

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE GERMAN IDEALIST TRADITION UPON WEBERIAN THOUGHT

by

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## ABSTRACT

Max Weber was one of the prominent social figures in this history of the social sciences for he made significant contributions to the development of anthropology, sociology and social theory as a whole.

Weber's aim was explicit: he wanted to develop a 'scientific study of man and society:' he sought not only to delineate the scope of the discipline but also wanted to construct a clear-cut methodology whereby data could be rigorously studied in accordance with the testable procedures of science.

This paper discusses the influence of the German idealist tradition upon Max Weber. Specifically, this study critically examines Weberian thought in terms of illustrating how he combined the Germanic emphasis on the search for subjective meanings with the positivist notion of scientific rigor, and in so doing was able to bridge the dichotomy between the idealist and positivist traditions.

## RESUME

Max Weber fut l'une des personnalités illustres de l'histoire des sciences sociales car il apporta une contribution importante au développement de l'anthropologie, de la sociologie, et de la théorie social dans son ensemble.

Le but de Weber était clair: il voulait organiser une étude scientifique de l'homme et de la société: il cherchait non seulement à délimiter le domaine de la discipline, mais aussi à délimiter une méthodologie précise qui permettrait une étude rigoureuse des données en accord avec les procédés fiables de la science.

Cet article mesure l'influence de la tradition idéaliste allemande sur Max Weber. Précisément, cette étude examine d'un point de vue critique la pensée Weberienne en illustrant sa manière de combiner l'insistance germanique sur la recherche de sens subjectifs avec la notion positiviste de rigueur scientifique, il fut ainsi capable de surmonter la dichotomie entre les courants idéaliste et positiviste.

## INTRODUCTION

Max Weber was undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in the history of social sciences, for he made significant contributions to the development of anthropology, sociology and social theory as a whole.

Weber's aim was quite explicit: he wanted to develop a 'scientific study of man and society.' That is to say, Weber not only sought to delineate the scope of this discipline, but also wanted to construct a clear-cut methodology whereby data could be studied rigorously and reliably in accordance with the testable procedures of science. In effect, Weber set out to combine the Germanic emphasis on the search for subjective meanings with the positivist notion of scientific rigor, and in so doing, was able to bridge the dichotomy between the idealist and positivist traditions.

In order to fully understand Weber and his ideas, I would argue that one must examine the intellectual influences on the man. No theorist develops his ideas in a vacuum and Weber was no exception. Weber was heavily influenced by the German idealist tradition, and the views which he adopted, played an active part in the revolution of the social sciences which occurred between 1890 and 1930.

It will be the purpose of this paper to discuss the influence of the German idealist tradition upon Weberian thought. Specifically, I will attempt to undertake the following: 1) briefly outline the relevant aspects of the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and the Baden school of neo-Kantians (namely, Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert and Windelband) and, 2) having done this, I will proceed to critically examine Weber's work in order to illustrate which aspects he drew from the idealist tradition while at the same time, emphasizing points of departure as well.

THE PHILOSOPHIES OF KANT AND THE NEO-KANTIANS<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent the Immanuel Kant began his epistemological researches with a consideration of the subject:

Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to the objects. Therefore, let us for once attempt to see

whether we cannot reach a solution to the tasks of metaphysics by assuming that the objects conform to our knowledge...(Kant, in Goldmann, 1945:63).

This shift in emphasis from object to subject could only make sense in a society where the 'individual' person was evolving as an entity apart from larger social groupings. As Marcel Mauss pointed out, the category of the individual is not an innate quality of human spirit, but rather, develops and changes in history:

The problem concerns nothing less than explaining to you how the categories of the human spirit--one of those ideas which we believe to be innate--was born and raised very slowly in the course of many centuries and has passed through numerous vicissitudes, 'person,' the idea of the 'ego.'

Everyone finds the idea natural and precise at the back of his consciousness all equipped at the back of the morality which is deduced from it. It is a matter of substituting for the naive view of its history and of its current value, a more precise view (1968:457).

