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**INTELLIGIBILITY AND IDEALIZATION:
MARX AND WEBER**

Introduction

Fortunately, the Cold War appropriation of Max Weber by American academic sociology, aided and abetted by 'orthodox' - i.e., Second International - interpretations of Marx, may now be a thing of the past. Recent Marx and Weber scholarship not merely recovers long-suppressed elements of their complex, and probably not entirely consistent oeuvre, but allows us, as well, to enlist them as regards problems posed by current work in the social sciences.¹ A current central problem regards the goals of a social science. Here we can sharply contrast 'prediction'--promoted by the assumption that explanation and prediction are symmetrical -- with a radically different goal, viz., intelligibility, roughly, the effort to understand what makes things the way they are. On my view, both Marx and Weber were on the side of intelligibility although they offered very different (and opposing) views on how to achieve it. For Weber it was in terms of 'ideal types' that we attempt to 'understand' (*verstehen*) historical reality, 'to understand its development, which is concretely determined, and its necessarily concrete patterns.'² Marx would have agreed with this notion of the goals of a human science, but granting the anachronisms 'idealization' is best articulated in terms of a strongly realist conception of theory.³ While the focus of the present essay is intelligibility and idealization, it will be necessary, I believe, to provide an overall framework for my consideration of their very different positions. This involves clearing away, a bit dogmatically, some common mis-readings, pointing to some tensions (or worse) and emphasizing some critical points of contact and agreement.

Materialism/Idealism

The first issue to be considered is the (still widespread?) view that Weber and Marx polarize on the idealist/materialist dichotomy. In my view, the dichotomy, as I think both Marx and Weber saw, was itself of dubious value. In any case, it is an error to hold that Weber's approach was idealistic or subjectivistic *because* he held that *verstehen* was indispensable to social science. As Weiss writes:

For Weber interpretative understanding denotes specific way in which social reality as such is presented to us both in the everyday world and in scientific practice. This is so because historical-social reality is defined and constituted in terms of 'meaningfulness.'⁴

For Marx, as for Weber, the social world, unlike the natural world which exists independently of us, is our product, the product of conscious social beings transactionally engaged with nature. There is nothing mysterious about 'interpretive understanding' since all human communication presumes it. (Weber termed it a 'transcendental assumption' of both everyday life and of any attempt to understand everyday life.⁵ Indeed, were it not for the naturalistic positivism which captured late nineteenth century thought (including, of course, Marxism) *and* modern academic social science (with pretensions to being nomological sciences in Weber's sense, below), this much would have been an uncontested assumption of any human science.⁶

Related to this is the contention by Cold Warriors (on both sides!) that it was Weber's explicit project to reject 'materialist' analysis and replace it with an analysis which explained history in terms of 'ideas.' The *Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* is usually taken as the case example. Of course, Weber did reject the then current Second International reading of historical materialism; but there is now ample scholarship which shows that the base/superstructure dichotomy essential to this reading cannot be attributed to Marx.⁷ Some such dichotomy is assumed by both sides. For Marx, surely, people were the causal agents of history and they were people with ideas acting in situated contexts with limited choices. Like Marx, Weber rejected Hegelian versions of history in which concrete reality 'emanated' from abstract ideas which had independent existences. Not only are there too many texts which confirm this, but the substantive historical work of both Marx and Weber show that they aimed at what is best termed structurally informed explanatory histories in which the 'economic' structures (including those ideas which are involved in their constitution!) were critically important in 'determining' the practices which conscribed choices. E.g., Weber:

Liberated as we are from the antiquarian belief that all cultural phenomena can be deduced as a product or function of the constellation of "material" interests, we believe nevertheless that the analysis of social and cultural phenomena with Special reference to their economic conditioning and ramifications was a scientific principle of creative fruitfulness, and with careful application and freedom from dogmatic restrictions, will remain such for a long time to come. The so-called "materialist conception of history- as *Weltanschauung* or a formula for the causal explanation of historical reality is to be rejected most emphatically.⁸

Indeed, speaking about the *Archive fur Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, which had provided the occasion for this much quoted essay, he concluded: "The advancement of the economic *interpretation* of history is one of the most important aims of our journal."

