scientists should make their political affiliation public and describe the values they are personally committed to (Weber, 1985, pp. 146, 155ff).[5] But it is not science's role to tell people what to do, only to help them develop a clearer consciousness of the consequences of their actions:

> "Die Wissenschaft kann ihm [dem wollenden Menschen] 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." (Weber, 1985, p. 149)

Despite his own liberal political standpoint, Weber (1985, p. 153) is also critical of the idea that there exists a political 'middle ground', which can claim more objective truth than other interpretations: "Die »mittlere Linie« *ist um kein Haarbreit mehr wissenschaftliche Wahrheit* als die extremsten Parteiideale von rechts oder links." This stands in interesting opposition to the views of some contemporary liberals (cf. Jenkins, 2003, p. 42ff).

In other words, Weber's (1985, p. 169) position is that no social-scientific analysis will ever be completely objective. Nonetheless, social scientists should commit themselves to integrity, in the sense of taking obvious facts into account, and should try to reason unemotionally and methodically (Weber, 1985, p. 153f, p. 182). With proper method, social science research can lead to knowledge which applies objectively – but only with respect to single, time-bound aspects of reality (cf. Holton, 2003, p. 31, Weber, 1985, pp. 169, 182f). Also, these results might not interest some people or seem irrelevant to some, because they shed light on limited aspects of reality only. As mentioned above, Weber (1985, pp. 191ff) considers this kind of 'objective' science to be dependent on concept formation. According to Weber (1985, pp. 180, 191ff), historians claiming to let the 'objective' facts

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[5] Weber (1985, pp. 157ff) himself describes the political standpoint of his journal in the following way: The journal is said to be composed of men (!), who consider the workers' question to be important and who would like the working masses to have a higher quality of life. However, they consider capitalist development the best solution currently available. It is interesting to note that, while the young Weber sympathized with his father's National Liberal Party and strongly supported nationalist politics, Weber later co-founded the German Democratic Party (DDP) and helped to devise the constitution of the Weimar Republic. However, he left the D DP again in 1920, because he did not want to join in socialization efforts. His conservative principles prevailed (Applerouth/Edles, 2012, p. 127; Mommsen, 2004, p. 333).

speak for themselves are in fact using concepts also, but in a non-defined, unreflective way, which conceals the theory hidden in their history.

In this context, it is important to note that his 'ideal types' are in no way meant to represent moral ideal types, but merely utopian models against which the endless complexity of reality can be measured and to a certain degree ordered. They are not static, but have to be changed constantly, as history moves on and new questions appear on the scientific agenda. So Weber holds that historical epochs vary with respect to the predominant values, and that social science is not only influenced by these values, but in its turn influences them. In other words, Weber describes the relation between science and history as a dialectical one (cf. Weber, 1985, p. 180f).

Again, it can be concluded that Weber's writings contain many ambiguities. Strauss (1965, p. 42ff) is of the opinion that Weber's insistence on the equal legitimacy of all standpoints leads to nihilism. On the other hand, Strauss (1965, p. 72) also points out that Weber did assign intrinsic value to science: science, for Weber, is 'good', if it helps people to make conscious, free decisions, non-distorted by delusion (see the above quote). Weber (1985, pp. 157ff) also believed in the value of democratic discussions among scientists of different political opinions. So the claim that Weber was a nihilist shall be disputed here. Rather, he could be labelled a liberal skeptic – someone, who found it difficult to place himself permanently in a political camp, but who had high regard for those who did.[6] With respect to Hatch's (2002) paradigms, Weber could maybe be labeled a 'postpositivist', who claims that, while the notion of 'objectivity' still retains value, it can only be used with substantial qualifications. Clearly, Weber was capable of seeing the world from many angles, which made his work very "alive to paradox and dilemma" (Holton, 2003, p. 34).

Antonio Gramsci on the micro-macro dilemma

The other classical author to be discussed here is Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci took up Marx' claim that "the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class" and expanded it, in order to develop a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of historical struggles over domination and leadership (Marx/Engels, 2013, p. 40). To this end, he developed the concept of hegemony.[7]

Similar to Weber's concept of legitimacy, hegemony can be said to include a micro- and a macro-dimension (cf. Opratko, 2012, p. 52ff; Gramsci, 1972, p. 161). On the structural side, the mode of production creates relations between groups which are differently placed in the production process,

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[6] It should also be remembered that Weber was writing at a time of great political changes and conflicts. Examined in light of historical context, the complexity of his writing itself can be interpreted as taking up a political stance for democracy. Of course, Weber (1985) opposed the use of science to strengthen a particular worldview. But neither did he support one-sided, simplistic, authoritarian interpretations of history. So in effect, he himself contributed to the strengthening of liberal democracy – or as Gramsci (1972) had said, to the strengthening of bourgeois hegemony (see further down). Strauss' (1965) critique might therefore apply to some of the more contemporary sociology inspired by Weber. But to interpret Weber as if the Holocaust had already happened during his lifetime seems somewhat unfair.

