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## INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH VERSTEHEN IN MAX WEBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES METHODOLOGY

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### **ABSTRACT**

The key role and clarifying function of Verstehen in Weber's interpretive methodology, as one of the important and illuminating tools, is used by scientists to properly understand social science phenomena. Considering Weber's interpretive approach based on individualistic interpretation of actors' actions, we find that Verstehen, in Weber's view, serves as a tool for social scientists to uncover the causes behind actors' intentional actions. Understanding actors' intentions, influenced by Weber's interpretive methodological approach, employs all its effort in explaining social science phenomena to achieve objectivity. In this research, we have attempted to address the meaning and importance of Verstehen's role, stemming from Weber's and his predecessors' interpretive perspective, as a tool for interpreting social science phenomena. Considering Weber's project aimed at achieving objectivity in social sciences, it should be said that Verstehen, like ideal types and other components of Weber's methodological system, are pieces meant to be initiated and employed by scientists to attain objectivity in social and cultural sciences. This research strives to correctly interpret the role and significance of this component (Verstehen) within Weber's methodological system.

**Keywords:** Verstehen, Interpretive Methodology, Philosophy of Social Sciences, Max Weber, Philosophy of Science, Individualism, Interpretation, Objectivity in Social Sciences, Social Sciences Methodology

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Methodological Debates and Their Influence on Weber's Methodology:**

One of the approaches that have fueled the methodological distinction between natural sciences and social sciences can be said to be influenced by Immanuel Kant's divisions<sup>1</sup>, which were later

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the distinctions between natural sciences and human sciences in terms of the nature of these two types of sciences, there have been many discussions among philosophers who believe in these fundamental differences between them. A famous criterion belongs to the 19th-century Neo-Kantian philosophers of Baden (Southwest).

followed by the Neo-Kantians. Max Weber, who is often recognized globally as a sociologist, was also influenced by this philosophical school. The intellectual currents known as Neo-Kantianism began in the 1860s and led to the emergence of two different schools of thought. One formed in Marburg and the other in Baden (or Southwest) (as Baden was located in southwestern Germany). The focus and intellectual currents of the Marburg school were centered on epistemology and logic, while the focus and centrality of the Baden school's studies were directed towards values and cultural matters. Notable figures of this intellectual trend include Ernst Cassirer, Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Troeltsch. (Alasti 2013, p. 90)

According to Rickert's views, it should be said that for him, the boundary between natural sciences and historical sciences is not considered precisely clear. From this perspective, in many natural sciences such as evolutionary biology or physical cosmology, according to Rickert's view, historical elements can also be found. On the other hand, in the humanities, many scientists and historians also use limited generalizations in their research. Rickert calls these kinds of Relatively historical concepts. This central idea from Rickert that has cast a shadow over Weber's methodology (especially in the section on causal explanations of phenomena studied in social sciences) is based on the notion that reality cannot be fully reconstructed, influenced by this view of Rickert. According to Rickert's opinion on this matter, it should be said that in fact, history only forms parts of reality that are meaningful in their individuality. From this perspective, many individuals who are of interest to historians have proper names. However, given that it was said that the scientist is unable to fully describe any part of reality, the reason for using these names can only be that they can clarify a specific aspect of reality (like a piece of the reality puzzle). Therefore, it can be said that historical individuals are mental constructs. (Alasti 2013, p. 93).

Weber, influenced by the perspectives of Baden Neo-Kantians such as Windelband and Rickert, attempts to clearly delineate the boundaries between these two in his methodology in order to achieve accurate explanations of social and historical phenomena. Windelband, as a leading representative among these debates, holds the view that the nature and method of all sciences are not considered the same. Contrary to the positivists' way of thinking on this matter, who had an idealistic approach believing that in the future of science, we would see human sciences and social sciences ultimately transform into mathematical sciences. According to Windelband, apart from the different methodologies between natural sciences and social sciences, it must be said that human and social sciences differ from other sciences in terms of subject matter. Given that the human sciences focus their attention on subjects of the mind and the inner workings of humans. On this basis, it should be said that Windelband considers the difference between the subjects of natural sciences and human sciences to be focused on understanding the inner workings of humans. (Alasti 2023, p. 4) It can be said that the distinction Weber makes between the methods of social sciences and natural sciences is influenced by this perspective. Proponents of the uniformity of methods in natural sciences and social sciences value the common methods in natural sciences, considering them as guarantors of scientific objectivity.