As the quoted text suggests, there was another aspect of Weber's rejection of "the materialist conception of history." It regarded attempts at mono-causal explanations, but especially the idea that there were laws of history from which one could 'deduce' historical events. I return to this, but here we may say (without here developing the argument) that Marx would have agreed with Weber that there were no laws of history and that the explanation of any event (historical or otherwise) involved appeal to many causes.⁹ As we shall see, Weber had a highly original solution to the problem of explaining the concrete. Because Marx's views have been obscured or confounded by appeals to 'materialist dialectics,' he too has been badly misread. In my view, what is wanted is sonic clarity as regards their respective, but never developed, philosophies of science.¹⁰

Weber and Post-Kantian Philosophy

Weber's specific response to Kantian philosophy is relevant here. While it is often said that Weber was "influenced" by neo-Kantian philosophy, in my view, saying this is entirely unhelpful since the sole Kantian aspect of Weber's epistemology was shared by a variety of late nineteenth century epistemologies. This aspect was the idea that knowledge was at least part-product of what the inquirer brings to inquiry.¹¹

Briefly, Kant had argued that the world 'in-itself' was unknowable. In addition, then, to Kant's specific transcendental philosophy, there were a variety of possible alternative solutions to the dichotomy of subject and object. One was Hegelian absolute idealism, rejected by Weber and Marx. Others included various versions of post-Kantian philosophy, from Fichte to Rickert, Lask, Gottl, Lipps, Hertz, e.g., to versions of pragmatism and conventionalism, e.g., in Peirce, James,

Schiller, Poincaré', and Duhem. If one must locate Marx and Weber within this problematic, their response was broadly pragmatic.¹²

In my view, there were two assumptions which Weber made. Both are critical in seeing the point and character of his overall philosophy and, especially, his notion of ideal types. First, following the generation of the 'epistemological problem' by modern epistemology, he accepted that there was a gap between concept and reality, a *'haitus irrationalis.'* Thus, the function of concepts, he insisted, could not be "the reproduction of 'objective' reality in the analysts's imagination."¹³ Second, he assumed that there was a structured reality which existed independently of inquiry. Kocka notes that "Weber has been criticized for presenting science with an object that does not exist in historical reality... Weber's reality, 'an amorphous detritus of appearances,' supplies no criterion for choice, evaluation, and control of those perspectives which make knowledge possible."¹⁴ But Kocka argues, this stance "cannot explain sufficiently numerous other elements and passages within his philosophy of science," in particular those elements that imply that if reality does not permit us to simply "read out" cognitive postures and truth claims, these "can be questioned and controlled." As Kocka says, "the 'heterogenous continuum' is not wholly without structure."¹⁵

Weber's solution, then, is essentially pragmatic. Since, for him, there is always room in the choice of concepts to be employed, and concepts can be only "means of thought for the intellectual mastery of empirical data," *interests* figure decisively in the selection. This is not, as Kocka says, a thoroughly 'decisionist' posture, since not only is there a 'material world,' but there is a 'material culture' which exists independently of inquiry. Both constrain inquiry. We can defend this interpretation by considering Weber's account of two kinds of science.

Weber: Two Kinds of Science

Weber accepted a by then familiar distinction between two kinds of science: "analytic" or "nomological", and "concrete." The "historical" sciences were paradigms of this latter, and, of course, they were his major concern. The purpose of "nomological science" is "generalized abstraction and the elimination of 'purely contingent facts.'" Concrete science has as its aim "the descriptive reproduction of reality in its full actuality (*wie es eigenlicht gewesen*)."¹⁶ For Weber (regardless of what were the views of Windelband, Rickert, Simmel, Dilthey or others), this was not a distinction between natural science and social science: There were natural sciences which were concrete, e.g., meteorology and biology, *and* it was logically possible to have a nomological social science.¹⁷

In the ideal case, a nomological science abstracts from the properties of experienced concrete reality by means of concepts which are "increasingly universal in extension" and "increasingly empty in content" (intension). Here 'abstraction' is 'generalizing': we "progressively strip away the properties of concrete entities until we find a common feature or features. Pure mechanics is the nomological science *par excellence* because we can frame general concepts of unconditional validity. Moreover, these give us knowledge which is "worth knowing."¹⁸ This is a contingent fact about both our world and our interests. Thus, one can do mechanics because the concepts of mass and acceleration represent "generic features" (*Gattungsmässig*) of *all* bodies and because the laws of these, true of all bodies are "worth knowing." Because of this, the defining feature of nomological science, that explanation is subsumption under law, is achievable.¹⁹

Weber was clear that the difference between the two kinds of science did not turn on epistemological or ontological differences regarding the human and non-human world, but on

considerations which cut across this division. For example, at one place he compares "knowledge of the biogenetic aspect of the animal and plant world" with "socioeconomic knowledge." He insists that "in neither case can concrete reality be deduced from 'laws' and 'factors.'"²⁰ But this has nothing to do with the fact that living things are different than non-living things. "The real reason," he continued, "is that the analysis of reality is concerned with the configuration into which ... 'factors' are arranged to form cultural [or biogenetic] phenomena."²¹ In both cases, our interest is in the particularity of the real concrete, and this can not be 'deduced.'