[7] Gramsci (1972, pp. 333, 357, 365) attributes the theorization of the concept to Lenin. However, the original use of the concept within Russian social democracy related to the role of the working class in an alliance with other classes. Gramsci redefined the concept to apply to the rule of the bourgeoisie (cf. Anderson, 1979, pp. 11ff; Opratko, 2012, pp. 30ff).

and which therefore have different 'objective' structural positions and different 'objective' interests. This material base of society influences the forming of consciousness as well as the distribution of resources, and as a result the materially advantaged group has better chances of achieving hegemony, and the subaltern group will have to struggle for counter-hegemony (cf. Gramsci, 1972, pp. 5ff, pp. 362ff). However, the structural characteristics of the mode of production do not solely or automatically determine a historical situation. Gramsci (1971, p. 408) makes it clear that despite the material base of society, historical development is open-ended:

> "Politics in fact is at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure, but it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realized."

In other words, Gramsci (1972, pp. 243f), like Weber, does not believe that society can be "studied with the methods of the natural sciences" (cf. Gramsci, 1972, pp. 158ff on 'economism'). On the contrary, he considers "mechanical determinism", including the Marxist kind, to be the false and naïve "religion of the subaltern", serving the sole purpose of creating hope, "moral resistance, […] cohesion and […] patient and obstinate perseverance" (Gramsci, 1972, pp. 336f). In this context, Gramsci (1972, p. 338) actually refers to Weber (2009) and claims that the conception of predestination in Calvinism has served the same purpose, namely to rationalize and mobilize practical activity for subaltern groups. However, as history progresses and the formerly subaltern groups succeed in achieving counter-hegemony, "mechanicism at a certain point becomes an imminent danger", leading to "passivity" and "idiotic self-sufficiency" especially on the part of the intellectuals (Gramsci, 1972, pp. 336f).

Gramsci (1972) is convinced that an understanding of agency is crucial to really comprehend the political balance of power and the resulting historical development (cf. Opratko, 2012, p. 53). Hegemony can from this perspective be understood as a political, strategic praxis of leadership. Similarly to Weber's conception of domination, hegemony cannot be based purely on force. On the contrary, the central challenge for a hegemonic group is to create consensus and agreement to their rule among as many people as possible, or as Weber had said: legitimacy (Gramsci, 1972, p. 161). The same holds for the struggle of the subaltern group for counter-hegemony. This struggle takes place in what Gramsci calls "civil society", for example in schools. "Political society", on the other hand, is characterized by an "apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively" (Gramsci, 1972, p.12). As Anderson (1979) correctly points out, Gramsci does not always conceptualize the role of the state this way. His writing contains some ambiguities on this point. Rightly, Gramsci makes a distinction between the role of the state in the parliamentary democracies of the West, where hegemony and consensus are central to the political system, and the czarist regime of the East, where domination is based mainly on outright force and coercion (Anderson, 1979, pp. 20ff). This analytical distinction between force and consensus is made in a much clearer way by Gramsci than by Weber. However, Anderson (1979, pp.

21ff) criticizes Gramsci's early distinction between the state as a coercive force and civil society as the real stronghold of hegemony, and points out that the idea of parliamentary democracy itself is an important factor within the hegemonic struggle. Gramsci's (1972: 246) later definition of legislature, judiciary and executive as "organs of political hegemony" therefore seems more useful for an analysis of current parliamentary democracies. Hegemony can then be seen as a combination of consensus and force (cf. Anderson, 1979, p. 19; Gramsci, 1972, p. 80). What is important, however, is that the struggle for hegemony, despite being conditioned by economic factors, is of a cultural kind (cf. Gramsci, 1983, pp. 24ff; Gramsci, 1972, pp. 161ff). It necessarily involves some level of compromise, and it is never over. Among other things, this means that even if existing structures might seem to primarily serve the interests of the hegemonic group, it must be remembered that a certain amount of compromise was involved when they came into being.

