Theories of Action and Morality

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SIMMEL AND RICKERT ON AESTHETICS AND HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

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Can there be a science of social action that brackets moral evaluation? The answer of mainstream sociology has been "yes, I guess", and it seems that most of us in the United States, but also in Germany, have relied on the work of Max Weber as the key theoretical contribution demonstrating this possibility. This approach, in which social science is recognized as being "value related" but still "free from value judgments", is considered by its adherents as more sophisticated than the positivism of French sociology (in which ethics –what we should do– is ultimately a factual matter akin to the health of an organism). The Weberian solution was believed to recognize the special binding nature of ethical obligations –a transcendent "ought" that can orient our lives meaningfully– without detracting from a sober, indeed, disenchanted recognition that the concepts we use to grasp the world are constructs produced for their analytic utility, and cannot be treated as simple reflections of reality. Yet the results produced by such knowledge must be taken into account by an ethical actor, at least, any actor who claims that sort of maturity that is available to those living in the modern world.

The problem with this approach, in a nutshell, is that, if pushed, it turns out to be fundamentally incoherent. If we produce concepts on the basis of our analytic interests (what we are trying to do), and thus adopt a wholly voluntarist theory of concept formation, it is altogether obscure as to how the results have some sort of binding claim over the thinkers.

Weber's methodological and epistemological forays were generally lengthy, often erudite, critiques of others that tended to begin from the presumption that Weber had no difficulty determining that other approaches were fundamentally unsound, but he seemed to lose interest in giving any clear specification of his own ideas. Indeed, he was not particularly interested in matters of philosophy in a professional sense, and

tended to refer readers to others, such as his colleagues and friends Georg Simmel and Heinrich Rickert, for details.[1] In particular, I believe that Weber considered Rickert to have established the consistency of the neo-Kantian approach to concept formation that Weber himself saw as the best way of working. Here I want to give detailed consideration to this conception, and to Rickert's attempt to stabilize a neo-Kantian theory of the sciences, and the cultural sciences in particular.

This stabilization attempt arose because his conception was under fierce attack. Now, there is a way in which the armies facing one another were two branches of neo-Kantians: on the one hand, there were those who emphasized Kant's theory of categories, and tried to build upon this formal approach to the preconditions of knowledge. The greatest opponents of this attempt were really those who, like Schopenhauer and his disciple Nietzsche, emphasized not Kant's transcendental analytic but his transcendental aesthetic: a recognition of the partial, limited, and anthropomorphic nature of our most fundamental experience of the world, and the implication that something "more" lay on the other side of it. This "more" often connected to emerging "life" theories, and was used as an attack on all would-be "complete" formal systems, such as those being constructed by neo-Kantians of the "southwest" school, of which Rickert became the leader.[2]

1. Kant's project

We begin with a brief reprise of the relation of these neo-Kantians to the master himself. After his monumental *Critique of Pure Reason*, exploring the way the human mind can or could know, Kant wrote a second *Critique of Practical Reason*, exploring the nature of our freedom and our morality. Although these two Critiques corresponded to the two

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[1] As in the beginning of Weber, M., *Economy and Society*, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich (two volumes), Berkeley, California, The University of California Press, 1978, p. 3.

[2] There certainly were figures standing in between these extremes; most important was Dilthey, as well as the Marburg school most associated with Cohen (who influenced Simmel).

halves of Kant's universe, Kant believed that his system would be incomplete without a "third Critique", the *Critique of Judgment*. Here Kant handled (among other things) the question of how we can judge beauty, for beauty is a curious sort of predication, as we believe that our statements of aesthetic appreciation are universally valid, although we understand that we cannot prove this to others with concepts. Kant admitted this immunity to logical proof, yet anchored aesthetics in intersubjective concordance and in a faculty of reflective judgment.

Reflective judgment is our capacity to attach a universal (such as "beautiful") to a particular (such as "this rose") without having a set of rules, the way we do when we simply *subsume* an instance into a general category ("this rose is a flower"). This was, thought Kant, a key part to the coherence of his system; indeed, such a capacity was necessary if free actors are to make use of the lawful knowledge produced by the intellect on the basis of sensory experience. For we must see purposiveness in the world if we are to believe that this lawfulness is of some relevance to us. And so we must, Kant argued, interpret aspects of the world *as if* they were made for us, even though they (perhaps) weren't. Thus we must assume a super-sensible realm from which this orderliness springs. This capacity to sense "purposiveness without purpose", then, is key to our ability to relate our will to our cognitive powers. Although no statement made about Kant's work will not be contested by *someone*, I am convinced by Kant that his system was unstable without this capacity for reflective judgment.

In any case, Kant's later work consistently built on this triadic system. But the neo-Kantians who influenced social science by and large ignored the "third Critique", with a few exceptions, most importantly Cassirer. Rather, they tended to adopt an ethics vaguely along the lines of the second critique, and tried to form a science based on a voluntaristic version of the first. In particular, Dilthey[3] had clearly appealed to Kant's first critique in proposing his own formulation of the cultural sciences as having a distinctive theoretical methodology and epistemology: his work should be seen, he wrote, as a "critique of historical reason". To Dilthey, history (the German version, that is) was a general science of the mental life of

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[3] See Dilthey, W., *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, translated by R. J. Betanzos, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988 [1883], p. 146.

willful human beings. It could not proceed along the same lines as a nat-
ural science, which used external causal explanations, but would require
some sort of interpretive understanding of one mind by another. This
formulation became increasingly attractive to the "left" (as we might call
them now) who wanted to put history with the humanities, and unat-
tractive to the "right" who wanted the cultural sciences to have an ex-
planatory capacity. A number of reformulations were put forward at the
end of the century, most importantly, Simmel's work on the philosophy
of history.

2. Simmel

a) Simmel and the problems of history

Georg Simmel is known to us as a sociologist; even in his own life
Simmel found this definition of his oeuvre solidifying (to his frustration,
as he considered himself a philosopher first and foremost). But Simmel's
charisma and brilliance were matched by a quality in his philosophical
work that made him harder than others to pin down. It is not that he
lacked core concerns –his work ever returns to issues of objective and
subjective culture, individual and group, wholeness and decomposition
of life– nor was he a loose thinker. But at a time of system-building,
Simmel's own allegiances were difficult to determine (he might generally
be seen as a Kantian, but in his *Philosophy of Money* he situates himself
squarely in a Marxian tradition; he appealed to Goethe as one who could
be fused with Kant, and there was something ever Hegelian about his
thought). Further, his own work resisted systemization, as he emphasized
that form could become content, that tendencies could reverse them-
selves, and that there was a second side to everything.

