

Advanced Modern Versions of Max Weber's Action Concepts

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Abstract: Are Max Weber's action concepts nowadays still useful for sociological analysis? Two strategies can be applied to decide the importance of Weber's ideal types for modern sociology. First, several researchers have tried to clarify Weber's ambiguous concepts by using his terminology. I will discuss some of these attempts and propose a new classification of Weber's action types. However, I am skeptical that Weber's concepts are useful even in clarified form. Therefore, I will follow a second strategy to replace his concepts with more advanced modern concepts. Here Parsons's further development of value-rational action, Schutz's investigation of traditional behavior, and the economic concept of altruism in relation to affectual behavior are specifically important. It can be shown that Weber's non-rational traditional and affectual behavior follow specific logical rules and therefore cannot be described as non-rational.

Keywords: Max Weber, Action Types, Talcott Parsons, Alfred Schutz

A description of Max Weber's action theory is not an easy task. The reason is mainly the unfinished character of his action theory. Weber relatively late in his life (between 1909 and 1913) turned his research interest from history to a generalizing sociology (Sato 2004: 29ff.). Until the »*Energetische*« *Kulturtheorien* of 1909, Weber in his methodological writings took the position of historian with the aim of interpreting (*verstehende Erklärung*) singular historical phenomena based on sociological concepts and known regularities. In 1913 in his paper *Ueber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie* he replaced the position of a historian with the position of a generalizing sociologist. His aim was no longer only to apply the general concepts and "laws" but also to locate and define them. Weber's aim was the construction of an action theory as a useful tool for the search for causal regularities and for heuristic application in historical analyses. This was a revolutionary approach of Weber's, because he gave sociology for the first time an action-theoretic foundation. However, although it is not the author's intention to disparage Weber's achievement, it should be stated that Max Weber's action types are nowadays too ambiguous and vague to be used in the social sciences. We shall first discuss several interpretations of Max Weber's action types before considering several specifications of his typology.

1. Interpretations of Max Weber's action types

Wolfgang Schluchter (1979) made one of the first attempts to interpret Max Weber's four types of action in a systematic way by developing a classification system. He ordered instrumentally rational action, value-rational action, affectual behavior, and traditional behavior

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under the four categories means, ends, values, and expected results (see Table 1). Schluchter interprets all types of actions as a means, but only three of them – except traditional behavior – also concern the ends of the behavior. And for two of these three types – the instrumentally rational and the value-rational action – values are also important. But only instrumentally rational action also takes the expected results of the action into consideration. In this way Schluchter offers a clear hierarchy of the action types based on their rationality. At the top instrumentally rational action is the most rational, and at the bottom traditional behavior is the least rational.

Table 1: Wolfgang Schluchter's classification of Weber's action types (1979)

	means	ends	values	expected results
instrumentally rational action	O	O	O	O
value-rational action	O	O	O	-
affectual behavior	O	O	-	-
traditional behavior	O	-	-	-

Schluchter's attempt was criticized (Döbert 1989: 214), because his classification relies too much on Weber's early paper *Ueber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie* (1913) and neglects the revisions made by Weber in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922). Especially problematic is the fact that Schluchter applies the means-ends considerations – the epitome of rationality – to affectual behavior, which for Weber is non-rational. The means-ends considerations were actually only a characteristic of instrumentally rational action (Döbert 1989: 216). But if the means-ends evaluations are excluded, then Schluchter's classification system would collapse. Therefore Schluchter's attempt to formulate Max Weber's action types as a hierarchy of rational actions failed.

Allerbeck (1982: 665) concludes out of Schluchter's failure that a systematization of Weber's action types must have a structure which is compatible with Weber's concepts. And he tries to provide a classification system which comes closer to Weber's original terms. First of all, he realizes that only three categories are necessary to differentiate the four types. This is an important methodological point, because schemes of interpretation should be in general as short as possible, although as long as necessary (cf. Döbert 1989: 210). Allerbeck distinguishes affectual from traditional behavior by the category of motivation (see Table 2). Traditional behavior is for him unmotivated. Affectual behavior is on the other hand separated from instrumentally rational and value-rational action by the category of intentionality. Allerbeck (1982: 673) here uses Alfred Schutz's distinction of because- and in-order-to-motives. Affectual behavior has only a because-motive and is therefore explained causally. In contrast, instrumentally rational and value-rational action is based on the in-order-to-motive and therefore intentional. Finally, instrumentally rational action is differentiated from value-rational action, because of its exclusive use of means-ends considerations.

