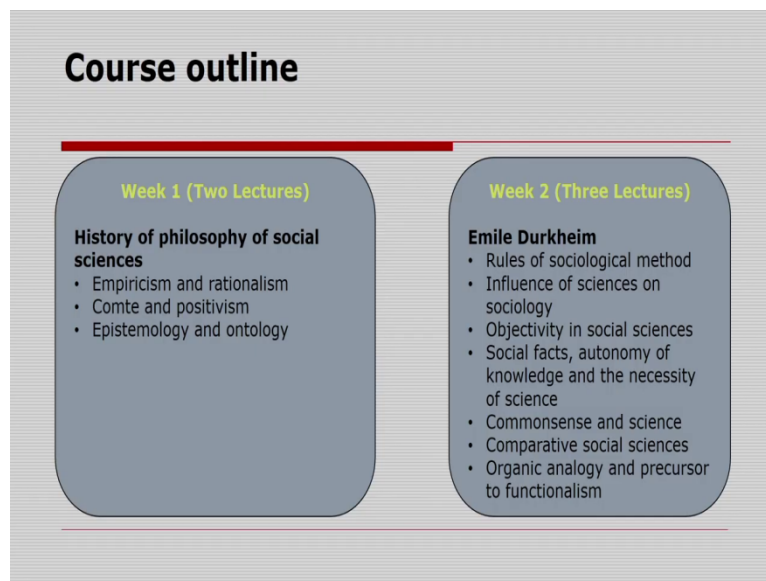


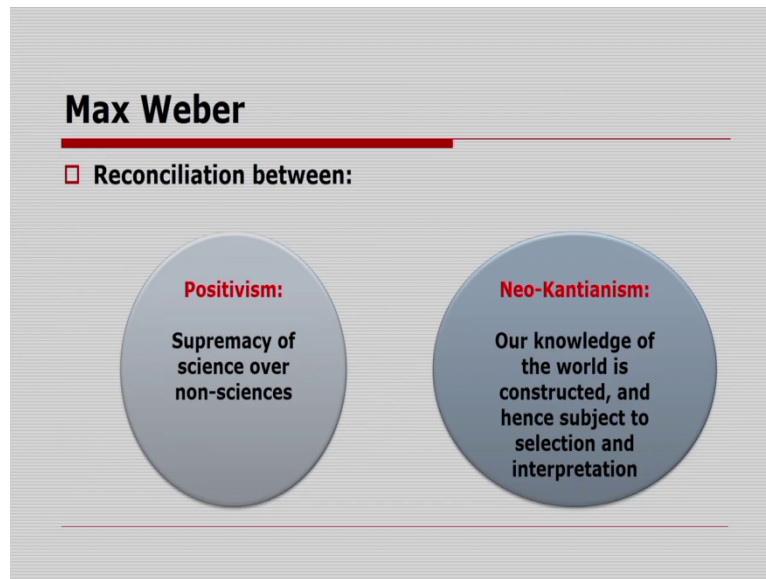
**Philosophical Foundations of Social Research**  
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**Week 3 (Max Weber -1) : Lecture – 06**  
**Positivism and Neo-Kantianism**

Hello everyone. Welcome to the sixth lecture of this massive open online course on Philosophical Foundations of Social Research. We have already completed two weeks: five lectures in two weeks.



In the first week, we have discussed history of philosophy of Social Sciences. Within that we have discussed empiricism and rationalism, Auguste Comte and positivism, epistemology and ontology.

And in the second week, in the form of three lectures, we have discussed Emile Durkheim's rules of sociological method, influence of Sciences on sociology, objectivity in social sciences, social facts and the autonomy of sociology as a discipline and social facts and the necessity of science, common sense and science, philosophy of religion, through the works of the elementary of forms of religious life and the division of labour in society within the comparative social science frameworks and organic analogy and precursor to functionalism.



Now, we are going to proceed with the sixth lecture that is the first lecture of the third week and here we are going to look at Max Weber. Third week, we will have two lectures and we will have three lectures in the fourth week. We have divided Max Weber into two parts.

