Kant’s anti-naturalism: The foundations of sociability in Max Weber and Sergey Hessen

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Abstract. The principal claims of Max Weber and Sergey (Sergius) Hessen are an extension of Kant’s anti-naturalistic tendency in ethics, in which an individual acquires his own freedom by actualising the autonomy of will as obedience to a duty. The moral justification of freedom leads to an explanation of the development of mankind as a process of interaction between culture and many individuals. The analyses of the principles of sociability showed the crucial role of the neo-Kantian paradigm in the development of Weber and Hessen’s social philosophy. My task is to analyse the socio-philosophical views of Hessen and Weber to show up affinities in determining the particularity of sociability. The foundation of this comparative study is the affinity in the interpretation of mankind’s progress as a socio-cultural process, which includes a specific functionality of each individual as a co-participant in the formation of culture as an ontology of freedom. Neo-Kantian philosophy of culture can be used as a foundation for identifying trends and interactions in the philosophy of Russia Abroad that were not even previously studied. The results of this investigation make it possible to prove that neo-Kantian ideas led to similar solutions in the works of both European philosophers and Russian émigré philosophers.

Keywords: Kant, neo-Kantianism, sociality, sociability, society, individual, axiology, Heinrich Rickert, Max Weber, Sergey Hessen

1 Introduction

Sociability, in a broad sense, is the proclivity for social interactions and cooperation. This notion has recently become an essential tool in historical-cultural (Randall, 2006) and philosophico-political (Cook, Halsall and Wankhade, 2015, p. 4) studies. In the socio-philosophical dimension, “sociability” has a more specific usage as a methodological instrument for investigating philosophical justifications of social practices. As a tool of historico-philosophical analysis, sociability is a concept concerning the system of social relations that can be actualised in society, depending on how the latter interprets the

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individual’s freedom of will. The way the problem of freedom of will is solved determines the character of a society.

Examining sociability within the field of the history of philosophy allows one to focus attention on an individual’s interactions with society and aids in outlining the principles behind their mutual congruity. Stephen Darwall has underscored the link between sociability (and socialisation in general) and morality. This approach helps distinguish the types of sociability that have emerged throughout the history of European philosophy.

Machiavelli’s (2008, 259) philosophy showed how the propensity to accept the individual “as is”, complete with his or her sensible desires, had destroyed the morally justified harmony between the private and collective social identification. He reshaped the interpretation of social practices, having made it possible to consider them as models for the existence of individuals seeking to satisfy their needs. Within European philosophy, his interpretation of the social produced two trends in understanding sociability: 1) Hugo Grotius maintained that humans are altruistic by nature and congenitally inclined to communicate and interact with other people (2005, pp. 79-85); 2) Thomas Hobbes, for his part, believed that humans had to overcome the natural predisposition to the war of all against all (Hobbes, 1998, pp. 87-88).

Immanuel Kant’s practical philosophy wedded the two trends in interpreting sociability. In the categorical imperative, he linked the private and collective identification of the individual, who obtains freedom by becoming social. Until then, acting of their own will, individuals view all other people as a means to satisfy their own needs. But, having embraced duty, they become free and start to see themselves as members of society and contributors to culture.

Sociability was further developed within Southwest Neo-Kantianism. Drawing on the Kantian deontological version of the social, Heinrich Rickert used his own axiology to devise a procedure for the formation of society. He unravelled Kant’s formal ethical principle within a system of values which are ultimately a priori forms of “ought”. In reality, values manifest themselves through the creativity of many people who thereby form a collective agent—society. Rickert’s system of values allows him to provide a rationale for the algorithms of correlation between the individual and culture in the multitude of social practices.

Rickert’s axiology was used by the philosophers Max Weber (1864–1920) and Sergey (Sergius) Hessen (1887–1950) to justify their versions of sociability. Both saw the individual freedom of will as a principal condition for the development of society and culture. It is worth noting that Hessen met Weber personally when studying in Heidelberg. During World War I, Weber helped Hessen obtain permission to leave the city for Sweden (Hessen, 1999b, pp. 735-736). Hessen was thoroughly familiar with Weber’s ideas and invoked them many times in his dissertations, placing them in the context of the development of Rickert’s ideas on the methodology of sciences of culture, including history (Hessen, 1909, pp. 22, 39-40),