Table 2: Klaus Allerbeck's classification of Weber's action types (1982: 671ff.)

	motivated behavior	intentional action	means-ends consideration
instrumentally rational action	?	O	O
value-rational action	?	O	-
affectual behavior	O	- (causal)	?
traditional behavior	-	?	?

Allerbeck consciously avoids a complete classification for all three categories, because he does not want to give the impression that his classification system is also a hierarchy of rational actions like Schluchter's. To his mind, Weber regarded affectual and traditional behavior as non-rational for different reasons, so that a hierarchy based on the criterion of rationality would be inappropriate (Döbert 1989: 217). However, Gerhards's (1989: 339f.) interpretation shows that Allerbeck's classification can be easily translated into a hierarchy, simply by extending the attributions to the categories (see table 3).

Table 3: Gerhards's classification of Weber's action types (1989: 339)

	means	values/ends		expected results
		causal	intentional	
instrumentally rational action	O	-	O	O
value-rational action	O	-	O	-
affectual behavior	O	O	-	-
traditional behavior	O	-	-	-

The bad point of Gerhards's interpretation is that he again includes the means as a fourth category, although it belongs to every action type. Categories which belong to all or to none of the categories are completely irrelevant and should not be used. However, an interesting aspect is that Gerhards seems to realize that Weber's action types can be distinguished by the values to which they refer. But he does not follow through on this idea and adapts Allerbeck's differentiation between intentional types of action and causal affectual behavior. We shall return to this point later.

The fourth attempt to classify Weber's action types that we shall discuss here is Döbert's. His classification system is important because of two characteristics (see Table 4). In opposition to the other interpretations he proposes to regard affectual not traditional behavior as the least rational type, if such a hierarchy is useful at all (Döbert 1989: 217). And the second point is that Döbert makes a distinction between instrumentally rational and value-rational action on the one hand and traditional and affectual behavior on the other hand based on the degree of control in the decision process. For Döbert also traditional behavior is concerned with means and ends, but they are not chosen by the actor but rather culturally bestowed. The number of alternative means and ends is set to one. In the same way the number of means in the case of the affectual behavior is set to one: affectual reaction is a means. In this sense only instrumentally rational and value-rational actions are defined by choices of the actors (Döbert 1989: 235).

Table4: Döbert's classification of Weber's action types (1989: 231)

	means	ends	values	expected results
instrumentally rational action	O	O	-	O
value-rational action	O	-	O	-
traditional behavior	O(n=1)	O(n=1)	-	-
affectual behavior	O(affect)	-	-	-

In my classification of Weber's action types I will use a combination of Gerhards's idea of the importance of distinguishing values and Döbert's insight that conscious choices are relevant for differentiation (see table 5). Instrumentally rational action and affectual behavior have in

common that their values are the ends or results of the behavior. But in the case of instrumentally rational action, the actor makes a consciousness decision between different alternatives based on means-ends considerations. Contrarily, affectual behavior is not the result of such a choice. It is a conditioned response to a stimulus in the form of a behavior which has led to satisfying results in the past. The difference between an instrumentally rational action and affectual behavior is therefore that for the instrumentally rational action, future expected results are relevant, whereas for affectual behavior past results have led to a conditioning of the successful behavior. Value-rational action and traditional behavior on the other hand do not depend on the ends or results as values. The value of value-rational action can be described as a normative system, deliberately chosen by the actors. And the value of traditional behavior can be regarded as the culturally given meaning structure of society. Although these characterizations of values in the case of value-rational and traditional behavior might be slightly counter-intuitive and not clearly stated in Weber's work, it might also be the best strategy to make sense out of Weber's action types.

Table 5: Classification of Weber's action types based on the categories of value and rationality

	ends as a value (utility)	other values (no utility)
rational (conscious decision)	instrumentally rational action	value-rational action (norms)
non-rational (no conscious decision)	affectual behavior	traditional behavior (meaning)

2. Translation of Max Weber's action types into modern versions

2.1. Behavior, action, and social action

So far the aim has been to provide an interpretation of Weber's action types based on his own classification. But probably Max Weber's action theory is no longer up to date, and it would be a far better strategy to connect Weber's classification system with modern and better-formulated action types. However, modern dealings with Max Weber's action theory are not unproblematic, because Weber's work is interpreted from different perspectives in very distinguished ways. The problems start immediately with his first two key concepts "*action*" in contrast to "*behavior*". Max Weber defines both concepts as follows:

"Handeln" aber (mit Einschluß des gewollten Unterlassens und Duldens) heißt uns stets ein *verständliches*, und das heißt ein durch irgendeinen, sei es auch mehr oder minder unbemerkt, "gehabten" oder "gemeinten" (*subjektiven*) *Sinn* spezifiziertes Sichverhalten zu "Objekten".¹ (Weber 1985: 429; emphasis of "(subjektiven) Sinn" in the original, other emphasis added)

"Handeln" soll dabei ein menschliches Verhalten (einerlei ob äußeres oder innerliches Tun, Unterlassen oder Dulden) heißen, wenn und insofern als der oder die Handelnden mit ihm einen subjektiven *Sinn* verbinden.² (Weber 1980: 1; emphasis in the original)

Two criteria for the distinction of these two concepts can be offered, dependent on the scheme of interpretation. An economic scheme of interpretation would suggest the criterion of rationality to

distinguish action from behavior.³ This interpretation refers to the subjective meaningfulness of actions in Weber's definition. In this sense, Weber (1980: 2) classifies traditional behavior as less rational or meaningful. A second scheme of interpretation can be derived from Schutz's phenomenological sociology. Action can be contrasted to behavior by separating the perspective of the actor from the observer's perspective. The concept of action describes in this case the perspective of the actor, whereas the observer regards this action as a behavior, which he can only understand by ascribing meaning to the behavior. This interpretation is connected to the ability to understand an observed behavior based on the specification of subjective meaning in Weber's definition.

However, these two interpretations are not compatible. Traditional irrational behavior of an actor (therefore not action in the economic scheme of interpretation) can be understood by an observer based on the observer's knowledge of the actor's culture (therefore an understood action in the phenomenological scheme of interpretation). But which of these two interpretations is more accurate cannot be determined, because Weber's statements are ambiguous.

After defining action in contrast to behavior, Max Weber clarified the concept of "*social action*". In a later definition in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* he avoided a mingling of the actor's perspective and the researcher's perspective.

Das für die verstehende Soziologie spezifisch wichtige Handeln nun ist im speziellen ein Verhalten, welches 1. dem subjektiv gemeinten Sinn des Handelnden nach auf das *Verhalten anderer* bezogen, 2. durch diese seine sinnhafte Bezogenheit in seinem Verlauf *mitbestimmt* und also 3. aus diesem (subjektiv) gemeinten Sinn heraus verständlich *erklärbar* ist.⁴ (Weber 1985: 429; emphases in the original)

"Soziales" Handeln aber soll ein solches Handeln heißen, welches seinem von dem oder den Handelnden gemeinten Sinn nach auf das Verhalten *anderer* bezogen wird und daran in seinem Ablauf orientiert ist.⁵ (Weber 1980: 1; emphasis in the original)

Besides the third part of the first definition, which refers to the interpretation of observed behavior, a social action means in the *perspective of the actor* that he is relating his actions "meaningfully" to other actors and guiding them based on this relation. But it is unclear what Max Weber understood by the term "meaningful" in this context. Weber gives an example of cyclists (Weber 1980: 11), who collide (not a social action) or get out of the way of the other cyclist (a social action). This example suggests that Weber thought of a "meaningful" orientation as an anticipatory expectation of the other actor's behavior with the aim of coordinating the actions with each other. But the grounds on which this anticipatory expectation of the other actor's behavior is formed are not further discussed by Max Weber. In sum, Max Weber's concept of "social action" is underdeveloped, although it is "the specific important action for interpretative sociology". This problem becomes obvious in the classification of Weber's types of action, because Weber did not distinguish between types of action and types of social action.

2.2. Instrumentally rational action

The most clearly defined action type of Max Weber is the “instrumentally rational action”. It is easy to make sense of this concept, because the underlying economic marginal utility theory has not changed significantly in the last hundred years.