In the first part, we are going to discuss how Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings are a reconciliation between positivism on the one hand, and Neo-Kantianism on the other. We will discuss this and then in the next lecture, we will discuss weberian methodology of the social sciences.

And in the second part of Max Weber, in the fourth week, we will discuss Weber's methodological individualism. Social action: typology of social action, traditional social action, effective or emotive social action, value rational social action and goal rational social action. Goal rational social action is alternatively known as instrumental rationality. Whether all sorts of social actions they turn out to be meaningful selection or not.

And we will also discuss verstehen. Verstehen, in German means understanding. Then, what kind of understanding: interpretative understanding of social action which consists of two parts; direct understanding and indirect understanding. Direct understanding is alternatively known as observational understanding and indirect understanding is alternatively known as explanatory understanding. Then we will discuss ideal types and so on.

Then in this case, we will start with Max Weber's theoretical positions, and methodological writings: how there are reconciliation between positivism on the one hand and Neo-Kantianism on the other.

Weber contributed heavily to the development of substantive sociological theory. And to and to the debate on methodology. Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writing are usually characterized as affecting a reconciliation between positivism and Neo-Kantianism. Though Weber's positions were not of course entirely consistent throughout his life, it is possible to say that in general he rejected the view attributable to some Neo-Kantians: that the cultural sciences are exclusively concerned with the uniqueness of their objects of study and the category of causality is inapplicable in them.

**Max Weber**

- Value relevance
- Interpretative understanding
- Cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge

Now, we will also discuss third area of interest for Weber that is idealizations in the cultural sciences, but let us first start with how Max Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings are usually characterized as affecting a reconciliation between positivism and Neo Kantianism.

**Max Weber**

□ Reconciliation between:

- Positivism:**  
Supremacy of science over non-sciences
- Neo-Kantianism:**  
Our knowledge of the world is constructed, and hence subject to selection and interpretation

We have already discussed positivism: positivism is nothing but supremacy of science over non-sciences. If you slightly recall, we have discussed counts law of 3 stages: theological stage, metaphysical stage and positivistic stage, we have also discussed there are certain sub stages within theological stage, fetishism, polytheism, monotheism but the objective of today's lecture is not that.

The objective of the today's lecture lies in the fact how positivism as well as Neo Kantianism influenced Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings. Then, if you slightly go back a little, you would recall that we have discussed how positivism became a dominant school of thought in the 20th century which suggests supremacy of science over non sciences, how the proponents of positivism, they stood squarely against theological as well as metaphysical explanations of reality.

We have discussed positivism in terms of certain characteristics, what are those characteristics? What are those features? What are those central tenets of positivism?

First, methodological: that science is distinct from all areas of human activity and creativity because it possesses a method unique to it, that is methodological. The objective of science and religion may remain the same. But does it imply that science is equal to religion, religion is equal to science, are they same? No, they are not same. Rather, what differentiates science from religion, notice the method or a set of methods which makes a demarcation between science and religion. We come to a point of contention that it is not the objective which differentiates science from non science. Rather, it is the method which differentiates science from non-science. People may say that the objective of religion is to arrive at the truth, the objective of science is equally to arrive at the truth, but that is not the question. The question is how to arrive at the truth. What are the processes, what are the techniques? What are the methods to arrive at the truth? These differentiates science from religion. That is why the first tenet of positivism suggests that science is distinct from all areas of human activity, or science is distinct from all areas of human activity or creativity, because it possesses a method unique to it.

Secondly, that there is only one method common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter that is called methodological monism. We have discussed I mean, we have discussed of monism means single one, dualism means two, pluralism means multiple. And positivists tried to look at the single method common to all sciences irrespective of their subject matter.

Whether it is physics, whether it is astronomy, whether it is chemistry, biology or mathematics, there must be a common method or there must be a single method common to all sciences irrespective, irrespective of their subject matter. Then what is that common method that positivists were arguing about?