According to Kant, all human knowledge of the external world is derived from the data of the senses. The knowledge of the object is, therefore, of an indirect kind. Whatever it is which excites the senses, cannot be apprehended through them, and thus remains for Kant, a 'thing-in-itself' (Ding-ansich). Kant divides reality into two ontologically distinct and separate realms: (1) the phenomenal universe, the world of the senses, governed by physical laws, structures and necessity; and (2) the noumenal world, the world of things in themselves, the world of 'pure' content and freedom (Levitt, 1972:32).

In the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, (1909;1929) it is evident that he established a radical disjunction between the world of man and that of nature. Essentially, Kant argued that man participated in the phenomenal world as an object, as a physical body, however, he emphasizes that the distinctive aspect of man was not his body, but rather his spirit. Moreover, as a spiritual being, man was able to participate in the world of ideas as a free subject despite the fact that he was a determined object as a physical body. Thus, one can see that Kantian thought was directed toward a radically dualistic position reaching its most acute point of focus in relation to man--who at the

same time was both a physical and spiritual being. As Talcott Parsons states:

...the Kantian scheme favoured the reduction of all phenomenal aspects of man, especially the biological, to a 'materialistic' basis, and produced a radical hiatus between this and his spiritual life--a hiatus which still persists in the rigidity of the line customarily drawn between the natural sciences and the sciences of culture or of the mind (Geist) (1949:474).

In effect, this Kantian disjunction influenced all German philosophy down to the time of Weber. Basically, it viewed man as a purposive, free individual in the realm of culture and history, and as such, man could not be dealt with by the sciences of the phenomenal world or even by their analytical, generalizing methods. For Kant, the mind and its creations are not subject to natural laws, and therefore, he argued that methods of analysis applicable to the sciences of man must be particularizing in contrast to generalizing; moreover, these methods must limit themselves to apprehending the springs of human action in an empathetic manner, or by attempting to grasp total cultural wholes in an intuitive manner (Gestalten) (Parsons, 1949:474). Kant felt that it was illegitimate to break down such totalities by 'atomistic' analyses or to subsume the activities of individuals under generalizing categories. Parsons aptly sums up Kant's position:...Since the general analytical level of scientific comprehension is a priori excluded, things human can be understood only in terms of the concrete individuality of the specific historical case (Ibid:447).

It is apparent that many scholars were significantly affected by the philosophical thinking of Kant; hence, there developed in nineteenth century Germany what was termed as the neo-Kantian school of thought. Essentially, this was a period characterized by great advancement in the laboratory sciences and thus, the grandiose speculative metaphysics proposed by Helgel fell into disrepute. These philosophers were also against the materialist approach, and as a result, they returned to the teachings of Kant. As Marvin Harris points out, Kant's philosophy was acceptable at this time essentially because it provided a compromise between idealism and materialism (1968:267).

Three neo-Kantians (from the Baden school) are particularly worthy of discussion at this point for as the reader will see, they exerted a great impact on the thinking of Weber: Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband. It is evident that these individuals influenced Weber by transmitting to him some of the

fundamental Kantian doctrines in modern form and by allowing him to develop his own methodology (which was partially in accord with their teachings and partially in opposition as well).

Wilhelm Dilthey's aim was quite clear; he sought to combat naturalism and materialism in the sciences of man, and attempted to defend the distinctiveness of these sciences against positivism. In effect, as R.E. Palmer points out:

It was Dilthey's goal to develop methods of gaining 'objectively valid' knowledge interpretations of expressions of inner life. At the same time, he reacted sharply to the tendency in the human studies simply to take on the norms and ways of thinking of the natural sciences and apply them to the study of man (1969:98).

