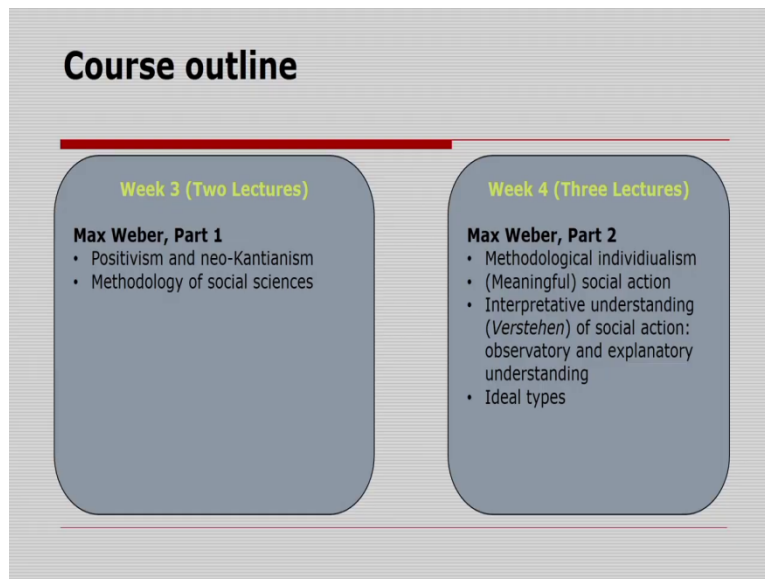


**Philosophical Foundations of Social Research**  
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**Week 4 (Max Weber -2) : Lecture – 10**  
**Weberian Social Sciences : Methodological Implications**

Hello everyone. Welcome to the 10th lecture of this massive open online course on Philosophical Foundations of Social Research. This is the last lecture of the fourth week where we are discussing the second part of Max Weber.



In the first part, we have discussed how Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings are usually characterized as effectively a reconciliation between positivist and Neo Kantian positions. Then, we have discussed Weberian methodology of the social sciences.

And in the second part, we have discussed methodological individualism, typology of social action and how value rational social and goal rational social action alternatively known as instrumental rationality, they constitute meaningful social action. We have discussed Weberian value relevance, interpretative understanding of social action, and how cultural sciences according to Weber differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge involved in them.

## Methodology of Social Sciences

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- Ethical neutrality in sociology and economics
  - Objectivity in social science and social policy
  - Critical studies in the logic of cultural sciences: objective possibility and adequate causation in historical explanation
- 

We have also discussed within methodology of the social sciences, ethical neutrality in sociology and economics, objectivity in social science and social policy, and how critical studies in the logic of cultural sciences was delineated in the context of objective possibility in adequate causation in historical explanation in Weberian methodology of the social sciences.

## Interpretative sociology

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Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a *science* which attempts the *interpretative understanding of social action* in order thereby to arrive at a *causal explanation* of its course and effects.

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We have also discussed how Weber tried to encapsulate sociology: sociology is a science, which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects.

## Social action

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- Understanding and explanation of social action
  - Distinction between individual social action and supra-individual entities
- 

We have discussed social action, understanding and explanation of social action. Explanation, if you look at, we have discussed explanation in the context of positivism and understanding in the context of verstehen method or Neo Kantain positions. And how Weber tried to make a distinction between individual social action and Supra individual entities.

## Social action: typology

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Traditional

Affective or  
emotive

Value-  
rational

Goal-rational or  
instructional  
rationality

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We have discussed typology of social action. We have discussed methodological individualism, I mean how methodological individualism refers to theoretical positions that adequate sociological accounts must necessarily involve reference to individuals/persons, their interpretations of their circumstances and the reasons and motives for the actions that they take.

## **Interpretative understanding of social action**

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- To grasp or 'understand' or interpret actors' meanings
  - 'Intentional' human action
  - Verstehen: not a method, but an objective, goal or achievement; understanding
  - Interpretation:
    - Textual and linguistic meaning of a cultural product
    - Value-interpretation
- 

We have also discussed how interpretative understanding of social action is very important to grasp or understand or interpret actors' meanings. Whatever action that we undertake, it must have a goal, it must have a purpose, it must have an aim, it must have an objective, it must have an intention that is intentional human action.

For Weber, verstehen is not a method, but an objective or goal or achievement, I mean understanding of social action. And interpretation, according to Weber, has two parts or consists of two parts; one interpretation at the level of textual and linguistic meaning of a cultural product and value interpretation; it may be social value, it may be cognitive value, it may be aesthetic value, it may be religious value and so on.