Thus, not everything "worth knowing" answers to the strategies of nomological science. Weber's criticism of Roscher shows clearly that the cultural sciences could be nomological but that so conceived we would be poorly served. As nomological, concept formation "would have the purpose of reducing, insofar as possible, all cultural phenomena to purely quantitative categories of some sort." The resulting "system" would "constitute an abstract representation of the features common to all historical events."²² But indeed, "for knowledge of the historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because the most devoid of content, are the least valuable." Weber's conclusion is emphatic: "The conclusion which follows ... is that the theses that the ideal of science is the reduction of empirical reality to 'laws' is meaningless."²³

At the contrasting pole, then, there are "the sciences of concrete reality," paradigmatically, history. In these sciences, there are no unconditionally valid concepts which can represent anything worth knowing. Instead we want knowledge of those aspects of reality "which we regard as essential because of their individual *peculiarities*."²⁴ Concept formation takes the reverse strategy: concepts are needed which are increasingly rich in content and are increasingly particular in extension. Instead then of generalizing or class concepts (*Gattungsbegriffe*) which represent the generic features of phenomena, in the cultural sciences we have the opportunity to construct ideal-types. Although the point will surely be contested, Weber was sufficiently clear that as mechanics had no use for ideal types, the cultural sciences, qua cultural, had little or no use for generalizing concepts.²⁵

Ideal Types

Ideal types, then, are *constructions* framed to capture what is 'essential' to the peculiar. Weber writes:

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 (*Gedankenbild*).²⁶

It is fair to say that *all* his key concepts, from 'city-economy' to 'state' to 'market' to 'rational action' were ideal types, even though, as I suggest, there were two very different kinds of ideal types. But before turning to this, we need to see what they share.

First, they are distinguished from those concepts found in nomological science in not being 'generic.' That is, they do not "merely summarize the common features of certain empirical phenomena." They are not, accordingly, hypotheses to be tested: They cannot be falsified by a counter-instance nor verified by inductive generalization. They may, of course, fail to apply to some concrete situation. Indeed, the logic of the ideal type was exactly that it allowed the inquirer

to unequivocally identify phenomena, for example, to see precisely how 'political capitalism' differed from 'colonial' or 'adventure' or 'modern industrial' capitalism.

Second, ideal 'types' are not descriptions of reality exactly because they are "like a utopia which has been arrived at by the analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality."²⁷ For example, the relation of 'exchange economy' to the "empirical data consists solely in the fact that where market-conditioned relationships of the type referred by the abstract construct are discovered or suspected to exist in reality to some extent, we can make the *characteristic* features of this relationship pragmatically clear and *understandable* by reference to the *ideal type*."²⁸ The 'characteristic features' are defining features, 'essences' of sorts, but as is plain, they are nominal essences (in Locke's useful sense). That is, ideal types are concepts which assemble the sensible properties of a thing and justify our calling it by a particular name.

Third, because these are utopias - literally nowhere, and because different features of concrete reality can be brought together, many such utopias might be constructed, each reflecting some valid 'point of view' from which they can be significant for us." But it is crucial to see that whether the 'point of view' is valid is determined 'objectively,' a function of whether, in fact, it is a culturally significant point of view. "Significance," Weber writes, is "historically variable in accordance with the culture and the ideas which rule men's minds." Of course, the 'for us,' relativizes (or relationalizes) the matter.²⁹

Types of Ideal Types

While Weber is anything but clear, it seems that there were two broad sorts of ideal types. If so, this would go some way toward resolving what are taken to be 'confusions' or outright contradictions in his methodology. Examples of the first include, 'merchant capitalism,' 'bureaucracy,' 'Protestant ethic,' 'modern state.' No doubt it was these sorts of concepts which people commonly confused with abstract *kinds*. But there were also ideal types which are 'teleological constructions.' The sense of these is clearest, perhaps, in this text:

Teleological rationalizations can be used as a constructive device for the development of conceptual schemes. These conceptual schemes are of extraordinary heuristic value for the causal analysis of historical relations. On the one hand, these constructive conceptual schemes (1) can have a purely concrete character; hypotheses for the interpretation of single, concrete complexes... On the other hand ... these conceptual schemes (2) can be ideal-typical constructions of a general character, like the 'laws' of abstract economics which theoretically deduce the consequences of certain economic situations by presupposing strictly rational action.³⁰

Examples of 'teleological rationalizations' include not only the concepts of modern economics, e.g., 'profit motive,' but the whole of what is called 'action theory' by erstwhile Weberians. In general, the first type was meant to identify unambiguously what was 'essential' about a concrete system of institutions (or social formations) so that exactly it could be causally explained. By contrast, 'teleological rationalizations' were meant to capture the sense (meaning) of types of activities. It was then possible, as above, to provide an explanation as to why just those activities and 'meanings' are in use by members. These two inevitably (and reasonably) ran together, thus explaining Weber's inattention to their differences.