As a culture historian, one could argue that Dilthey (1959:30-52) perceived his task as one of a hermeneutic reconstruction of world views. He believed that this reconstruction is undertaken not by introspection (as in Husserl's phenomenology), but rather through the study of the cultural objectifications of life. In Dilthey's view, human nature was not a fixed nature, but rather, an historical creation of self-creation (Levitt, 1972:36). This view led Dilthey to a type of radical historical relativism which at times, he found unsatisfying and attempted to react against.

An examination of Dilthey's philosophy reveals that Dilthey, (1914, V.1), like Kant before him, compromised between idealism and materialism. While it will be remembered that other theorists such as Morgan, Tylor and Marx<sup>2</sup> focused upon the material conditions of life--elements about which testable hypotheses could be constructed--Dilthey (and the neo-Kantians) in contrast, worked out the mechanics of the mind. For Dilthey (1914, V.1), the essence of external things was neither mind nor matter, but rather, it was unknowable. To the extent that one comes to know something is based upon sense impressions. These impressions are constrained by the fundamental categories of the mind. For Dilthey (1914:V3), knowledge is an interactive product of mind and reality. Knowledge may be obtained in two manners: (1) by obtaining sense data (empiricist approach) or (2) by realizing what the observing mind makes to the perception of the data (mental approach). Initially, the neo-Kantian movement emphasized the former but by the end of the century, they stressed the latter (Harris, 1968:267). It is important to point out that Dilthey made the distinction between mind and reality in terms of the natural science (Naturwissenschaften)--human science (Geisteswissenschaften) dichotomy. That is to say, he equated the

natural sciences with reality and the human sciences with the mind. So in effect, Dilthey (1914, V.1), argued that there are two ways to interpret things: in the natural sciences, one attempts to make testable hypotheses about the phenomenal world, while in the human sciences one attempts to understand mental constructs created in the interpretative process. In short then, the reader can see the Dilthey drew his Naturwissenschaft-Geistwissenschaft dichotomy in terms of subject matter.

After pointing out that the sciences of culture require a different methodological approach than the natural sciences and that all methodology must adapt itself to the nature of the object under investigation, Dilthey states:

Natural sciences are distinguished from culture sciences in that all facts of nature are given to the senses as external phenomena while the reality and the concrete connections (lebendige Zusammenhaenge) of cultural-phenomena are apprehended innerly (1914, V.1).

For Dilthey, knowledge of the world of man could not be obtained through external knowledge; rather, it could only be attained through an internal process, through experience (erleben) and subjective understanding (verstehen). Since actors and their cultural creations are imbued with meaning, Dilthey held that the social scientist must direct his attentions toward an understanding these meanings, and the only way in which he can accomplish this end is through re-experiencing (Macherleben) the meanings carried by the actors or objects themselves. Dilthey (1914, v.1) asserted that a basic tool to attain this goal would be a new type of psychology, not the experimental psychology that is prevalent today, but a descriptive and comparative type of psychology which would be able to grasp the totality of the subject's experiences by empathetic understanding. For Dilthey, the natural sciences can merely explain (erklaren) observed events in terms of relating them to natural laws. However, in the human sciences, knowledge is not external, but internal. The investigator attempts to attain knowledge by reconstituting his own inner experience in the actor by 'reading' him. In short, understanding is a 'rediscovery of the I in the Thou' (Schutz, 1967:338). Hodges sums up Dilthey's position regarding the human sciences:

The human studies do indeed take an interest in the individual for his own sake, just as he is, apart from all thought of his relation to laws and determining conditions, and without any attempt to explain him at all. The human studies, therefore, contain an element of pure description, a 'loving understanding'

(Verstandnis) of the personal, a reliving of the inexhaustible totalities, which is seen at its simplest in biography (1952:231).

Therefore for Dilthey, this insight into individual actors is the paradigm of knowledge that is proper for the social sciences.

When one examines the theoretical framework of Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband, it is evident that these philosophers had much in common with Dilthey in terms of distinguishing appropriate procedures for the cultural sciences from those employed by the natural sciences. However, I would argue that these two scholars differed from Dilthey in some important respects, namely in terms of their analytical focus as well as in their specific doctrine.

