

Economics as a Science, Economics as a Vocation: A Weberian Examination of Robert Heilbroner's Philosophy of Economics

Daniyal Khan, Graduate student at the Department of Economics, The New School for Social Research, New York, USA
daniyalk@gmail.com

Abstract

In an attempt to re-envision economics, the paper analyses Robert Heilbroner's philosophy of economics through the lens of Max Weber's philosophy of science. Specifically, Heilbroner's position on vision, ideology and value-freedom is examined by contextualising it within a framework of Weberian science. Doing so leads to a better understanding of Heilbroner's seemingly contradictory statements about ideology as well as a re-interpretation of his position on the place of value-freedom (or a lack thereof) in economics. This inquiry also leads to a demonstration of (1) the relevance of Weber's work on methodology of science to contemporary issues in economics, and (2) the identification of a major shortcoming in Heilbroner's work. Overall, this leads to a clarification and reconstruction of Heilbroner's vision of economics as a science and as a vocation, which is seen to be a self-reflexive, reflective and dynamic process.

Keywords: Heilbroner, Weber, economics, methodology, vision, ideology

1. Introduction

1.1 Robert Heilbroner, an Economist: The Task at Hand, Context, and Scope

Given the state of economics (Blaug, 1998, 2001; Kay, 2011) there is a need to re-imagine and re-envision the discipline. This paper is an exploratory exercise in such a re-imagination which takes Robert Heilbroner's work as a starting point. Two factors make Heilbroner's work a suitable choice. His work presents a unique perspective on economics from within the discipline, taking a historically aware and self-critical approach, all the while keeping a keen eye on questions of methodology. Much of his work is comprised of commentary on, and critique of, the state of economics (Heilbroner, 1994a, 1995; Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997) and by virtue of the fact that many of the problems with economics that he pointed out continue to persist, his work continues to be relevant. What is important is that Heilbroner's criticisms and assessments are not those of an outsider, but of an insider – he served as vice-president of the American Economic Association in 1984. His work provides a reliable and trustworthy picture of economics from the point of view of a person who skilfully navigated the space between economic orthodoxy and the margins of the discipline.

Secondly, his work has been engaged with and recognised by his contemporaries. The commentary on his work points out his contributions and shows the breadth and depth of his thought. For example, Milberg (2004, p. 236) points to the curious nature of Heilbroner's

work as both historically conscious and 'forward-looking' and Dimand (2004, p. 389) has noted that 'Heilbroner was also a pioneer in appreciating Polanyi's importance.' Furthermore, Forstater (2004, p. 1) notes that Heilbroner was 'aware of environmental-economic challenges from remarkably early on' and Canterbury (2001, p. 333) places Heilbroner within 'a uniquely American tradition of social criticism.' Gilkey (1975) analyses Heilbroner's 'vision of history' from the perspective of the respective places of science and religion in times to come, as well as their relationship with each other. In exploring these less-discussed aspects of Heilbroner's work, Gilkey has pointed towards the bigger issues being raised by Heilbroner with regards to modern society.

Hence, if we are to refer to the work of an economist to help us re-imagine economics, an examination of Heilbroner's work seems to be a good place to start. We take a seeming contradiction in his views on ideology as a point of departure into this examination. It appears that he does not always take a negative view of ideology. In fact, he has argued for the legitimacy and necessity of ideology. Related to these issues, is his position that not only is value-freedom in economics impossible, but also, that it is undesirable. This evidence from Heilbroner's work stands in stark contrast with that part of his writing in which he categorically denounces ideology as a negative phenomenon. The question arises whether these two seemingly contradictory views can be held at once by the same person or not, and if so, then how. The emphasis placed by Heilbroner on vision and his position on value-freedom in economics are both related to his position on ideology and must also be examined further. What is required is an examination of Heilbroner's philosophy of economics.

There is one important qualification to be added with regards to the scope of this paper. Heilbroner discusses ideology on many different levels, and in many different contexts. Thus, it is important to ask: ideology of what or whom? As we will see, his view of ideology, by virtue of the possibility of defining it in many different ways, is difficult to deal with. This makes it important to specify the level of ideology or the context in which it is being discussed. While this is not *the* point being argued in the paper, it is certainly one of the larger issues which the paper points towards: the possibility of a plurality of understandings of ideology which are context-dependent.