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1 As Phil Withington (2007, p. 294) writes, “...all sociability, from formalized rituals and rites to informal interaction, should be interpreted primarily in relation to social and material realities”.
2 Darwall (2013, pp. 162-163) considers the problem of sociability in the history of international philosophy as a trend in the communicative theory of society.
3 For more detail, see Zagirnyak (2021, pp. 1113-1115).
4 From the perspective of the problem of sociability, Kant proposed in the three formulations of the categorical imperative a new model of private and collective identification of an individual, having equated their harmony to duty: the formula of universalisability (MS, AA 06: 389) makes it possible to connect the freedom of an individual as a member of society to the universal spread of moral principles; the formula of personality or humanity (GMS, AA 04: 429) gives the possibility to proclaim the supreme value of the freedom of an individual as a member of humanity and link private manifestations of freedom to the functioning of society; the formula of autonomy brings out the significance of the will of an individual, shown to be the principal condition for morality (GMS, AA 04: 432).
5 This feature of Hessen’s philosophy is emphasised by Nina Dmitrieva (2016, p. 389).
or considering them against the background of the specifics of cognising the history of culture (ibid., pp. 34, 45), particularly in connection with the problem of causality (ibid., pp. 55, 85-86). As an émigré, Hessen also referred to Weber’s works (albeit less frequently than before) in the context of his own axiological doctrine. Below I will attempt a comparative-historical analysis of Weber and Hessen’s models of sociocultural development through the lens of the problem of sociability. This investigation will be conducive to implementing the axiological model of sociability, where the private and collective identification in society mutually affect each other, and measuring the heuristic potential of Kant’s anti-naturalistic research programme as a means for an ethical justification of sociability.

2 The axiological dimension of socio-cultural development in Rickert’s philosophy

In his model of humanity, Rickert contrasts extra-temporal values (Werte) with the temporal cultural reality, which exists as a complex of goods (Güter) (Rickert, 1910/1911, pp. 12-13). Culture, according to Rickert, is a dynamic formation actualised as a manifestation of extra-temporal values. Since values are infinite content-wise, culture is a process of revealing their content (ibid., p. 27). This process takes place by virtue of individual acts of valuation (Wertung) (ibid., p. 11), whose variability in determining the prospects of the actualisation of goods is limitless as well. In the act of valuation, each individual overcomes natural determinism and gains freedom as a participant in the formation of culture. As a free being, the individual creates meanings (Sinn), i.e. conducts an interpretation (Sinndeutung) of the act of valuation and understands goods as manifestations of values and his or her life as a unique role he or she has in this process (ibid., pp. 25-26). The freedom of the individual is a sine qua non of cultural development.

By linking individual freedom to the development of culture as a whole, Rickert constructs a model of society. Whilst the meaning of cultural good is, as Benjamin Crowe (2010, 620) notes, justified by each individual independently, Rickert does not interpret society from a social atomism perspective. Culture, which acquires dynamism as values become actualised, is a historical formation that existed before the birth of any individual and will exist after his or her death. Each individual contribution to the content of culture is significant because it is an element of cultural content independent of individuals’ lives. By discerning indications of values in goods (Rickert, 1910/1911, pp. 22-23), the individual performs a universally significant act of attributing value, making further individual valuation possible (ibid., pp. 104-105). The supra-individual status of the transcendental subject allows the individual to view society not as a multitude of individuals, but as a unity whose object is culture in general, and see his or her life as participation in the actualisation of values in historical reality (Rickert, 1986, p. 102). By discovering values, individuals identify themselves as free beings playing the part of co-participants in the development of culture and, therefore, as elements of a social unity. Each individual can, through the act of interpreting a meaning, contribute to the content of culture. This model of socio-cultural development was capable of linking the private and collective identification of an individual. A significant shortcoming of Rickert’s axiology is the gap between the spheres of transcendent values and reality. Weber and Hessen attempted to solve this problem.