Essentially, Rickert (1929) and Windelband (1893:100-160) rejected the Naturwissenschaft-Geisteswissenschaft dichotomy proposed by Dilthey and argued that distinctions should be made in terms of method rather than subject matter. They contended that since certain aspects of human behaviour could be studied by the methods of the natural sciences used in traditional psychology, the entire domain of human activities could not be claimed by the Geisteswissenschaften. Hence, Rickert and Windelband argued that the real distinctions are based upon the differences between the individualizing and generalizing thought. Essentially, they contended that there exist two radically opposed scientific approaches: (1) the nomothetic sciences, and (2) the idiographic sciences. The former sciences are generalizing: they aim at establishing universal laws and uniformities. In contrast, the latter sciences are particularizing in nature. That is to say, the idiographic sciences (above all, history or Kulturwissenschaft) attempt to give descriptive accounts of particular historical events or individual actors. In effect, the idiographic sciences aim at understanding mental competence, of how one gets to know about things in causal relationships.

Dilthey (1914, v. 1) argued against this stance and held that both idiographic and nomothetic interests were legitimate in the human sciences. He stated that one can look at both general laws and particulars in a sequence; basically, he felt that it was just a matter of method to be able to do so. In essence then, Dilthey argued that one merely had to examine nomothetics in a different manner.<sup>3</sup> However, Rickert (1929) and Windelband (1883;1893) reacted against Dilthey and argued that this distinction between the idiographic and nomothetic interests was irreconcilable.

Further, it is important to emphasize that Rickert, in his treatment of historical knowledge followed the Kantian tradition in terms of insisting that the 'act of knowing' transforms the 'object of knowledge.' Such a transformation is always determined by the theoretical purpose (Erkenntniszweck) which lies behind the attempt to gain knowledge (Mandelbaum, 1967:121). In short then, for Rickert, historical knowledge is characterized by an interest in the particular, in contrast to the general; that is to say, it attempts to grasp individuality and concreteness.

Even if one accepts the tenet that historical knowledge aims at the understanding of individuals rather than general laws, one may still wonder why an investigator chooses as his object of research, one person over another. In response to this question, Rickert (1929) developed the notion of 'value-relevance (Wertbeziehung)--a term which he defined differently than Weber subsequently did. Essentially, Rickert argued that what constitutes an actor an historical individual is not that the social scientist values him, but rather, his relevance to universally acknowledged cultural values. Rickert states (as Weber subsequently did) that historians are selective when they proceed to attack an historical problem; they choose to understand one aspect of history rather than another. But in contrast to Weber, who we shall see believed that the investigator's consciousness of cultural values influenced these choices, Rickert believed that there existed a normal consciousness of cultural values which are shared by man. Rickert attempted to shield himself from being accused of developing a cultural relativistic theory by arguing that primary historical objects are those individuals who are endowed with generally acknowledged cultural values.

The preceding discussion has, by no means, been an attempt to present in totality the philosophies of these scholars. In a paper of this length, such an aim would be impossible. Thus, I have attempted to give the reader certain portions of their philosophies that are relevant to my discussion of Weber.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE GERMAN IDEALIST TRADITION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF WEBER'S METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

It will now be my purpose in the final section of this paper to discuss the influence of the German idealist tradition on the development of Weber's methodological approach to the social sciences. It is evident that when one first reads Weber, he sees many similarities with the idealist tradition; however closer examination reveals that Weber departed from the tradition in some important respects--specifically in adopting some elements from the positivist



tradition. I will attempt to illustrate how Weber combined aspects of the idealist and positivist traditions into one framework, and in so doing laid the foundation for modern sociology as we see it today.

It is apparent that the German neo-idealists sought to fuse together the world of the social sciences with the world of historical experience. These two systems had not yet been bridged, and this was to be one of Weber's major achievements. In effect, Weber's aim was to combine the idealist sense for history and subjective understanding with the positivist notion of scientific rigor.