The qualification I would add to my general argument is as follows. Let us envision an economist. He (or she) lives and works within a scientific community. That scientific community, in its varying material conditions, may find within itself people belonging to different classes. These classes live within a larger social setup which we can identify as capitalism, and we can see that members of a larger scientific community can have links with other groups within capitalism; industry, for example, or finance. In this small exercise, we have moved from the individual economist to capitalism in general. Ideology permeates all these different layers or levels of social life in different ways. With the particular purpose of trying to better understand the internal dynamics and process of economics as a social science in Heilbroner's view, my paper merely discusses his view of ideology in the very specific context of how the individual economist thinks and works within the scientific community.

Heilbroner of course thinks that social scientists' points of view are related to their position in society, as will be seen later in the paper. Those parts of his work where he does discuss this point would help us make the link between 1) ideology of economists as individuals, of economists as a group, and as members of a scientific community, and 2) ideology of capital (1985, p. 107). My paper however, merely addresses the former. This in no way implies that the latter is not important in terms of how we understand the former. In fact, the influence of the latter on the former may well be indispensable in understanding not only the economics discipline as it is today but also how it has come to be the way it is today.

These themes are, however, beyond the scope of the current study and may be explored in the future.

A comment about the larger context of Heilbroner's ideas is warranted. His take on ideology is interesting for two main reasons. Firstly, ideology as a broad theme remains a neglected area in the mainstream of the discipline. For example, for those looking for an introduction to the theoretical and empirical relationships between economics and ideology, Oxford's *A Dictionary of Economics* (Black et al., 2009) offers nothing. Secondly, Dobb (1973, p. 3) points to the significance of Joseph Schumpeter's contribution to this issue, in which the latter employed the concept of 'vision' in relation to ideology and economics. Heilbroner's position on ideology and vision, directly and openly Schumpeterian in its intellectual lineage, thus deserves attention in any contemporary discussion of the relationship between economics and ideology. Furthermore, the relegation of values to the separate field of welfare economics and the consequent strengthening of the positivist commitment to value-freedom within the mainstream of the discipline (Putnam and Walsh, 2012, p. 3) stands diametrically opposed to Heilbroner's position on value-freedom, as we will see. Against the background of the division between positive and normative economics, and the position that economics must aspire to value-freedom for it to qualify as a science (Block, 1975, p. 38) Heilbroner's position seems radical and deserves a closer look.

1.2 Max Weber: An Intellectual Affinity and Relevance

This examination of Heilbroner's understanding of vision, ideology and value-freedom will be conducted using a Weberian interpretative lens. To put together this lens, the paper will rely on (1) Max Weber's essay 'Science as a Vocation' and on (2) secondary literature on Weber's view of science, its purposes, characteristics and relation with the principle of value-freedom. By extracting some relevant insights from this literature (which comprises the work of Karl Lowith and Basit Bilal Koshul), and by complementing it with evidence from Heilbroner's own work, the paper hopes to provide a relational reading of Heilbroner's work. This should lead to a clarification of Heilbroner's position.

Why Weber? Weber's stature in the social sciences and his extensive work on the methodology of the social sciences is widely recognised and thus justifies using his work as a touchstone and interpretative lens. The possibility of a further refining and clarification of Heilbroner's thought when viewed from the lens of Weber's methodology of (social) science(s) is an exciting prospect which, if realised, can contribute to the secondary literature on Heilbroner's ideas. Besides this, it could also potentially show the continued relevance of Weber's work to contemporary problems in economics, his past contributions to economics already established (Engerman, 2000).

Still, why Weber? Why not take the methodological work of some other social scientist? There is, I believe, a fundamental and strong intellectual affinity between Weber and Heilbroner which has been overlooked by the literature on Heilbroner's work, and which justifies using Weber's work as the analytical lens. Demonstrating, as I believe, that this affinity is the result of a direct influence of Weberian ideas on Heilbroner is a research project in itself, and is as such beyond the scope of this paper. However, to indicate the basic evidence which has led to this belief, I would point to two key ideas in Heilbroner's thought which seem to express what are at core Weberian ideas.