Characteristically, Simmel's contribution to the question of the meth-
od of cultural sciences, his 1892 *Problems of the Philosophy of History*,[4] was
filled with brilliant insights that popped up later in the work of his col-

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[4] *Geschichtsphilosophie* is conventionally translated as "philosophy of history", but it
could almost with as much justice be translated "historical philosophy", for the questions
were not merely about how we could know the past, but what the philosophical implica-
tions of the past were, and whether history itself was philosophically significant.

leagues (such as Max Weber) but was not considered a decisive solution. In this case, Simmel agreed with this verdict, and re-wrote the piece in 1905, saying that he himself had not understood his own point in the first edition. Here I generally rely on the (translated) second edition, though making a few references to the first, where differences are notable.

Simmel accepted the then-current idea that history was fundamentally a science of subjectivity, of mental processes and their effects. To Simmel, this implied that history is to some extent "concerned with the individual, with absolutely unique personalities". This raises a key problem of intersubjective access, for "what we call individuality is the peculiar fashion in which ideas –the contents of which are given– are united in one consciousness". What does it mean for one person to understand the mind of another, who has some different mental make up? How does one individual, one totality, reproduce the structure of a very different one? How does the historian reconstruct the interconnection of subjective elements in another mind? When the connections are logical ones between elements, it may be not too difficult, but what about when these connections are subjective as opposed to objective? We must (as Weber was later to repeat) to some extent rely on our own experiences and our own particularity– we must create some sort of empathetic reconstruction.[5]

This problem can be phrased in a number of ways: first, let us formulate it such that we can envision it as an everyday occurrence. When we are dealing with some particular person, and we wish to forecast her behavior, we will need to make some sort of attribution of a mentality to her, and almost certainly this implied mentality will be richer than what we might be able to directly support with data from her observable responses or actions. Thus we make

"presuppositions of the following sort: they are trustworthy in the sense that they are useful for the purposes of both theory and practice. But they are not certain in the sense that they can be deduced, with logi-

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[5] See Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, second edition, translated by G. Oakes, New York, The Free Press, 1977 [1905], pp. 64f, 72f, 75, 87ff.

cal necessity, from what is actually and empirically given" (Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, p. 47).

Note that this is somewhat similar to the problem faced by an neo-Kantian actor –able to derive principles that are necessary for action but of an uncertain noumenal status.

This sort of empathetic re-creation, then, is an "imaginative synthesis" that could allow us to make useful deductions, but if we cannot demonstrate the truth of this synthesis, we have not solved our original puzzle: "how can a state of mind of one person also be *eo ipso* represented as the state of mind of another person?".[6]

Let us now re-phrase our question in a way that might seem closer to the issue for the discipline of history. A historian sets out to make clear the actions of, say, Themistocles, and to do this, both for his own analytic purposes and to communicate his conclusions to readers, he must form some sort of "mental construct" that brings coherence and intelligibility to his data. Is this construct an arbitrary one, one that has more to do with the individuality of the historian than the individuality of Themistocles? The historian certainly does not think so; rather, he "feels that there is a sense in which necessity [*n.b.*] can be ascribed to this psychological construct". Indeed, he believes that this mental construct is *objectively* and *trans-subjectively valid*. Thus we have a puzzle. These mental structures "seem to have a universal, law-like status; however, this is not actually the case at all", as each construct must be historically unique.[7]

Thus although we still see a connection to Kant's distinction between the sciences of things and the sciences of persons, for Simmel (and for others at this time in the emerging modern university) the problem to be solved no longer seemed to turn on the grander philosophical questions about how one understands the relation between freedom and necessity, or between spirit and mind, but rather, how we have can formulate understandings of the world that have the force of objective law, and how historians can make statements that are as binding as those that would come from objectivity. The puzzle resolves itself as one familiar to us –

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[6] Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, p. 75.

[7] Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, pp. 69-71, 76; *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, Leipzig, Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1892, p. 23, n. 1.

how there can be judgments that are valid and allow us to demand agreement even though they cannot be supported by subsumption into concepts? Simmel's reformulation of the puzzle of the character of the human sciences clearly points to Kant's critique of judgment as the closest solution and the natural starting place for the formulation of a set of answers.

b) History, aesthetics and the intellect

Yet this is not how Simmel proceeded. Like Dilthey, Simmel assumed that it was Kant's *first* critique that was relevant for the study of history. Indeed, from his first page onwards, Simmel[8] insisted that he was demonstrating a parallelism between history and nature in terms of the "constitutive power of the intellect", but for the case in which a mind knew another mind, and not nature. Like others, Simmel[9] saw the overall claim of Kant as being that "in addition to elements of sense perception which give experience its definitive character, it also includes a priori forms". And thus Simmel moved to try to think in analogous terms, even though this was inappropriate to the problem he formulated.[10] (He was later to use a similar approach to thinking about sociological problems, where the first critique provided a better template, given the generalizing concepts at issue.)

My argument, then, is that Simmel reproduced the problem that Kant solved in the "third Critique", but misidentified it as one pertaining to the use of the intellect (understanding). If this seems tendentious, there are two pieces of evidence that offer strong support. The first is that Simmel[11] himself found it necessary to introduce the equivalent of a supersensible that could justify the trans-subjective validity of these constructions. Noting that he faced a puzzle of how to establish an "inter-

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[8] See Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, pp. viif, 43, 77, 98, 150; *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 21.

[9] See Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, p. 132f.

[10] This is perhaps even clearer in the first edition, where Simmel (*Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 2f) suggested that it is possible that there is only a single class of a prioris –those of the intellect (*Verstand*), which is also the basis for those of sensibility and reason.

[11] See Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, pp. 94f, 97.

mediate zone" between two consciousnesses, Simmel proposed a collective inherited unconscious, one modified by successive generations. That this was an outlandish solution did not escape Simmel. "I am most fully aware", he admitted, "that this sort of interpretation has been discredited on the most legitimate grounds". But he did not want to defend it as a statement of fact so much as to treat it as "a methodological fiction. Phenomena occur *as if* this sort of latent correspondence between our minds and the minds of completely different persons really obtained". This is of course exactly how Kant introduced the complicity of our minds and the world via the supersensible.

The second type of evidence supporting the argument that Simmel's formulation of the problem of history was fundamentally in aesthetic terms is that Simmel continually used analogies to aesthetics to clarify his claims. Thus Simmel gave the example of artists making different portraits of the same person.

"These differences between the individual artist's conception of the aesthetic problem –even though different solutions to this problem may be equally valuable– establishes the following point: in the solution of the objective aesthetic problem, it is the personal or subjective factor that is decisive. The same proof also holds for history" (Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, p. 86).

Thus it would make a great deal of sense to try to approach the puzzle of historical explanation from where Kant left off his critique of judgment. But because the first critique remained the dominant model for Simmel, he instead attempted to understand the process whereby the intellect created these historical individuals. This process, Simmel[12] argued, turned in large part on the point of view or "problematic" of the investigator. There were two problems here, though Simmel did not necessarily put things this way. One was the creation of unified entities (historical individuals), and the other was the choice of what to examine. Regarding the latter, Simmel[13] noted that "What motivates us to engage

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[12] See Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, pp. 80, 82.
[13] Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, pp. 153-156.

in theoretical activity cannot be something else that also has a theoretical status. On the contrary, it can only be an impulse of will and a sense or feeling of significance or value". Now "significance" can be ambiguous. In some cases, we may attribute *moral* or *aesthetic* significance to an event, though there is also a third type of significance, an irreducibly historical one. These three standpoints can be used to categorize any set of events. Simmel went on to disambiguate "values", for this term can either be used to refer to all extra-theoretical considerations that we use in history, or in a more delimited sense of evaluation.