Weber, influenced by Neo-Kantian philosophy of science, in his methodological essay ("Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," 1904), elaborates on his fundamental understanding of the nature of science, objectivity, and truth. Weber, with a strong emphasis on critical method and rejection of positivism from the Southwestern Neo-Kantian school, and especially on Rickert's limitations of concept formation in natural sciences, lays the foundation for

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The focus of differences between these two types of sciences is based on the type of perception that the human mind has regarding its cognitive understanding of the surrounding world. In this type of thinking, there are always divisions between nomothetic (law-oriented) sciences and ideographic sciences. (In fact, there are divisions between natural sciences and cultural sciences). (For further reading on this topic, refer to the article "Explaining the Regulatory Role of Human Sciences Against the Developmentalism of Natural Sciences (With a Review of Heinrich Rickert's Views)" by Keyvan Alasti)

the study of science (study of foundations or theory of science<sup>2</sup>), which is rooted in his theory of objectivity. From Weber's perspective, our goal is to understand the unique characteristics of the reality in which we move. On one hand, we want to understand the relationships and cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations, and on the other hand, we desire to understand the historical causes of their being as they are. In fact, according to Weber, we are seeking two types of explanations. One on a smaller scale and the other on a larger scale, which is history. Weber, in his philosophy of methodology, reconnected the methods of Verstehen and explanation, which had been separated in Neo-Kantian philosophies of science (McCarthy 2019, p. 131).

Weber believed that social sciences, in their initial stage, should focus on meaning. In fact, meaning for Weber was considered as that which an actor bestowed upon their action in relation to their intentions. This distinctive and important aspect of Weber's methodology allowed us to separate the meaning of behavior from an action coupled with intention, and to better understand it. Indeed, in Weber's methodology, meaningful action differs from behavior and can be said to have precedence and superiority over it. According to Weber, we can always have perceptions from the context of the society in which we live, and these perceptions are dependent on and influenced by the actions that individual in society exhibit when confronting social phenomena. (Benton and Craib 2022, p. 149). It should be said that Weber continues the tradition followed by the Southwest Neo-Kantians (such as Rickert, Windelband). As mentioned earlier, they distinguished between natural sciences and human sciences in terms of subject matter. (Hughes 2007, p. 276). According to this perspective, unlike natural sciences which aim to discover causal laws of nature, social sciences seek to Verstehen social phenomena, based on the meaning that social actors attribute to their actions. (Ries and Sprenger 2020).

It can be said that Weber's approach in examining social science phenomena is reductionist (individualistic). In his methodology, he always strives to reduce all issues related to sociology to the individualism. Therefore, it can be said that giving importance to the individual (actor) for Weber in examining social phenomena and achieving social sciences that have the characteristic of objectivity is a key concept. Given this approach that is the prevailing spirit of Weberian methodology, other aspects of his methodology can be better understood and comprehended. Weber's methodology is called Methodology of individualism and, as mentioned, is based on the individual. For this purpose, to better understand Weber's methodology, it might be better to clearly explain its relationship with Verstehen (understanding the intentions of actors).