The first point is that Heilbroner's characterisation of vision (1990, p. 1112) reflects the central Weberian insight that certain values, taken as starting points of worldviews, ultimately stand opposed to each other and their 'validity' cannot be proven or disproven in an absolute sense. In Heilbroner's context, this would mean differing – even opposing – visions

taken as starting points of different kinds of analytical paths. The second point is that Heilbroner's view of economics as possessing an instrumental function (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997, p. 125) reflects Weber's own instrumental view of science as presented in 'Science as a Vocation.' The evidence presented in sections 2 and 3 should corroborate these points further.

An important question about the relevance and viability of the Weberian framework for examining Heilbroner's work remains. Considering that ideology is not an explicitly discussed theme in 'Science as a Vocation,' (and presumably in the Weberian corpus at large, considering that an entry on ideology is not to be found in *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Swedberg, 2005)), to what extent is the classroom context of 'Science as a Vocation' relevant and useful in helping us understand Heilbroner's ideas about ideology? I would point out here that Weber's vision of science as an instrument of self-understanding is fundamentally akin to Heilbroner's vision of economics as capitalism's instrument of self-understanding (Heilbroner, 1994a, p. 8). The classroom is one of the many forums on which this self-understanding is developed, challenged, and transmitted from generation to generation. The scientific community at large is another such forum, only bigger. The classroom, while not a big part of Heilbroner's discussion of ideology, vision and value-freedom, is relevant because of the central place it occupies within the economics profession as the location of transmission of economic doctrine, including ideology.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews Heilbroner's position on vision, ideology and value-freedom and show the relations among the three. Section 3 reviews Weber's view of science as presented in 'Science as a Vocation.' It also reviews the interpretation of Weberian science provided by Lowith and Koshul and the insights from their work relevant to the issue at hand. Specifically, it shows Weberian science to be a dynamic and continuous process rather than a static and mechanical process. Sections 4 and 5 analyse Heilbroner's philosophy of economics through a Weberian lens. That is, by contextualising vision, ideology and value-freedom within a framework of Weberian science, they reconstruct Heilbroner's vision of economics as a science and as a vocation, and discuss the insights gained from this analysis. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Heilbroner on Vision, Ideology, Value-freedom, and the Purpose of Economic Analysis

The term vision is understood by Heilbroner as follows:

'the political hopes and fears, social stereotypes, and value judgments – all unarticulated, as we have said – that infuse all social thought, not through their illegal entry into an otherwise pristine realm, but as psychological, perhaps existential, necessities. ... "vision" sets the stage and peoples the cast for all social inquiry' (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997, p. 4).

Furthermore, 'our individual moral values, [and] our social angles of perception' (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997, p. 4) are also part of our vision. Hence, vision precedes analysis and sets the analytical agenda. Heilbroner (1988, p. 198) holds that visions are not true or false – they cannot be proven or disproven historically. He concedes that 'while not denying their wishful character, I see visions as free of the exaggerations and inconsistencies that we commonly associate in a pejorative sense with ideologies' (1990, p. 1109). Despite this, he insists that vision is to be 'celebrated' because of its 'immense constructive power' (1988, pp. 198-199).

The purpose visions serve is that they 'structure the social reality to which economics, like other forms of social inquiry, addresses its attention' (1990, p. 1112). This structuring and constructing of reality is the reason that vision is necessary for analysis (1988, p. 198).

The problem with understanding Heilbroner's view of ideology arises because of what can be called an almost schizophrenic view of ideology. Firstly, ideological elements are a part of vision (Heilbroner, 1993, p. 93). For Heilbroner, ideology is (1) 'biased discourse' (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997, p. 114) (2) 'claims of universality' (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1997, p. 114) (3) 'unknowing deception of the self' (Heilbroner, 1995, p. 26) – all having negative connotations. He also claims that ideology is 'irremovable,' (1988, p. 193) and differentiates between 'blatant' and concealed ideologies (1988, pp. 189-190). On the other hand, he claims that ideology is legitimate and necessary for analysis inasmuch as ideology is part of vision and vision is itself necessary for analysis (1993, p. 94; 1994b, pp. 325-329).