For positivists, the third tenet of positivism suggests that, that what is that method. That the method of science is the method of induction, that is called inductivism. Then what is that method of induction? Now, how you arrive at generalizations by accumulating particular instances. What is that principle of induction then? Now, you first try to collect all observational data, then put forward a tentative generalization which must be verified and once it is verified, the tentative generalization becomes a law, then it gets confirmed, that is the principle of induction and positivists sided with inductivists.

Now, what is the process through which you would like your tentative generalization to be verified. Then positivists argue that the hallmark of science lies in the fact that all scientific statements must be systematically verifiable that is called systematic verifiability. That is why I gave you this example that if I say that I have seen a ghost then it must be verified. Whether actually I have seen a ghost or it is the psychological state of mind which forced me to see something which is actually not there. Then positivists try to look at systematic verifiability as a hallmark of scientific knowledge.

We have also discussed how there is unilateral relationship between observation and theory in the positivistic schema; observations lead to theory regeneration, but the converse is not true. Observations that we make are independent of theoretical commitment. On the contrary, theories are always winnowed from observations. Then there is a one way relationship between observation and theory. In other words, theories are observation dependent, whereas observations are theory independent, in the positivistic schema. And that also influenced Weber, no doubt about it.

And then, we also have discussed how positivists looked at the dichotomy between fact and value. If I say, this is a table, this is a fact. If I say this table looks beautiful, then I add value to it. Science as the paradigmatic or as the paragon of knowledge production does not believe in values; because it may look beautiful to me, it may not look beautiful to somebody else, then this is not fact.

Then positivists looked at not simply naturalism or natural sciences and scientism which refers to the fact that, everything is reduced to a natural sciences, but positivists also looked at facticity being attributed to science, that is why for positivists facts are always value neutral, whereas values do not have any factual content.

In other words, science always believes in facts and on the contrary science does not have any value commitments for positivists. As I said, the inductivists start with collecting observational data without recourse to any theoretical commitment, positivists also start with observations or a set of observations. But there positivists take a different turn and they suggest that from observations you tend to have at least two premises to confirm your statement.

That from observations you come to a set of laws, premise number one; premise number two is a set of statements describing the initial conditions and your conclusion is a set of statements describing the phenomenon to be explained. From two premises, you are going to provide an explanation, but it must always start with observations, a set of laws, then a set of statements describing the initial conditions, which will lead you to a set of statements describing the phenomenon to be explained. Then positivists also argued that, how are you going to do this? Now, you are going to keep on accumulating your observations to verify your statement to make generalizations.

Let us now see how this kind of supremacy of science over non-sciences has been interrogated. It was interrogated initially by Immanuel Kant, critique of pure reason: that there cannot be anything called Pure Reason, that cannot be anything called reason in its purest form. Whatever reason, whatever experience that we tend to see, these are always constructed.

That is why the followers of Kant, basically the Neo Kantian's viewpoint is this that our knowledge of the world is constructive knowledge, and hence subject to selection and interpretation. These three are important: our knowledge of the social world is constructed which involves selection and interpretation of multiple data systems.

How it is constructed? Our knowledge or image of the social world, how we look at the social world? Perhaps social world cannot be examined through the lenses of Natural Sciences. Perhaps Social Sciences must evolve their own methods of inquiry, own methods of looking

at reality. That is why Neo Kantians argue that our knowledge of the of the social world is constructive knowledge.

How it is constructed? It is socially constructed, it is economically constructed, it is politically constructed, it is culturally constructed, it is legally constructed, it is ethically constructed, it is institutionally constructed, it is ideologically constructed and so on. Now, this is an interplay of different layers of construction of reality. For Neo Kantians, the way I look at reality may differ from the ways in which you look at reality or somebody else looks at reality. There will be multiple versions of reality, there will be multiple realities themselves

In this sense, if there are multiple realities or multiple layers of reality, then it contradicts with the viewpoints of positivism, which suggests that there is a distinction or there is a demarcation between science and non science, there must be cognitive authority of science, there must be autonomy of science over non science and so on.

