

Module-4

MAX WEBER



(1864-1920)

Developed by:

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(1864-1920)

Maximilian Weber (April 21, 1864 – June 14, 1920) was a German political economist and sociologist who is considered one of the founders of the modern "antipositivistic" study of sociology and public administration. His major works deal with the sociology of religion and government, but he also wrote much in the field of economics. Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Prussia (present day Germany). Weber's father was greatly involved in public life and so his home was constantly immersed in both politics and academia. Weber and his brother thrived in this intellectual atmosphere.

In 1882, he enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, but after two years left to fulfill his year of military service at Strassburg. After his release from the military, Weber finished his studies at the University of Berlin, earning his doctorate in 1889 and joining the University of Berlin's faculty, lecturing and consulting for the government. In 1894, Weber was appointed professor of economics at the University of Freiburg and then was granted the same position at the University of Heidelberg in 1896. In 1903, Weber became the associate editor of the Archives for Social Science and Social Welfare where his interests lied in more fundamental issues of social sciences. In 1909, Weber co-founded the German Sociological Association and served as it's first treasurer. Weber's most powerful impact on his contemporaries came in the last years of his life, when, from 1916 to 1918, he argued powerfully against Germany's annexationist war goals and in favor of a strengthened parliament. After assisting in the drafting of the new constitution and in the founding of the German Democratic Party, Weber became frustrated with politics and resumed teaching at the University of Vienna and then at the University of Munich. The major works of Max Weber are as follows:

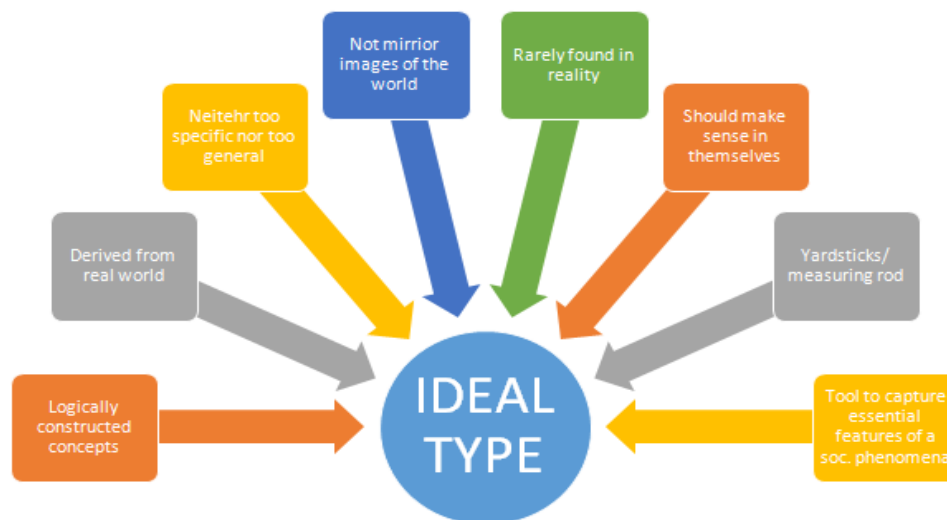
1. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904)
2. The City (1912)
3. The Sociology of Religion (1922)
4. General Economic History (1923)
5. The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (1925)

IDEAL TYPE

The concept of Ideal Type is of utmost importance in understanding Max Weber's methodological approach to sociological investigations. For Weber, the conduct of social science depends upon the construction of abstract, hypothetical concepts. The "ideal type" is therefore a subjective element in social theory and research, and one of the subjective elements distinguishing sociology from natural science.

Ideal Type refers to mental image or conception rather than a material object. It is a model. The term type means a kind, class or group as distinguished by a particular character. So generally, we may conceptualize ideal type as a kind, category, class or group of objects things or persons with particular character that seems to be the best example of it. Weber used Ideal type in a specific sense. To him Ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and systematic characterization of a concrete situation. Indeed he used Ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyze social reality.

