

**Sociological Perspectives on Modernity**  
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**Lecture – 07**  
**Sociological Modernism: Max Weber I**

Welcome to the 7th lecture of the course on sociological perspectives on modernity. Till now we have discussed thematic preliminaries and the second section half of it we have covered, I mean we have discussed Marx's views on modernity. But whichever theorist we are looking at whichever theoretical trajectory we are looking at, we always be looking at through the 4-central philosophical and political foundations of critical modernist paradigm in sociology.

This is very important; we have already discussed Marx's views on modernity against the backdrop of these 4 pillars of modernity. Now in another 3 4 lectures, maybe 4 lectures including today's 7th lecture, we will be reflecting on max Weber's interpretations of modernity through the lenses of those 4 critical paradigms of modernity 4 central ideas of modernity, 4 central themes of modernity.

Namely holism or totality, reflexivity, rationality, and social movements, but before starting with Weber's interpretations of modernity, let us first see Weber's theoretical and methodological positions to tackle modernist paradigm in sociology. Both Marx as well as Weber, their intellectual orientations; however, remain the same, but the way they look at but the way they look at modern society, and the way they project modern society, the way they envision modern society are quite different.

Will both are drawn from German philosophically tradition. Both were writing both were the byproducts of I mean both were writing in the 19th century Weber a little more than 19th century. I mean, he wrote till 1920, when he passed away I mean twentieth century, but almost contemporary.

I mean maybe a gap of 15, 20 years or 25 years 30 years not much. And both were influenced by industrial revolution, in Europe, I mean especially Great Britain. Both were influenced by German philosophically tradition, and both were influenced by French revolution of 1789. In this context, it is interesting to see how Weber tried to

reflect on critical modernist paradigm in sociology, through his different works. Suppose methodological one methodological individualism. Suppose classes, religion protestant ethic in the spirit of capitalism, economy and society. Methodology of the social sciences because whatever methodologies that that were that we formulated for social sciences it they were modeled on the basis of natural sciences. For a long time, sociologists as well as social anthropologists, they started with the positivistic tradition.

In this context; however, deviated from positivism, Marx deviated from positivism in in a different sense, but; however, deviated from positivism is interesting to examine. In fact, Weber contributed heavily to the development of substantive sociological theory, and the and the and to the debates on methodology. Weber's methodological writings are usually characterized as affecting reconciliation between positivism and neo Kantianism. What are this 2 schools of thought? as I have already discussed that positivism is the school of thought which emerged in 19th century and early part of the twentieth century.

So, very dominant school of thought it emerged as a response to both theological stage as well as metaphysical stage. It questioned the dominance of church, I mean all religious institutions. It is a school of thought which places sciences on a higher pedestal (Refer Time: 06:49) non-sciences. It is such a school of thought it is a byproduct of enlightenment industrial revolution, French revolution.

Where positivists I mean the proponents of positivism saw the supremacy of sciences over non-sciences. There are several tenets of positivism. There are different characteristics of positivism; to name a few that science is distinct from all areas of human activity or creativity, because it possesses a method unique to it. That is methodological. Science follows certain methods, which are very much different from the methods which non-science is follow.

That is how science should be given; a unique place in it is history in the history of science. Secondly, that there is only one method common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter. That is methodological monism, then what kind of method that that will be absolutely common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter whether the astronomy or physics or chemistry or biology or mathematics.

What kind of method? Then the positivists argued that the method of science is the method of in induction. What is that method of induction? Then they went back to

baconian philosophy of science who Bacon was the founder of inductivism. Inductivism is rooted in imprecision and imprecision is based on experience. We must start with observation then we arrive at a theory. Without observation without experience we do not tend to arrive at a theory. That is what inductivism argued. Now this is inductivism also is known as Baconian philosophy of science or inductivist, philosophy of science.

And positivists suggested that not the method of science is the method of induction. Fourthly the proponents of positivism argue that the hallmark of science lies in the fact that, all scientific statements must be systematically verifiable; that is, systematic verifiability, whatever I tend to claim I tend to prove, I want I tend to observe, I must be able to systematically verify it. I just cannot say that no it is I this is true, but I cannot verify it.

No, if it is true, then it must be verifiable for positivists. Fifthly there must be a uni-linear relationship between observation and theory. Observation leads to the generation of theory, but theory does not lead to the generation of observation. The relationship between observation and theory is uni-lateral. Observation theories are I mean theories are for according to positivists. Theories are observation dependent whereas, observations are theory independent. Another tenet suggests that there must be a dichotomy; there must be a binary between fact and value.