Simmel did not, in my understanding, dispose of the problem that he raised with the idea of the historical "significance" of some event –this sort of extra-theoretical value that seemed outside his main system. Nor did he tie this issue (of what is significant) to the issue of the formation of historical individuals (which could have been handled from the perspective of an aesthetics). Thus at the same time as he proposed to distinguish between natural science and history as two different undertakings, largely on the basis of the conclusion that the more historical something is, the more individual it is, Simmel[14] had an unclear understanding of the process whereby aprioris might enter from the intellect to form the nature of historical individuals. It was this problem that Heinrich Rickert was (almost) to solve.

3. Rickert

Heinrich Rickert (a friend of Weber's) was a student of Windelband who had done his dissertation on the theory of definition.[15] The work of his that became crucial for sociology (*On the Limits of Concept Formation in the Natural Sciences*) was in part a response to Simmel's theory of history. He published the first edition in 1902. In 1905 Simmel's second edition came out, and in 1913 Rickert's second. In 1921 the third and fourth editions came out (Weber had died the year before). Here I concentrate on the first edition, for this is what Weber read (perhaps he glanced at the

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[14] Simmel, G., *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, p. 174f.

[15] See Oakes, G., *Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Social Sciences*, p. 6.

second which is largely identical), although I make references to certain changes in the later editions. Wherever possible, I use Oakes's[16] partial translation of the fourth edition, which is mostly the same as the first: where the two diverge or where no translation exists, I use the first edition.

a) Concept formation in natural science

As Rickert[17] noted, the great problem of his time was the seemingly self-evident opposition of the psychic and the physical. There were two aspects to this —the first, the general problem of how the mind knows the world, and then within that, the bifurcation of two types of worlds, basically corresponding to the world of physical phenomena and the world of conscious human actors, which Rickert assimilated to the problem of physical as opposed to historical sciences.

Rickert[18] began by formulating perhaps the strongest (and soon to be most influential) version of the neo-Kantian idea of selective abstraction (as it was to be called later). The essential problem is that as we face the world, we find an immeasurable multiplicity of phenomena that confound any epistemic theory of "knowing" as a simple intromission of what is "out there". Not only is there an *extensive* multiplicity (in that there are an infinite number of things), but each thing itself has *intensive* multiplicity in having an infinite number of properties or aspects that can be of interest.

For this reason, we must use concepts: mental structures that seize upon *some* aspects of objects and ignore others. Generalizing concepts (the kind most often envisioned by ideas of selective abstraction) unite concrete instances through the common possession of certain aspects selected. Such generalizing concepts are the fundamental units of natural science. Because these concepts are formed by suppressing particularities, as we ascend in generality, we necessarily leave the concrete reality

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[16] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, Fifth Edition, translated by G. Oakes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986 [1929].

[17] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 13.

[18] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, Tübingen, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1902, p. 36.

of individual phenomena behind. Even more, our concepts develop that sort of intrinsically hypothetical nature that we associate with nominalism.[19] Still, the concepts so produced are not arbitrary, but rather have a general validity (to which we shall return in greater detail when considering the objectivity of historical concepts), allowing the human mind to successfully make use of a limited set of limited concepts to deal with the unlimited nature of reality[20].

b) The problem of history and of individuals

The problem enters when science attempts to grasp individual configurations as such, as opposed to considering them only as members of classes. This is, argued Rickert, key for the discipline of history, for we call "historical" that which for logical reasons can never be subsumed under a natural scientific concept.[21] Just as natural science's job is to find the *general* in the real, historical science has the task of bringing out the *individual* in the real.[22]

This sort of individuality –most simply, things that only happen once– has long been understood as posing a problem to the scientific status of history (see, for example, objections discussed by Spencer),[23] and thus a challenge to the project of rationalism as a whole.[24] Now, in nineteenth century thought, one common way of dealing with the problem posed by the unique nature of the material of historical science was to claim that history was a science of an entire realm of phenomena associated with psychological processes, and which perhaps could be studied via direct introspection or intuition.

Rickert admitted this as an empirical coincidence –"Most historical sciences are predominantly concerned with mental processes".[25] If, for

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[19] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 73.
[20] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 73.
[21] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 34.
[22] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 54, cf. 107.
[23] See Spencer, H., *The Study of Sociology*, New York, Appleton, 1896 [1873].
[24] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 214f.
[25] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 118.

this reason, one wishes to call history a "human science" (*Geisteswissen-schaft*), then that is all well and good as far as it goes, but it was, emphasized Rickert, important not to imagine that this *substantive* distinction had a direct *methodological* implication.[26] First, Rickert[27] denied that (as Dilthey and Wundt imagined), we have some sort of *immediate* access to mental life. Indeed, if we are to think rigorously, we realize that we can't claim that there is a psychology that is simply the study of psychic processes, because *all* the sciences begin with and manipulate data that are fundamentally psychic processes, namely sense impressions.[28] There is nothing particularly unmediated in those psychic processes that we use as avenues for the investigation of mind in contrast to those used in the investigation of physical reality.

Thus there is no intuitive fast track to knowledge of mental life, for the world of the psychological, like the world of objects, has a multiplicity and hence also poses problem of intensive and extensive infinity, and so must be "worked up".[29] This is one reason to reject the division between natural sciences and history as being fundamentally about the *substance* of investigation. But second, we know that we can have a generalizing/natural-scientific approach to mental phenomena, for that is just what we see in the new science of psychology.[30]

Thus the central issue is a *formal* one of grasping the individual, not a *substantive* one of knowing the psychological. A natural-scientific approach to history that fails to recognize the special challenge of studying the individual would be in effect to re-derive sociology, which as we all can see, said Rickert,[31] has not really accomplished much. This failure comes because a natural scientific approach implies the development of laws, and the subject of social life is one that is so historical by its very nature that we can expect that such laws will be few and far between.

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[26] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 127.

[27] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 153.

[28] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 165.

[29] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, pp. 185, 188.

[30] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 211f.

[31] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, pp. 287f, 294, 590; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 133.