Max Weber was particularly concerned with the problem of objectivity in social sciences. Hence he used Ideal type as a methodological tool that looks at reality objectively. It scrutinizes, classifies, systematizes and defines social reality without subjective bias. The Ideal types are nothing to do with values. Its function as a research tool is for classification and comparison. As Weber said, ““The Ideal typical concept will develop our skill in imputation in research. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description.” In other words, Ideal types are concepts formulated on the basis of facts collected carefully and analytically for empirical research. In this sense, Ideal types are constructs or concepts which are used as methodological devices or tools in our understanding and analysis of any social problem.”



SOCIAL ACTION

The concept of social action is the center of all social ideas of Max Weber. According to his all social concepts joined the central conception of social action. He defines social action, “social action is that action of an individual which is influenced by the actions and behavior of other persons and by which its direction determined”. Thus social actions of individuals which are

somehow influence, guided or determined by the actions of other individuals is called social action.

Characteristics of Social Action Theory

The significant features of Max Weber ideas are under

- 1.Social action may be influenced by an act of past, present or future. Social action is the result or modification of some actions of some other individual but the modifying action may be occur in past, present or future. For example; in case of present action, when a man provide any type of help to the poor man and is result the poor man wishing him well. In case of past action, a man who did good deed in past with a person, that person will try to do good with him. In case of future actions a man decorating his house in order to impress his friends who are invited in the near future.
- 2.Social action occurs in the existence of other individual. It is possible only if there is another individual whose action or behavior promoting any given individual to act in a particular manner. It means that there can be no social action in isolation.
- 3.Social action should have subjective meaning to another particular social action. If two persons collide accidentally and without any motive, the collision will not be a social action. So, sociology is the study of social action and human behavior. It studies not only the behavior but meaning. So, social action is the new name of sociology.

Types of Social Action

According to Max Weber following are the four stages of social action

Traditional Stage

This stage is concerned with customs, traditions and their usages. Thus all those actions which are influenced guided or determined by customs or traditions comes wider this stage.

Emotional Stage

An emotional reaction to the actions of others comes under this stage. If there is expression of love, late, sympathy or pity in response to the behavior of other individuals.

Valuation Stage

The social actions which are concerned with values are considered valuation stage. The religious and ethical actions comes under. The social value of Islam; we pray five times, Deeping fasts, go to pilgrimage, conduct the jihad etc.

Rational or purposeful Stage

These actions are guided primarily by reason and discrimination. These actions are rational based on some reasons and wanted to get some benefit from others. These are purposeful actions. So, these were the four stages of social actions, which determine human behavior.

PROTESTANT ETHICS AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was published in German in 1905. It has been a mainstay of sociological study since it was first translated into English by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in 1930.

This text is notable for how Weber merged economic sociology with his sociology of religion, and as such, for how he researched and theorized the interplay between the cultural realm of values and beliefs, and the economic system of society.

Weber argues in the text that capitalism developed to the advanced stage that it did in the West due to the fact that Protestantism encouraged the embrace of work as a calling from God, and consequently, a dedication to work that allowed one to earn a lot of money. This, combined with the value asceticism -- of living a simple earthly life devoid of costly pleasures -- fostered an acquisitive spirit. Later, as the cultural force of religion declined, Weber argued that capitalism was freed from the limits placed on it by Protestant morals, and expanded as an economic system of acquisition.

Weber found that under the influence of Protestant religions, especially Puritanism, individuals were religiously compelled to follow a secular vocation with as much enthusiasm as possible. A person living according to this worldview was therefore more likely to accumulate money.

Further, the new religions, such as Calvinism and Protestantism, forbade wastefully using hard-earned money and labeled the purchase of luxuries as a sin. These religions also frowned upon donating money to the poor or to charity because it was seen as promoting beggary. Thus, a conservative, even stingy lifestyle, combined with a work ethic that encouraged people to earn money, resulted in large amounts of available money.