Heilbroner's opposition to value-freedom is largely linked to his view of the role of the economist and his/her social context. Firstly, Heilbroner believes that the distinction between the economist and the economic statistician is that the former, in his attempt to explain social phenomena, infuses meaning into his data. For Heilbroner (1973, p. 131), this infusion of meaning is an act which makes economics value-laden. This infusion of meaning is directly related to visions. Heilbroner (1990, p. 1112) sees 'visions as expressions of the inescapable need to infuse "meaning" – to discover a comprehensible framework – in the world.' Secondly, the economist's work is closely tied to his own social context. Economics cannot be value-free because the economist cannot remove himself from his own social context:

'Indeed, at the risk of making an assertion that verges on a confession, I would venture the statement that every social scientist approaches his task with a wish, conscious or unconscious, to demonstrate the workability or unworkability of the social order he is investigating. ...

Moreover, this extreme vulnerability to value judgments is not a sign of deficiency in the social investigator. On the contrary, he belongs to a certain order, has a place in it, benefits or loses from it, and sees his future bound up with its success or failure. In the face of this inescapable existential fact, an attitude of total "impartiality" to the universe of social events is psychologically unnatural, and more likely than not leads to a position of moral hypocrisy' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 139).

A last feature of Heilbroner's philosophy of economics which is worth reviewing is his proposal for serious consideration of the possibility of a political economics (Heilbroner, 1970). Political economics would entail telling the economist that the social and political goal 'x' is desired. The economist would then make clear as to what means could be employed to achieve that end, and what they would entail. The economist is not in any privileged position more than anyone else in deciding which socio-political ends are desirable. Determination of socio-political ends will be the political project/enterprise. What this means is an 'instrumental reorientation of economics' (Heilbroner, 1970, p. 18).

3. Key Features of Weber's Philosophy of Science

Having seen Heilbroner's position on vision, ideology and value-freedom, we now turn to Weber's view of science. We will first review a handful of relevant characteristics of a Weberian view of science (though these are not the only ones): that it offers clarity as a goal,

that it is based on presuppositions and values which are not provable by its own methods, and that despite an affirmation of these values at its base, it ought to be value-free by becoming aware of these presuppositions and by accounting for them. As this discussion proceeds, Weber's view of science will be seen to be a dynamic, continuous and creative process rather than a static and mechanical one.

In 'Science as a Vocation,' Weber offers us the three contributions of science. The one most pertinent to the issue at hand is the third one: science helps us 'gain clarity' (Weber, 1969, p. 151).¹ The scientist sets out for others a choice map of sorts. Rather than saying that you ought to aim for this end, he instead tells us that if you wish to obtain this end, you have at your disposal such and such different paths. Each path brings with it such and such implications. That is, 'if you take such and such a stand, then, according to scientific experience, you have to use such and such a *means* in order to carry out your conviction practically' (Weber, 1969, p. 151). In doing so, the scientist can give a person '*an account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*' (Weber, 1969, p. 151).

However, science itself must first begin somewhere, and it begins with certain presuppositions (Weber, 1969, p. 143). Besides presupposing the validity of its methods, science also presumes that the things it wishes to know are 'worth being known' (Weber, 1969, p. 143). According to Weber:

'In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be *interpreted* with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life' (Weber, 1969, p. 143).

Furthermore, each specific science will have its own specific presuppositions. As Koshul notes:

'all sciences studying empirical reality, ... are based on suprarational factors such as presuppositions, evaluative ideas—and ultimately on a suprarational affirmation of the validity of these presuppositions and evaluative ideas' (Koshul, 2005, p. 47).

Moreover, 'Weber asserts that cultural values play a critical role in bringing order to the chaotic form of an observed phenomenon that presents itself to the observer' (Koshul, 2005, p. 47).