The core difference between history and the natural sciences, then, is a methodological one, one pertaining to the difference between generalizing and individualizing concept formation. However, it is not accidental that the individualizing sciences tend to be more associated with the realms of human action, with life, and with thought. As we array the sciences from physics to chemistry to biology to anatomy to history we find more and more historical elements, and the ultimately historical science is not that of the "mental" but that of *culture* –culture in opposition to nature.[32]

This fundamental relation between history and culture, thought Rickert, explains the frequent understanding that there is some of the aesthetic in the craft of the historian. A painter, overwhelmed by the multiplicity of the object, tries to simplify it in such a way so as to best communicate his essential intuition as to the nature of this object. In contrast, the natural scientist cares nothing for this aspect of the object and is happy to be rid of it in the process of concept formation.[33] History sits in between: for the historian, the aesthetic elements are only a means to an end, communicating "how it actually was", and not an end in themselves, as in the arts.[34]

We must see that Rickert, like Simmel, has basically approached the central problem of aesthetic communication in Kant, namely, how to establish intersubjectively valid presentations or statements without concepts. But like Simmel, Rickert turned away from this path; indeed, Rickert argued that Simmel was incorrect to emphasize the issue of intersubjective concordance in the first place. Although Rickert[35] was quite complimentary regarding Simmel's insights as to the differences between narrative and lawful sciences, he believed that Simmel had made a fundamental error in attempting to begin from psychological presuppositions.[36]

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[32] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* p. 589.

[33] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* p. 42.

[34] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* p. 387.

[35] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,* p. 301f.

[36] Simmel seems to have agreed, as he replaced this approach in the first chapter of the first edition with a more Rickertian emphasis on immanent limits in the second edition.

Thus to Rickert, the essential problem was of the individual historian forming concepts in a non-arbitrary way, and not the establishment of intersubjective concord (which might or might not use concepts). Thus when turning to the key issue raised by Simmel of not knowing interiority of others, Rickert[37] emphasized that this issue of the inaccessibility of foreign mental life [*fremden Seelenlebens*, translated by Oakes as "third person mental life"] is no different from the more general problem of just not having enough data.

Yet as we shall see, Rickert was forced to recapitulate Simmel's thoughts along these lines; although able to push the problem outside the empirical, Rickert acknowledged the need to account for agreement as to nonreal meaning configurations in a way that made much of his post- and contra-Simmelian work superfluous. But to make this point, we will need to follow Rickert as he defined a way for historical science to grasp individuals.

c) *Values and the formation of individuals*

Because they too partake in infinite multiplicity, individuals must be grasped conceptually, yet we cannot do so using the process of selective abstraction, for this requires suppressing particularity. But the signifycance of an individual (say, an individual human being, such as Goethe) *is* his particularity. "There is no general concept under which he can be subsumed".[38]

How, then, can we form individuals in a way that they can be manipulated by the intellect? Indeed, what is a true individual (as opposed to an instantiation of a class, which can be subordinated without loss in the more general concept)? Consider a nondescript dog that you happen to see on the street; to you, this may be simply "a" dog, a member of the larger class, and not an individual at all, but to me, this is (let us say) "Scout", a unique and moderately irreplaceable animal. This difference, argued Rickert[39] comes because the individual name indicates the *value* of

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[37] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 534f.

[38] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 89.

[39] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 380.

the pet to the owner. And this turns out to be more generally the case – individuality is correlative to the value that the candidate individual has for us. Thus the value solves the same problem for an individualizing science that the suppression of concrete particularities does for a generalizing one.[40]

For it is this focus on values and individuality that gives us, thought Rickert, the proper formulation of the division between history and natural science. It has to do not with the substantive issue of there being a class of "cultural" phenomena that elude the grasp of the natural sciences, but that these sciences, in their quest towards a pure model of determinations connecting wholly qualityless elements (the ultimate units of physics, perhaps quarks), necessarily attempt to shake off all intuitively accessible aspects of actuality. But many of the questions that are of interest to us –including some about inorganic processes– cannot be answered in such a way, and we find a need for a complementary approach that does not attempt to sacrifice empirical individuality.[41]

"The problem of concept formation in history, therefore, is whether a scientific analysis and reduction of perceptual reality is possible that does not at the same time –as in the concepts of natural science– forfeit individuality, and yet also does not produce a mere 'description' of facts that cannot yet be regarded as a scientific representation" (Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 78).

We have seen with the case of the pet that individuality seems to require a value relation connecting observer and observed, precisely what most analysts would assume must completely undermine the possibility of a science. Rickert's argument was that, first, such a value relation was a *necessary* part of the formation of the individualized concepts required. by history and, second, that the objectivity of history came *through* this value relation, not in spite of it.

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[40] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 83, 101.

[41] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, pp. 264, 266.

The problem, then, is how there can be a science that develops such individualizing concepts given that (as any historian knows) it is no more the case that all observers from all perspectives would formulate their individual concepts in the same way than that we would really value each other's pets.[42] Does this mean that individualizing concepts lack objectivity?

d) Objectivity and individual concepts

As a good neo-Kantian, Rickert[43] rejected any idea that the objectivity of science comes via the agreement of the contents of its concepts with ultimate reality, because natural science is not about reproduction of the actual world [*wirklichkeit*], but production of a conceptual world (with an unbridgeable gap between us and actuality). Instead, we must demonstrate the *possibility* for a *non-arbitrary* character to our investigation (most importantly, our principles of selection[44]) as we "work up" reality via concepts.

· Now there is, admitted Rickert,[45] a way in which dependence upon the selection of values pushes history away from the objectivity possessed by natural science. However, since the importance of certain values to members of a particular community is an empirical question, one that can be answered via empirical methods, there is the possibility of having a value consensus that links not only the investigator with others of his breed, but with his subjects of study.[46] Thus whether we are considering Alexander Rodchenko alone, or the entire Russian Productivist School, we form our concept as an individual that has a relation to the

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[42] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 504; also *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 100.

[43] Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 656.

[44] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 213.

[45] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 196f.

[46] The historian "surmounts all caprice when, for example, he related the development of art to aesthetic cultural values and the development of a state to political cultural values. In this way, he produces a representation that –insofar as it avoids unhistorical value *judgments*– is valid for everyone who acknowledges aesthetic or political values as normatively general for the members of his community" (Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 199).

values that bring us to our historical investigations, most obviously (in this case) aesthetic values. Since the Productivists themselves were oriented to such aesthetic values, the sharing of values between the historian and the object of study, often understood as threatening objectivity, actually ensures it.[47]

But what if there is *no* overlap in values between the historian and the "mental beings that belong to the most comprehensive historical nexus"? In such a case, Rickert[48] argued, "to understand these beings, [the historian] must at least be able to 'get the feel' of their values". If we cannot empathize with the values of actors, we will see them as "things", in Kantian terms, as objects fit for physical science, not anthropology. So rather than the historian being able to arbitrarily construct individuals based upon his own values, he must attempt to relate to the values of his subjects to the fullest extent possible, even if this is only a theoretical relation.

In sum, Rickert's approach to formalizing the process of concept formation required a bold maneuver –to recognize that precisely *because* history was, above all else, a science of concrete reality (*Wirklichkeit*), it could not be separated from valuation. Although this in no way meant that historical science should incorporate value *judgments*,[49] it meant that the division between "is" and "ought" was not the same for history as for natural science. When it comes to human life *oughtness is*, and it is *necessarily*, where individuality exists as such.

e) Generality and validity

Yet we have, in a way, only pushed off the problem of objectivity: we have defined individuals by values, and focused on the values that are *non-arbitrarily* shared (between the investigator, his interlocutors, and his subjects). But the thing about values is that they aren't merely things that "are" but things that "should be". Values that do not, inherently, possess *validity* as values are no values at all. In other words, they are an "ought" that *ought* to be an ought. Thus we have not solved the problem of ob-

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[47] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 125f.