Finally, Gramsci considers human beings to be social beings, entering into "active and conscious", complex relations with other human beings and the natural world (Gramsci, 1972, p. 352). Human beings make history, by playing their subjective part in it and by uniting their will with the will of others. But human nature is not static; it is always "becoming" in a dialectical and historical sense (Gramsci, 1972, p. 355). Because each individuality reflects all those dynamic relations, all of history is mirrored in individual human beings (cf. Gramsci, 1972, pp. 353ff). Gramsci's answer to the micro-macro dilemma is therefore that science ("philosophy") has to avoid both solipsism, defined by the editors of the prison notebooks as "a form of subjective idealism which maintains that the self is the only object of knowledge", and mechanicist interpretations of the world, contenting themselves with merely ordering social facts and processes (Gramsci, 1972, p. 345). Science should be more than a purely ordering activity, it should be creative:

> "But what does "creative" mean? Should it mean that the external world is created by thought? But what thought and whose? […] To escape simultaneously from solipsism and from mechanicist conceptions implicit in the concept of thought as a receptive and ordering activity, it is necessary to put the question in an "historicist" fashion, and at the same time to put the "will" (which in the last analysis equals practical or political activity) at the base of philosophy. […] Creative, therefore, should be understood in the "relative" sense, as thought which modifies the way of feeling of the many and consequently reality itself, which cannot be thought without this many. Creative also in the sense that it teaches that reality does not exist on its own, in and for itself, but only in an historical relationship with the men who modify it". (Gramsci, 1972, p. 345)

So the *will* of human beings should be at the base of social science, but the object of study should be the resulting historical patterns. This is very similar to Weber's approach.

Antonio Gramsci on objectivity

The above quote, given at length here for its beauty, also indicates that Gramsci, just like Weber, is aware of the impact of science on ideas, and therefore its political value-relevance. Gramsci agrees with Weber that ideas can contribute to social change, but Gramsci's perspective is different in that it is the perspective of a committed socialist. For example, Gramsci's (1972, p. 338) interpretation of Weber's (2009) analysis emphasizes that also religious ideas function as factors within the class struggle between hegemonic and subaltern groups – something that Weber does not seem to be very concerned about in this study. While Weber often refers to the Marxist perspective in a very respectful way, he clearly wasn't committed personally to contributing to social change in the same way as the Marxist Gramsci (cf. Weber, 1985, pp. 165f).

However, there can be drawn an interesting parallel between Weber's concept of the administrative staff and Gramsci's concept of the intellectuals. Gramsci (1972, pp. 5ff) holds that intellectuals play a major role in the constant struggle over hegemony (cf. Opratko, 2012, pp. 48ff). Each time and each class produce new "organic intellectuals", defined as organizers of social groups as well as organizers of society, who develop the necessary body of thought to legitimize their group's interests (Gramsci, 1972, pp.6ff).[8] Intellectuals, according to Gramsci (1972, pp. 5ff), create consciousness and ideology. In the struggle for hegemony, a group needs to either win over the intellectuals of other groups, or to produce its own intellectuals. This resembles Weber's thoughts on the role of the administrative staff. Presumably, Weber (1980, p.154) is thinking more of bureaucrats than of intellectuals and does not assign as much importance to these bureaucrats' possible intellectual creativity. But for Gramsci, the bureaucrats of the administrative staff would have qualified as organic intellectuals, too, since they are clearly central to the organization of society and the (re)production of ideology and hegemony. In any case, both authors have in mind a specific group of people, who are strategically placed to influence political processes and who can survive as a group even in cases of "the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 7).

While Weber (1985) did not aim at being an organic intellectual in Gramsci's sense, Gramsci (1972, p. 8) believes that this role is unavoidable. For Gramsci (1972, p. 8), the self-conception of traditional intellectuals as "»independent«, autonomous, endowed with a character of their own" is nothing but a "social utopia" and "idealist philosophy". Gramsci (1972, p. 171) does not believe that "purely »objective« prediction[s]" are possible:

> "Anybody who makes a prediction has in fact a "programme" for whose victory he is working, and his prediction is precisely an element contributing to that victory."

His main concern as a social scientist is therefore not to replicate the hegemonic ideology, as so many other intellectuals do, but to evaluate it critically from the standpoint of the subaltern. In this way, he

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[8] Considering Gramsci's political commitment within the Italian Communist Party and the vast impact his writing has had later on, Gramsci can certainly be considered an organic intellectual himself (cf. Opratko, 2012).

aims at what Sandra Harding has called "strong objectivity" – a reflexive approach taking the historical locatedness not only of the objects, but also of the subjects of knowledge, namely the researcher himself, into account (Harding, 1993). In other words, Gramsci aims at the production of counter-hegemony, which requires to 'think outside the box' of those hegemonic ideological assumptions that are taken for granted by many.[9]

Just like Weber, Gramsci does not believe that intellectual activity can be value-neutral, but in contrast to Weber, he considers strong political commitment a good thing.[10] If one has a "rigorous and coherent", political conception of the world, instead of "a random series of arbitrary notions", one is more capable of identifying relevant elements in historical processes, which will in fact increase the "objectivity" of one's predictions (Gramsci, 1972, p. 171):

> "This can be clearly seen in the case of predictions made by people who claim to be "impartial": they are full of idle speculations, trivial detail, and elegant conjectures."