For example, Hessen mentions Weber’s celebrated work The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (cf. Weber, 2001) when exploring the role of law in the formation of society and demonstrating the potential of liberalism (Hessen, 1999a, p. 231).
3 Weber’s purposive-rational action and ideal types

Rickert’s axiology had a prominent role in Weber’s philosophical teaching. “The concept of culture is a value-concept”, writes Weber (1949, p. 76). Yet he criticises Rickert’s procedure of attributing value (ibid., pp. 149-150). Despite accepting the correlation between social and cultural development, proposed by Rickert, Weber rejects his interpretation of transcendental values as having their own significance irrespective of the agents and objects of historical reality. Society is a complex system of interactions amongst many individuals, and culture is the result of concordance between their actions. A proponent of sociological nominalism, Weber reduced social phenomena to relations between individuals, construing these relations as a tool to optimise interactions between individuals (Weber, 2019, pp. 103-105). At the same time, he was critical of organicist theories (ibid., pp. 93-94).

The multitude of social formations creates a structure in the use of which an individual has to observe regulations – act in such a manner, in such forms and using such algorithms as are prescribed by a correspondent community, institution or organisation. This structure is the historical individual, i.e. “a complex of elements associated in historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance…” (Weber, 2001, p. 13).

The interactions amongst people within the historical individual rest on the predictability of actions, performed following patterns accepted in the given social formation. In reducing all social formations to social relations, Weber considers the former not as a tool for uniting people, but as a mere mechanism of human interaction. An individual resorting to the mediation of an institution can expect others, using the same institution, to follow similar algorithms and action scenarios as if the parties were acting in concert. The same is presumed in the cases of disagreements and even conflicts. The efficiency of social interactions depends on whether each individual conforms to the declared regulations concerning the action. To characterise the most rational correlation between the means and the ends, Weber introduces the term “purposive-rational action” (zweckrationales Handeln): in the conditions of a culture, an individual rationally chooses ends and means to perform the undertaken tasks (Weber, 2019, p. 101).

A purposive-rational action generates social phenomena or ideal types (Weber, 1949, p. 105; 2019, pp. 81-82). The ideal type is a combination of expectations, emerging based on understanding the functional purpose of an institution in society. All ideal types are dynamic: they change in line with the expectations and are superseded by other ideals, creating the public space of individuals’ interactions.

Based on Rickert’s axiology, Weber produced a sociological doctrine where an individual’s freedom is the main condition for the formation and development of a culture. The model of sociability proposed by Weber is a take on restoring the unity between the private and collective identification of the individual. Within his approach, Weber develops the idea of social unity. For him, communalisation means organising social practices that imply “closed and open social relationships” (Weber, 2019, p. 123).

Weber (1949, p. 105; 2019, pp. 99-100) interpreted the freedom of an individual as cultural content creation and defined all possible social communities, institutions and social phenomena as a communicative tool optimising individuals’ interactions. Communalisation (Vergemeinschaftung) is, for Weber (2019, p. 120), a social relationship characterised by a mutual sense of belonging.

4 Hessen’s goal-task and tradition

Hessen was Rickert’s student and defended a doctoral dissertation (Hessen, 1909) under his supervision. Instead of Rickert’s notion of values, Hessen (1995, p. 33) uses the term “goal-
The goal-task is the purpose of developing culture, a purpose prevailing over the interests of an individual. Its potential, just like the potential of value in Rickert’s philosophy, is infinite (inexhaustible, unerschöpflich) in Hessen’s terminology (Hessen, 1930, p. 113). Goal-tasks are development trajectories, prompting people to understand culture not as a constant but as the formation of tradition (Übergabe) – the aggregate of the results of goal-task performance (ibid., p. 115).

Unlike Rickert’s values, Hessen’s goals-tasks cannot exist before the agent and the object appear. The goal-task is the potential for perfecting culture, which does not have any sense without a history of actualisation. Each society solves the same problems, thereby creating culture. Hessen (1995, p. 27) groups the objectives faced by societies into three levels: 1) civilisation (economy and technology); 2) civicism (law and statehood); 3) education (science, art, morality, religion). The way these problems are solved shapes concrete local cultures (Hessen, 1961, p. 22). For example, the plough and the tractor are connected, both being solutions to the goal-task of agricultural soil treatment (Hessen, 1930, p. 114). This goal-task, which emerged as a way to solve a problem of a society at the level of civilisation, can be found in a variety of cultures. In other words, any sum of things is understood by a human as the evolution of goal-task performance in a historical reality. People evaluate cultures and shape themselves as participants in society only in the framework of fulfilled goal-tasks. Hypothetically, a situation is possible when it is impossible to understand the purpose of an object, albeit it can be identified as an element of a culture or an object of goal-task performance (ibid.). But the emergence of unique goal-tasks is possible as well. A goal-task is a route, a trajectory of cultural development.