## **Methodological implications**

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- Selection
  - Value
  - Interpretive understanding
  - Culture
  - Verstehen: imaginative identification, rationality
  - Explanation: meaning and statistical generalizations
  - Adequacy – Generalizations – Experience
  - Multiple Causes – Single Effect model
  - Economic, religious and power relations
  - Economic phenomena, economically relevant phenomena and economically conditioned phenomena
-

And in today's lecture, we are going to focus on what are the methodological implications of Weberian framework for social science research in 2021 in the 21st century. To start with, as I said interpretation consists of two things, one interpretation at the textual or linguistic meaning of a cultural product, and value interpretation that does not involve evaluation of action or product but involves selective conceptualization of the object in relation to some value. It may be social value, it may be cognitive value, it may be aesthetic value, it may be religious value and so on.

**Interpretative understanding of social action**

- To grasp or 'understand' or interpret actors' meanings
- 'Intentional' human action
- Verstehen: not a method, but an objective, goal or achievement; understanding
- Interpretation:
  - Textual and linguistic meaning of a cultural product
  - Value-interpretation

*selective conceptualization*

But value interpretation involves selective conceptualization, selective conceptualization of what? Now, selective conceptualization of the object or the product in question in relation to some value. That is why I gave you the example of suppose tea in Assam is a cultural product, it has social value, it has religious value, it has cognitive value, it has aesthetic value.

Suppose handloom products, they are very unique to some regions. You will find different handloom products in South India, you will find different handloom products in northeast India, you will find different handloom products in eastern part of India, you will find different handloom products in western part of India, you will find different handloom products in northern part of India. Handlooms, handicrafts they are culturally embedded in a particular region. That is why selective conceptualization of the object or product in question.

But when I say selective conceptualization of the object or product in question in relation to some value. Value as we understand, it is not limited to only economic value. It may have economic value, I am not denying that, but it must have some social value, cognitive value,

aesthetic value, religious value, cultural value and so on. In this sense, we are using selective conceptualization.

**Methodological implications**

- Selection — Cultural relevance
- Value
- Interpretive understanding
- Culture
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Now, according to Weber, what is the basis of selection; on what basis we tend to select? According to Weber, selection is based on cultural relevance. How? If I ask you, what is the topic that you are more interested in? I am sure you will try to point out certain topics, which are very much culturally, socially, economically, politically relevant to your own position: to maybe your own village, maybe your own state, maybe your own region, maybe your own country, or maybe your own continent.

If you look at Durkheim, if you look at Weber, they tried to select certain topics on the basis of their cultural relevance. If I ask you, if somebody is interested in working on farmers suicides in India, we generally do not say that I want to study farmer suicides in the United States of America. An American may look at this.

At best what we do, we try to look at comparative framework, what is the condition of farmers in India on the one hand, and what is the condition of farmers in the United States of America or United Kingdom or France or Germany, or People's Republic of China or Japan or Singapore or Hong Kong or Taiwan, we have that comparative framework. But independently, we do not want to do that because of this dimension of cultural relevance. That is why, according to Weber, selection is based on cultural relevance.

## Methodological implications

- Selection
- Value — *object of study*
- Interpretive understanding
- Culture
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And what is that value then? How do we attach value to the process of selection? According to Weber, value for a sociologist in particular and social scientist in general is always an object of study. Please do not think that this is a value, this is higher order norm that is why this cannot be questioned. No, value also must be questioned: what was value 200 years ago is no longer a value. Let me give you an example.

In Indian socio cultural value I mean 200 years ago Sati was considered a value, but now Sati is considered illegal, unethical, it is a crime. Values undergo change with the change in our intellectual and political consciousness with the change in the modes of production, with the change in our rational thinking.

That is why according to Weber, what a social scientist, what a sociologist must look at so far as value is concerned? How does one examine value? Now, value for a sociologist, for a social scientist is always an object of study that is why they must be interrogated, they must be questioned and so on.

## Methodological implications

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Direct-observational  
Indirect-explanatory

Weber divides interpretative or interpretive understanding into two parts. One is direct understanding and the other indirect understanding. Direct understanding is alternatively known as observational understanding, and indirect understanding is alternatively known as explanatory understanding of social action.