Then demarcation between science and non science, cognitive authority of science and autonomy of science, these things were challenged by Neo Kantians and obviously, it was challenged more so by Max Weber. When we say our knowledge of the social world is constructed, then we tend to be selective about this.

If I ask you, how do you look at demonetization in Indian economy, which happened in 2016? I am sure all of us will have different opinions. I am sure all of us will not have the same opinion. Somebody may say that, demonetization was done with the objective of procuring black money. Somebody may say that no, demonetization was poorly planned. In fact, the government tried to convert all black money into white money. There are different opinions. That is why you tend to select from various perspectives at hand. That is why I told you that what is a perspective. Now a perspective refers to a set of symbols, which are representative in character: a perspective refers to a set of symbols which human beings use to select from all potentially observable aspects of nature.

When I say nature, it includes both natural as well as social phenomenon. A perspective is above all a viewpoint that helps us in selecting, organizing our perceptions and guiding our actions. That is why selection is very important. And once you select on the basis of your perspective, on the basis of your positionality, then you tend to interpret it from the vantage point of your positionality as well.

Our interpretations are not same, we tend to interpret differently. If I give you a set of data: if I tell you that 70 percent of India's population comes under the age group of below 25. If I say suppose, now there are 130 crores or 140 crores population in India, out of that 70 percent of India's population, they come under the age group of below 25. Then I obviously come under the age group of above 25, then I belong to that 30 percent group.

But if I see say, this particular set of data information then how can interpretations be made? How are you going to interpret this piece of data that 70 percent of India's population come under the age group of below 25. Then somebody may say that the nation is very young, then we have to groom this nation, we have to nurture this nation, we have to direct this nation in a proper manner. We have a huge human resource.

Then another interpretation would be, only 30 percent of the population in India belong to the age group of above 25, then we have poor medical facilities, our healthcare system is poor, our life expectancy rate is low. So the same set of data may elicit different kinds of responses.

Then, why different kinds of responses? Now precisely because our image of that piece of data, our knowledge of that piece of data is determined by some kind of perspective, some kind of positionality, some kind of an ideology: that is why I said our knowledge of the social world is constructed, which involves selection and interpretation.

Now, you will find in the context of Neo-Kantianism, that the entire structural edifice of positivism was challenged: that nothing is absolutely objective, nothing is neutral. If you are familiar with Michel Foucault, Foucault talked about interpretation of interpretations,

Let me give you an example, how Michel Foucault tried to look at interpretation. Of course, it is not a part of this, but such examples will definitely help you probe into the philosophical foundations of social research. What are concepts: concepts are short hand descriptions of reality or a part of reality. If, when our real world phenomena change, our concepts are also bound to change: with changing real world phenomena we tend to arrive at newer and newer concepts. If our real world phenomena are not static, then our concepts will also not be static, our concepts will undergo transformation. Let me give you an example from the order of things by Michel Foucault.

Foucault talked about madness in the order of things: he was referring to how the term madness has undergone changes. He divided the historical epochs into three parts. One Renaissance, second Reformation, third Enlightenment.



In the face of renaissance madness was considered a divine creation. That's why people very often use to say that if somebody is not behaving properly or so, then maybe some ghost or witch has gone into his or her body. Madness was considered a divine creation in the phase of renaissance. But when the mode of production changed, our intellectual and political consciousness changed then we encountered reformation.

And in the age of reformation madness was regarded as a criminal threat: that is why people may say that if somebody is mad then that fellow is trying to kill me. Madness earlier was considered a divine creation and in the age of reformation it was considered a criminal threat.