Facts are value neutral, whereas values do not have any factual content. That is why I gave you this example a couple of lectures back that if this is a suppose this is a laptop, this is a table, I will say that this is a draft. These are facts. I just cannot tell you suppose I will say that my I mean this pair of glasses of mine. This is a fact, but I cannot tell you, but if I say, but if I say. No, this pair of glasses looks nice. And you say no this pair of glasses looks very ugly.

Then both of us we add value to it. That is why for positivists facts are value neutral, whereas, values do not have any factual content. How do we produce knowledge in the positivistic scheme? No, only by accumulating more and more observations, this is I mean supremacy of sciences over non-sciences. There cannot be any interpretation, that there is only one way of looking at a particular phenomena. Whereas new contents drawn from the works of Kant Immanuel Kant who wrote critique of pure reason.

What is pure reason? It does not imply that they were superstitious, no. You see positivism try to sketch these characteristics, keeping the dominance of religious institutions in mind. But I mean, but on the I mean so that they I mean that would enable that in fact, enabled them to put forward these arguments that, no science is distinct from all areas of human activity or creativity, because it possesses a method unit quit.

This is the thing, but if you if you look at Kant and subsequently neo Kantians. For them the knowledge of the social world is not very objective as positivists argued, for positivists knowledge is very objective, it is not subjective. But for Kant and neo Kantians is special particularly neo Kantians, the knowledge of the social world is subjective in nature is a constructed one. It involves interpretation. I mean, the knowledge of the social world our knowledge of the social world is a constructed one which involves selection and interpretation of multiple data systems.

That is what neo Kantianism is all about. Suppose I will keep on accumulating my observations, but my observations are also my observations also involves certain amount of selection, I do not tend to observe everything. I know observe something you may observe something others may observe something, but I do not tend to observe if I will be given or you will be given an option to observe this room. Somebody may say that no this camera looks beautiful somebody may say that no this books look beautiful, somebody may say that no this arrangement does not look nice, somebody may say that no their lecture is not nice, somebody may say that no the lecture is good. See, our observations are also our observations also involved certain amount of selection.

We do not tend to observe everything. This is very important. Please keep in mind that we do not tend to observe everything we always tend to observe in a selective manner. And that selection also is based on certain perspective on what basis? What is a perspective? Then a perspective refers to a set of symbols which human beings used to select from all potentially observable aspects of nature. When I say nature, it includes both natural and social phenomenon.

A perspective is above all of viewpoints, which helps us in selecting organizing our perceptions and guiding our actions. In this sense for neo Kantians our knowledge of the social world is a constructed one, is a partial one, is a subjective one. It is not objective it

is not absolute. If this is so, then it must involve certain amount of certain criteria of selection and certain criteria of interpretation of multiple data systems.

If positivism suggests supremacy of sciences over non-sciences, because science is the most objective thing produced by human species generated by human species, for neo Kantians no, our knowledge of the social world including sciences. Because what is science? Science is social creation in all knowledge including scientific knowledge is socially caused.

As Bourdieu said it, in knowledge and social imagining that that our knowledge of the social world is a constructed one, is subjective, is not absolute, is partial. And which involves selection and interpretation of multiple data systems. And Weber's theoretical positions Weber's methodological writings are usually characterized as affecting, or reconciliation between these 2 extreme schools of thought. Weber did not try to bank only on positivism or only on neo Kantianism to while making an argument.

Rather he banked on he used he deployed both these schools of thought, both these theoretical construct both these both the methodological devices to make his arguments. Then then Weber's as I said weber; obviously, contributed heavily to the development of substantive sociological theory and to the debates on methodology, I mean Weber's methodological writings Weber's theoretical reflections are usually characterized as effective or reconciliation between positivism and neo kantian though Weber's positions were not of course, entirely consistent throughout his life.

Because he always used oscillate between positivism and neo Kantianism. It is possible to say that in general Weber rejected the view attributable to some neo Kantians that the cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their objects of study.

