

Max Weber as Theoretician

Jan-Erik Lane

Professor Emeritus, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

**Corresponding Author: Jan-Erik Lane, Professor Emeritus, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland.*

ABSTRACT

The social sciences know three great founders: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. My candidate for number 1 is Weber, because he mastered both the micro and the macro.

Keywords: *micro-macro inquiry, inner-outer behaviour, verstehen, causation.*

INTRODUCTION

One can look at Weber's publications from different angles. The mainstream interpretation was stated by R. Bendix, but recently more daring approaches have been launched. On the one hand, there is the Freudian interpretation with focus on the troubled personality of Weber. On the other hand, we have the Marxist approach setting Weber in the political situation in Germany at his time - "situation determined" a la Mannheim, including the German catastrophe 1933-1945.

I will outline still another kind of interpretation, though admitting that both the psychological and the Mannheim approaches have some evidence - Weber failed as an *Ordinarius* and he gave a virulent talk on the *Ostfrage* at UNI Freiburg in 1895.

Weber was both a theoretician and a philosopher of science. His *Collected Papers in the Philosophy of Science* is a book published after his death in 1920, making him one of the most influential philosophers of science besides Popper, Hempel and Kuhn.

MICROFOUNDATIONS

Weber identified the basic micro unit in social science analysis as intentional behaviour. The emphasis for Weber was upon intention - what he called "Sinn" (meaning). This word has a specific semantics in German philosophy and in religion. *Sinn* was the inner side of behaviour: thought, belief, will, emotion, etc. When outer behaviour was directed by complex Sinn, there was "Sinnzusammenhang".

Weber devoted much time to analysing such meanings or complexes of meanings in macro theories.

Sinn

The humanities and social sciences understand outer behaviour by advancing intention or motive. He called it "deutend verstehen". There is nothing similar in the natural sciences.

Sinnzusammenhang

This emphasis on the basic subjective nature of human activity opens up for the analysis of ideas, plans, hopes, etc. Since the relationship between inner and outer behaviour is many-one, finding the correct intention requires a conjecture or hypothesis. Intention or reason is simple or complicated, as when I walk over the street a la J. Searle in order to buy ice cream or when I travel to Dubai a la Mossad to spy upon terrorists. Action = intention + behaviour.

Example 1:

On midsummer 1941, lots of people and objects started to move on the Ostfront into the USSR. What was the plan? The war had been planned for one year, but the end and the means? Amongst the German generals there were different goal conceptions but they all adhered to the *Blitzkrieg* as means. Yet, in August the Supreme Commander declared Minsk and Kiev (*cauldrons*) the priority, not Moscow. Hitler's decision changed *Barbarossa* into an attrition war with one likely ending.

Means and Ends

Weber declared that every rational action could be analysed with the means-end framework for understanding the inner aspect. Much criticism has been raised against Weber's methodology of understanding an actor's motive - the inner side. It is all wrong. Without intention, how to

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account for the outer side? Goals change behaviour.

Example2:

Why did Gustavus Adolfus intervene in the 30 years war? The motives and plans? Can sayings or written documents be trusted? His innermost intention?

Weber stated that any hypothesis from "verstehen" needs corroboration or outer evidence. A social relation occurs when two persons relate to each other in consciousness, I.e. Sinn. What, then, does "Sinn" refer to? The scope of Sinn is large and its importance makes a great difference *visavi* Nature and the natural sciences. Searle and Putnam live in a so-called material world, whatever this may be: atoms, waves, strings or quanta. Weber did not advocate Cartesianism or phenomenology and rejected dialectic materialism.

MACRO THEORY: IDEAL-TYPES AND CAUSALITY

The subjective aspects of action did not pose a hindrance to causality. It was not the mind-body problem that interested Weber, but cause and effect in social life. He argued incessantly that belief and ideas mattered, although as a realist he underlined power and material benefits. Thus, he was to penetrate into the cores of religious beliefs, while explaining religious struggle as conflict over life opportunities.

Weber put forward a number of macro theories where he often employed his specific method of concept formation -*ideal types*. Here, we have:

- The difference between the Orient and the Occident ecologically – in Anticipation of Wittfogel's thesis.
- The end of the Antique period by the transformation of slaves into serfs - anticipating Roztovzeff's thesis.
- The evolution of two Law families that could claim justice, or the difference between Roman and Common Law on the one hand and socialist law as well as *Kadijustice* on the other hand - anticipating Law and Economics.
- The *Staendestaat* as the ideal type of feudal society.
- The emergence of commercial law in late medieval trading societies (*commenda*)
- The rise of modern *Herrschaft* with the ideal type of bureaucracy.

- The two ideal types of democracy: parliamentary and presidential democracy.
- The impossibility of a socialist or military economy- anticipating Hayek.

All these theories include causality arguments, which needed various kinds of evidence, even counterfactual analysis. They also have micro foundations.

MICROTHEORY

Weber became well-known for his theory about the rise of capitalism. He linked the modern market economy with the Reformation, specially Calvinism, leading to endless debate about *Sinn, causation, and modernity*.

Weber argued 1904 that the parallel between the meaning of reformation and the meaning of modern capitalism were affiliated both logically and causally. He then in 1913 set out to show the opposite: no capitalism, no Calvinism. Causation called for evidence from outer behaviour or actions. The debate over the so-called Weber thesis goes on, now as the origins of modernism. For example Swedish economic historian K. Samuelson denied any connection, neither on the level of meaning (Sinn) nor in causation

Weber emphasized *Sinnzusammenhang* inquiring into the world religions and their economic impact. He found their essence in the thoughts of the virtuosi, I.e. *Sinnzusammenhaenge*.

CONCLUSION

Weber developed a meta-science in a very original manner, picking the best from mainly German philosophy. He was neither a Kantian nor a positivist or adhered to phenomenology. His concept of the inner aspect of actions is today highly relevant. The subjective meaning cannot be neglected but what is it?

Meaning or intention is not in the external world except in the sense that actor x's *Sinnzusammenhang* is outside of actor x's *Sinnzusammenhang* but other people's mind is outside of my mind but not merely brain substance or neurological interactions.

Finally, Weber was a honourable German democrat and their foremost *social* scientist ever, as his private correspondence testifies. Neither Marx nor Durkheim had a plausible micro approach to support their macro theories.

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