### **Interpretive Methodology: (and its relation to understanding actors' intentions):**

Interpretive methodology stands directly opposite to the methodology of logical positivism. According to positivists, we can use the methodology employed in natural sciences for social and human sciences as well. This belief in positivist methodology contrasts with Weber, who is considered an interpretationist and opposes this way of thinking. The difference between these two models of thought should be found in the distinction between observational understanding and explanatory understanding. It can be said that observational understanding only provides a description of behavior, while explanatory understanding also shows the reason for the action being performed. Weber's methodology of Verstehen, sometimes referred to as empathy, aims to allow (the social scientist) to put themselves in the place of the acting individual and understand what goes on in an actor's mind that leads to the manifestation of that action. (Benton and Craib 1401, p. 154)

Historically, positivists have always tried throughout the history of methodological debates to

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<sup>2</sup>Wissenschaftslehre

implement and execute the methodological approaches of natural sciences in human and social sciences. Considering this key and important point, in the methodology of natural sciences, the scientist needs to observe and find recurring patterns in nature or the laboratory to discover and attain laws. Attaining the laws governing the world serves as a key that can provide the scientist with an explanatory role regarding natural phenomena. However, this positivist approach in social and human sciences is not easily executable or feasible. Because, according to Weber's views in his methodology, in order to obtain recurring patterns (similar to the explanatory patterns of natural sciences) in human societies, the presence of meanings of actors' actions should be predetermined and clear to social scientists. However, Weber explains that given the meanings that actors attribute to their rational behaviors, causing that behavior to be considered rational, it differs for each individual (actor) according to the internal meaning they have previously assigned to it (personally). (Alasti 2013, p. 86).

To better understand the difference between these two methodological ways of thinking, we must refer to the understanding of cultural sciences. In fact, we should understand from Weber's perspective what a social scientist means when talking about cultural sciences. What does cultural reality mean and how can a social scientist comprehend it?

Positivist philosophies of social sciences proposed the idea of methodological unity between natural sciences and human sciences, and this unity necessitated minimizing interpretive elements in both forms of science. Objectivity in human sciences, like natural sciences, is based on empirically verifiable sensory evidence, especially as manifested in the behavior of actors. Dilthey, who still viewed things through the lens of the relationship between natural sciences and human sciences, sought a separate methodology for human sciences and saw hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, as the main candidate.

Amidst these methodological debates, Weber's social sciences attempted to find a middle ground that incorporated interpretive elements (Gimble 2016, pp. 80-81). According to Weber, interest in studying cultural facts (related to values) is necessarily linked to comprehensible human action. It should be said that this remained the legitimate and undisputed domain of historical sciences. Weber realized that interpretation (*Deutung*) could mean both attribution of value and understanding of motives. However, these meanings had to be clearly distinguished from each other. From a scientific perspective, Weber called for avoiding value judgments at all times. In fact, interpretation as valuation was, by definition, not a scientific act. Of course, in interpreting a historical event or person, the researcher could use value concepts, which he, as a value-judging human, took a position on (Butros 2024, p. 576).

In Weber's methodology, the issue of interpretation is pursued in a completely rational and purposeful manner by the scientist (who, if we want to correctly name according to Weber's methodology, should be called an interpreter). Weber defines the position of sociology based on subjective meaningful behavior oriented towards the behavior of others. The subjective meaning of an action is the agent's motive (reason-goal-intention or value). Social action should be rationally interpreted in light of schemas that specify the agent's goals or values, in relation to which actions are effective instruments. Interpretation is a form of causal explanation, although causes in this case (motives, reasons, or anything else) are different in type from causes in natural sciences.

The question that arises here is: how does the social scientist retrieve subjective meaning? According to most of Weber's interpreters, through *Verstehen*. In his essays on Roscher and Knies, Weber explicitly and repeatedly rejects the method of empathetic projection or recreation of others' thought processes and experiences in one's own mind. Social scientists cannot retrieve motives through intuition or psychological analysis of personality, and the required method is

rational interpretation. Weber describes rational interpretation as a hypothesis or ideal-typical construct of an agent's situation. Social scientists include in their model those situational characteristics they believe are vital for understanding the agent's meaning, disregarding unnecessary aspects. Accordingly, the task of the social scientist is to attribute a goal or motive that makes the action reasonable for the type of agent in his type of situation. The purpose or meaning of the action, in an important sense, is formed by and inferred from the situation (Jacobs 1990, p. 561).