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- Though Weber's positions were not, of course, entirely consistent throughout his life, it is possible to say that, in general, Weber rejected the view attributable to some neo-Kantians (though not Rickert) that the cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their objects of study, and that the category of causality is inapplicable in them.
- Weber was committed to neo-Kantian insistence on the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences.
- For Weber, these peculiarities centered around the **two** related concepts:

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graph TD; A[Value-relevance] --- B[Interpretative understanding];
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And that the category of causality is inapplicable in them. For Weber causality is also applicable to cultural sciences. See what is culture that if I if somebody I do not want any formal definition, I want you to understand the meaning of it. If you have watched 3 idiots movie, I do not want you to be chatur Ramalingam who always that that tradition of thinking that no, we were to learn by wrote. This is not the way to. I do not want any formal definition.

I want you to understand the meaning involved in the concept of culture. What is culture? See culture is not like a tree, once a tree is uprooted, that dies, culture is not like that. Culture is just like a stream. That flows from one generation to the other. In this sense, neo Kantians suggested that the way causality the aspect of causality is applicable in sciences, may not be applicable while studying culture, whereas, Weber pointed out that cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their objects of study.

And that the category of causality is inapplicable in them. Weber was committed on the other hand Weber rejected first of all the view attributable to some neo Kantians that the cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their object substance where. And on the other hand, on the contrary Weber was committed to neo kantian insistence on the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences. For waber these

what are those methodological peculiarities these peculiarities centered around 2 related concepts.

One is value relevance and the other interpretive understanding. We will discuss value relevance what is value relevance, what is a value? It is not simply in economic sense. What is value relevance? What is interpretive understanding of social action and so on.

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- For Weber, the cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of concepts, and in the distinctive type of knowledge involved in them.
- A **third** area of methodological differences was thought by Weber to be the use of 'idealizations' in the cultural sciences.

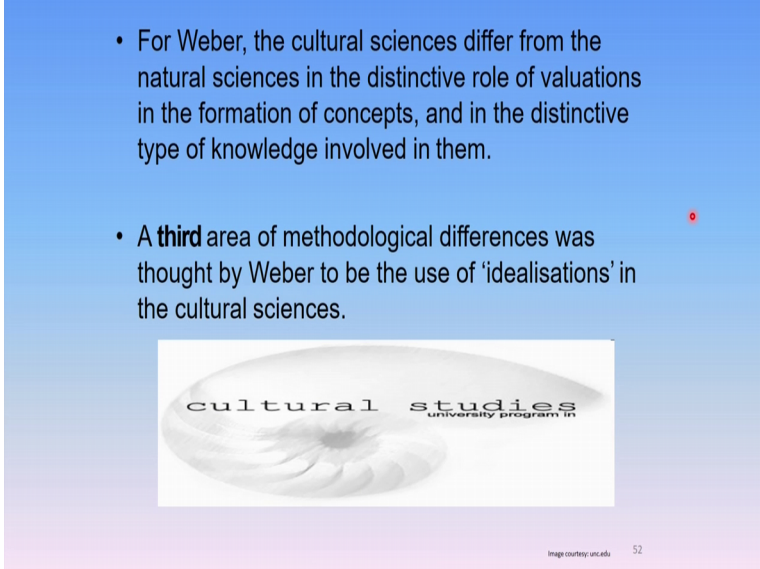
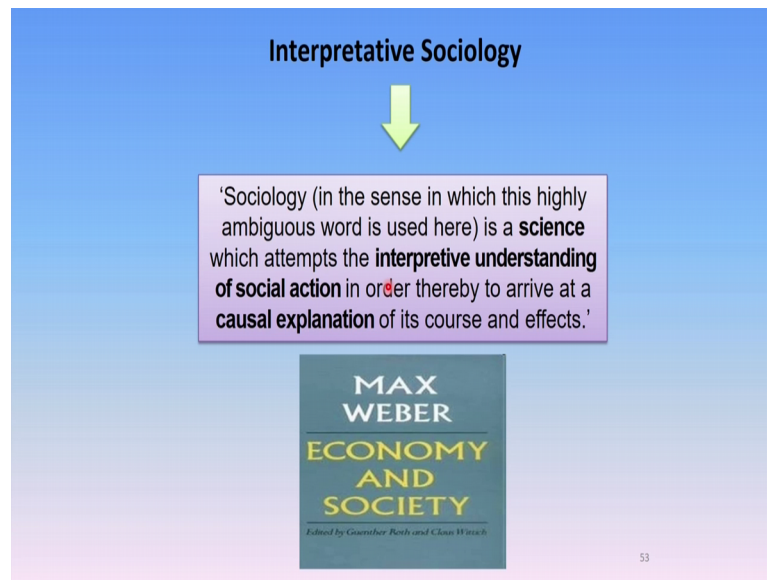


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For Weber the cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations. In the formation of concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge involved. In them a third area of methodological differences was thought by Weber to be the use of idealizations in the cultural sciences. Then first 2 areas we have seen one is positivism the other neo Kantianism, and the third area you will find we are discussing, third area of methodological differences between natural sciences and cultural sciences was taught by Weber to the use of idealizations in the cultural sciences.