Zweckrational handelt, wer sein Handeln nach Zweck, Mittel und Nebenfolgen orientiert und dabei sowohl die Mittel gegen die Zwecke, wie die Zwecke gegen die Nebenfolgen, wie endlich auch die verschiedenen möglichen Zwecke gegeneinander rational abwägt: also jedenfalls weder affektiv (und insbesondere nicht emotional) noch traditional handelt.⁶ (Weber 1980: 13)

An action is instrumentally rational if the actor is evaluating different anticipated alternative results of possible actions and chooses the best of these alternatives. The evaluation of the alternatives is based on a judgment of the desired positive results minus the undesired secondary results, and all alternatives are compared simultaneously.⁷ And the choice of a specific action depends on its usefulness or its utility. Therefore the value in this action type is the end or result of the action. This kind of teleological action is called in modern microeconomic theory a utility-maximizing action (in the form of marginal utility theory in the case of security, and subjective expected theory in the case of risk).

Instrumentally rational action receives an additional component in the context of social action. Instrumentally rational social action is no longer only oriented to objects but also to the expected reactions of other actors to the performed act (Weber 1980: 12). As in the case of teleological action in economics, the actor has to evaluate simultaneously the different alternatives based on their utility. Also the value in the form of the end or result of the action is the same. But the complexity increases. It becomes a strategic problem, because not only the alternatives of the actor's actions but also those of the other actors' reactions and the first actor's reaction and so on must be considered (cf. Bader 1989: 308). Today game theory is the theory which deals with such kinds of interaction problems.

2.3. Value-rational action

Value-rational action is on the other hand for Max Weber an action which is motivated by values that are not equivalent to the ends or results of actions. The reason for their performance “does not lie in the achievement of a result ulterior to it, but in carrying out the specific type of action for its own sake” (Weber 1968: 25 [1980: 12]). But what does Weber mean with the act's value in the sense of the act's own sake?

Rein wertrational handelt, wer ohne Rücksicht auf die vor auszusehenden Folgen handelt im Dienst seiner Ueberzeugung von dem, was Pflicht, Würde, Schönheit, religiöse Weisung, Pietät, oder die Wichtigkeit einer “Sache” gleichviel welcher Art ihm zu gebieten scheinen. Stets ist (im Sinn unserer Terminologie) wertrationales Handeln ein Handeln nach “Geboten” oder gemäß “Forderungen“, die der Handelnde an sich gestellt glaubt.⁸ (Weber 1980: 12)

The second part of the definition is important. Here value-rational action refers to “commands” and “demands”. Weber also calls this “rule-following should be” (*regelhaftes Seinsollen*) a *norm*, which is an evaluation of an action in the sense of a value judgment (Weber 1985: 323). But with the specification of the value as a norm, the value-rational action is not yet sufficiently clarified. It is not obvious which person's value judgment based on normative grounds this should be (the actor's value judgments or the value judgments of the other members of the society). The solution to this question is offered by Talcott Parsons in his Max Weber interpretation.

Talcott Parsons describes a case in which the other members of society address expectations to the actor, judge and finally sanction his behavior positively or negatively dependent on the actor's fulfillment of the expectations as a problem of *optimizing the sanctions* (Parsons 1951: 5f. and 59).⁹ The actor is simultaneously evaluating the results of the other actors' value judgments of the different alternative actions. This evaluation is also based on utility considerations as in the case of teleological and strategic action, but here the utility of an act largely depends on the goodwill of the other members of the society. The difference between instrumentally rational action and value-rational action in the sense of normative action would be therefore the question of what the utility produces: the consumption of objects or the sanctions of other subjects.

But for Parsons the consideration of other persons' sanctions is only one aspect of normative or moral action respectively. Parsons regards it as more important that the actors internalize the norms of their social group (Parsons 1986: 169f.; cf. 1951: 64). In this case the norms of society become the values of the actor in the sense of his own *moral* judgment system. A violation of these moral values leads to a feeling of guilt or internal sanctions by the actor himself. And these self-sanctions by the actor are independent of the other actors' knowledge of his misbehavior. Therefore the actor evaluates simultaneously the results of his own value judgments of the different alternative actions. Also, moral action depends on an evaluation of the outcomes in the sense of utility, but utility is mainly implemented by the moral values related to the action and not by the ends of the action.