Now, both are important what I observe whether it is true or false I must provide an explanation to validate whether what I have observed is correct or not. I might have observed something which is absolutely wrong. I might have observed that suppose if there was a time when people said that Indians and dogs are not allowed, what kind of explanation the colonizers, the British government provided. What is that explanation, that explanation was racist in nature.

If they say one particular community is superior to other community, then I become racist in nature. If I say a particular culture is superior to other cultures then this is racist in nature.

In this case, I must provide some explanation to validate my claim, to validate my observation, and both forms of interpretive understanding are required. That is why such understanding is based on interpretative understanding of social action that involves a method or a strategy.



## Methodological implications

- Selection
- Value
- Interpretive understanding — *Method/strategy*
- Culture
- Verstehen*: imaginative identification, rationality
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Now, what is that method or strategy?

*Spontaneous and immediate* ← "recognition" of the acts/meanings

## Methodological implications

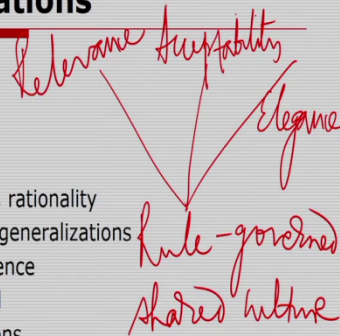
- Selection
- Value
- Interpretive understanding — *Imaginative identification*
- Culture
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↓  
*rule-governed shared culture*

This method or strategy is nothing but imaginative identification. Imaginative identification is primarily to be spontaneous and immediate recognition of the acts and their meanings and their meanings in everyday life. And this imaginative identification is processed through rule governed shared culture. Then as I said, interpretive understanding involves some method or a strategy that is imaginative identification primarily to be spontaneous and immediate recognition of the acts and the kind of meanings which are associated with those acts in everyday life.

## Methodological implications

- Selection
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This imaginative identification is processed through rule governed strategy within a shared culture. What is this rule governed shared culture? This rule governed shared culture is based on relevance, acceptability, and elegance.

When I said this imaginative identification is processed through a rule governed strategy within a shared culture and then such rule governed shared culture, rule governed strategy within a shared culture is based on relevance, acceptability and elegance. What does it imply?

It must be culturally relevant. A particular interpretation must be acceptable to the wider audience and it must be elegant, it must be unique, unique in style, unique in fashion, unique in appearance, unique in aesthetics. It must be relevant, it must be acceptable and it must be elegant.

In this sense, we are using rule governed strategy within a shared culture or rule governed shared culture. But, is it possible to make all three combined; is it possible to have such kind of combination that that such interpretation must be relevant, must be acceptable and must be elegant, is it always possible?

## Methodological implications

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observer / observed

rule-governed  
shared culture

This is methodologically very important. It is possible for Weber, only when both observer and observed, both subject and objects of study, both researcher as well as the researched when they share culture. But most often you will find that observer and the observed they do not share culture, then what will happen?

Suppose if I go to a field where the culture, the practices, the material world of my respondents, but the researched, the observed not the observer, but only the observed, if I do not understand their cultural practices as a researcher if I do not understand, then in that case if observer and observed if they share culture then that is fine if they understand each other's culture that is fine, but if the observer or if the researcher does not understand the culture of the observed; if observer and observed they do not share culture, then what will happen?

## Methodological implications

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observer / observed

different meaning

One possibility is that observer may give a different meaning, then that is a problem. If I say the observer may give a different meaning, then he or she is not able to capture the facts; he or she is not able to capture the reality. If you go to a village if you study a tribe, then perhaps if you do not understand the culture of that, then perhaps you will give a different meaning.

That is why sociologists, social anthropologists and so on social scientists they all place much emphasis on participant observation, ethnographic research and so on so that you should try to understand the culture, the practices of your respondents. You go and speak to scientists, top notch ethnographic research can be carried out, like Bruno Latour's laboratory life, but if you do not understand their practices, then how can you capture that.

You want to speak to plan builders, you want to speak to molecular biologists, you want to speak to physicists, but you should understand their world first. What they are doing, how they are doing, prior knowledge of their work will help you understand their work. That is why we always place much emphasis on literature review; you should be ready with literature first, to see to have some kind of prior knowledge about the cultural practices, about the scientific practices of your respondents. But if you do not share culture, if you do not understand their practices, then you tend to give a different meaning altogether, that is one possibility.