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The way Weber tried to reflect on sociology. It is I mean, Weber talked about sociology as a as a reflection of interpretive sociology. I mean, for according to Weber sociology in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of it is course and effects.

Then there are 3 things important here. What are these 3 things? Then sociology is a science. Not in I mean, both the way positivism try to sketch science as well as neo Kantians the way they tried to interprets on it is. That kind of a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action and our interpretations will differ, my interpretation may differ from you my your interpretation may differ from another person.

But what whichever interpretive understanding of social action that we are going to demonstrate, it must involve a causal explanation what is an explanation, which has a cause and effect relationship. Then for according to Weber sociology is a science, he was very much aware of the ambiguities involved in the term science itself. Having been aware of such ambiguities of the term science for Weber I mean science as well as sociology themselves he according to him sociology is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of it is course and effects.



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An exposition of Weber's methodological position can usefully proceed with an analysis of each of the concepts and contrasts involved in the definition.




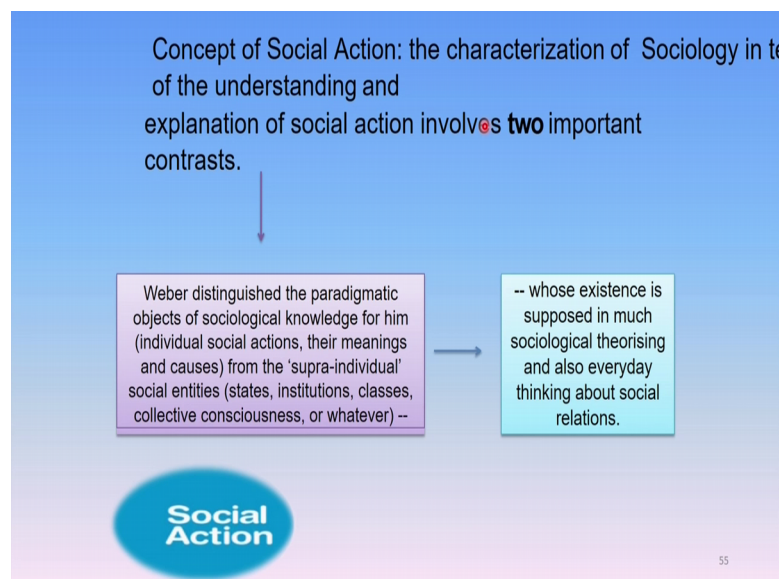
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An exposition of Weber's methodological position can usefully proceed with an analysis of each of the concepts and contrasts involved in the definition these 3 things science, interpretive understanding of social action, and causal explanation.

Concept of Social Action: the characterization of Sociology in terms of the understanding and explanation of social action involves two important contrasts.

Weber distinguished the paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for him (individual social actions, their meanings and causes) from the 'supra-individual' social entities (states, institutions, classes, collective consciousness, or whatever) --

-- whose existence is supposed in much sociological theorising and also everyday thinking about social relations.



**Social Action**

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Then to start with first what is that we know now what is science in the positivistic schema. Now let us see what is social action for Weber. That that concept of social action for Weber. I mean the characterization of sociology. In the schema of the in the methodological schema of the understanding and explanation of social action, which involves 2 important contests. First what are those 2 important contests?

A first Weber distinguished the paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for him, I mean from the supra individual social entities. What are these paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for Weber? I mean paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for Weber refer to individual social actions, their meanings and causes. And what are these supra individual social entities, may be states, institutions, classes, collective consciousness, and so on.

Then for Weber if paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge are indicative of individual action, individual social action, then or concerning only individual then supra individual social entities refer to the collective social action that there is a contrast. Then such existence is supposed in much sociological theorizing and also everyday thinking about social relations.

Then this concept of social action, the way we are talking about interpretive or interpretive so, understanding of social action. That is the that refers to the characterization of sociology as a as a disciplinary formation as a theoretical construct as well as a methodological device in the schema of the understanding and explanation of social action, which involves these 2 contests. Now I mean these 2 contrasts I mean one is paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for Weber.