Weber's principle of value-freedom is well known and need not be discussed in much detail. In as much as science lends its assent to its presuppositions as an act of faith, does it not become value-laden when it should be value-free? How then, is it possible to have value-free science? This point is clarified in a passage by Koshul worth quoting at length. Koshul's own reading of Weber depends on Karl Lowith's interpretation of Weber's essay 'Science as a Vocation':

'Weber seems to be saying that, while science is based on certain subjective factors and value judgments, it is at the same time free of certain subjective factors and value judgments. This apparent contradiction in Weber's thought is clarified by Lowith in these words.

¹ The first contribution is that it 'contributes to the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities.' The second is that it gives us 'methods of thinking, the tools and the training for thought' (Weber, 1969, p. 150).

“What Max Weber’s call for a value-free science sought none the less to demonstrate was that, in spite of science’s emancipation, its ‘facts’ were underpinned by specific preconceived value-judgments of a moral and semi-religious type, some of which even approximated to fundamental principles. Science was to become free, in the sense that its value-judgments were to become decisive, logically consistent and self-reflexive, rather than remaining concealed, both to others and to science itself, under the cloak of ‘scientific knowledge.’ Weber’s call for the value-freedom of scientific judgement does not represent a regression to pure scientificity; on the contrary, he is seeking to bring those extra-scientific criteria of judgment into the scientific equation. ...” (Lowith, 1989, p. 146)

For Weber, the value-free character of science is not related to the fact that it is free of subjective factors and value judgments of a “moral and semi-religious type.” Science is value-free in the sense that its “moral and semi-religious” dimension has become “decisive, logically consistent and self-reflexive, rather than remaining concealed.” Science becomes science only when its extra-scientific dimension is explicitly recognized, accounted for, and made clear. As long as the extra-scientific, semireligious dimension of science remains concealed from the view of the scientist, science falls short of being science’ (Koshul, 2005, p. 47).

In the passage by Lowith quoted by Koshul, Lowith goes on to write:

‘what Weber demands is not an eradication of the “value-ideas” which provide science with its criteria, but the objectification of these ideas as a pre-condition for the adoption of what seemed to him a possible critical distance from them’ (Lowith, 1989, p. 146).

Thus, science first fully commits itself to its value-ideas and is only then able to become ‘value-free’ by creating a distance between itself and its values. Koshul interprets this relationship between the fundamental values which underpin science and value-freedom in another manner consistent with Lowith’s interpretation. In his study of Weber, Koshul (2005, p. 144) goes on to show that ‘for Weber, the praxis of science must precede any fruitful reflection on the methods of science.’ As reflection on the methods succeeds praxis, the scientist ‘should not shrink from the possibility of having to revise the “logical forms” of the “enterprise” – even if this revision means the reformulation of the very “nature” of the work’ (Koshul, 2005, p. 144). That is, before science can revisit its fundamental values which determine the logical forms of science, it must first commit itself to these values and *then* examine its fundamental commitments. In doing so, it may have to ‘tweak’ its fundamental evaluative ideas, thereby changing the logical forms and nature of its praxis from then onwards.

From the evidence presented in this discussion, we can view Weberian science to be a dynamic and creative process which can roughly be described in three stages. Note that understanding Weber’s view of science in such a manner runs the risk of presenting it again

as a static and linear process. What is intended, however, is only to use this depiction of Weberian science as a heuristic device which will allow us to analyse Heilbroner's views in the next section. The three stages are as follows:

1. Affirmation of presuppositions and evaluative ideas (a) without which science cannot begin, and (b) which give order to observed phenomena,
2. Scientific praxis as a means to gaining clarity about the best means to achieve a given/desired end,
3. Reflection on methodology, revisiting values affirmed at Stage 1 and revealing the previously concealed values-judgments; revision of logical forms and nature of science if the need be.