The second possibility is that either the observer or the observed should get socialized into the culture that the observer wants to study. These are two possibilities, I mean, either the observer must get socialized into the culture of the observed or the observed must also understand the limits of the cultural traits of the observer. Now what is culture for Weber?

*Intentional human action for the sake of value-ends.*

**Methodological implications**

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*Totality of real objects to which we attach generally acknowledged values or complexes of meaning constituted by values.*

Weber defines culture as the totality of real objects to which we attach generally acknowledged values or complexes of meaning constituted by values. What does it mean? It implies that culture consists of all those items, things, products and so on produced by human beings and human action and that it must be intentional human action or purposive social action or goal oriented social action for the sake of value ends.

Then, culture consists of all those items produced by human beings for the sake of value ends. Then Weber defines culture as the totality of real objects to which we attach generally acknowledged values or complexes of meaning constituted by values. In other words, culture consists of all those items produced by human beings for the sake of value ends.

Thus we have come to know that how culture is plays an important role in such interpretation, in such imaginative identification, in such selection, in understanding value ends. If I say understanding value ends, then I mean verstehen: that understanding is important. In German, it is called verstehen, in English it is understanding.

Now, such imaginative identification that we have discussed: that it is processed through a rule governed strategy within a said culture, imaginative identification primarily to be spontaneous and immediate recognition of the acts and their meanings in everyday life.

**Methodological implications**

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*Handwritten red annotations:*

- Recognition of the rational connection between means and ends (with an arrow pointing to 'Culture')
- useful, but not an essential condition for meaningful action (with a circle around 'Verstehen')
- Individual (with a line pointing to 'Verstehen')

According to Weber, such imaginative identification is useful, but not an essential condition for meaningful action. Imaginative identification according to Weber is useful, but why? Now, precisely because it is primarily spontaneous and immediate recognition of the acts and their meanings in everyday life; imaginative identification is processed through a rule governed strategy within a shared culture; I mean such rule governed strategy within shared

culture is based on relevance, acceptability and elegance. According to Weber, imaginative identification is a useful tool for sociologists for social scientists and so on. But it is not an essential condition for meaningful social action.

And secondly that there must be a recognition of the rational connection between means and ends, there must be a rational connection between means and ends. Verstehen is extremely important in Weberian framework that imaginative identification is useful, but not an essential condition for meaningful social action. And there must be recognition of the rational connection between means and ends.

As we have discussed sociology as such for Max Weber is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. It is very much made clear in his methodology, how he distinguished himself from Durkheim and Marx and other classical figures, in that his primary focus was on individuals and culture. This meaningful social action also centres around individuals. Then, as I said, Weber's primary focus was on individuals and culture, and unlike theorists such as Auguste Comte and Emil Durkheim, Weber did not consciously attempt to create any specific set of rules governing sociology or the social sciences in general.

Whereas, Durkheim focused on society, Weber concentrated on the individual and their actions that is structure and action. Compared to Marx that we are going to cover in the fifth week in terms of three lectures, who argued for the primacy of the material world over the world of ideas. Weber valued ideas as motivating actions of individuals, at least in the big picture.

### Methodological implications

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*objectivity/subjectivity*

Max Weber would primarily be concerned with the question of objectivity and subjectivity going on to distinguish social action from social behaviour. As I said, coughing is a part of social behaviour. But if I tend to apologize after that, then it is a part of social action.

It must be noted that social action must be understood through how individuals subjectively relate to one another. And study of social action through interpretive means or *verstehen* or understanding must be based on understanding the subjective meaning and purpose that individuals attach to their actions. Social actions may have easily identifiable and objective means, but much more subjective ends. And the understanding of those ends by a scientist is subject to yet another layer of subjective understanding that again of the scientist.

Weber noted that the importance of subjectivity in social sciences makes creation of foolproof universal laws much more difficult than in natural sciences and the amount of objective knowledge that social sciences may achieve is precariously limited. Overall, Weber supported the goal of objective science as one definitely worth striving for. Though he noted that it is ultimately unreachable, this objectivity cannot be reached according to Weber.

Absolute objectivity, absolute neutrality is always a myth. What he wrote in objectivity in social science, in sociological writings in 1904, that there is no absolutely objective, scientific analysis of culture. All knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from particular points of view, particular perspectives, particular vantage points.

And an objective analysis of cultural events which proceeds according to the thesis that the ideal of science is that reduction of empirical reality to laws is meaningless, because the knowledge of social laws is not knowledge of social realities, but is rather one of the various aids used by our minds for attaining this end.