On the one hand and supra individuals a social entity on the other, when we discuss when we say understanding and explanation, explanation is often attributed to the school of positivism. Understanding on the other hand is often attributed to the school of neo Kantianism. That is why in research methods what we generally find that explanation when we talk about in an in quantitative research methods we very often we attribute explanation to quantitative research methods, whereas, we attribute understanding to qualitative research methods.

But there are there are controversies regarding this I truly admit this controversies and I truly admire those controversies, because I always believe in the dialectical relationship between both quantitative as well as qualitative. I always believe in the dialectical relationship between explanation and understanding. That is why when this kind of theoretical and methodological schema of the understanding and explanation of social action which involves 2 important contrasts between paradigmatic objects of sociological

knowledge for Weber on the one hand, and supra individual social entities on the other hand.

If paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for Weber are concerned with individual social action, individual consciousness, and why do they I mean if I say that individual social actions, why do individuals undertake such action. What are the meanings generated? What are the, why what are the motives behind such action? What are the causes of such action? And when I when Weber referred to, the supra individual social entities namely states, institutions, classes, collective consciousness and so on, this is very important. Again, then he always I mean Weber always tried to look situate the concept of social action, social action as a effecting or as effecting or reconciliation between the 2 between the 2. I mean, between the paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for him on the one hand, and the supra individual social entities on the other.

And such existence such delineation is supposed in much sociological theorizing, and also everyday thinking about social relations. Weber indeed does not actually deny the existence of such entities. This this whether they are paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge or supra individual social entities.

Weber actually does not deny the existence of such entities, but argues that for interpretating sociology, they must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons. Whereas Marx was always referring to collective social action was always referring to collective consciousness intellectual consciousness political consciousness, class consciousness, class struggle.

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- Weber does not actually deny the existence of such 'entities', but argues that for interpretative sociology they must be 'treated as solely the resultants and modes of organisation of the particular acts of individual persons...'
- Weber's position here would now be regarded as 'methodological individualist', involving the claim that insofar as collectivities may be said to have characteristics independent of the individuals which make them up, those characteristics are to be explained in terms of individual actors and their actions.

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Weber deviated from that position, and he always argues that if you for interpretative sociology such entities.

I mean those paradigmatic objects of knowledge, sociological knowledge on the one hand and supra individual social entities on the other must be treated as solely the resultants of modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons when any change was attributed to the existing mode of production by Marx, but for Weber such paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge, as well as supra individual social entities, must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual person then whereas, Marx emphasized more on stretched more on the collective Weber emphasized on stretched more on the individual.

Perhaps for this reason Weber's position, here would now be regarded as methodological individualist. Involving the claim that insofar as collectivities may be said to have characteristics independent of the individuals, which make them up, those characteristics are to be explained in terms of individual actors and their actions. That is why what is methodological individualism we will come to this point a little while later.

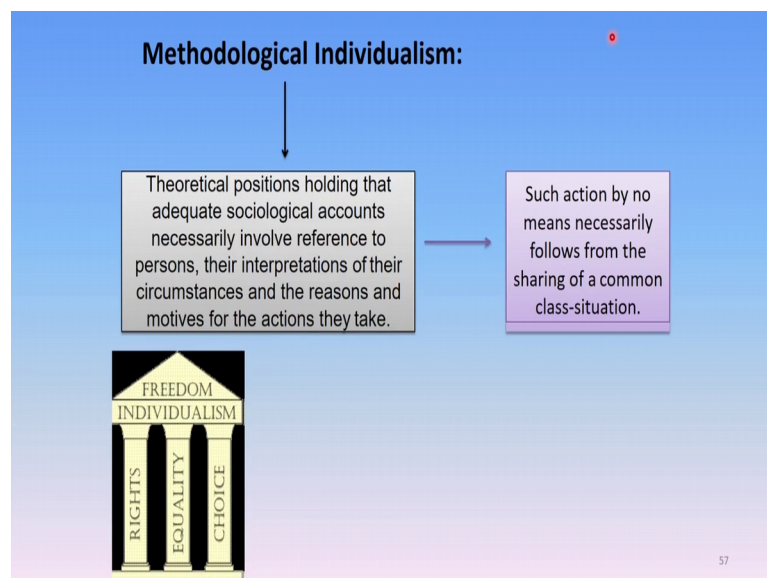
But then as Weber tried to emphasize more on the aspect of individual, individual social action their meanings with the meanings are the meanings which are generated through those individual social actions the meanings which are attached to those individual social actions. The causes of those individual social actions, the motives of those individual

social actions they are important for Weber in the modernist construal of agency, if society or new social order or collective became the hallmark in the Marx's schema. Then individual social actions their meanings their causes their motives, they became they assume greater significance in the in the schema of Weber.