[48] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 126.

[49] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 91.

jectivity until we have established not only the existence of the value relation, nor even its commonality, but also its *validity*. Rickert thus accepted that "the value with reference to which objects become historical individuals must be a general value: in other words, a value that is *valid for everyone*".[50]

.   Hence Rickert[51] concluded that for us to derive "the objectivity of history in the highest sense" we have to (first) "suppose that at least *some* values or other are absolutely valid" and (second) suppose that some "substantively embodied and normative general human values objectively approximate them more or less closely". Then our search for axiological development has a valid grounding. Although we do not have to assume that the values used in concept formation are *themselves* unconditionally valid, we need to assume that they are *related* to such valid values.[52]

Every historian worth his or her salt, however, certainly knows that values change; so what can it mean to require general validity? It is not that the values must be *timelessly* generally valid, but that they be valid *for a community*. If this is so, there is a unification of the "normatively general" validity of a value (everyone *should* value this) and its "factually general" validity (people *do* value this), "for under these conditions factually general values must also appear as requirements for all members of the community".[53] It is important that Rickert did not mean here a community of *investigators*, but an actual human community of interdependent lives. The values of this community are then what we call *cultural* values.[54]

Now by "cultural values" Rickert did not mean any values that happen to be shared among the members of some group (such shared values may be trivial or accidental). Rather, cultural values are those values "that the members of a community take seriously". Further, these values are cultural in a sense that returns us to the root of the word— these are values whose *cultivation* we may reasonably expect.[55] Thus they get at what is essential to a human community, and what is seen as "oughting"

[50] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 89, cf. 130, 105.

[51] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 205.

[52] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 206.

[53] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 130f, 134.

[54] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 64.

[55] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 135.

to be essential to them. This implied that cultural values are those that permit, indeed demand, a sort of development. "In other words, real culture exists only where value-related or historical-teleological *development* either exists or has existed. Thus we see an even more intimate connection between culture and history".[56]

f) Civilization and progress

Taken seriously, the logic suggests there can be no history of a place and time that is oriented to *invalid values*, and such persons can do no historiography. Rickert seems to have fallen into Hegel's form of history in which most of the world's continents simply have no history at all. Rickert recognized and was disturbed by the ethnocentric implications, and tried to grapple with them.

Rickert began by recapitulating the distinction between what Germans called *Naturvölkern* and *Kulturvölkern*. Although this corresponds to the English distinction between "primitive" and "civilized", the emphasis in English pertains to position on a developmental continuum –the "early" peoples who are not yet in "cities" (on the one hand) with "civil" states, laws and forms of behavior (on the other). In contrast, the distinction in the German terms returns to the issue highlighted by Rickert as the distinction between nature and culture, and has more of a sense of those who are stuck in a world with no linear time as opposed to those who are part of a developmental story. The very implication is that only *Kulturvölkern* have a history. The others, if they are to be studied at all, are properly the subject of generalizing sciences, no different from animals, trees, rocks and waters.

Rickert's[57] response was to make two careful (and related) qualifications. The first was to point out that just as the true Calvinist church is an invisible one, so too is the church of culture. We may accept the distinction between primitive and civilized as a formal one without being confident that we can ever tell where any particular people belongs.[58]

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[56] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 136.

[57] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 586.

[58] "We've certainly already seen that the division between primitives and historical or civilized can be precisely determined by our considerations, because if in the course of time a people shows no fundamental alternations with regard to normative general cul-

The second was to emphasize that when we believe that a society lacks cultural values, all we are really able to determine is that they are not connecting to *our* values. We cannot say that any culture really is, in itself, a natural society. The only societies that are without history are those of ants and bees.[59]

We can appreciate Rickert's efforts to shield us from the harsher implications of his work, yet we cannot be wholly comforted. Rickert's determined effort to find the grounds of objective historical concept formation has necessarily led him to emphasize cultural values of progressive civilizations —not in the triumphalist version of Hegel's history, but because uncultivatable values cannot be good, and we cannot demand that others respect invalid values, and if we cannot find universally valid values we cannot have an objective history. History then requires the possibility of infinitely progressive ascension in terms of civilizational values.

Rickert's key second edition was published in 1913. A year later, the Great War began, and in short order, no commentator on intellectual life in Europe would be sanguine at the prospect of grounding a philosophy in continuous value progress. There could not have been a less promising choice of a basis on which to construct a historical science.

g) Non-real meaning configurations

But it gets worse. Thinking through his logic, Rickert[60] concluded that both logic and ethics depends on the following: "That the world is so arranged [*eingerichtet*] that in it the goal of cognition actually can be reached". Here he *could* have followed Kant and simply declared this a transcendental condition and been done with it. Indeed, relying on the hypothesis of a supersensible realm, as did Kant in his "third Critique",

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tural values, we bring it only under natural-scientific general concepts and say that it has no historical development. But this division is formal; that is, if cultural and historical development is existent in some people, we could always make our conclusions only with a perspective on the normatively general values that are known to us, and so long as we thus are not secure that we are aware of all these values, we must be careful not to deny any people the title of 'Cultural-Folk'".

[59] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 587.

[60] Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 737.

would have sewn up the argument nicely in logical terms, even if it were unsatisfactory as a scientific statement. And it would have highlighted the connection of the cultural sciences to aesthetics. Instead, Rickert had tried to specify the non-arbitrariness of these individualizing concepts *without* such a hypothesis, and instead, to base his argument on the empirical (even if not completely knowable) facts of cultural civilizations.

But Rickert himself later concluded that he had not solved the problem of agreement in the constitution of individual concepts after all. Hence he returned to the issue from a new perspective in a section on value consensus added in later editions. Rickert[61] recognized that values are part of a domain of configurations that aren't "real" –like the meaning of a word, they are neither corporeal nor psychic. Thus when we think about "generality", we must acknowledge the possible generality that arises when all the subjects have a similar experience of something that isn't real, like a value. Rickert maintained that meaning "can be directly grasped by us in common with other persons as *the same*", and this happens when we grasp this meaning "in its *individuality*, in the same way that we perceive the same body as an individual"[62] (but unlike a historical individual, this meaning is not empirical). Rickert suggested that we use the word "understanding" to refer to these meaning configurations which we try to grasp as wholes.[63]

This grasping of the individual meaning by different persons had strong implications for the issue of how a historian can transcend a mere conceptual representation of another's mentality and attain a real grasp and a re-creation of the other –and hence if, and if so, *how*, we can understand an alien mentality.[64]

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[61] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 141, 149.

[62] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 167, 154.