A further specification of Talcott Parsons's concept of morality was developed by Richard Münch, who investigated the importance of Immanuel Kant's philosophy for Talcott Parsons's action theory (Münch 1982: 13; cf. Parsons 1978: 370f.). Kant distinguishes two kinds of practical reasons in the sense of methods to form intention with the help of practical principles: maxims, which are subjectively valid, and practical laws, which are valid generally and which exist in the two forms of hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Hypothetical imperatives are conditionally valid dependent on a concrete fact. Categorical imperatives on the other hand are always valid (Störig 1993: 411). The moral-judgment system can usually be characterized as maxims (if only he has these moral values) or as hypothetical imperatives (if he shares the moral values with the other members of society). A moralist in this sense would for example evaluate the positive effects of a violation of his own moral values against the expected negative effects as a result of a guilty conscience. He will feel bound to his moral values as long as they are not becoming too costly or, stated differently, as long as his moral values do not force him to make intolerably big

sacrifices. But if an actor regards his moral values as categorical imperatives, he will not make such or similar considerations. He will follow his morality independently of the situation and independently of the costs of losing opportunities. The actor will no longer evaluate simultaneously the results of different alternatives of actions as in the case of the maxims or hypothetical imperatives. Why should he? He will follow the moral standards anyway. Therefore the selection mechanism can be described as a *dispositional selection procedure*.¹⁰ The actor will make only once a decision as to whether a moral value should be accepted as a categorical imperative or not. But after this decision is made, the actor will not confront himself with this choice again. He will follow the rule in all future cases (cf. Munch 1982: 30).

Max Weber's concept of value-rationality can therefore be specified by distinguishing the other persons' from the actor's value judgments of the actor's behavior (normative versus moral action) and by separating a simultaneous selection procedure from a dispositional selection procedure (moral action based on maxims and hypothetical imperatives versus moral action based on categorical imperatives). If the judgment and the sanction of the actor's behavior by the other members of society are anticipated, then it is Parsons's normative action. If the actor judges and sanctions his own behavior, then it is called moral action based on maxims and hypothetical imperatives. And if the actor does not evaluate the results of the alternative actions at all, because he follows the moral values unconditionally, then it is Kant's moral action based on categorical imperatives. It becomes obvious that Max Weber probably had Kant's categorical imperatives in mind when he says that the actor is carrying out the specific type of action for its own sake.

2.4. Affectual behavior

In contrast to Weber's ideal types of the instrumentally rational action and the value-rational action, the clarification of affectual and traditional behavior is a specific problem. The first point which attracts attention is the fact that Weber uses not scientific terms as in the case of the instrumentally rational action or value-rational action but rather everyday life expressions. This arouses the suspicion that for Weber affectual and traditional behavior are nothing more than residual concepts.¹¹ This impression is supported by Weber's connection of traditional and charismatic domination (based on traditional and affectual behavior) with pre-modern societies in the sense of the term *Gemeinschaft* on the one hand and legal domination (based on instrumentally rational action and value-rational action) with modern societies in the sense of the term *Gesellschaft* (Weber 1980: 21; cf. 1985: 483).¹²

The meaning of the everyday-life expression of an affect has two nuances. First, the term "affect" can refer to a spontaneous and not well considered behavior. And second, it can be meant to be a specific emotionally motivated action. Max Weber uses the concept of affectual behavior with both meanings in different contexts. He is emphasizing the aspect of spontaneity when he describes *affectual behavior* in distinction to affectual social action.

Das streng affektuelle Sichverhalten steht ebenso an der Grenze und oft jenseits dessen, was bewußt "sinnhaft" orientiert ist; es kann *hemmungsloses Reagieren* auf einen außeralltäglichen Reiz sein. Eine Sublimierung ist es, wenn das affektuell bedingte Handeln als *bewußte*

Entladung der Gefühlslage auftritt: es befindet sich dann meist (nicht immer) schon auf dem Weg zur »*Wertrationalisierung*« oder zum *Zweckhandeln* oder zu beiden.¹³ (Weber 1980: 12; emphases added)