So far as the modernist construal of new social order is concerned that is why Weber's methodological individualists position involves the claim that in so far as the insofar as collectivities maybe said to have characteristics, independent of the individuals which make them up those characteristics must be explained in terms of only individual actors and their actions. The meanings which are attached to those actions, the reasons of those actions, the motives behind those actions, the causes of those actions, then we will come to this point, that what is this what we to do we talk about methodological individualists position.

What is that methodological individualism? What did Weber referred to when he talked about methodological individualism? This is very important. Methodological individualism refers to theoretical positions holding that adequate sociological accounts necessarily involve reference to persons I mean, individuals, their interpretations, of their circumstances, and the and the reasons and motives for the actions that they take.

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And such action by no means necessarily follows from the sharing of a class situation for Marx, whatever collective social action that we undertake. It follows from the sharing of

a common class situation. But for Weber, no it may not emanate from a common class situation. It may emanate from status. Then, the proponents of Marxism would argue that know, what is status.

Status is gained through class. But for Weber no status maybe gained through education maybe politics maybe party building it is not simply through class for Marx. If for if for Marx it is not simply through classes for Weber, if for Marx classes are manifestations of economic differentiation for Weber classes are based on 2 parameters, at least 2 parameters. One is life chances and the other causal component.

We will discuss this in the next lecture, or that to go what are life chances what are causal components I mean not next, but next to next lecture, I mean when we will be dealing with holism or totality reflexivity rationality and social movements modernity I mean now all these parameters. Will get into will definitely discuss this the what are life chances causal components, and so on for Marx the way so not for Marx.

But for Weber for Weber what methodological individualism indicates it indicates certain theoretical positions. What are those theoretical positions? What are those conceptual categories? Those theoretical positions, those conceptual categories, they were they were promoted, I mean they were exhibited through the notions of rights fundamental right equality, choice, preference, my freedom, in the collective conscience, what is the significance what is the role of an individual. Let that the idea of exercise my fundamental right my the idea of exercising my right to make selection, my right to have equality, y right to have freedom, these constitute crucial elements of methodological individualists position in Weber's schema.

That is why when Weber said no methodological individualism refers to certain theoretical positions, which hold that adequate sociological accounts necessarily involve reference to individuals, their interpretations of their circumstances, and the reasons and motives for the actions that they take. Then there are 3 characteristics of this methodological individualist's position which Weber undertook.

What are those? What are those 3 parameters; the first parameter, that methodological individualism when we look at when we examine, we must look at individuals first individuals as social actors Individual actors, then not only individual actors, but also individual actions and the way secondly, the way individuals attempt to interpret their

circumstances. Their conditions, their contexts, their backgrounds, my circumstance may be different from your circumstance.

Your circumstance may be different from my circumstance. If our circumstances differ, then our actions will also differ. Our individual actions will definitely differ if our circumstances differ. If our circumstances differ, then the then the kind of actions that we are going to undertake if they will also differ they bound to differ if our circumstances differ. Then our circumstances also involve the reasons also involve the motives for the actions that we undertake this is the third one.

I mean first one is individuals, individual actors, as well as individual actions. Secondly, individual actors interpretations of their circumstances, their conditions, their contexts, their backgrounds and so on and thirdly the reasons and motives for the actions that individuals undertake. In the next lecture we are going to discuss interpretive understanding, then what we have discussed today? We started with max Weber's theoretical approaches and methodological writings.

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**Max Weber's Methodology**

- Weber contributed heavily to the development of substantive sociological theory and to the debate on methodology.
- Weber's methodological writings are usually characterised as effecting a reconciliation between

Positivism      Neo-Kantianism

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And as we have already discussed Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings are usually characterized as effecting a reconciliation between positivism, as well as neo Kantianism. And Weber at times he was critical of neo Kantians that I mean Weber rejected the view attributable to some neo Kantians.

That the cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their objects of study and that the category of causality is inapplicable in them Weber; however, was committed to neo Kantian insistence on the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences, and for Weber what are those methodological peculiarities, I mean those methodological peculiarities, centered around 2 related concepts, namely value relevance and interpretive understanding. And for Weber the cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of concepts, and in the distinctive type of knowledge involved in them.