[63] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 158f, 164. Rickert (*Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, Fünfte Auflage, Tübingen, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1929, p. 546f) suggested aesthetics as an analogue whereby we can understand a compound having a unitary meaning not reducible to a sum of meaning of its parts; a second example was a facial expression –in all cases, we cannot go from the parts to the whole, but can only interpret parts from the perspective of the whole.

[64] See Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, pp. 166, 168. Rickert's example was not a member of a different culture, but contrarily, that we hear a

Rickert's answer as to the possibility of "the re-creation of the meaningful mental life of *another* person" was to acknowledge that (contra Scheler) we have no direct understanding, but to argue that

"because we have understood the meaning that really lies in this mental life as nonreal meaning –on the basis of our knowledge of mental life in general, which is grounded in our own mental life– we can construct the mental life of another person in such a way that we acquire *mediated* knowledge of it as an interpenetration of nonreal meaning and real mental life that can be re-created" (Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 170).

That is, we actually have an *experience* of this meaning (even though this is not an experience of something in the *real* world), and we use *this* as the basis of our re-creation of the other's mental life. "Nonreal meaning, therefore, can form the bridge between our own real mental life and the real mental life of another person. This is because, as nonreal meaning, it can be ascribed neither to us nor to another person".[65]

Rickert[66] understood that this capacity to grasp a meaning that does not actually dwell in our own mental life, but "swims freely" about, was fundamental for his project, and indeed for science in general, for if we lacked a faculty for such understanding, we could only learn what we already knew. Thus he created a third realm, to mediate between the two that seemed again threatening to separate.[67]

German express satisfaction with the treaty of Versailles! What could *his* mind be like?!

[65] Rickert, H., *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 171.

[66] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 585.

[67] This is literally true. "The central historical individuals are in their totality thus composed [*zusammengesetzt*] out of *three* factors: out of physical bodies [*Körper*], out of minds [*Seele*], and out of non real meaning" (Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 596). At the same time, Rickert (*Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 608) then found himself recapitulating the dualism that this third realm was intended to solve, as any historical understanding using this non-real meaning was a double-relation: on the one hand, the *re-experience* of the real mental life of the past, and, on the other, the *understanding* of the non-real meaning configuration, two layers laminated so tightly together that the practicing historian would have no idea of their conceptual distinction.

In other words, after all this work, Rickert, upon re-reading his own solution, has precisely recapitulated the claims of Simmel's with which he originally took such strong issue![68] Simmel of course more flagrantly proposed that the non-real mental constructs that allow of a non-arbitrary re-creation of others' mentalities were an inherited collective unconscious, but he did not mean to defend this literally –he simply needed to posit *some* substrate, and he did so in a way that was logically strong if empirically weak.

Rickert, on the contrary, posited a different substrate that was empirically less implausible but logically of dubious status –simply claiming that there is a reality of meaning and that we experience the meaning of these values in their own realm, completely begging the question of how we know that *our* "experience" of a value (say, honor) is in fact the same as that of another. Rickert[69] seemed to only admit the possibility of differences in the *degree* to which persons grasped the complete meaning configuration –not differences of meaning itself.[70]

Even more, the alert reader will no doubt seize upon the similarity of this expression –that these absolute meanings "swim, so to speak, 'freely' *between* the [historical] individual, in whom they actually live, and ourselves"[71]– to Kant's use of the same idea of "swimming between" both in the first critique when accounting for the role of the imagination in the production of evaluative standards *and* in the "third Critique" to account for our capacity to establish intersubjective validity of ideals of beauty by appeal to some shared archetypes.[72] We have clearly returned to a structural weakness inherent in the philosophy of the subject.

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[68] Further, Rickert (*Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 592), returning to the issue of "missing data", now admitted that in many cases there was nothing to be done but for the historian to bring into play his "intuitive imagination" [*anschauliche Phantasie*] so as to complete a meaningful construction of the individual in whom this individual meaning once dwelt.

[69] See Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 547f.

[70] Rickert (*The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, p. 173) hurried to leave this issue once he had come to this formulation: "We need not consider any further *the particulars* of how this part of historical activity as the transconceptual, perceptual, or 'intuitive' grasp of the factual material of history takes place, and the extent to which, in every such case, more than *mere* perception or *mere* 'intuition' is involved".

[71] Rickert, H., *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, p. 583f.

[72] In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (*Critique of Judgment*, translated by W. S. Pluhar,

We must also note how Rickert's solution parallels that which was being formulated at around the same time in France by Saussure and Durkheim (each drawing influence from the other). Saussure[73] found that any attempt to begin by deriving language as an empirical phenomenon of communication between persons failed —"We are left inside the vicious circle"— and hence argued that empirical speaking (*parole*) had to be derived from a posited language (*langue*). This idealized language was social, unmodifiable by the individual, unitary and homogeneous. Quite similarly, Durkheim[74] argued that "The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own", the "collective consciousness". Like Saussure's language, this was a unitary and homogeneous entity: "It is the same in north and south, in large towns and small, and in different professions". This explains how different consciousnesses can "cleave" to one another —there is a single system outside of all that has objectivity for each.

Rickert too was forced to solve the problem of intersubjectivity through a *deus ex machina* —that we must posit a realm of meaning that is fixed and identical for all. Of course, were this true, it would indeed simplify matters greatly. And it may often be a reasonable approximation

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Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987 [1790], p. 84; *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974 [1790], p. 153) struggled to sketch out the psychology of beauty, and suggested not only that the average is the most beautiful (a point common to many late eighteenth century theorists), but that there is a single image that "swims between" (or hovers between) the singular and various intuitions of the individuals [*Sie ist das zwischen allen einzelnen, auf mancherlei Weise verschiedenen, Anschauungen der Indviduen schwebende Bild für die ganze Gattung...*"]. As Makkreel (*Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 115) has pointed out, this language refers back to that in the First Critique regarding the way the archetypes of the imagination can produce "monograms" that serve as ideals of sensibility, which serve as an orientation "more as a sketch that swims in the midst of different experiences, than a determinate image..." [*...welche mehr eine im Mittel verschiedener Erfahrungen gleichsam schwebende Zeichnung, als ein bestimmtes Bild ausmachen...*] (Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Leipzig, Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1944 [1787], p. 551; A570/B598). In both places, Kant opposes the lack of a determinate rule here to the obscurity of the process involved.

[73] de Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by W. Baskin, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959 [1915], p. 9.

[74] Durkheim, E., *The Division of Labor In Society*, translated by W. D. Halls, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1984 [1893], p. 38f.

to treat this as if it were true —certainly we do so in our daily lives. But philosophy is not the place to confuse a determinate statement, a useful approximation, and a transcendental one, and I think this is exactly what Rickert did. Further, Rickert undercut the ways in which others had salvaged these ideas. We have seen his scornful rejection of the average as any type of basis for the grounding of the ideal; further, despite his obviously similar language, he took nothing from Kant's "third Critique". Although Kant too posited a trans-individual realm that could explain intersubjective concordance in terms of qualitative perception, he noted that this was a transcendental proof of a hypothetical statement: we must treat the world *as if* this were true. The advantage of an approach that says (for example) that speakers need to act *as if* words have the same meaning for all persons as opposed to insisting that they really *do* have this one meaning is that unlike the latter, the former does not explode when faced with the undeniable evidence of polysemy and pragmatic failure in everyday speech.