Examination of Weberian thought (1949:37-80) reveals that he rejected the theoretical stance of the positivist school<sup>4</sup>. That is to say, Weber rejected the idea that the cognitive aims of the natural and the social sciences were the same. At the same time however, he also rejected the idealist doctrine that in the realm of Kultur and Geist (i.e. history), it is impossible to make generalizations because the actions of individuals are not subject to natural laws. In short, against the idealists, Weber contended that the method of science, whether its subject matter be humans or things, always proceeds by abstraction and generalization. Moreover, against the positivists, Weber contended that man could not be solely understood in terms of external manifestations, but rather, in terms of underlying motivations as well.

Weber (1949:72) like his neo-Kantian predecessors made the distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences (Naturwissenschaft-Geisteswissenschaft), however, he kept emphasizing that these distinctions were based upon the cognitive purposes of the social scientist, not on differences in method or subject matter as Rickert and Dilthey respectively held. For Weber, the dichotomy between the natural sciences and the human sciences did not arise from the inapplicability of scientific and generalizing methods to the subject matter of human action; nor did it arise from a difference in methods of investigation. Rather, this difference arose from the differing interests and aims of the social scientist:

There is no absolutely 'objective, scientific analysis of culture--or perhaps more narrowly but certainly not essentially differently for our purposes--of 'social phenomena' independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints according to which--expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously--they are selected, analyzed and organized for expository purposes (Weber, 1949:72).

It is evident that both types of science involve abstraction. As Stuart Hughes (1958:301) points out, the richness of the world of facts, in nature and in history, is so great that it is impossible to achieve a complete explanation in either realm. Weber contended (1949:76-80) that both the natural and cultural sciences must abstract from the numerous aspects of reality: they always involve selection. Basically, the natural scientist is interested in natural events that can be formulated in terms of general laws. Weber held (1949:77) that while the social scientist may wish to look for these abstract generalizations with regard to human behaviour, he may also be interested in the particularizing characteristics of the actors and the meaning that they ascribe to their actions. Essentially, he felt that any scientific method has to make a selection from the 'infinite variety of empirical reality.' When the social scientist employs the generalizing method he abstracts certain aspects of reality: that is, concrete individual actions are conceived of as 'cases' or 'instances', which are placed under theoretical generalizations. Weber emphasized (1949:77) that the individualizing approach, in contrast, concentrates upon particular features of phenomena or historical actors. However, Weber maintained that both methods are defensible, neither method allows one to study phenomena in their totality. Further, neither method is superior to the other.

In terms of his methodology then, Weber sought to establish a 'middle' level of empirically-derived conceptualization. As Parsons (1949:229) points out, Weber attempted to introduce 'conceptual rigor into a tradition where either intuition or a naive concern for the facts had hitherto ruled unchallenged.'

Weber, in analyzing the theories of his predecessors, began to realize that the positivists were not totally incorrect in their scientific assertions. As Hughes (1958:303) states, "they (the positivists) had simply chosen one horn of a great dilemma and the idealists another." What bothered Weber was the fact the neither tradition had a proper understanding of the concepts which they were utilizing. In other words, Weber contended that neither tradition had a satisfactory knowledge of the nature of such terms as 'law,' 'cause', 'objectivity' and 'value.' Thus, Weber took it upon himself to define these terms precisely and to delimit the range through which they could be utilized.

In terms of the concept, 'law,' as I previously pointed out, Weber (1949:76-80) argued that human behaviour is subject to laws in the same manner that events in the natural world are. He argued that if a phenomenon could be explained in rational terms, then it must be subject to certain laws. In this sense, the reader can see that for

Weber, the truth about the world of human beings was contrary to what was posited by the German idealists.