As a consequence of which a third area of methodological differences was thought by Weber to the use of idealizations in the cultural sciences. From here Weber defines sociology, as a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. And such exposition of Weber's methodological position can usefully proceed with an analysis was analysis of each of the concepts and contrasts involved in the definition.

Then if there are 3 things which Weber tried to unfurl in his definition of sociology that is one is science. Secondly, interpretive understanding of social action and then causal explanation, let us begin with concept of social acts we discussed social action in this lecture, that that is the characterization of sociology in the schema of the understanding; and explanation of social action which involves 2 important contrasts.

I mean contrasts between paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge for Weber namely individual social actions their meanings and causes on the one hand, and the supra individual social entities namely states institutions classes collective consciousness, or whatever on the other whose existence is supposed in much sociological theorizing, and also everyday thinking about social relations.

Weber does not actually deny the existence of such entities, I mean the entities of both I mean both paradigmatic objects of sociological knowledge, as well as the supra individual social entities. But argues that for interpretive sociology, them they must be treated I mean such supra individual social entities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons.

Hence Weber's position here would now be regarded as methodological individualists involving the claim that insofar as collectivities may be said to have characteristics



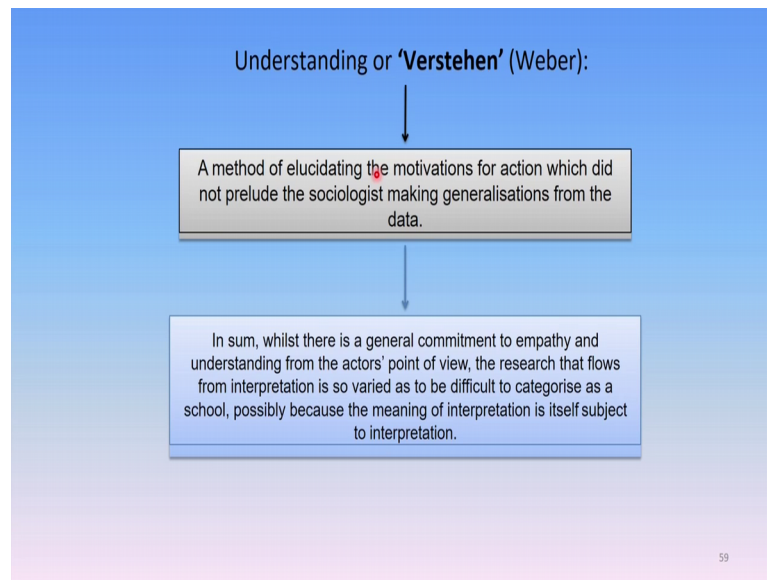
independent of the individuals which make them up those characteristics are to be explained must be explained in terms of individual actors and their actions. And then we are trying to end this lecture with Weber's reflections on methodological individualism which refers to the theoretical positions which hold that adequate sociological accounts necessarily involve reference to at least 3 things. One individuals, 2 individuals interpretations of their circumstances and 3, the reasons and motives for the actions that those these particular individuals take.

And in in contradiction with Marx Weber suggest that, such action by no means necessarily follows from the sharing of a common class situation. This is very important I mean Marx always said that what whatever collective social action that takes place, it always follows from the sharing of a common class situation. For him for Marx, change is very important, and whatever change occurs it is only through classes.

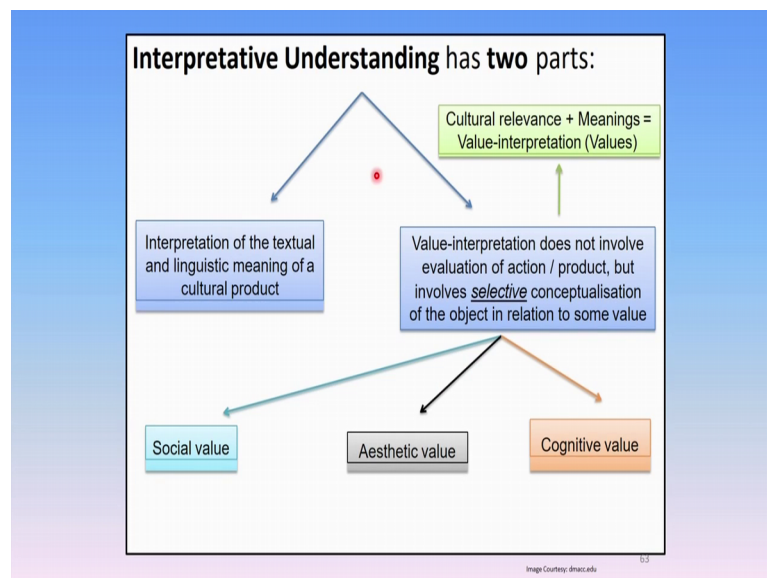
Ultimately it is a history of class we are we do not talk about history of one particular individual. But for Weber the kind of reference that we are making to individuals, individual social actions individual actors their interpretations of their circumstances and the reasons and motives for the actions that these individuals take, such action by no means necessarily follows from the sharing of a common class situation.