The second part of the statement is decisive for a differentiation from an instrumentally rational or value-rational action. Affectual behavior is gradually distinguished from these two types by the degree of reflection of the selection and not qualitatively by a different value or criterion of evaluation (Stauth 1994: 182). Also affectual behavior is therefore characterized by a utility-based evaluation of the ends or results of the behavior but without a completely rational simultaneous selection procedure. I have made the proposal to describe the limited degree of consciousness as a *sequential selection procedure* (Etzrodt 2001: 163f.) in the sense of Herbert Alexander Simon's *satisficing*-concept (Simon 1955: 104ff.; 1957: 204f.; 1972: 168; 1978: 10; Selten/Tietz 1980: 19; Klopstech/Selten 1984: 14). A so-defined affectually behaving person will no longer evaluate all alternative actions simultaneously and choose the maximum, but will compare alternatives one by one with an aspiration level till he finds an alternative which fulfills the aspiration level. Experimental psychology showed furthermore that actors can more easily retrieve an experience from memory if it was a very emotional experience (Christianson/Loftus 1991: 85ff.). This phenomenon in connection with the sequential selection procedure now produces the desired effect (for the model construction). The actor will first remember the alternative which has led in the past to very strong emotional results, and if this expected result will fulfill the aspiration level, then he will follow this alternative without considering any further alternatives. Finally, the person will behave spontaneously, and will not even realize other alternatives. In contrast to simultaneous procedures, sequential selection mechanisms have specific chaotic characteristics: 1) They normally do not lead to a maximum, because the first best alternative does not need to be the best of all possible alternatives. 2) Because they do not find a maximum, repetitions under the same condition do not lead to the same choices (the choice of an alternative depends mainly of the alternatives' order). 3) And because repetitions do not result in the same choice, intransitive preferences can occur. For example, if a child prefers a banana to an apple, an apple over an orange, and an orange to a banana, then this means that all three alternatives satisfy the aspiration level and that only the order of the fruits in the questions were changed.¹⁴ As a result of these chaotic characteristics, affectual behavior will be perceived as a spontaneous, unconscious, and unrestrained reaction to a stimulus, as described by Max Weber.

However, Weber emphasizes the second component of the emotionality of everyday life expression of an affect when he talks about *affectual social action*. This is especially the case for his statements in relation to charismatic domination. Charismatic domination is legitimate for Weber, because of the affectual devotion to a person and his extraordinary qualities or his charisma respectively (Weber 1985: 480). In the same way he gives the personal erotic relationship as an example of an affectual closed social relationship (Weber 1980: 24). In both examples, the specific emotional quality of the relationship and not the degree of rationality in the decision process is of importance. The concept of altruism in modern economic theory (Becker 1976: 819; 1981: 173; Opp 1984: 87; Ramb 1993: 6) is probably the most adequate formalization of

these strong emotional bonds between two actors. An altruist is defined in modern economics as an actor who is not only taking his own utility function into consideration but also the utility functions of other people. Dependent on the weighting of the other persons' utility functions, a complete egoist (the weight is so small that he does not care about other people) as well as a complete altruist (the weight is so big that he can only become happy if other people are happy) and every mixing ratio between these two extreme poles can be described. However, altruism should not be confused with moral or normative actions in the defined sense here. The motivation of these behavior types is completely different, although they might lead to the same results. For example, given the problem of whether one should help an old woman to cross the street, an altruist will ask the old woman if she wants the help. Probably she does not like the feeling of being helpless and prefers to walk alone. A moralist on the other side is not interested in what the old woman wants. He will help if he follows the moral rule to help old people. And the norm-following actor will help if he believes that his neighbors are watching him, because he wants to avoid their talking ill of him. In this way, affectual social action as the instrumentally rational action is interpreted also as teleological action in the sense of a simultaneous utility-based evaluation of the ends or results of the action. The difference is that for instrumentally rational action, the choice of an alternative is explained by the actor's own utility expectations, whereas for affectual social action, the choice of an alternative depends on the other actors' or the group's utility expectations.

Affectual behavior can therefore be differentiated from instrumentally rational action, because of its chaotic nature based on a sequential selection procedure instead of a simultaneous selection mechanism. And affectual social action can be demarcated from instrumentally rational action, because of its altruistic criterion of evaluating the alternatives instead of an egoistic criterion which modulates the strong emotional bonds between the actors.

2.5. Traditional behavior

Max Weber's last ideal-typical concept of action, *traditional behavior*, is particularly difficult to clarify. Max Weber does not submit a sufficient definition for this kind of behavior. This is in my opinion the result of Max Weber's underestimation of the implications and the importance of this type. Furthermore, the everyday-life expression of a tradition is also not very helpful in this case. For Weber, traditional behavior is no longer a reasonable or meaningful action, because it is carried out automatically as a habitual reflex to a known stimulus.