We need to spend a moment on 'teleological rationalizations.' We hinted that the method of Ideal types involved a two-step process. Weber refers to the first step as the effort at an interpretation of an activity "adequate at the level of meaning" or "subjectively adequate." Of course, he poses this in terms of 'motives' and 'intentions,'³¹ but he is quick to point out that the interest of cultural science is *never* the "actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor." While this is a legitimate question for jurisprudence or ethics (where one must try to fix responsibility), "the empirical sciences of action are concerned with "pure types," 'constructs' attributable to 'hypothetical actors in a given type of action.'³²

Here the confusions between understanding and explaining acts, and understanding and explaining types of acts haunts us.³³ Consider the difference between explaining the particular decision of a person to sell drugs or to invest in real property with the effort to explain what structures criminal activity or investment. In both cases, of course, one must 'understand' what criminal activity and investment is if we are to explain it, that is, if we are to give an account of what produced it or brought it into being. But, in general, we explain specific acts by appeal both to the material conditions which structure the possible choices *and* the specific motives, goals and beliefs in terms of which the actor made the choice she or he made. On the other hand, we explain a *type* of action (or a pattern of action) by showing what are the causal conditions (structures) of that type. Indeed, as Weber insists, "We do not 'infer'... 'actual action,' but rather 'objectively possible' complexes."³⁴

Although this is always missed, Weber held that the so-called laws of economics are 'teleological rationalizations.' They do not explain or predict acts; they are schemata of intelligibility providing an 'understanding' of 'objectively possible' complexes. Weber argued that pure economic theory is not psychologistic, even if practitioners themselves so believe. There is a failure to distinguish "between 'the principle of profit' in objectified economic management and the mental instinct of self-interest and selfishness in the human subject."³⁵ The analysis depends upon the former, not the latter. Thus, economic laws "cannot be deduced from a psychological analysis of the individual, but rather from an idealtypical reproduction of the competitive price mechanism of the objective situation as stipulated by the theory."³⁶ That is, the theory idealtypically defines a meaning structure which is a material resource for hypothetical actors. It is thus that, for him, we gain 'understanding: of the system (and thus also that economics is not a predictive science).'³⁷

More generally, then, Weber seems to have recognized that the attribution of motives, intentions, and goals is a resource for *members of society* in explaining behavior, and that the cultural scientist cannot escape this (at the risk of distorting the domain to be explained). But the aim of the investigator is not to improve on member's explanations of their activities.³⁸ An alternative would be to understand why just those activities and 'meanings' are in use by members. Thus, one needs *first* an interpretation of the activity which is "adequate at the level of meaning." But we can go beyond this: we can give an account of just why *those* 'meanings' are involved (perhaps constitutively) in those types of actions.³⁹

Ideal Types and Causal Explanations

The kind of social science which Weber sought was "an *empirical science* of concrete reality [*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*]." He aimed "to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically *so* and not *otherwise*."⁴⁰ But we are now in position to see clearly Weber's novel solution.

Consider, he writes, one concrete act of exchange. "As soon as we seriously attempt an exhaustive description of all the individual components of this 'individual phenomenon,' to say nothing of explaining it causally," there is, he insists, an "absolute infinitude," "an infinite multiplicity of successively and coexistingly emerging and disappearing events, both 'within' and 'outside' ourselves."⁴¹ Accordingly, "all the analysis of infinite reality which the finite mind can conduct rests on the tacit assumption that only a finite portion of this reality constitutes the object of scientific investigation, and that only it is 'Important' in the sense of being 'worthy of being known.'"⁴²

We have seen the limits of nomological science in this regard and we have seen also that for the cultural sciences as concrete sciences, we can construct ideal types.

Ideal types solve the problem of causal explanation in a complex multi-causal world. Because reality is causally infinitely complex, "in order to penetrate to the real [*wirklich*] causal interrelationships, we *construct unreal ones*."⁴³ Since properly constructed ideal types do capture "traits, meaningful in their essential features, from the empirical reality of our culture, ideal types can serve to identify what is "essential" in the way of causal attribution. Thus,

if ... I wish to conceptualize "sect" genetically, e.g., with reference to certain important cultural significances which the "sectarian spirit" has hid for modern culture, certain characteristics of both become *essential* because they stand in an adequate causal relation to those influences. However, the concepts thereupon become idealtypical, in the sense that they appear in full conceptual integrity either not at all or only in individual instances. Here, as elsewhere, every concept which is not purely classificatory diverges from reality.
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We provide "the causes of their being historically so and not *otherwise*," and, as seems clear, these causes are *pragmatically* essential, being those idealized causes without which the phenomenon, ideal-typically identified, could not be what we are calling it.