Weber, in his article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," when discussing the importance and value of laws in natural sciences, considers the importance and validity of these laws to be in their pursuit of universal validity. However, Weber points out that for understanding the non-abstract reality of historical and social phenomena, the more general our laws are, the less content they will have. From this perspective, one can say that in Weber's methodology, these laws will have less value for social science knowledge.

Conversely, it can be said that the more specific and particular an approach is, and also corresponding to the value it pursues, the more important it is from Weber's point of view. Weber believes that in cultural sciences, knowledge of the universal and general is never considered valuable in itself, as it cannot be illuminating in explaining a social science phenomenon. Therefore, it can be said that the objective analysis of cultural events, assuming that the ideal of science is to reduce empirical reality to a series of laws, is meaningless from Weber's perspective. In fact, according to Weber, no law can show us in which situations and in what respect importance and meaning are exemplified.

In his methodology, Weber believes that the solution to this problem can only be found in light of the researcher's value ideas (Weber, 2020 "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 127). In his methodological approach, Weber even believes that we cannot explain historical reality solely through a series of universal laws dependent on human behaviors. Unlike economics or political science, historical reality cannot be extracted or explained through universal laws of human behavior. Rather, it can be expressed that explanation alongside *Verstehen*, generality with specificity, universal laws with cultural meaning together, can lead to knowledge (McCarthy 2019, p. 140).

Interpretivists sought to explain social science phenomena by discovering the meanings that actors gave to their own actions. The key to this type of approach was understanding the motives behind the actors' behaviors. In fact, from the methodology of interpretivists, of which Weber himself is considered a member, it emerges that we cannot act generally to explain social and cultural phenomena. In reality, we are unable to reduce a group of actors' actions to a series of predetermined elements to explain social science phenomena. The correct method, in their view, was to examine each individual's action as a separate atom in society (Keating and Della Porta 2016, p. 64).

In Weber's interpretivist tradition, the individual is considered as an atom in the study of social phenomena, and any proposition related to a collective such as a party or a nation must ultimately be decomposable into concepts that refer to the actions of human individuals (Giddens 1996, p. 70). This approach of Weber is strongly in contrast with the idea of formulating social phenomena (for the purpose of explaining and interpreting them).

### **Weber's Interpretivist Tradition and Critique of the Formulation Approach in Examining Social Phenomena:**

In the article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," Weber criticizes the approach of formulating social phenomena based on a series of predetermined general templates at various

points. For example, when he is critiquing the view that history can be reduced to a few phenomena, he makes numerous criticisms. In his view, throughout the history of social science thought, there has always been the idea that we can reduce historical events to a series of elements, for instance, dependent on human geography (such as races or nationalistic characteristics). Weber believes that if we want to focus solely on such elements in our historical analysis, this work of ours stems from our ignorance and lack of comprehensive awareness of historical phenomena. From Weber's point of view, such analyses and research are considered systematic. Weber believes that this kind of systematic analysis (a sort of technician-like approach to social science phenomena) has been stagnant throughout the history of social sciences and has not grown. Weber believes that the cause of this immaturity and stagnation stems from the way of thinking of those who believe that precise explanations of social science phenomena should be based on careful studies of empirical data selected from specific aspects. Weber believes that our interest in the results of this type of research depends on the degree of success in studying them. In his view, nascent fields like racial biology fall into these categories. Weber believes that this kind of explanation cannot be considered correct and successful for social science phenomena, and they are somewhat viewed as exaggerated excitements in new sciences that dream of natural science-like explanations in social sciences (Weber, 2020 "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 112).

According to Weber, the issue of historical economic interpretation can also be considered a good example in this regard, which sought to consider reality as a (universal) law and thereby explain all cultural and social phenomena that have meaning for us in its final analysis as phenomena conditioned by economics. They always attributed their shortcomings to matters such as chance and general and vague affairs. Weber, in his criticisms of this kind of dogmatic view, argues that 1 - Sometimes those historical events that cannot be explained by resorting to economic motives (precisely for this reason, or better to consider it a problem that has not yet been resolved) are considered accidental and lacking scientific importance. Criticism 2 - In other cases, they make the definition of (economic matter) so vague and general that all human interests that are somehow related to the use of material tools can be included in the definition. Weber explicitly criticizes this dogmatist view that the condition of the economic factor can be used as a cause for all phenomena. From Weber's perspective, explaining all social phenomena by relying on economic causes is by no means complete and correct, even within the realm of economic sciences itself (Weber, 2020 "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 113).