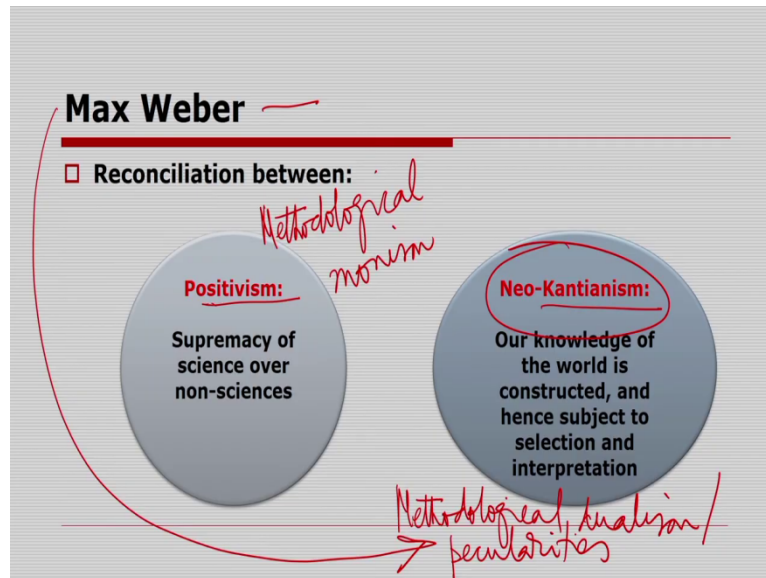
And in the Age of Enlightenment the third phase, the world had already witnessed modernity, Industrial Revolution, critical thinking, rationality, reasoning capacity, questioning the dominance of God, religion, priests and so on. The entire phase of enlightenment questioned such delineation of madness, such conceptualization of madness. Madness was considered a medical condition in the Age of Enlightenment. That is why whatever mental hospitals that you will find, they all were created in the post enlightenment phase, whereas earlier it was never considered a medical condition. Madness was never considered a medical condition, but today we always say madness is always a medical condition, it is not a divine creation or a criminal threat.

Now, of course in some societies, we see this but this is illegal, this is unethical to say that madness is a divine creation or a criminal threat, rather, it is only a medical condition. That is how concepts undergo change, concepts undergo transformation with the change in the modes of production, we also tend to change our intellectual and political consciousness.

And with the change in intellectual and political consciousness, we tend to change our concepts, we tend to change our frameworks, we tend to change our methods and so on. That is why we have clearly discussed that how our knowledge of the social world is constructive knowledge, which involves selection and interpretation.

Now, if we have to recapitulate very quickly, what we have discussed till now: we have discussed how Weber contributed heavily to the development of substantive sociological theory and to the debate on methodology and Weber's theoretical positions and methodological writings are usually characterized as affecting reconciliation between positivists and Neo-Kantianists positions.

Though Weber's positions were not of course entirely consistent throughout his life, it is possible to say that, in general he 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.



And Weber was committed to the widespread Neo-Kantian insistence on the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences. If positivism advocated methodological monism, the Neo-Kantian advocated methodological dualism or methodological peculiarities. Weber was an advocate of methodological dualism or methodological peculiarities. If the nature of our inquiry changes then our methods must also change. Our research questions must guide what kind of methods that we are going to have, not the other way around. Our objectives must guide our inquiry or our objectives must guide what kind of methods that we are going to deploy, not the other way around,

If we are diehard in following a particular set of methods then actually we are not probing into reality, we are actually trying to prove our ideology. Therein lies the significance of the distinction between science and theology, science and religion, science and non-science and so on. We have discussed this in the case of Durkheim. Now we will discuss how Weber was committed to the widespread Neo-Kantian insistence on the methodological peculiarities of the cultural sciences.

**Max Weber**

- Value relevance ①
- Interpretative understanding ②
- Cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge

*Methodological peculiarities*

*anthropology*

*"Idealizations" in the Cultural Sciences*

For Weber, these methodological peculiarities, centred on the two related concepts: what are those two related concepts? Now, one is value relevance and secondly, interpretative understanding. The cultural sciences differ from natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the 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. Idealizations in the cultural science, we will discuss this, value relevance interpretative understanding, cultural sciences, but we will have to move back and forth a little, when we will be discussing methodology of the social sciences and Weberian methodology of the social sciences as well as methodological individualism, meaningful social action, then interpretative understanding of social action, ideal types and so on.