If the foregoing analysis is close to being correct, we can see why his causal analyses are so contentious. Stephen P. Turner has ably raised the problem:

In the *General Economic History*, based on notes for his final series of academic lectures, Weber reiterated what can be found scattered throughout his later writings on 'the distinguishing characteristics of Western capitalism and its causes' by listing explanatory factors, including rational law, the rational organization of labor, rational technology, rational accounting, free labor, the use of stock shares, the rational spirit, and a rationalistic economic ethic. The status of these lists is left vague: 'distinguishing characteristics' and 'causes' are never distinguished. The rational organization of labor is at one moment produced by Western capitalism, at another its primary cause, at another its distinctive feature... The lists are not so much an answer to the question of the origin of *homo economicus modernus* as a restatement of it at the institutional level, radically broadened into the question of the origin of *homo rationalis modernus*.⁴⁵

This is, I believe, a consequence of the epistemology and methodology of ideal types. Ultimately, the method of ideal types constrains Weber to the empirically real. Because of this, causes can only be conjunctions - as Hume had insisted. It is thus that there is no principled way to discriminate between mere 'correlations' (especially if they are invariant) and causes, and no way,

accordingly, to demarcate a distinguishing feature of a concrete phenomenon. from what produced it. It is also an obvious place to turn to a comparison with Marx.

Marx: A Realist Alternative

I believe that Marx shared in the assumption that the human sciences were concrete and historical, that with Weber, the ideal of nomological science had to be rejected. Moreover, Marx also assumed that, following Kant, there was a gap between concept and reality which could not be closed in Hegelian fashion. Finally, he assumed, with Weber, that reality was structured.

There were, however, three fundamental (and related) differences. Put briefly, for Marx, the point of theory was the effort to represent real essences. As Dilworth has noted, Locke's formulation (with his contrast to nominal essence, as above) is here apt: The real essence is "the real internal, but generally unknown constitution of things, whereon their discoverable qualities depend."⁴⁶ The contrast to Weber was profound. For Marx, knowability was not restricted to pragmatically defensible 'utopias.' For him, inference to the in-principle unexperienceable had not yet been codified as 'metaphysics.'⁴⁷ And this meant, as well, that the commonsense understanding of the social world might well be superseded by a deeper understanding, an understanding which explained not only what structured choices, but why people have the beliefs about the social world which they have. Third, by virtue of this, Marx could argue that the interest of social science was emancipatory, that inquiry guided by the search for the real, but generally unknown constituting features of the social world empowered all those whose subjugation depended on their remaining in ignorance.⁴⁸ Plainly, I cannot hope here to develop any of these large themes. Instead, I make the effort to sketch, by way of contrast to Weber, Marx's realist methodology.

A Sketch of Marx's Method

Sayer has given what is, perhaps, the most detailed account of Marx's methodology.⁴⁹ The form of reasoning closely parallels what Hanson called (following Peirce) 'abduction' and has strong parallels to Dilworth's 'Abstractive-Theoretical' model of scientific explanation.⁵⁰

Marx's starting point, like Weber's, is the concrete as it presents itself phenomenally. And like Weber, he is interested in its particularity. For example, the commodity is a product of labor, and the category, 'product of labour' is, of course, a transhistorical category. But this is only the beginning since the analysis, a "-peeling away," is meant exactly to distinguish "attributes which pertain to production as such from attributes which stem from the particular relations of the mode of production of which these phenomena are manifestations."⁵¹ The next step, then, was "to posit mechanisms and conditions which would, if they existed, respectively explain how and why the phenomena we observe come to assume the forms they do."⁵²

The 'mechanism' (again oversimplifying considerably) is exchange, but the critical aspect of this, not noticed by Ricardians (nor by "bourgeois" theory) is 'abstract labor.'

When we bring the products of our labour into relation with one another as values, it is not because we see in these articles the material receptacles of homogeneous human labour. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it.⁵³

We arrive at the concept of 'abstract labor' by 'abstraction,' but 'abstract labor' is real; it is not an abstraction at all.⁵⁴ Where there is a spontaneous division of labor and labor is 'private,' 'things' have exchange values through the simple mechanism of exchange. So, as Sayer notes, quoting Marx, exchange value is "the form of social labour as it exists on the basis of commodity production."⁵⁵

Nowak has argued in some detail that we can think of Marx's analysis in *Capital* as the effort to construct models which represent real mechanisms at work in capitalist society.⁵⁶ The initial model is extremely simple in that Marx has abstracted away everything but free wage laborers and capitalists. The only process represented is the purchase of labor power to be employed (abstractly) in the production of commodities. Although there is money, there are, strictly, not even mechanisms of circulation, e.g., banks; there is no state, not even the domestic and familial structures which give productive workers flesh and blood existence. There are, hence, no mechanisms producing patriarchy, or racism, or anything else of manifest importance in understanding what is happening in any concrete capitalist society. But this initial model represents what is real, as real, presumably, as the mechanism which results in the solubility of NaCl in H₂O. In *Capital*, then, Marx progressively 'concretizes' his analysis; but, of course, he never gets even close to the real concrete; indeed, even had he completed what seems to have been his plan, he still would not have reached the real concrete exactly because while all capitalist societies are capitalist by virtue of the mechanisms detailed in *Capital*, Volume 1, all capitalist societies will, finally, be concretely different.