It is Stage 3 which is crucial to science's dynamism. When the basic evaluative ideas and methodology are revisited, some of them may be found wanting and others may be found to be as relevant and necessary as before. Thus, depending on the degree to which one will revise one's basic evaluative ideas and methodology, one will revise the nature of scientific praxis. As was said before, the division of science into a three-stage process serves only as a heuristic device which risks looking at the three stages as being mutually exclusive. In fact, each of the three stages can be seen to interact with the other two in a unique way. Every particular case of Stage 3 can also be seen as a 'new' Stage 1, and vice versa. Furthermore, Stage 3 itself is not mutually exclusive with Stage 2. Once the very first affirmation of the value of science is made and scientific praxis has begun, each particular case of reflection on methodology will be a part of scientific praxis, rather than lying outside its domain. In as much as every Stage 3 is a new Stage 1, Stage 1 also then becomes part of scientific praxis. It is these dynamics of science which make it self-reflexive.

4. Heilbroner's Philosophy of Economics through a Weberian Lens

We now begin to place vision, ideology and value-judgments in the Weberian framework of science outlined above. First and foremost, all of vision, including its ideological aspects, can be placed under the heading of Stage 1. For economic (scientific) analysis to begin, there must be the affirmation, even if unconscious or unarticulated as Heilbroner says, of certain presuppositions and evaluative ideas: 'political hopes and fears, social stereotypes and value-judgments' as well as 'our individual moral values.' That is, as Heilbroner says, there *must* be vision. Furthermore, this vision cannot be proved using the methods of economic science.

The second stage is scientific praxis. Economic analysis is part of the scientific praxis of economics. The scientific praxis of the economist requires him/her to help us gain clarity about the most suitable means to achieve any desired end. A more specific part of the praxis of an economist specified by Heilbroner is crucial to understanding Heilbroner's views contextualised within the three-stage process of Weberian science. This element of praxis is the writing of a reflective journal:

'Like the natural scientist, the economist (or for that matter, any social scientist) is expected to keep his journal, recording as best as he can his starting points, his successive steps, his final conclusions. He records, with all the honesty and fidelity of which he is capable, not only his data and his processes of reasoning, but his initial commitments, hopes, and disappointments' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 143).

This process of journal writing – part of the economist's praxis – directly and smoothly transitions into Stage 3, for it requires, in part, the explicit articulation of the economist's vision which had initially been unarticulated. Now we see that at Stage 3, vision – including the economist's values and ideological leanings – must come under scrutiny and may need to be first articulated, and then revised if need be. Thus vision, ideology and values placed in the context of the three-stage Weberian framework outlined above make economics as a science and a vocation to appear as follows:

1. Affirmation of vision, ideology, values and evaluative ideas (a) without which economics cannot begin, and (b) which structure and construct reality,
2. Economic praxis (analysis and journal writing) as a means to gaining clarity about the best means to achieve a given/desired end,
3. Reflection on vision and ideology, revisiting vision and ideology affirmed at Stage 1 and articulating the previously unarticulated visionary elements; revision of logical forms and nature of economics if the need be.

5. Discussion

By contextualising values, ideology, vision in this Weberian view of science, a number of insights emerge. Firstly, Heilbroner's position that vision is unarticulated must be interpreted to mean that vision is only unarticulated *at first*: that is, at the very first instance of Stage 1. Self-consciousness and laying bare of the economists' basic presuppositions and evaluative ideas which is to happen at Stage 3 requires articulation. For example, Heilbroner himself articulated (or made explicit) the vision of the worldly philosophers in his work, and others like Milberg, Gilkey and Canterbury have articulated (or made explicit) Heilbroner's vision. Left unarticulated, the ideological elements within vision cannot be identified, let alone scrutinised. Furthermore, even the non-ideological elements of vision may lose their legitimacy if vision is left unarticulated because without articulation, these parts of vision can also not be made explicit for 'painful self-scrutiny' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 142). From this perspective, the vision and ideology distinction becomes possibly irrelevant. If vision as a whole is to be subjected to 'public examination' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 143), so will the ideological elements within it. If, however, all of vision is left unexamined, so will the ideological elements in it.