When Weber pointed out that these methodological peculiarities centred on two related concepts of value relevance and interpretative understanding; that cultural sciences must differ from natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge. This problem that how cultural sciences must be different from natural sciences, this problem obviously has exactly the same logical structure as the problem of historical causality.

Positivists suggested that knowledge has to be grounded through logic, science must be based on logic; for Weber, science or knowledge or even knowledge in humanities and social sciences research, knowledge must be grounded, not simply through logic, but also

historically. It is also historically determined what kind of knowledge that we have today. For just like history, the problems of practical social relationships of human beings and especially of the legal system for Weber are anthropocentrically oriented, anthropocentrically oriented.

**Max Weber**

- Value relevance
- Interpretative understanding
- Cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge

*Handwritten annotations:*  
Cause-effect (pointing to the first point)  
anthropocentric (pointing to the second point)  
causal significance (pointing to the second point)  
of human actions (pointing to the third point)  
objectivity/subjectivity (at the bottom)

What is this anthropocentric? That is they inquire into the causal significance of human action. Then just as the question of the causal determinateness of a concrete injurious action which is eventually to be punished under criminal law or for which indemnity must be made under civil law, the historian's problem of causality also is oriented towards the correlation of concrete efforts with concrete causes and not towards establishment of abstract uniformities. It must be context specific thing. Then as positivists suggested that science is universal or so, knowledge is universal, but knowledge of the social world is not universal, it is context specific; our human action, individual social action is also context specific. Jurisprudence and particularly criminal law however leaves the area of problems shared with history for a problem which is specific to it in consequence of the emergence of the further problem. That is why I said a distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts. Now, what is that? Now, if and when the objective purely causal imputation have an effect to the to the action of an individual also suffices to define the actions of one involving his own subjective guilt.

## Max Weber

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- Value relevance
- Interpretative understanding
- Cultural sciences differ from the natural sciences in the distinctive role of valuations in the formation of the concepts and in the distinctive type of knowledge

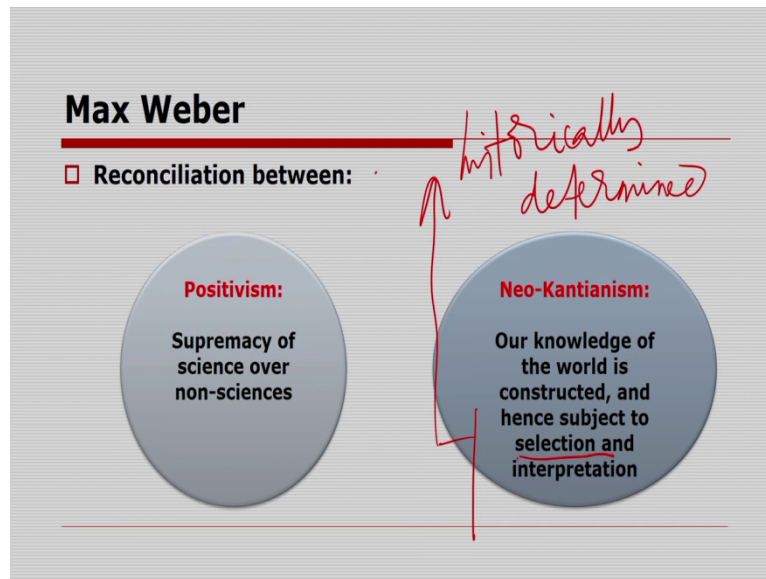
*Objectivity/subjectivity*

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Therein lies the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. For positivists science is objective in nature; the way we produce knowledge must be objective in nature. For Neo-Kantians, our knowledge of the world is constructed and hence, it involves certain subjective biases and so on, which involves selection and interpretation.