It is thus that Marx would have agreed with Weber that social science is not usefully nomological - if that means, as Weber (and modern social science assumes), that the aim is explanation by subsumption under law. On the other hand, for Marx (and realist theory of science), the processes engendered by mechanisms are lawful. Thus, if the analysis of *Capital* is sound, the profit rate, *ceteris paribus*, must fall. It is a necessary outcome of those mechanisms. To be sure, as Marx fully well realized, the profit need not fall; but that is because there are other causes at work in the world: the opportunities of capitalists to export capital, the actions of the state or of unions, a war, and so on. What actually happens is the causal product of these, as Weber often acknowledged.

This implies that while theory - including theories of the capitalist state, of racism and sexism, of schools and media and the rest - is essential if we are to understand what happens in capitalist societies, we will need to employ this theory concretely, which is to say historically and empirically. Weber was correct that we must select from among the causes so theorized and that our selection is, in part at least, interest determined. But it is not determined only by our interest. The analysis in *Capital* is enormously valuable exactly because, as Weber acknowledged, capitalism is "the most fateful force in our modern social life."⁵⁷ That is, if Marx was correct, everything that is culturally significant in capitalist society is more or less affected by the mechanisms theorized in *Capital*. Given, of course, that the concrete is a "complex of determinations," the actual effects of this 'fateful force' are contingent, unpredictable and perhaps, even, indeterminate. Capitalism can, then, be a 'fateful force' even if there are no laws of history.

Conclusion

Both Marx and Weber sought 'intelligibility.' For Weber this was largely the effort to identify and explain the 'characteristic features' of the concrete; for Marx it was the effort to describe the 'nature' and 'constitution' of the things which comprised a complex concrete. Both resisted

explanation as construed by the covering-law model, and both saw that the explanation of *events*, construed as happenings nameable by definite descriptions, had to be historical. Because Weber was constrained by an empirical realism, he was led to his highly original notion of ideal-types, pragmatically justified 'utopias' which provided clarity about the 'characteristic' features of concretes. Marx took a different tack. For him, 'idealization' was a 'peeling away' from the concrete in the effort to discover (now quoting Harre'), "the nature and constitution of the things involved which makes clear to us what mechanisms have been brought into operation."

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NOTES

1 A very partial list of some of the better recent Weber scholarship would include three anthologies: R.J. Antonio and R.M. Glassman, eds. (1985); W.J. Mommsen and J. Osterhammel, eds. (1987) and S. Lash and S. Whimster, eds. (1987). Also of considerable value is J. Wiess (1981), S. Hekman (1983), W. Outhwaite (1983) and W. Hennis (1987).

2 Weber (1903--06), p. 64.

3 As regards 'realism,' I have in mind Harre (1970, 1987); Bhaskar (1976); Dilworth (1986). As regards recent Marx scholarship, I am much influenced by the 'realist' readings of Marx in D. Sayer (1979) and (1987)- Bhaskar (1979); Nowak (1980).

4 Weiss (1980), p. 67.

5 Compare here, Giddens's useful term, 'double hermeneutic.' Members engage in interpretative understanding in everyday activity. Social scientists are engaged in a hermeneutic about these 'meanings.' Hence, in contrast to natural science, a double hermeneutic.

6 Both 'naturalism' and 'positivism' are weasel words. As used here, anti-naturalism holds that there is a radical epistemological and/or methodological disjunction between inquiry in the physical sciences and inquiry in the humanities: radically, that a social science is impossible, or less radically, that, e.g., explanation or theory construction in the humanities proceeds on entirely different principles, such that instead of causal explanation, explanation in the humanities is *verstehen*. Naturalists deny this, even if they acknowledge that there are differences, e.g., (the pertinence of a double hermeneutic in social science or in the use of experiment.

But naturalism is not identical to positivism, as seems to be presumed by a host of important writers. Thus, e.g., Schutz becomes an anti-naturalist opposed to the 'naturalism' of Nagel or Hempel. See Natanson (1963). It is best, perhaps, to distinguish four theses usually associated with positivism: (1) Only empirical reality is knowable. In 20th century positivism, a theory of empirical meaning attends this. (2) 'Action' can be understood in terms of 'behavior' (materialism, physicalism, behaviorism). (3) X causes Y (as per Hume) means 'whenever X, Y'; and (4) Explanation is explicated in terms of the covering law model.

On the present view, Marx was clearly not a positivist; Weber seems to have accepted (1) and (3) but not (2) or (4) - at least as regards (the human sciences. See below.

7 See especially Sayer (1987).

8 Weber (1904), p. 68.

9 Here we need to distinguish laws of history from system laws, e.g., in capitalism, the law of the falling rate of profit. See below.