Das streng traditionale Verhalten steht ganz ebenso wie die rein reaktive Nachahmung ganz und gar an der Grenze und oft jenseits dessen, was man als ein "sinnhaft" orientiertes Handeln überhaupt nennen kann. Denn es ist sehr oft nur ein dumpfes, in der Richtung der einmal eingelebten Einstellung ablaufendes Reagieren auf gewohnte Reize.¹⁵ (Weber 1980: 12)

In connection with traditional domination, Weber states that "valid is that which has always been" (Weber 1968: 36 [1980: 19]). The actors describe legitimacy to the traditional domination by virtue of faith in the holiness of the always-given order (Weber 1985: 478). If we abstract from the

religious connotation, then all statements have one point in common: the traditionally given is not questioned. It seems very likely to assume a dispositional selection mechanism as in the value-rational action in the sense of a categorical imperative. But what then is the difference between these two concepts? Why does Weber need two concepts which describe the same phenomenon? Weber speaks in relation to the traditional behavior of "habits" (Weber 1980: 12; 1985: 480; cf. 331). On the other hand, value-rational faith is valid, because it "has been deduced as an absolute" (Weber 1968: 36 [1980: 19]). Therefore the demarcation line between traditional and value-rational action would be the degree of reflection of the original decision not to question something anymore in the future. However, the question arises, if the internalization of a moral value system is not also a process of habituation as for example Parsons assumes. In this case it would be again difficult to distinguish traditional behavior from value-rational action. Altogether, Max Weber's dealing with traditional behavior is insufficient. Unfortunately, it is impossible to develop a better concept out of Weber's preparatory work. Here clearly Heinrich Rickert's influence on Max Weber had an undesired side-effect. Rickert, like Weber, does not recognize any difference between norms and meanings. Norms and meanings are both undistinguished aspects of their concept of value. For Rickert, every interpretation of a symbol is a value judgment by which it becomes impossible to separate the normative aspect from the aspect of meaning.

But if the concepts of norm and meaning are distinguished, then the difference between traditional behavior and value-rational action can be grasped. A value-rational action in the sense of a categorical imperative selects a norm judged as useful which will not be questioned anymore in future decision situations. This norm is useful, because the following of the norm will avoid internal sanctions or a guilty conscience. Traditional behavior on the contrary defines a plausible value in the sense of meaning which is unquestionable accepted in the future. But the meaning of a symbol is plausible, because it already exists in the social group in which the actor is born. And if an actor wants to interact with other people, then he has the aim of acting understandably for the other actors. Therefore he will apply the already existing meaning of a symbol. It now becomes obvious why Weber had so much trouble saying something about the origin of traditions. Languages are almost never adopted completely new as can be done with normative systems. Changes in a language are based on the already existing structures. Therefore the core of traditional behavior is the already given *meaning structure* in society, and not the actors' individual normative choices. This is Alfred Schutz's action theory with a clear differentiation of three types of values: the result of action, the meaning, and the norms (which is not further discussed by Schutz). He also separates two criteria for evaluating these values: utility-based and plausibility-based evaluations. The criterion of plausibility orders the alternatives in relation to the chance that the alternative action can be understood by other actors. For example, the most plausible greeting in Japan is a bow. And shaking hands might also be understandable to a lesser degree. But kissing each other, as in France, would probably lead to a shock. Normally this plausibility criterion is not very important, because most of the alternatives adjudged plausible are unquestionable given and habitually carried out. But if the habitual alternatives become problematic, then the actor is forced to evaluate the plausibility of the different alternatives (this is for example the subject of Harold Garfinkel's crisis experiments). Traditional behavior is as a

result not a less “meaningful” behavior as Weber stated. It is in contrast the original type of meaningful action, and because of its reliance on the traditional meaning structure, especially understandable.

2.6. Summary

Table 6 gives a summary of Max Weber’s action types with their specifications. All the behavior types initially perceived as irrational can easily be understood as rational after the clarification. But rational does not necessarily mean the rationality principle of economic theory. If variations of the values, the criterion of evaluation and the selection mechanism are considered, then all types are following logical rules and therefore are rationally understandable.

Table 6: Weber’s action types and their specification

Weber’s action types	Specification	Value	Evaluative criterion and mechanism of selection
instrumentally rational action	teleological action (microeconomics)	result of action (egoism)	simultaneous utility-based evaluation
instrumentally rational social action	strategic action (game theory)	result of action (egoism)	simultaneous utility-based evaluation
value-rational (social) action	a) normative action (Parsons)	result of action, incl. external sanctions (egoism)	simultaneous utility-based evaluation
	b) moral action (Parsons)	result of action, incl. internal sanctions (egoism)	simultaneous utility-based evaluation
	in the sense of a categorical imperative (Parsons/Münch)	norm	no evaluations, because only a dispositional choice
affectual behavior	affectual behavior (psychology)	result of action (egoism)	sequential utility-based evaluation
affectual social action	teleological action (microeconomics)	result of action (altruism)	simultaneous utility-based evaluation
traditional (social) behavior	a) habitual behavior (Schutz)	meaning	no evaluations, because only a dispositional choice
	b) meaningful action (Schutz/Garfinkel)	meaning	simultaneous or sequential plausibility-based evaluation