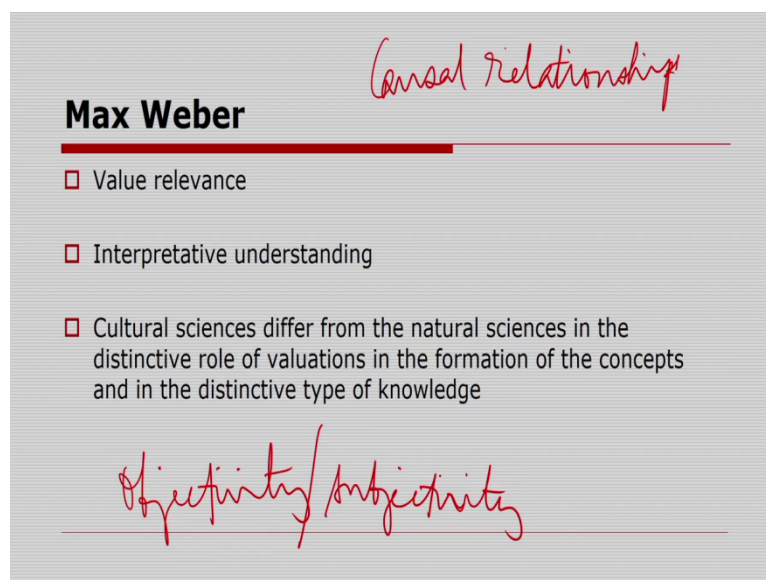
And Weber try to mediate between positivism and Neo-Kantianism. In other words, Weber always tried to mediate between objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences. This question is no longer a purely causal one, soluble by the simple establishing of facts, which are objectively discoverable by perception and causal interpretation.

Rather, is it a problem of criminal policy oriented towards ethical or other values? For it is a priori possible prior to experience, actually frequent and regularly the case today that the meaning of legal norms explicitly stated or elicited by interpretation inclines to the view that the existence of the guilt in the sense of the applicable law should depend primarily on certain subjective facts in regard to the agent. Such as intent, subjectively conditioned capacity of foresight into the effects and so on. And under these circumstances, the import of the logically distinctive characteristics of pure causal explanation will be considerably modified. That's why science not only follows logic, but also follows how it is historically conditioned, and how it is historically determined.



That is why that is why our knowledge of not only the social world, but also the natural world is not only logically determined, but also historically conditioned. The possibility of selection from among the infinity of the determinants is conditioned first by the mode of our historical interest.

Then our selection is historically determined. When it is said that history seeks to understand the concrete reality of an event in its individuality causally, what is obviously not meant by this as we have seen is that it is to reproduce and explain causally the concrete reality of an event in the totality of its individual qualities.



Then history is exclusively concerned with the causal explanation of those elements and aspects of the events in question, which are of general significance and hence of historical interest from general standpoints exactly in the same way as the judges deliberations take into

account, not the total individualized course of the events of the case, but rather those components of the events which are pertinent for subsumption under the legal norms.

Our real problem is like this, that by which logical operations do we acquire the insight and how can we demonstratively establish that such a causal relationship exists between those essential components of the effects and certain components of the infinity of determining factors. Obviously, not by simple observation of the course of events in any case: certainly not if one understands by that presupposition less mental photograph of all the physical and psychic events occurring in the space time region in question even if such were possible. Rather, does the attribution of effects to causes take place through a process of thought which includes a series of abstractions.

The first and decisive one occurs when we conceive of one or a few of the actual causal components as modified in a certain direction and then ask ourselves whether under the conditions which have been thus changed the same effect or some other effect would be expected.

Then, our causal relationship that we tend to look at, what then is meant when we speak of a number of possibilities between which those contests are set to have decided. It involves first the production of imaginative constructions, imaginative identification: we will discuss imaginative identification, imaginative constructs in the fourth week.

Now, we are moving away from Weberian position of reconciliation between positivists and Neo-Kantian positions to do the methodology of Social Sciences precisely because of such judgments about possibility. That Weber did not or Weber never subscribed to any of the views between positivism and Neo-Kantianism rather he tried to mediate the two. You will find at times he was referring to objectivity in social sciences and sometimes he was referring to the fact that even this objectivity is subject to multiple interpretations. This is extremely important to understand Weber's value neutral approach towards social sciences on the one hand and value laden approach to social sciences on the other. Thank you.