10 See Manicas (1997).

11 Weiss (1980) and Kocka (1966) have been the clearest on the critical issues. Weiss points out that Weber held none of the distinctive features of Kant's analysis, e.g., the *a priori* (universal and necessary) character of (he categories of reason, the particular Kantian solution to problems in ethics and esthetics, the Kantian project for history. Similarly, as regards other 'neo-Kantian' influences,' Guy Oakes. (1987) is a welcome exception. Interesting is the fact that neither Marxists nor anti-Marxists specify what is objectionable (or not) about Weber's 'Kantianism.' Marxists, as Weiss argues, have followed Lenin's lead in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Unfortunately, Lenin (now following the later Engels) was unaware (reasonably) of Marx's effort to transcend epistemological materialism/idealism. Weber could not accept the Marxist refusal to countenance the *haitus irrationalls* of concept and reality. For them, of course, truth depended upon a 'correspondence' of concept and reality, but unfortunately, the 'reflection' theory was an entirely inadequate solution. See Weiss (1980), chapter 3.

12 By 'broadly pragmatic' I mean that they both had anthropocentric conceptions of knowledge, rejected Kantian transcendental moves, and warranted knowledge claims methodologically. For Marx, see Bernstein (1964).

13 Weber (1904), p. 106.

14 Kocka (1966), p. 154. My account is much influenced by Kocka.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Weber (1903--06), p. 55.

17 Following Hegel, Roscher had distinguished between 'philosophical' and 'historical' sorts of sciences. But this "immediately reminded" Weber "of the contemporary distinction between *nomological sciences* and *sciences of concrete reality*- (*von Gesetzesund Wirklichkettswissenschaften*), a distinction, he continued, "which appears most unambiguously in the methodological contrast between the exact natural sciences, on the one hand, and political history, on the other- (p. 55).

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 56 - 57.

19 Weber (1904) noted that evolutionary theory encouraged the mistaken view that "there was in general no conceivable meaning of scientific work other than the discovery of *laws* of events." It was thus that proponents of the "'abstract'-4heorctical method- insisted that "science can make behavior directly intelligible with axiomatic evidentness and accordingly reveal its laws" (pp. 86, 87).

20 Weber (1904), p. 75.

21 *Ibid.* See also Weber (1903-06): "The logical peculiarity of 'historical' knowledge ... has nothing at all to do with the distinction, between the 'psychical' and the . physical,' the 'personality' and 'action,' on the one hand, and the dead 'natural object' and the 'mechanical process of nature,' on the other" (pp. 184 - 85).

22 Weber (1903--06), p. 64.

23 Weber (1904), p. 80.

24 Weber (1903-06), p. 57.

25 Weber (1904) emphatically rejected the "common notion" that "in the sphere of cultural phenomena, the abstract type is identical with the abstract kind (*Gattungsmassigen*)" (p. 100). In another place, he wrote:

With the exception of pure mechanics, on the one hand, and certain [parts of the] historical sciences (*gewissen Teilen der Geschichtswissenschaft*), on the other, it is certain that none of the 'sciences' which in fact exist can develop their concepts from only one of these two points of view (Weber (19034)6), p. 58; my translation, from Weber (1973), p. 6).

This text raises some questions. A reasonable interpretation is that *qua* historical, the historical sciences cannot dispense with ideal types, even if there are aspects of the study (or 'disciplines,' e.g., archeology?) which also use generic (class) terms. See below, note 30.

26 Weber (1904), p. 90.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, p. 84. Weber's use of the term 'subjective' has perhaps misled readers. Weber makes two claims: the (innocent) claim that values always function in determining *what* we investigate and the (still innocent) claim that "worthy of being known," like "the extent or depth to which ... investigation attempts to penetrate the infinite causal web" are *cultural* variables, *not* reducible to the values of the investigator. ' They are 'subjective,' that is, in the weak sense that they are not read out of 'the things themselves.'

I do not, however, consider here whether this relationism is, in some sense, vicious. This matter is well treated by Hekman (1983), pp. 153 - 160.

30 Weber (19034)6), p. 189. In *Economy and Sociely* (p. 9), Weber refers clearly to the second sort and directs the reader, for further clarification, to his 1904 essay, "'Objectivity' in Social Science." But in these passages (which are the *locus classicus* for ideal types), his examples do not include terms like 'the profit motive,' 'instrumental rational action' or 'traditional action.' Instead, we have 'Methodism,' 'city--economy,' 'capitalist culture,' 'imperialism,' and 'innumerable concepts of like character'(p. 92).

Some writers (e.g., Watkins (1952), Rex (1971) and Burger (1976)) argue that Weber conflated the tools of the historian and sociologist, that the historian needs specific concepts, while the sociologist needs concepts which "generalize over cultures and periods..This view assumes,

without warrant in my opinion. that Weber acknowledged 'sociology as an autonomous (and nomological!) science. Hekman's account is most useful, but she too seems willing to allow that "the ideal type is to be constructed on a principle of synthesis that is inclusive of both the historian's interest and the sociologist's interest in the significant aspects of the phenomena derived from many societies" (p. 40). Does this imply that for Weber there is an autonomous sociology which seeks "generalizations"? I am suggesting that Weber ended with the view that he clearly expressed in a 1914 letter to von Below:

We are absolutely in accord that history should establish what is specific to, say, the medieval city; but I think this is possible only if we first find what is missing in other cities ... And so it is with everything else. It is the subsequent task of history to find a causal explanation for these specific truths ... Sociology, as I understand it, can perform this very modest preparatory work (cited in Weber (1968), p. lviii).