Throughout the article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," Weber repeatedly criticizes these explanatory approaches that have even taken root in the tradition of sociology itself, such as his criticisms of Karl Marx. In summary, it can be said that in Weber's scientific methodology, Weber's interpretive sociology is a generalized part of the study of history. It should also be said that regarding interpretive sociology, an important point that is always significant is that the social scientist should not search for historical laws of social evolution. In fact, unlike Marx and other evolutionists, the social scientist with Weber's approach should not have such an approach (Marx's approach). Rather, he should try to understand the ideas and intentions of historical actors (Roth 1976, p. 316).

In another part of the article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," Weber opposes the idea of treating social science phenomena as general matters. According to Weber, those who believe that social sciences should be approached like the methodology of natural sciences are mistaken. For example, Weber argues that even if we can demonstrate that we have arrived at a law and can make it tangible and comprehensible, we realize that we have only managed to formulate and organize a large number of similarities according to our desired rules and laws. However, Weber believes the problem arises when we have elements of individual events that, after selecting elements that can be categorized under the laws and rules we have specified, are not explainable. (Weber, 2020, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 116).

In fact, these are considered uncategorized sequences that must be reconsidered and reformulated in the system of that law-based cognitive system. (Weber, 2020), "'Objectivity' in Social Science

and Social Policy," p. 117). According to Weber, social science seeks to understand the unique characteristics of social reality, relationships, and the cultural significance of individual phenomena. It aims to understand the causes of these events, which may or may not be historical, and ultimately tries to explain them. Therefore, Weber considered social science in its goal to be closer to history than to natural sciences, although he was distinct from the historians of his time and after, which should be attributed to the extraordinary breadth of his ideas, as he greatly developed sociology (Goddard 1973, p. 8).

In his methodological collection, Weber even believes that having a naturalistic approach to sciences such as history is a mistake. Weber argues that the clue to this issue can be found in such wrong attitudes. For instance, the idea that the true content and essence of historical reality are depicted in a series of theoretical constructs, and these constructs are used as a Procrustean bed into which history must be fitted. The notion that such ideas exist as real forces with objective existence and are considered true realities that operate beyond the course of events and ultimately realize themselves in history. Another mistake relates to when we consider the ideas of an era as thoughts and ideals that dominated people or a specific number of those who lived in that era and were the powers and creators of that era's culture. (Weber, 2020, "Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 174).

Weber even views statistical probabilities as general explanations, emphasizing that focusing solely on them may lead social science researchers astray. Weber believes that no matter how precise statistics are, or in other words, how low their tolerance, they are still general categories in their essence. The key point of Weber's methodology is based on the idea that to achieve objectivity (attaining objectivity in social and cultural sciences), the social science researcher must examine phenomena in a partial and individual manner. (Weber 2021, p. 47).

In fact, Weber does not deny the proper use of sociological methodological tools, but for example, he believes that statistical probabilities can be useful in explaining social science phenomena. However, this is only if they can show the understandable subjective meanings of actors. In his methodology, Weber always strives to show that social science knowledge is not law-bound. Although some believe that if we can make social sciences law-bound, we will be able to bring this science closer to standards of objectivity. But Weber, by raising a subtle point, explains that this way of thinking cannot be effective for social sciences. According to Weber, there are differences between the social knowledge of a particular event and the knowledge of the laws of that event. It is obvious that knowledge of laws can be considered as research tools for reaching knowledge of social science phenomena. From this perspective, social knowledge has a close relationship with the meaning that occurs concretely among events. As a result, according to Weber, no model of established or developing laws has the ability to reveal to us how and in what situation events become meaningful. (Burt 2018, p. 82).