Secondly, we see that ideology as unknowing self-deception *is* legitimate, in-so-far as it allows for the beginning of scientific praxis (Stage 1). However, once scientific praxis begins, the economist will be obliged as part of his practice to try and articulate his vision (including its ideological aspects) in his journal (Stage 2) and then return to it to reflect on it and in the process identify the ideological elements within it and to change them (Stage 3). In doing so, he will be able to make his vision and its ideological elements, in Lowith's words, part of the scientific equation. He will then be able to account for them in his analysis. Ideology can also be understood as what Lowith calls the objectification of value-ideas which then allows for a critical distance from them (i.e. value-freedom).

Thirdly, as Heilbroner says, ideologies (and thus also visions) are alterable (1988, p. 193). Heilbroner himself takes up this task in his work, of proposing a new vision. Thus, visions must be consciously edited. As the socio-political context of the economist's inquiry changes, say over his lifetime,² vision may also change unconsciously and new ideological elements may enter it accordingly. Heilbroner himself admits that there is never a shortage of

² Or even over generations, in which case, we can think of science as a social enterprise in place of an individual scientist.

ideologies (1993, p. 91). Thus at Stage 3, 'science goes about its task, exposing itself to informed criticism at every stage of its inquiry, engaging in painful self-scrutiny with regard to its premises, experiments, reasoning, conclusions' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 142). That is, (economic) science as this three-stage process must be continuous and dynamic – it must be self-reflexive.

Fourthly, as was discussed earlier, Heilbroner does not wish for economics to be a value-free science and does not think it to be possible for it to be so. However, it appears that Heilbroner himself has laid the ground for a value-free economics as a possible eventuality in the specifically Weberian understanding of value-freedom reviewed earlier. Heilbroner's insistence on constructing more relevant visions and scrutinising ideological visions – and thus the value-judgments, presuppositions and evaluative ideas embodied in those visions – lends itself to this thesis. Despite claiming to 'urge the abandonment of the idea of a "value-free" economics' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 143) Heilbroner in fact *did* allow for the possibility of a Weberian value-freedom, albeit unintentionally, in the conclusion of his essay 'Economics as a "Value-Free" Science':

'Rather, I want economics to make a virtue of necessity, exposing for all the world to see the indispensable and fructifying value-grounds from which it begins its inquiries so that these inquiries may be fully exposed to—and not falsely shielded from—the public examination that is the true strength of science' (Heilbroner, 1973, p. 143).

This desire effectively embodies Lowith's interpretation of Weberian value-freedom.³

All of this seriously undermines Heilbroner's claim that ideology is 'irremovable' (1988, p. 193). If ideology is irremovable, then the question arises as to what is the point of self-scrutiny and public examination of one's value-commitments. It also raises the question of why this self-scrutiny is painful if not because of the realisation of the self-deceptive nature of ideology. Having admitted the legitimacy of ideology at the very first instance of Stage 1, room must be made now for the self-conscious eradication of ideology and re-construction of vision at every successive Stage 3. Indeed, that is exactly what Heilbroner has attempted to do in much of his own work.

An attempt ought to be made to explain why it is that Heilbroner describes self-scrutiny as being painful. This will be attempted, again, from a Weberian perspective arising from a reading of Weber's 'Science as a Vocation.' The ideological elements in vision which are synonymous with unknowing self-deception can be understood to cover up what Weber (1969, p. 147) calls 'inconvenient facts.' The role of the scientist *qua* teacher is to bring about in his students an awareness of 'facts that are inconvenient for their party opinions' (Weber, 1969, p. 147). In doing so, he/she successfully weeds out the ideological elements in a person's vision. This self-scrutiny with the aid of the scientist is painful exactly because it makes us aware of our deception of ourselves. This pain can also be viewed from another perspective. Koshul (2005, p. 119) states that 'for Weber, an investigator takes up the investigation of a particular subject because he/she seeks to better understand the factors that are challenging or undermining a particular value-commitment that he/she has.' If such is the case and if we come to realise the validity of the factors which undermine a particular

³ Anghel Rugina (1998, pp. 821-824) is of the opinion that Heilbroner is unable to offer a solution to the problem of value-freedom. However, Rugina's conclusion is based on a completely different methodological approach, including an interpretation of Weber which, in my understanding, is different from that of Koshul and Lowith, through whose work I have accessed Weber's thought.

value to which we are committed, we become aware of the ideological and self-deceptive nature of that particular value; thus the pain.