Others (e.g. Andrews (1984)) have argued that Weber has two incompatible sorts of ideal types, one "a proper name of a particular cultural entity," e.g., 'Protestantism,' and the other "a generic concept defined by its abstract attributes and denoting an open set" (p. 42). On the present view, all ideal types are 'defined by abstract attributes' and all define 'open sets'; but all are consistently distinguished from generic concepts in that they are not intended to classify, but especially by means of necessary and/or sufficient conditions. Weber (1904) writes: "A 'definition' of... synthetic historical terms according to the scheme of *genusproximum* and *differetia specifica* is naturally nonsense" (p. 93).

31 In *Economy and Society*, Weber defines action in terms of 'subjective meaning' and an action as social insofar as "its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.- As Giddens has argued, this surely will not do. This formulation seems to commit Weber to a psychological theory which presumably has as its aim, the explanation of the acts of individuals in terms of their intentions and motives (assumed to be causes). On this view (fundamental to both Parsonian theory and Schutzian phenomenology), motives and intentions (as Bilmes (1987) notes) are theoretical resources for the inquirer.

Andrews (1984) gives an entirely sensible account, concluding that Weber recognized that "whereas the practical commonsense understanding of human behavior relies mainly ... on emphatic comprehension, the scientific method is needed for going beyond the knowledge thus attainable" (p. 31).

32 Cf. Weber (1903-06), pp. 189 - 190.

33 This is a characteristic error of the methodological individualist, a posture which Weber did not entirely escape. Gerth and Mills (1964) point out that "taken literally, the 'method of understanding' would hardly allow for Weber's use of structural explanations" (p. 57). Also see Andrews (1984), pp. 31 - 41.

34 Weber (1903-06), p. 190.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Nor was political economy a predictive science for Marx. But he would also have insisted that ideal-typical theorizing was insufficient for understanding, exactly because political economy "has never once asked the question why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude of that value" (Marx, (1967), p. 80). See below.

38 Bilmes (1987) argues that Weber inspired 'the standard view,' a view which fails to see the difference between considering 'internal states' as theoretical resources for members and considering them as theoretical resources for the social scientist. As with ethnomethodology, motivation, etc. are properly treated as 'topics,' and not as 'resources.'

I am arguing, of course, that action theory, even if inspired by Weber, misreads him on this critical point. The Parsonian synthesis of neo-classical economics, Durkheim and Weber, of course, propelled this misreading.

39 Even though Weber proceeded from a garbled notion of subjective meaning, he was, as Giddens (1977) says, quite correct to insist that *verstehen* and *erklären* are 'two sequential aspects of social scientific method, that, indeed, the division between "adequacy at the level of meaning" and "causal adequacy" is essential for "the possibility of a social science which does more than describe actors' own understanding of their acts."' (p. 182).

40 Weber (1904), p. 72.

41 *Ibid.* This is not a claim that reality is chaotic, but that it is complex. Thus against the "fantastic claim" that, e.g., "abstract theories of price," can, by ostensibly following the analogy of physical science propositions," deductively explain economic behavior, Weber writes:

This claim fails to observe that in order to be able to reach this result even in the simplest case, the totality of the existing historical reality including every one of its causal relationships must be assumed as 'given' and presupposed as known. But if this type of knowledge were accessible to the finite mind of man, abstract theory would have no cognitive value whatsoever" (*Ibid.*, p. 88).

42 *Ibid.*

43 Weber (1904), pp. 185 - 86. Also: "A description of even the smallest slice of reality can never be exhaustive" and "the number and type of causes which have influenced any given event [or concrete entity] are always infinite and there is nothing in the things themselves to set some of them apart as alone meriting attention" (*ibid.*, p. 78).

44 Weber (1904), pp. 93 - 94.

45 Turner (1985), p. 176.

46 Dilworth (1989), p. 175.

47 Marx, of course, arrived at this solution by means of a continuous critique of Hegel, but especially on the question of the relation of the concrete and the abstract. Weber, operating in an empiricist milieu which included a invigorated Kantianism, moved with the mainstream. See Manicas (1987).

48 See Bhaskar (1979), especially pp. 69 - 91.

49 Sayer(1979).

50 Dilworth (1989).

51 Sayer (1979), pp. 110 - 112.

52 Ibid., 114

53 Marx (1867), p. 74.

54 Colletti (1972).

55 Sayer(1979).

56 Nowak (1980).

57 Weber (1920), p. 17.

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