Weber came into greatest conflict with the idealist tradition with regard to the notion of causal explanation. Croce (1921) a neo-Hegelian historian had eliminated the notion of cause from historical explanation because he felt that this term was only useful in the natural sciences. While Weber did not totally disagree with this idea, he differed in terms of the criteria of historical explanation. Weber was opposed to the aesthetic categories of Dilthey and Croce; he contended that such concepts as 'intuition' and 're-experiencing' were unsatisfactory. Therefore, it was Weber's aim to develop some form of causal explanation to replace them.

Weber (1949:10) agreed with the idealist idea of delimitting the range of causal explanation in the social and historical world. However, he was not willing to disregard it altogether. For Weber, the fundamental difference between the natural and human world is due to the fact that in the latter, it is impossible to get at causal explanations or laws which would satisfactorily explain human activities. Therefore, Weber wanted to develop a method whereby one would be able to arrive at partial explanations (of a causal nature) that would be more exact than neo-Kantian procedures which utilized such concepts as 'intuition,' 'feel' and 're-experiencing.'

In effect, Weber developed an hypothetical analysis which was based on the idea that in the study of human affairs, the best that a causal explanation could do was to locate the factor; when this factor was removed, it would make the difference in a sequence of events. In short, this procedure opened the way for Weber's ideas on 'values' and 'objectivity.'

It is evident that in Weber's method of hypothetical causal explanation he emphasized that 'the decisive factor in question could only be described as decisive from the standpoint of the individual investigator' (1949:148-49). Essentially, this meant that selection of a problem is based upon some explicit or implicit value-system. Like Rickert before him, Weber also held that the choices that social scientists make, reflect the values that they hold. However, one can see that Weber diverged from Rickert in one important respect: Weber refused all the metaphysical support for his own values and in attempting to maintain the claims of 'objectivity' and 'ethical neutrality.'<sup>5</sup> Weber flatly rejected Rickert's idea of 'externally valid values' and argued that the objective validity of all empirical knowledge rested upon an analytical order of reality according to subjective categories (Lukacs, 1972:393). In short then, Weber

developed the relationship between value-judgment and scientific objectivity into a process of mutual interaction. On the one hand, he felt that scientific research diverged from some standpoint in the realm of values. Consequently, this type of investigation began to expose the range of value choices. For example, Weber stated that scientific investigation could demonstrate what values were consistent or inconsistent with each other: moreover, it could also determine the results of a proposed course of action. However, Weber clearly emphasizes that scientific investigation is not capable of making choices relating to what is considered worthy of investigation--this choice is dependent entirely upon the researcher who must weigh and choose from within his own value-system. Thus, "an empirical science could not tell anyone what he should do--but rather what he can do--and under certain circumstances, what he wishes to do" (Weber, 1949:157). Further, in refusing to recognize anything absolute about value-judgments (ie. in abandoning metaphysical support for ethical or practical norms), Weber developed a relativistic philosophy similar to Dilthey's relativism. Hughes aptly sums up this point:

Weber had ended a universe of mutual conditioning--an infinitely complex view of human affairs in which pluralism was as inevitable philosophically as a succession of unilateral approaches was a practical necessity. In brief, he arrived at a 'fictional' viewpoint...In the social and cultural world, he had found, a fixed reality was undiscoverable. All that he was sure was that human beings held to ethical and cultural values whose origin and ultimate meaning were veiled in mystery and that the investigation of these values was alone made possible by the pursuit of certain frankly arbitrary methods that in practice gave comprehensible results(1958:309).

In order to fully understand Weber's fictional approach and his philosophical pluralism, it is necessary to examine two of his concepts: namesly, 'verstehen,' and 'ideal type.'

Verstehen was undoubtedly a remnant out of Weber's idealist past. Basically, this term translates as 'interpretative understanding.' It will be remembered that this was the method of investigation utilized by certain philosophers and historians: for example, this concept was central to Dilthey's 're-experiencing' and Croce's 're-thinking.' In essence, Weber (1922a:181-193, 386-512) argued in order to understand human behaviour, the investigator must place himself in the position of the actors (subjectiv gemeinter Sinn).