Furthermore, Weber's position, that the ideas and values involved at what has been called Stage 1 are actually required to make sense of reality and to allow us to analyse it, can be seen as theoretical capital which could have been employed by Heilbroner to support his 'valorization of vision' (1993, p. 93). This has three important implications. Firstly, it shows that Weber's work on methodology of the social sciences still remains relevant to economics. Secondly, it shows a neglect of Weber's methodological capital on Heilbroner's part. Surely, referring back to one of the major methodologists of the social sciences to find support for a major idea in his work would have been fruitful. Thirdly, it also gives Heilbroner's position legitimacy from a Weberian perspective.

6. Conclusion

Analysing Heilbroner's position on vision, ideology and value-freedom in economics through the lens of a Weberian philosophy of science allows us to see a number of things. Firstly, it allows us to clarify and better understand Heilbroner's philosophy of economics as a science and as a vocation. We see the different contexts of the conflicting understandings of ideology and the possibility of its removal, the dynamic and self-reflexive nature of economics as a science and as a vocation, the need for reflection as part of an economist's vocation (and implicitly, the need for the cultural richness which such self-critical reflection requires), a possible re-understanding of Heilbroner's position on value-freedom, and potential explanations of the reasons for the painful nature of self-scrutiny.

Secondly, it shows us the relevance of Weber's methodological capital to contemporary issues in economics. The presence of ideology in economics is a major concern for Heilbroner; the fact that 'the actual and very positive goal of his [i.e. Weber's] epistemological essays is *the radical dismantling of "illusions"*' (Lowith, 1993, p. 148) makes Weber's work a potential resource which can be employed to dismantle illusions within economics. Thirdly, it allows us to identify a shortcoming in Heilbroner's work: an absence of direct reference to Weber's methodological capital, which could have allowed him to expound his thesis for the valorisation of vision and condemnation of ideology with greater force and clarity.

To summarise, the paper has argued that **IF** we accept that:

- (1) Lowith and Koshul's interpretation of Weber's philosophy of (social) science and value-freedom forms one valid interpretative lens among many, and
- (2) Heilbroner is a fair representative of the discipline of economics and that his work is still relevant to contemporary issues in the methodology of economics,

and we then use the interpretative lens mentioned in (1) to analyse Heilbroner's ideas about ideology, vision and the methodology/philosophy of economics in general, **THEN** it appears that:

- (A) Heilbroner's philosophy of economics as a science and as a vocation can be clarified and refined, and allows us to see economics as a dynamic and self-reflexive science, and
- (B) Weber's work has a continuing relevance to contemporary issues in the methodology of economics, which suggests that Weber's work perhaps needs to be re-visited more thoroughly for new insights.

It appears that an absence of an explicit reference to ideology in 'Science as a Vocation' and the classroom context of Weber's essay do not impede on the ability of the Weberian framework to help us better understand Heilbroner's thought. This is because of the crucial point that the problems the two of them are exploring are very much of the same nature. The paper's arguments could be made stronger by devoting a complete research project to clearly establishing the link between Weber and Heilbroner, especially with regards to the influence of the former on the latter. Moreover, Weber's ideas about methodology have only been employed in their least potent form, without reference to his other methodological writings. These lines of inquiry, should they be pursued, should provide interesting insights about facets of Heilbroner's work which have yet been left unexplored.

As economics develops, evolves and hopefully moves forward, we can assess the work of a number of economists through a number of different interpretative lenses, which would result in a large variety of perspectives and lines of inquiry. Each such combination will yield (or not) its own lessons and problems. By analysing Heilbroner's philosophy of economics through a particular kind of Weberian lens, we come to a very specific understanding of his work, which in turn gives us a very particular way to approach economics – a particular way to envision and imagine economics. Whether or not this particular approach is worth theoretically exploring – even practically attempting – is an issue I invite the readers to debate and discuss.

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