3. Conclusion

Max Weber is the founder of sociological action theory independent of the rational action theory of microeconomics. Weber sees different types of behavior, whereas economic theory regards every behavior as teleological or strategic action. But are Weber’s action concepts still useful for modern sociology? On the one hand, I do not think so, because his concepts are too ambiguous and they usually refer only to types of action and not to social action. In sociology and economics, several better concepts have been developed in the last hundred years in part based on a critique of Weber’s pioneer work. On the other hand, Max Weber’s action theory is still

important for modern sociology, because no better theory which includes all of Weber's ideal types in their specified modern versions has been formulated. Still today it is Weber's action theory which binds the modern developments together. What is needed is a general theory with action types logically deduced out of a few basic categories. In this way ad-hoc constructions of ideal types with complex meanings and therefore ambiguities can be avoided. The specification offered here of Max Weber's action concepts follows such basic concepts: the result of action, the meaning, and the norms as the three types of values, as well as two criteria (utility and plausibility) for evaluating these values based on Alfred Schutz's action theory. Altogether I regard Alfred Schutz's action theory as a much more promising starting point for a general action theory.

NOTES

- 1 But "action" (inclusive the wanted omission and acquiescence) is for us always an understandable and that means a specified behavior to "objects". This behavior is specified by some be it more or less unnoticed had or meant (subjective) sense. (Weber 1985: 429; translated by C.E.)
- 2 We shall speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. (Weber 1968: 4)
- 3 Several economists distinguish economic action theory from behaviorism with this criterion (for a summary of the positions of Homans, Emerson, Opp, and Voss, see Etzrodt 2003: 128ff.). But some sociologists also interpret Weber's concept of behavior as non-rational or non-intentional (Allerbeck 1982: 672).
- 4 The specifically important action for interpretative sociology is specifically a behavior, 1) where subjectively meant sense refers to the behavior of others, 2) which is codetermined in its course by this meaningful reference, and also 3) which is distinctly explainable by referring to this (subjective) meant sense. (Weber 1985: 429; translated by C.E.)
- 5 Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course. (Weber 1968: 4)
- 6 Action is instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*) when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. Determination of action either in affectual or in traditional terms is thus incompatible with this type. (Weber 1968: 26)
- 7 The simultaneity of the choice is a prerequisite for the construction of transitive (logically ordered) preferences over the expected outcomes of the alternative actions.
- 8 Examples of pure value-rational orientation would be the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty, honor, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, personal loyalty, or the importance of some "cause", no matter in what it consists. In our terminology, value-rational action always involves "commands" or "demands" which, in the actor's opinion, are binding on him. (Weber 1968: 25)
- 9 Max Weber speaks at least in one case of a "calculation of aversion" (Weber 1985: 331).
- 10 The concept of the dispositional selection procedure was developed in the border area of economics with

the aim of describing moral action (Vanberg 1988: 148, 154ff.; 1993: 103f.; 1998: 142 and 144; Kliemt 1990: 75; Baurmann 1996: 325).

- 11 For Hahn (1988: 117) and Gerhards (1989: 342) Max Weber's affectual behavior is only characterized by a lack of rationality (cf. Frommer 1994: 240).
- 12 Max Weber points out that he uses the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* without the deeper meaning of Tönnies's terminology (Weber 1980: 22).
- 13 Purely affectual behavior also stands on the borderline of what can be considered meaningfully oriented, and often it, too, goes over the line. It may, for instance, consist in an uncontrolled reaction to some exceptional stimulus. It is a case of sublimation when affectually determined action occurs in the form of conscious release of emotional tension. When this happens it is usually well on the road to rationalization in one or the other or both of the above senses. (Weber 1968: 25)
- 14 The logical proof that the order of the alternatives or the selection criteria will produce intransitive preferences in sequential procedures was given by Tversky (1972).
- 15 Strictly traditional behavior, like the reactive type of imitation discussed above, lies very close to the borderline of what can justifiably be called meaningfully oriented action, and indeed often on the other side. For it is very often a matter of almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli which guide behavior on a course which has been repeatedly followed. (Weber 1968: 25)

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