Therefore, according to Weber, if we want to search for laws to explain social and cultural science events, like what is done in natural sciences, and ultimately reach specific formulas, this is considered a futile endeavor. Because Weber believes it is devoid of empirical content. This incorrect view even applies to culture. So much so that Weber has applied his criticism of this approach in the article on objectivity. In his view, what was commonly known as national characteristics was a set of attitudes that had persisted over many years and could serve as a good excuse and pretext for a series of justifications for the behaviors of states and individuals. Based on this type of thinking, the English could be considered pragmatic and committed to gradual changes, the French dogmatic and prone to revolution, the Germans combative and domineering, and so on. This stereotypical view was used as an incorrect solution for explaining and justifying phenomena. (Keating and Della Porta 2016, p. 186)

In the article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," Weber criticizes the methodological view of some followers of the historical school who viewed social science phenomena with a natural approach. He compares this unattainable approach with an example from astronomy:

{Among the followers of the historical school, we see this type of view that the ideal of all sciences, including cultural sciences, in the distant future is to achieve a system of propositions through which reality can be deduced. This is considered impossible and unachievable. Weber, to further explain, expresses the reason for the unattainability of this ideal by referring to an example that the ideal and unattainable goal of such an approach to cultural realities can be considered as a kind of astronomical knowledge. The first point to note about this is that astronomical knowledge is not a system of laws, but borrows its presumed laws from other fields such as mechanics. In fact, this science engages itself with the question of what is the singular and specific result of the operation of mechanical laws within the framework of a unique celestial configuration. And how can it be explained through this, because all the celestial configurations that are important to us are singular. Every singular system that is explained or somehow predicted in this science can only be causally explained as the consequence of another system, which is itself equally singular. No matter how much we try to delve into the dark depths of the distant past, we still cannot extend laws to all those phenomena and must always resort to deducing reality from an individual perspective to understand and discover reality.} (Weber, 2020, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 117).

However, a question that arises in Weber's methodology is: Can we still reach an initial state that Marxists are seeking (which would be deterministic)? According to Weber, the assumption of the existence of an initial cosmic state that lacks individual characteristics or has fewer individual characteristics compared to the current cosmic state is a meaningless idea. Weber believes that traces of such ideas can be seen in social science disciplines. Especially when sometimes propositions are taken from natural laws or sometimes tested with primitive observations (of primitives). These indicate the existence of a kind of initial state (initial economic-social state) where historical accidents have no way in. Weber cites situations such as primitive agricultural communism as an example in this regard. The point he wants to make is that as a result, any misfortune that supposedly exists is merely due to the existence of that initial state. (Weber, 2020, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 118).

In the same article, he even tries to show that if we think we can prove the scientific validity of a principle that serves as a foundation for solving other social science issues, this demonstrates the height of our naivety. Although Weber himself notes that there may still be some who believe these principles can be proven, Weber's suggestion is that we can enrich social sciences by discussing fundamental principles and reducing, for example, value judgments to logical premises (minor and major). In fact, from Weber's perspective, we can extract useful and practical propositions from them in this way (Weber, 2020, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 95).

Another important and fundamental question Weber poses in the article "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" is whether the goal of social science knowledge can be achieved by exploring recurring sequences.

Weber provides an example: Suppose that through psychology or anything else, we have managed to analyze all observed or conceivable relationships between social phenomena into a few ultimate fundamental factors, and have finally succeeded in formulating them. Now, what implications could such results have for our knowledge of the culture of a specific historical moment or any singular dimension of this culture, such as the growth, development, and cultural meaning of capitalism? This method, according to Weber, is as useful as a textbook on organic chemical compounds is for our knowledge of the biogenetic aspect of the plant and animal world. It should be said that in no case is concrete reality deducible from laws and factors. Not because some mysterious higher power like dominant genes or spirits or anything else that can be named



as a mysterious factor resides in living phenomena. Rather, the real reason for this non-deducibility is that the analysis of reality is concerned with how and in what form the hypothetical factors mentioned are arranged and organized to cause the emergence of a cultural phenomenon that becomes meaningful and important to us historically and culturally. In fact, it is the role of the formulation of hypothetical factors as well as values among social scientists that can necessitate clarity and explanation of social and cultural phenomena. In a way, a combination of these factors creates the degree of importance of a social and cultural phenomenon for scientists.