The principle of methodological individualism that we have already discussed, which holds that social scientists should seek to understand collectivities maybe nations, cultures, governments, churches, religious institutions, corporations and so on, solely as the result and the context of the actions of individual persons.

It may be traced to Weber particularly to the first chapter of economy and society, in which Weber argues that only individuals can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action. In other words, Weber contended that social phenomena can be understood scientifically, only to the extent that they are captured by models of the behaviour of purposeful individuals, models that Weber called ideal types.

*comparative historical analysis*

**Methodological implications**

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- Selection
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*Ideal types*

*Historicism*

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Weber called these models ideal types from which actual historical events necessarily deviate due to accidental and irrational factors. And the analytical constructs of an ideal type never exists in reality according to Weber, but provide objective benchmarks against which a real life constructs can be measured.

Now, what Weber wrote in economy and society that we know of no scientifically ascertainable ideals to be sure, that makes our efforts more arduous than in the past since we are expected to create our ideals from within our breast in the very edge of subjectivist culture.

And if you look at Weber's methodology that was developed in the context of a wider debate about methodology of Social Sciences: which one is more valid between understanding and explanation between positivist and Neo Kantian positions between explanation and verstehen method, Weber's position was close to historicism, historical method.

As Weber understood social actions as being heavily tied to particular historical contexts and its analysis required the understanding of subjective motivations of individuals. These individuals are social actors. Thus, Weber's methodology emphasizes the use of comparative historical analysis.

As such, Weber was more interested in explaining how a certain outcome was the result of various historical processes rather than predicting an outcome of those processes in the future. Then within that comparative historical framework, how are you going to explain it?



If I say, what is the economic condition of the larger section of the population in India on the one hand, and Scandinavian countries on the other I mean, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and so on - that competitive framework I am trying to build and historically I have to situate. In that case, I must try to provide some kind of explanation.

*Complex, subjective meaning*

### Methodological implications

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*Motives - Social action*  
*Causes - Effect*

For Max Weber, indirect or explanatory understanding of social action involves two things. One, explanation must be adequate at the level of meanings. And secondly, explanation must be adequate at the level of statistical generalizations. If I say that explanation must be adequate at the level of meaning, Weber was taking a Neo Kantian position, and statistical generalization is a positivist position. That is why for Weber, interpretative understanding of social action, or rather that indirect or explanatory understanding of social action must involve two things, one that explanation must be adequate at the level of meanings. And two, explanation must be adequate at the level of statistical generalizations.

And according to Weber, adequate at the level of meaning as well as explanation must be adequate at the level of statistical generalizations then what is this adequacy? To what extent or after reaching a certain level, I will say that this is adequate: it may be adequate for me, it may not be adequate for others. Weber suggested adequacy is based on generalizations, and generalizations are based on experience.

And then he was trying to build an empirical method, inductivist method that there is a possibility, there is a probability that a particular action often occurs in a similar way or in the same way. If motives are the causes, then social action is the effect, because no social is undertaken without any motive, without any purpose, without any goal.

If motives are the antecedent, then social action is the consequence. Then what is a motive? Now Weber defines motives as a complex subjective meaning which seems to the actor herself or himself or to the observer, as an adequate ground for the conducting question. And multiple motives can lead to a similar or same kind of social action. Multiple motives, multiple causes, multiple contexts may lead to a similar or same kind of social action.

There are different models of explanation. Suppose in the case of Durkheim, Durkheim followed mono causal model that single cause single effect model, but Weber followed multiple causes single effect model.

In 2021, if you look at this in the 21st century, we will say, there must be multiple causes multiple effects model. The central dimensions of Weber, nevertheless are that economic, religious and power relations are crucial sociological explanations.

Weber pointed out three types of economic phenomena: he was trying to refer to this that one is economic phenomena, secondly economically relevant phenomena and thirdly, economically conditioned phenomena. What is this? What are these economic phenomena, economically relevant phenomena and economically conditioned phenomena.

Institutions deliberately created and used for economic needs.

**Methodological implications**

- Selection
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legal/religious phenomena  
 stratification systems and the state

1      2      3

Economic phenomena refer to institutions deliberately created and used for economic needs. Economically relevant phenomena refer to legal and religious phenomena which are not primarily economic, but have consequences which are economic in nature in certain circumstances.

And when I say economically conditioned phenomena, I mean these as stratification systems and the state as the most important political institution are not directly economic phenomena, but they are affected in some way by economic phenomena. Now, let us see what are economic phenomena.