Having said this in the next lecture, we are going to discuss interpretive understanding of social action, I mean verstehen I mean understanding I mean in German verstehen means understanding.

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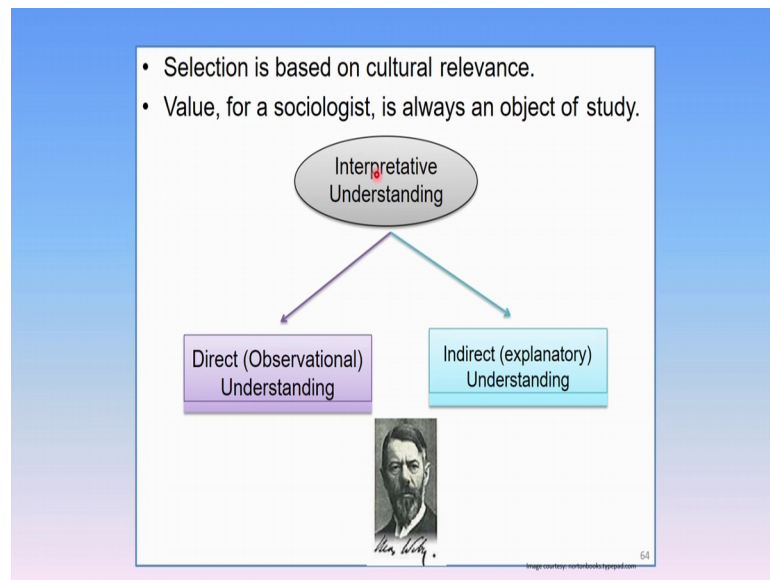


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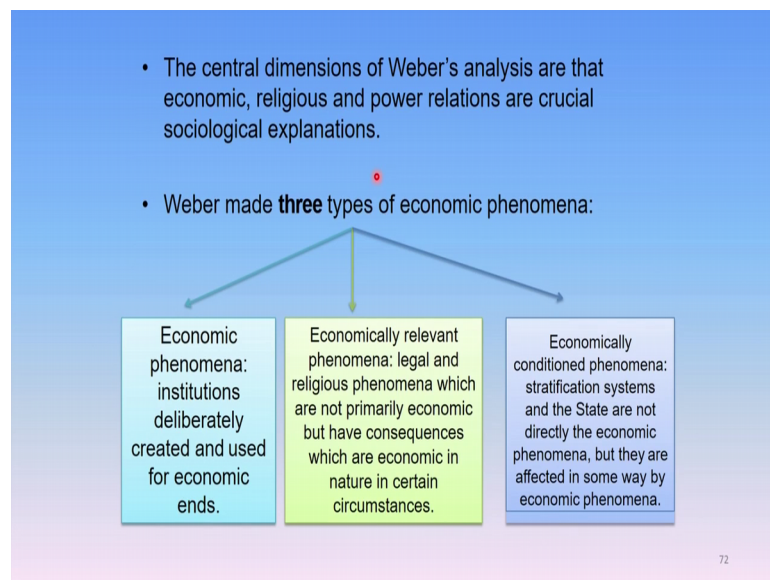
And what are the methodological peculiarities that we find in interpretive understanding, whether there is direct understanding, or indirect understanding, direct understanding, is alternatively known as observational understanding.

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Whereas indirect understanding, alternatively known as explanatory understanding, and so on.

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And what is culture for Weber I mean, then we will discuss tomorrow what kind of methodological implications on modernity that that Weber's writings have, I mean on economic phenomena economically relevant phenomena and economically conditioned phenomena. And what kind of relationship that economy and religion can forge, and they

cannot be separated in our day to day life according to Weber. We will discuss from interpretive understanding in detail in the next lecture.

Thank you.