Humans become free when participating in the performance of a goal-task. And this requires them to move beyond their individual interests. An individual can show creativity only as a participant in a social unity. Only having identified himself or herself as a member of society does an individual start to live a meaningful life and become capable of evaluating his or her past and future, the lives of other people, the functioning of social formations, organisations, institutions and society as a whole. Temporal perspectives are possible only as personal trajectories within the performance of goal-tasks, i.e. as participation in creating cultural content.

Individual creativity is contribution to the tradition (ibid., pp. 119-120). Interacting individuals make up a collective social agent whose object is culture as a whole. And the success of cultural development depends on the efficiency of social interactions amongst individuals. All collective formations, organisations and institutions are tools to support and improve individuals’ interactions. By offering scenarios and regulations, social formations help individuals actualise themselves in the sociocultural space and give their lives meaning. Through institutions, each individual gains an opportunity to combine the regulations and algorithmisation of social practices in such a way that his or her freedom is actualised to the fullest in the given conditions.

Hessen believed that social formations contributed to the unity of individuals by establishing legal orders, the regulation of which may involve the interaction of individuals. For Hessen (1939, p. 245), the state has a special role since it facilitates the identification of society as a unity: it exists beyond the multitude of legal orders as a coordinating body. The state retains social unity, precluding society from falling into many social formations and,

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7 In the revised and expanded Italian edition of the *Foundations of Pedagogy*, Hessen (1961, pp. 20-22) designates this term *fini ideali*. In the German edition, Hessen (1930, p. 113) opted for the term Ziele.
8 In the Italian language, Hessen (1961, p. 14) calls this level civilità.
9 In Italian, Hessen (1961, p. 15) refers to this level as *l’organizzazione statale*.
10 In the Italian edition, the phrase *la cultura constituiscasi* denotes this level (Hessen, 1961, p. 15). In calling the *third layer* culture, Hessen underscores the crucial role of education in its formation (ibid.).
therefore, many cultures.\footnote{In a work of the Polish period, Hessen (1939, p. 74) mentions Weber in a similar context when viewing society as an association of people buttressed by the authorities.} Hessen (1935, p. 369) notes that Weber saw the state as a body having a coercive monopoly necessary to preserve order in society. This monopoly, according to Hessen, prevents societies from coming apart and losing cohesion. Coordinated by the state, any institution can be correlated with any organisation and community. This ensures the identification of an individual as a member of society as a whole rather than a part of it.

Using Rickert’s axiology, Hessen proposed to view sociocultural development as the interaction between the tradition and goal-tasks. Through this interaction, he justified individual freedom as the determining condition of the historical process. The repudiation of Rickert’s transcendental values and the introduction of transcendental goal-tasks allowed Hessen to strip the sociocultural process of metaphysical qualifications characteristic of Rickert’s ideas.

5 Conclusion

Based on Rickert’s notion of transcendental value, Weber’s purposive-rational action and Hessen’s goal-task have the same purpose (but offer functionally different algorithms): they help an individual identify himself or herself as a member of society and co-participant in culture, outlining the trajectory of freedom actualisation. Individuals recognise themselves as free only in the capacity of members of society and culture. Hessen and Weber outlined the development of society and the evolution of culture as constituents of a single process, namely they justified sociability as affiliation with culture.

A comparative analysis of Weber and Hessen’s sociability models points to a substantial discrepancy which translates into different variants of social identification. Weber believed that individuals interact in society by following established regulations and algorithms, and the unification of social practices is the *sine qua non* of the creation of culture. Hessen, however, maintained that individuals contributing to the cultural content (tradition) see themselves as elements of a social unity – the social agent, whose object is culture as a whole.

In identifying the freedom of an individual as the main condition of the development of culture, Weber and Hessen continued the trend for an axiological transcription of Kant’s anti-naturalistic research programme. They proposed ways to restore the balance between collective and private social identification. From the viewpoint of the problem of sociability, Rickert’s axiology provided the groundwork for the development of new sociocultural development programmes within twentieth-century doctrines, whilst Weber and Hessen outlined a new trajectory for justifying society and culture: they ended the struggle between collectivistic and individualistic models of society by placing emphasis not on an individual or social formation (an institution, a class, etc.), but on algorithms for the interactions between the individual and society as a whole.

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