CHAPTER 18

The ‘Value Relation’ as Bearer of ‘Freedom from Value Judgements’

What was supposed to make a ‘science of values’ of the southwest German philosophy of values was the distinction between value reference [Wertbeziehung] and value judgement [Werturteil]. Windelband, who considers historiography and the examination of culture examples of ‘value-affected cognition’ [werthaftes Erkennen], contrasts such ‘value-affectedness’ with the ‘weakliness of a moralisation and judgement of objects’; ‘value-affectedness’ is defined in terms of the scientific objects themselves ‘only coming about by virtue of their relationship to a value’. The value-relating method is to be ‘distinguished with utmost clarity from the evaluating method’, Rickert writes in Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft [‘Cultural Science and Natural Science’], because when history is at issue, values are relevant only to the extent ‘that they are in fact valued by subjects’. The philosophy of values becomes a ‘science’ by virtue of refusing to value the values it deals with: ‘it establishes only what is’, relates the data of experience to values that are in fact valid and thus engages with values only by means of their effects. In contrast with the willing and evaluating ‘practical man’, the historian and cultural scientist needs to enact a ‘theoretical “referencing” of values’ that involves considering history ‘under the aspect of values’. While ‘value judgements’ distinguish between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, valuable and worthless etc., the ‘value-relation’ divides reality into value-relevant (and thereby ‘essential’) and value-indifferent phenomena. One might, for example, consider Luther’s personality a boon or an evil, but no one can deny, according to Rickert, ‘that he was relevant with regard to generally recognised values’. To the extent that philosophy proceeds in a ‘purely scientific’ manner, it is concerned exclusively with the ‘validity of values’ and its theoretical comprehension.

1 Windelband 1914, p. 240.
2 Rickert 1962, p. 87.
4 Rickert 1929, p. 330.
5 Ibid.
6 Rickert 1929, p. 701.
18.1 A Commonality with Marx’s Standpoint of Science

As its name indicates, the ‘debate on value judgements’ provoked by Weber turned almost exclusively on the possibility or impossibility of scientific freedom from value judgements, but not on the ‘value relations’ that are prior to such freedom and on whose basis it is supposed to function. The more Weber’s model imposes itself within the social sciences, the more it becomes part of anti-Marxism’s standard repertoire for criticising Marxism’s ‘partisan’ thought in the name of scientific ‘freedom from value judgements’. The subordination of science to the communist party and its ‘Marxist-Leninist’ philosophy has repeatedly provided this critique with demonstrative confirmation.

And yet, considered by itself, the postulate of scientific ‘freedom from value judgements’ displays surprising affinities with Marx’s understanding of an autonomous science that one must not accommodate to a ‘viewpoint which is derived from outside, from alien, external interests’. The young Marx of 1843 already opposed to the ‘dogmatic criticism . . . that struggles with its opposite’ a ‘true . . . criticism’ that can account for the contradictions of, say, the current constitution by ‘[grasping] their essence and necessity’. And *Capital* is presented as the project of a ‘free scientific inquiry’ that exposes the internal logic of the phenomena examined without external additions and against the ‘Furies of private interest’.

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7 In 1910, Weber made his participation at the Sociological Congress, the organisation of which he had himself suggested, conditional on the inclusion, in the congress statutes, of the principle ‘that the association rejects, on principle and definitively, all propagandistic promotion of practical ideas’ (Weber 1988b, p. 431). Compare his 1913 expert opinion on the value judgement controversy (reprinted in Baumgarten 1964, pp. 102ff), or the extended 1917 version (Weber 1988d, pp. 489ff). In a dissenting expert opinion written in 1914, Spranger attempts to demonstrate ‘that it is a specific feature of the humanities to formulate “value judgements based on cognition”’ (quoted in Keuth 1989, p. 39). Later controversies within the theory of science, including the controversy over positivism, have been described as rehashing the classic debate on value judgements (Keuth 1989, pp. 69ff, 93ff; compare Feix 1978, pp. 9ff).

8 Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 31, p. 349. In this passage, Marx is criticising Malthus, whose ‘sinning against his science’ he contrasts with Ricardo’s scholarly forthrightness: ‘But when a man seeks to accommodate science to a viewpoint which is derived not from science itself (however erroneous it may be) but from outside, from alien, external interests, then I call him “base”’ (ibid.).