Nonetheless, Gramsci (1972, p. 344) advocates openness to those who pursue scientific progress:

> "In scientific discussion, since it is assumed that the purpose of discussion is the pursuit of truth and the progress of science, the person who shows himself most "advanced" is the one who takes up the point of view that his adversary may well be expressing a need which should be incorporated, if only as a subordinate aspect, in his own construction. To understand and to evaluate realistically one's adversary's position and his reasons (and sometimes one's adversary is the whole of past thought) means precisely to be liberated from the prison of ideologies in the bad sense of the word – that of blind ideological fanaticism. It means taking up a point of view that is "critical", which for the purpose of scientific research is the only fertile one."

This statement shows that Gramsci, like Weber, makes a distinction between scientific and political activity, and also believes that democratic discussions can serve to develop a more 'objective' understanding of reality. By trying to understand other people's reasons for their standpoints and the meaning of their action, scientists can create useful knowledge. Gramsci doesn't say here whether he thinks that 'absolute truth' can actually be known. But he makes it clear that one can only come closer to it by achieving some kind of critical intellectual distance to the struggle for hegemony. In terms of Hatch's (2002) paradigms, Gramsci can clearly be labeled a critical researcher.

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[9] For Gramsci, this is a political as well as a scientific programme. His work also includes practical tips for those who aim at producing counter-hegemony: For example, one should "[n]ever tire […] of repeating [one's] own   arguments" and one should "work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever growing strata of the populace" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 340). Gramsci clearly believes in the enlightening effect of education.

[10] However, Weber (1985) also advocates that scientists should have political standpoints. For Weber, the problem arises once they try to use their writing for political purposes. Gramsci (1972), on the other hand, does not believe that it is possible not to do that.

Conclusion

Both Weber's and Gramsci's writings are extensive, multi-layered and complex. In Gramsci's case, his attempts to fool the fascist censor in prison by using metaphors and circumlocutions pose additional difficulties of interpretation. As a result, both authors' writings have been interpreted in many different ways by different scientific and political 'camps' (cf. Anderson, 1979). Though both authors are widely read, contemporary Weberians are presumably even more diverse than Gramsci's modern followers with respect to their political standpoints. This might be related to Weber's own political ambivalence (cf. Mommsen, 2004).

Regarding the two dilemmas discussed in this essay, it is possible to discern differences as well as similarities between the two authors' thinking. For example, they both emphasize the importance of agency, but without any intention of giving up the analysis of macro-structural, historical processes. On the contrary, history and historical context feature centrally in both authors' writings. Historical configurations are assumed to result from and to condition human action, but not in a random way. Individuals and society are bound together in historical, dialectical patterns, which can be analyzed, and history is reflected in individuals' consciousness. In other words, both Gramsci and Weber can be said to construct a micro-macro link by taking history into account. Their historical approach is in that way a clear advantage.

Gramsci and Weber are also both aware of the value-relevance of social science. They are both advocates of reflexivity and would both have agreed with Harding (1993, p. 63) that "the thought of an age is of an age". However, Weber's approach is more contradictory on this point, since he seems to hope that rigorous method can somehow limit the influence of political standpoints on science. All his life, he struggles for the ideal that scientific judgment should be free of value-judgment – without however attaining this ideal in his own writing (cf. Mommsen, 2004, pp. 64ff). He does not embrace his own role as organic intellectual. While Gramsci (1972, p.171) believes that "strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating", Weber seems to see emotions as a disturbing factor. In this context, it is interesting to consider how Harding (1993, p. 63) continues her statement by saying that "the delusion that one's thought can escape historical locatedness is just one of the thoughts that is typical of dominant groups in these and other ages." This is more in line with Gramsci's than with Weber's thinking. All in all, Gramsci's historical approach offers a more consistent answer to the objectivity dilemma, by making it clear that the influence of history cannot be limited to the objects of social science, but also always affects the subject of research; the researcher and her scientific judgment. Because researchers are individuals, too, society and society's history are inevitably mirrored in them. When framed in Gramsci's (1972, pp. 353ff) terms, this is not a problem, but an advantage, as long as the researcher is aware of her own historical locatedness. For understanding the relations, past and present, which come together in

one's own individuality, not only allows one to make a more precise judgment, but is also the first step to understanding how those relations can be changed.

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