The way these issues were resolved, Weber argued, was to invest the money—a move that gave a large boost to capitalism. In other words, capitalism evolved when the Protestant ethic influenced large numbers of people to engage in work in the secular world, developing their own enterprises and engaging in trade and the accumulation of wealth for investment.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

In ordinary usage, the term ‘power’ means strength or the capacity to control. Sociologists describe it as the ability of an individual or group to fulfil its desires and implement its decisions

and ideas. It involves the ability to influence and/ or control the behaviour of others even against their will. For Max Weber, power is an aspect of social relationships. It refers to the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Power is present in social interaction and creates situations of inequality since the one who has power imposes it on others. The impact of power varies from situation to situation. On the one hand, it depends on the capacity of the powerful individual to exercise power. On the other hand it depends upon the extent to which it is opposed or resisted by the others. Weber says that power can be exercised in all walks of life. It is not restricted to a battlefield or to politics. It is to be observed in the market place, on a lecture platform, at a social gathering, in sports, scientific discussions and even through charity. For example, giving alms or 'daan' to a beggar is a subtle way of exercising your superior economic power. You can bring a smile of joy to the beggar's face or a feeling of despair by giving or refusing alms.

What are the sources of power? Weber discusses two contrasting sources of power. These are as follows a) Power which is derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market. For example, a group of producers of sugar controls supply of their production in the market to maximise their profit. b) An established system of authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. For example, in the army, a jawan is obliged to obey the command of his officer. The officer derives his power through an established system of authority. As you have seen in the last point, any discussion of power leads us to think about its legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which according to Weber constitutes the core point of authority.

Authority

The German word "Herrschaft", used by Weber, has been variously translated. Some sociologists term it as 'authority', others as 'domination' or 'command'. Herrschaft is a situation in which a 'Herr' or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master's ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him. In this unit, Weber's concept of Herrschaft will denote the term "authority". A question may be raised, namely, what is the difference between power and authority? Power, as you have seen, refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed.

Elements of Authority

For a system of authority to exist the following elements must be present.

- i) An individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters.
- ii) An individual/group that is ruled.

iii) The will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.

iv) Evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of compliance or obedience shown by the ruled.

v) Direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler's commands must be obeyed.

We see that authority implies a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers believe that they have the legitimate right to exercise their authority. On the other hand, the ruled accept this power and comply with it, reinforcing its legitimacy.

Types of Authority

Authority implies legitimacy. According to Weber, there are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms, which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimating which are designated as the following types of authority.

- (i) Traditional authority
- (ii) Charismatic authority
- (iii) Rational-legal authority

Traditional Authority

This system of legitimation flows from traditional action. In other words, it is based on customary law and the sanctity of ancient traditions. It is based on the belief that a certain authority is to be respected because it has existed since time immemorial. In traditional authority, rulers enjoy personal authority by virtue of their inherited status. Their commands are in accordance with customs and they also possess the right to extract compliance from the ruled. Often, they abuse their power. The persons who obey them are 'subjects' in the fullest sense of the term. They obey their master out of personal loyalty or a pious regard for his time-honoured status.

Charismatic Authority

Charisma means an extraordinary quality possessed by some individuals (see Box 16.1). This gives such people unique powers to capture the fancy and devotion of ordinary people. Charismatic authority is based on extraordinary devotion to an individual and to the way of life preached by this person. The legitimacy of such authority rests upon the belief in the supernatural or magical powers of the person. The charismatic leader 'proves' his/her power through miracles, military and other victories or the dramatic prosperity of the disciples. As long

as charismatic leaders continue to 'prove' their miraculous powers in the eyes of their disciples, their authority stays intact. You may have realised that the type of social action that charismatic authority is related to is affective action. The disciples are in a highly charged emotional state as a result of the teachings and appeal of the charismatic leaders.

Rational-legal Authority

The term refers to a system of authority, which are both, rational and legal. It is vested in a regular administrative staff who operate in accordance with certain written rules and laws. Those who exercise authority are appointed to do so on the basis of their achieved qualifications, which are prescribed and codified. Those in authority consider it a profession and are paid a salary. Thus, it is a rational system. It is legal because it is in accordance with the laws of the land which people recognise and feel obliged to obey. The people acknowledge and respect the legality of both, the ordinance and rules as well as the positions or titles of those who implement the rules. Rational-legal authority is a typical feature of modern society. It is the reflection of the process of rationalisation. Remember that Weber considers rationalisation as the key feature of western civilisation. It is, according to Weber, a specific product of human thought and deliberation. By now you have clearly grasped the connection between rational-legal authority and rational action for obtaining goals.