It is important to point out that Weber essentially accepted this procedure without attempting to modify it; he was opposed to Emile Durkheim and the positivist tradition, and hence, knew that some intuitive method was unavoidable if the study of human behaviour was to exceed mere observation. However, while the idealists relied on understanding as a method which extolled intuition over rational-causal explanation, Weber viewed it as merely a preliminary step in the establishment of causal relationships. In other words, Weber attempted to limit the range of the verstehende methodology and combine it with causal explanations of a positive type:

Verstehen must...be controlled so far as possible by the...usual methods of causal imputation, before even the most evident interpretation can become a valid 'intelligible explanation.(1922b:428).

Weber argued that in order to achieve the dignity of a scientific proposition, the interpretative explanation must become a causal explanation. As Parsons states:

Our immediate intuitions of meaning may be real, and as such correct. But their interpretation cannot dispense with a rationally consistent system of theoretical concepts. Only in so far as they measure up to such criticism can intuitions constitute knowledge. And without such criticism the door is opened to any number of uncontrolled unverifiable allegations. Weber had a very deep and strong ethical feeling on this point: to him the intuitionist position made possible the evasion of responsibility for scientific judgments (1949:589).

In sum, one can see that Weber only retained those elements from the idealist position which could stand the test of scientific proof. By limiting and controlling this methodology, Weber was able to take this method utilized by historians and make it an acceptable method for sociology.<sup>6</sup>

Examination of Weber's concept of 'ideal type'<sup>7</sup> reveals that it is closely related to the idea of causation. For Weber (1949:90), an ideal type,

is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly

emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia...It has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components. Such concepts are constructs in terms of which we formulate relationships by the application of the category of objective possibility. By means of this category, the adequacy of our imagination, oriented and disciplined by reality, is judged.

In short, the notion of ideal type allowed Weber to escape from the individualizing and particularizing approach of German Geisteswissenschaft. It will be recalled that Weber argued that no scientific system is capable of discovering all concrete reality; neither can any conceptual apparatus do justice to all particular phenomena. For Weber (1949:70-95), science always involves selection as well as abstraction. He believed that the researcher can easily possess a problem when he chooses his conceptual apparatus. So for example, when his concepts are very general (i.e., when he attempts to explain capitalism or Protestantism by including them under the general concepts of economics and religion respectively)--the researcher will fail to detect what is distinctive about them. Conversely, when the investigator utilizes the traditional concepts of the historian and attempts to 'particularize' the phenomenon, this allows no room for a comparative analysis with other phenomena (Coser, 1971:223). Weber employed the notion of 'ideal type' in order to solve this dilemma.

From the previous quotation, one can see that an ideal type is basically an analytical construct that serves as a measuring rod for ascertaining both similarities and differences in particular cases; in short, it provides a basis for comparative analysis. The ideal type involves an accentuation of typical forms of conduct. For Weber, an ideal type does not represent any concrete reality but rather, exists one step away from it; it is constructed out of certain elements of reality and forms a coherent whole which can never be found as such in reality.

Ideal types allow the researcher to develop hypotheses linking them with the conditions that brought the phenomenon into existence, or with the consequences that result from its emergence. For example, if one wants to study the relationship between religion and capitalism<sup>9</sup>, one might develop the ideal type, 'Protestant.' The researcher then proceeds to determine empirically whether the conduct of Protestants was similar to the ideal type. This, in turn allows the researcher to make a distinction between the people who adhered to either Protestant or Catholic faiths. The investigator can then

proceed to investigate correlations between Protestantism and the development of capitalism--both being conceived as ideal types. As Julien Freund (1969:69) states: "Being unreal, the ideal type has merit of offering us a conceptual device with which we can measure real development and clarify the most important elements of empirical reality."