It is easy for us to wonder at how deep thinkers like Simmel and Rickert could be led to proposing something as fantastic as an imaginary realm of ideas or values. But the problem of how to comprehend intersubjective comprehension has been fundamental to almost all post-medieval thought, with most "solutions" being little other than the *claim* to having a solution (most famously, Heidegger's[75] pronouncement that *Dasein* is primordially *Mitsein*). The puzzle is still live enough that the discovery of the mirror neuron system has been hailed as the solution ("Thanks to this mechanism, actions done by other individuals become messages that are understood by an observer without any cognitive mediation"[76]), a claim taken seriously by contemporary sociological theorists (e.g., Lizardo[77]). Rickert and Simmel, it seems, were *right* to think that they needed *something* here, even if it appeared fanciful. The problem

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[75] Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York, Harper Collins, 1962 [1926].

[76] Rizzolatti, G. and Craighero L., "The Mirror-Neuron System", *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 27 (2004), p. 183.

[77] Lizardo, O., "'Mirror neurons', Collective Objects and the Problem of Transmission: Reconsidering Stephen Turner's Critique of Practice Theory", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 37 (2007), pp. 319-350.

with Rickert's solution, however, was not simply that it was fanciful, but that it had a poor anchor.

For Rickert's main solution was to wed the objectivity of the cultural/historical sciences to the validity of civilizational values, which we have seen was a disastrous choice. But he realized that establishing the uniform experience of values required a further lemma, that values are not subjective constructs at all, but rather are, in and of themselves, intersubjectively stable "things" of which different persons have experiences.[78] Although Rickert's work has large stretches of impressively careful analysis, the overall solution is a failure.

4. *Weber*

Max Weber did not seem to understand this: he had only read Rickert's early edition, before the acceptance of nonreal meaning configurations. Weber seemed convinced that the details of the problems that confronted him were solved by Rickert's approach (although he himself did not seem to use Rickert's system in any disciplined or coherent way). Thus Weber had a misplaced confidence that the stability of a voluntarist neo-Kantian approach to cultural values had been proven, even as he – Weber– redefined "cultural values" in a way that made no sense for the Rickertian project, basically depriving them of their unconditional validity, which is key for the establishment of history as a science in Rickert's work. Still, Weber was sure that there could be a neo-Kantian approach to concept formation that could produce a social science whose only relation to ethics would be that it could provide a *means* to independently and exogenously chosen values. Indeed, he (and his followers) acted as if anyone who denied was a fool or a "big child". In Germany Weber had been able to brow-beat his opponents into relative quietude, and in America, those opponents and critics rarely were imported.

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[78] Further, as Oakes (*Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Social Sciences*, p. 142) has argued, in his work on the *System of Philosophy* (published in the same year as the third and fourth editions of *Die Grenzen*), Rickert derived very different claims about values which completely undermine their status as trans-individually experienceable.

But the distorted version of "value relevance" that Weber seems to have adopted led to a fundamentally solipsistic vision of the work of a cultural scientist –just as Weber's Puritan faced his angry God alone, so Weber's scientist (or his politician) had only his transcendent value to reckon with when forming his arsenal of concepts and his explanations. The famous "methodological individualism" of Weber's work came not in his rooting things in acting individuals, but in his uprooting of the notion of truth from the lived interactions of members of some community (which Rickert still found crucial).

5. Back to Simmel

It may well be that this approach to formalizing a neo-Kantian vocabulary is simply a dead end. But perhaps if it *can* be salvaged, the way to restart would be to return to Simmel's work. Whatever one thinks about Weber, no one will argue that he was a playful man (and one might well doubt that he truly understood what play was all about). Simmel, however, understood play and playfulness as one form of the more general dynamic interchange between form and content. Weber remained locked into his unshakable conviction that there was little hope on the horizon to save us from a completely formally rational existence, despite a lack of empirical evidence then or now to support such a hypothesis. Simmel, on the other hand, understood that it is not simply that the form can become all-powerful, in the way that bureaucratic rules lead to their own formal rationality at the expense of substantive rationality. Rather, form can *become* a content, actually become this, as it does in play or in sociability.

This understanding suggests the possibility of an intersubjective connection based on substantive terms, even if this resists formal exposition. In the idle chatter, the flirting, the banter of playful subjectivity, we *use* forms to communicate, but refuse to be *constrained* by them. Indeed, the content, the substance, of our interaction is nothing other than the mutual recognition that the forms have no power over us –that for this protected time and space, we master them. If this sort of communication is possible between flirting youth at a ball, I do not understand why it is not possible between two aged historians!

Although Simmel never solved the problem of intersubjectivity, if we were to pick up the pieces in his work to start anew, we would start with his writings on love and on women, especially his 1911 essay on "Female Culture". This might seem implausible, but it is here that Simmel returns to the themes of historical epistemology, and he devotes a large portion of this text to a direct re-statement of many of the epistemic issues discussed in his philosophy of history. Simmel emphasizes our need to find, behind the empirical data we have in others' actions, "thoughts, feelings, and intentions that can never be directly ascertained but can only be conjectured on the basis of the intuitive imagination".[79] Although we know that in everyday life we make such psychic attributions with great confidence, as scientists, we must recognize that "facts of observation are consistent with a number of different psychological infrastructures that are in principle unlimited...".

Why return to this basic issue of the indeterminacy of explanations for historical action? This essay was an attempt to understand what letting women into the world of the mind might mean. Simmel realized that this might shake any subjective concord about the social world that male scholars may have had, given that "the psychological interpretation of men by women may be fundamentally different in many respects from the manner in which women psychologically interpret one another –and the converse is also the case". "Women as such not only have a different mix of identity with and difference from historical objects than men do, and thus the possibility of seeing things men do not see; by virtue of their distinctive psychic structure, they also have the possibility of seeing in a different way" –seeing in a different way "from the a priori of their nature...".[80]

Now Simmel is not proposing that sort of solution that Mannheim would have reached for –that we need *both* men's *and* women's views. Something more weighty is being uncovered, something not to be solved by academic manipulations. For Simmel, the haunting idea is that just as perhaps we men (I will follow Simmel in assuming a male speaker and

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[79] Simmel, G., "Female Culture", translated by G. Oakes, in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984 [1911], p. 78f.

[80] Simmel, G., "Female Culture", p. 80.

male audience) can never really see things the same way as women, so too we may never have that spiritual unity with woman that we want.