Economic phenomena refers to institutions deliberately created and used for economic needs like market. Markets are purely economic phenomena, they have been created very intentionally, deliberately, purposefully and they are used to meet our economic needs. When I say economically relevant phenomena, they may be legal phenomena, there may these may be religious phenomena, which are not primarily economic, but have consequences which are economic in nature in certain circumstances.

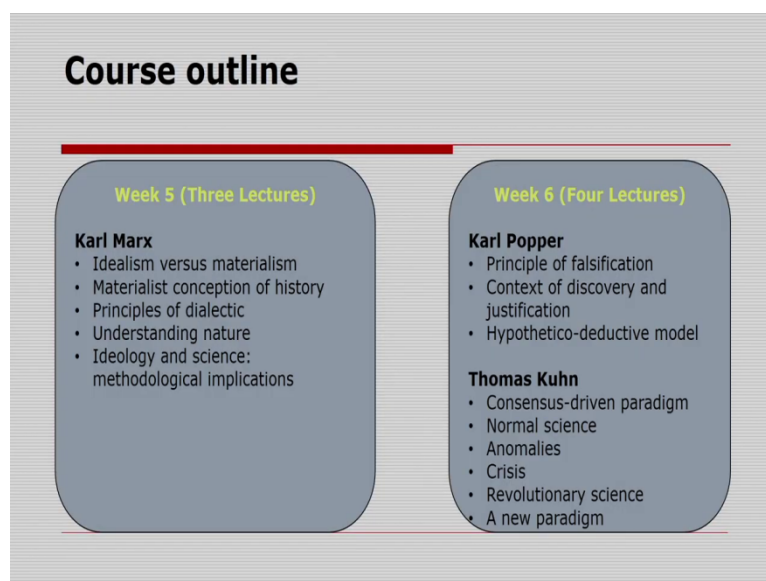
Economically conditioned phenomena refer to the stratification systems and the state that are not directly the economic phenomena, but they are affected in some way by maybe market. If market fails, then the state suggests that no we must try to withhold certain expenditure, we cannot go on and on because the market has failed. The state is affected if the market fails, that is why it is known as an economically conditioned phenomena.

Weber was of the view that economic, religious and power relations are important sociological explanations, Weber was of the view that economy and religion cannot be separated in our day to day life. As Marx would argue that, they are different things but Weber was of the view that economic, religious and power relations are crucial sociological explanations, economy and religion cannot be separated in our day to day life. Then what we have discussed today, very quickly, we will try to wrap it up.

We have discussed the methodological implications in terms of selection, value, ends value interpretation, I mean interpretive understanding, know of social action, I mean, which is of two types, one is direct understanding and the other indirect understanding. Direct understanding of social action is alternatively known as observatory understanding of social action, and indirect understanding is alternatively known as explanatory understanding of social action.

And how Weber defines culture as the totality of real objects to which we attach generally acknowledged values or complexes of meaning constituted by those values, and how culture consists of all those items produced by human beings for the sake of value ends.

How verstehen comprises two things: one imaginative identification and the second recognition of the rational connection between means and ends. And how indirect understanding of social action or explanatory understanding of social action, how it suggests at least two important things, one is explanation must be adequate at the level of meanings and explanation must also be adequate at the level of statistical generalizations. And to what extent we will say this is adequate? Adequacy is based on generalizations, and generalizations are based on experience. How Weber followed the model of multiple causal single effect model, how far Weber's economic, religious and power relations are crucial, sociological explanations and how economic phenomena, economically relevant phenomena and economically conditioned phenomena in terms of the creation of market, usage of market, legal and religious phenomena and stratification systems in the state respectively, how they are really important and how economy and religion cannot be separated in our day to day life. We have discussed this, we have come to the closer of the fourth week. In the fifth week, we are going to discuss Karl Marx.



If you look at the course outline we will discuss Marx's delineation of the relationship between idealism and materialism, materialist conception of history, principles of dialectic, I mean how quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes and vice versa.

The law of negation of negation, unity and struggle of opposites or interpenetration of the opposites we will discuss this, and how understanding nature in terms of the distinction between ideology and science, and what are the methodological implications. If you look at Marx must be examined from two vantage points, one as an ideologue of the Communist

Party and but more importantly, marks must be examined as a top notch theoretician. We are going to have three lectures in the fifth week and we will discuss Marx, Thank you.