### CONCLUSIONS

In summary, one can see that Weber adopted many values of the Enlightenment without hesitation. As Hughes (1958:323) points out, "he took his stand with the best of the eighteenth century principles of mental integrity and social equity." Weber was undoubtedly one of the great leaders of humanistic culture:

An impassioned defender of justice...he proved to be courageous in his fight against obscurity of thought, prejudice of judgment, and injustice of action. Ultimately it was the moral dignity of reason which regardless of historical destiny, constituted his faith. (Bergstraesser, in Hughes, 1958:334).

It is evident from the preceding discussion that Weber drew from the philosophies of many of his predecessors and contemporaries: like Freud he argued for the 'supreme virtue of reason'--even though he recognized that human behaviour was rooted in the irrational. Similar to Croce, but extending far beyond him--Weber defined the epistemological for social and historical investigation with a new scientific rigor. In so doing, Weber developed valid and reliable standards for achieving and understanding of the human world (Hughes, 1958:334). In contrast to his contemporaries, Weber was able to bridge the dichotomy between the positivist and idealist traditions. Through his methodological approach, he was able to unite the residual positivism prevalent in Durkheimian thought with certain elements from the idealist tradition. As a result, Weber "abandoned to the realm of the irrational--to the unconscious--a vast field that could never be more than partially comprehensible." (Hughes, 1958:335). For Weber, recognition of the irrational and scientific rigor were disparate only on a superficial level. Reacting against the dogmatic elements of the positivist tradition as well as the 'intuitionism' of the idealists, Weber centered social thought in a 'fictional theory' which significantly affected sociology and anthropology as we see it today.

In conclusion then, this paper has attempted to emphasize to the reader that the importance of Max Weber lies not in his uniqueness, in exploring and developing new aspects of society, but rather, in

elucidating a set of concepts and developing a methodological perspective whereby the dimensions of society could be systematically and rigorously embodied into a sociological investigation. Just as Durkheim brought to a conclusive stage the analysis of the objective characteristics of social facts,<sup>10</sup> so too, Weber brought to a conclusive stage the methodology for achieving a causal account of social behaviour from a subjective point of view. For this feat, we as social scientist should be indebted to him.



## NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion of Kant and the neo-Kantians, see Korner 1955; Fletcher 1972; Hodges 1944, 1952; Ricert 1962; Aron 1964; Abel 1965, 1970.
2. For example, see Marx 1964, 1962; Tylor 1871, 1878; Morgan 1964.
3. Dilthey outlined these ideas in his discussion of hermeneutic circles.
4. Essentially, the positivists believed that the world operated according to a set of laws which operated independent of human volition. In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers who argued that man was the repository of reason, the positivists contended that objective reason resides in the world. It was the aim of man to make sense out of his world through rigorous scientific investigation. Thus, positivism was an attempt to suspend human judgment and search for truth without involving the subjective intervention of humans--a tenet flatly rejected by Weber.
5. For a detailed discussion on objectivity and ethical neutrality, see Weber, 1949:1-112.
6. See Weber, 1962:29 for a relevant discussion of the sociological method.
7. The concept of 'ideal type' did not originate with Weber; rather, he adopted this tool from his predecessors--particularly from Karl Marx.
8. Weber contended that there exist three forms of 'ideal types' that are distinguished by their level of abstraction: (1) ideal types rooted in historical particularities, ie. the 'Protestant Ethic', the 'western city'; (2) ideal types which involve abstract elements of reality that are visible in a wide variety of cultural contexts, ie. bureaucracy; (3) ideal types that refer to the manner in which men would act if they were actuated solely by economic motives. For an illustration of how Weber employed this logical construct, see: Weber 1927, 1947, 1958a, 1948c, 1968a, 1968b.
9. See Weber 1958a for a discussion of the relationship between Protestantism and the development of capitalism.
10. See Durkheim 1950 for a discussion of what he conceived to be the rightful subject matter for sociology.

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