This theme is a recurring one for Simmel who, in his *Soziologie*,[81] eloquently speaks of the fundamental incompleteness of our relations with others due to our limited capacity to truly know another's individuality, which reaches its depth in the passionate craving for union between the sexes: "something essentially unattainable". The epistemic problem raised in the philosophy of history is, for Simmel, also an abiding personal, existential problem. For we always do injustice to others' individuality by seeing them via general concepts. Even where we seek the greatest fusion with another and believe that we have gained it, we find that a woman's physical surrender "does not eliminate a final secret reserve of her soul". "This," says Simmel,[82] "is the purest image –but perhaps also the crucially decisive original form– for the loneliness of the human being, who is ultimately an alien, not only in relation to the things of the world, but also in relation to those to whom he is closest".

The same epistemic problems in history thus return to frustrate our eternal attempt to "seek one another, complement one another" across "the deepest metaphysical chasm". These somewhat depressing thoughts actually come from an essay on flirtation, written for a popular publication.[83] Why this discussion of the *hiatus irrationalis* between men and women on an essay on this lightest of topics? Because flirtation is the way in which we come to deal with the fact that love is, as Plato said, having and non-having (also discussed in Simmel's[84] work on Schopenhauer and his[85] "Religion and the Contradictions of Life", where he

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[81] See Simmel, G., "How is Society Possible?", translated by Kurt H. Wolff from *Soziologie*, in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by D. N. Levine, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971 [1908], p. 10; *Soziologie*, third edition, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by K. H. Wolff, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1950 [1923], p. 128.

[82] Simmel, G., "Flirtation", translated by G. Oakes, in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, p. 149f.

[83] First published in *Der Tag*, May 1909, then included in *Philosophical Culture, Collected Essays*, along with "Female Culture".

[84] See Simmel, G., *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, translated by H. Loiskandl, D. Weinstein, and M. Weinstein, Amherst, Mass., University of Massachusetts Press, 1986 [1907], p. 56.

[85] Simmel, G., *Essays on Religion*, edited and translated by H. J. Helle in collaboration with L. Niedler, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997 [1909], p. 38.

argues that this tension reaches its acme in our feeling for God). Simmel's take on this is that flirtation is the unique relation between the sexes that has that fusion of form and content that Schiller identified as the heart of aesthetics. It is, says Simmel, the best example of "purposiveness without purpose" (Kant's formula from the "third Critique") that we have.

In other words, Simmel accentuates the problem of intersubjectivity that is intrinsic to history and proposes at least one type of resolution – flirtation– as relying on the same "indifference to its object" that characterizes the pure aesthetic. But it is not that flirtation provides the answer for history, because flirtation, by definition, does not matter. My point so far is not that Simmel has solved the problem, but that he has identified it and made it unmistakable. Even a Rickert could not argue that the solution to the lover's anguish would be "more data".

When thinking about historiography, one is free to imagine asymptotically approaching that dreary and monotonous agreement that would make us finally a science; when thinking about love, such an eleatic progression is absurd. We both know and doubt, we utterly fuse then draw back with the realization that we have no idea who the beloved is, and again, we know in fact that we do. But it seems that Simmel –without denying this uncertainty– was beginning to recognize a key type of *certainty* here. For in a posthumously published fragment on love he writes that

"with the exception of religious feelings, love is more intimately and unconditionally linked with its object than is any other feeling. The clearcut fashion in which love develops from the subject corresponds to the same clearcut fashion with which it is oriented to the object. The crucial point here is that no instance of a general sort is inserted between them" (Simmel, G., "On Love (a fragment)", translated by G. Oakes, in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, p. 64).[86]

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[86] Also see earlier "How is Society Possible?", p. 13. William James had made the same point: "Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfection to the enchantment of which we stolid on-lookers are stone-cold. And which has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? Which has the more vital insight into the nature of Jill's existence, as a fact? Is he in excess, being in this matter a maniac? or are we in defect, being victims of a pathological anesthesia as regards Jill's magical importance. Surely the

That is, here individual meets individual without the general concepts that Simmel had argued in other works *always* intervene between us and others. Simmel may be wrong, but he is serious that there is a different epistemic quality to the mental states involved. "Thus love exists as an intention, directly focused on this object" —here he is using "intention" in the scholastic sense of the connection between a mental state and a physical object. Were that so —and it is not obvious that it cannot be so— this would have serious implications for the resolution of the question of historiography, and perhaps for other cultural sciences, including generalizing ones.

6. Conclusion

This emphasis on a fundamentally *second person* approach to social knowledge —one that was neither the "first person" knowledge that Scheler or even Dilthey imagined the historian must have, or the "third person" knowledge (Oakes's translation of *fremden Seelenleben*, we recall) that the "generalizing" sciences seemed to claim —was the basis for the theological approach of Simmel's famous student, Martin Buber. In Buber's[87] words, "the relation to the *Thou* is direct". Although we easily remember Buber as only discussing the relation of Man to God, this is incorrect; although theological through and through, Buber's approach is a phenomenology of the face-to-face encounter, and the difference between the relation of (on the one hand) I to It (or even He or She), and (on the other), of that of I to Thou. Although we may now emphasize the connection to Heidegger's work (clearly inspired by Simmel, whom Heidegger considered one of the few living philosophers worthy of notice), we cannot take Buber's work out of the context of the triad of persons —not, as in most western philosophy, the three persons of the Christian godhead, but instead, the triad of grammatical persons.

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latter... For Jack realizes Jill concretely, and we do not..." (James, W., "What Makes a Life Significant", in Matthiessen, F. O., *The James Family: A Group Biography*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1947 [1900], p. 404f).

[87] Buber, M., *I and Thou*, translated by R. G. Smith, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1937 [1923], p. 11.

This triad had indeed been a key structuring element for Simmel –the structural differences between the planes of the Individual, the Social, and the Objective. (Although we cannot go into this here, we see a close relation to the work of the central figure of the Marburg school of neo-Kantians, Herman Cohen, who also emphasized this triad and drew upon it in his relational theology; we further cannot understand Simmel's use of this triad without understanding his relation to Schelling, but again, we must leave this to the side for now.) In his sociology, Simmel had tended to assume that the "social" was a collective –a second person plural, if a second person at all– and one destined to be transcended by objectivity. Just as arbitrary group norms and rituals are the scaffolding from which an objective, defensible enlightenment ethics can develop, so too more generally, the "social" is a stepping stone on the way to objectivity.

But Simmel's theory of love as intention –if we take it more seriously perhaps than he did– suggests that our best social knowledge may not start from such second person plural knowledge, and push it towards objectivity, but from a second person singular, a compilation of value-saturated embracings of particularity. As Simmel says, in "Female Culture"[88] among other places, one does not need to be Caesar in order to know Caesar. But it seems that the question is whether in order to know Caesar, one has to love him.[89]

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[88] See Simmel, G., "Female Culture", p. 79.

[89] An earlier version of this was presented at the conference *Georg Simmel: Life, Self, Culture, Society*, at the Franke Center for the Humanities, University of Chicago, November 12, 2011; I thank the participants, especially Donald Levine and Hans Joas, as well as Monica Lee, for their comments.

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