**Criticisms of Marx, considering Weber's interpretive approach: (Continuing from the previous text)**

From Weber's point of view, social science explanations cannot be considered formulated or axiomatized explanations. In fact, social science explanations cannot be pursued reductively. The criticism that Weber levels at Marx stems from this way of thinking. According to Weber, we cannot pass all human affairs through an economic perspective. What Marx had done, in Weber's view, is considered immature. Trying to label all human actions as economic and attempting to explain all social science phenomena on that basis, from Weber's perspective, this kind of one-dimensional thinking is unable to assist us in correctly explaining social, cultural, and historical phenomena. Wanting to view social and cultural categories entirely from an economic perspective, apart from imposing a materialistic thinking on the spirit of research, accepting a single cause (as one-dimensional thinking (dogmatism)) dominates the researcher's methodology. From Weber's point of view, this kind of acceptance by the researcher is considered intentional. Because it seems the researcher is consciously aware that a single cause cannot account for all human phenomena. (Weber, 2020, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 109).

According to Weber, Marx had made this big mistake, namely that with regard to a monocausal view (economic factor), he tried to explain and interpret all human actions based on it. Contrary to Weber's view, from Marx's perspective, social science phenomena were considered monocausal, and this caused social and cultural exceptions to be ignored. (Weber 2021, p. 56)

**Marx's thesis should be considered as interpretation:**

On this basis, Weber believes that we cannot consider an important thesis of Marx as a general rule for explaining human and social phenomena, as well as historical worldview. In fact, general theses and also obtaining a series of relationships, or formulating a series of laws for social science phenomena are not applicable. According to Weber, social sciences should address the minute details and also various factors that cause social science phenomena. The perspective that Weber pursues in social sciences is individualism (humans as atoms forming social science phenomena). With a materialistic understanding of all history or society, wanting it to be considered as a kind of complete worldview is considered a mistake in Weber's view.

For Weber, historical cultural knowledge of a phenomenon is not due to its commonality with other phenomena, but due to its definitive characteristics. Because the values that constitute their appropriate subject are essentially subjective, tangible, and individualistic. Unlike nomothetic that natural science seeks, what matters in historical science is not a universal law-based causality, but the specific way in which an individual attributes values to certain events and institutions or takes a position on a matter. The cultural values of one's own time are under a unique and unrepeatable set of historical conditions. Its goal is to understand the specific historical individual, tangible, with unavoidable universal and rational concepts. (Stanford Encyclopedia, Weber)

Weber, in a different reading of Marx's thesis, believes that this important thesis of Marx should be considered as an economic interpretation. The correctness or incorrectness of this interpretive sociological thesis of Marx can be examined by social science researchers over different times. Weber believes that the theses of Marx and his like, rather than being considered as social

explanations, have become the subject of superficial readings by some of the public and intellectuals. (Weber, 2020, "Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 111).

According to Weber, people who have followed such an approach have generally accepted superficial explanations of events, which in social sciences is tantamount to a pest and moving away from objectivism. From Weber's point of view, this situation and this type of thinking in examining social phenomena is not new and similar events have occurred in other sciences as well. That from time to time, sciences such as biology have claimed that they are not only a source of science and knowledge but also a universal window for worldview. In Weber's opinion, when science makes such a claim, it has separated from its mission of experimenting and discovering its errors, and also does not possess that meaning of objectivity that science is pursuing. In a sense, rather than having scientific expertise, it is more like an ideology and doctrine. Weber's correct criticism is that resisting and succumbing to one-dimensional thinking ultimately leads to the destruction of that way of thinking and science. In fact, they are not willing to accept criticisms and their errors and are only looking to explain phenomena from a one-dimensional perspective. (Weber, 2020, "Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," p. 111).

### **The component of individualism in interpretive methodology and its relationship with Verstehen:**

Weber, influenced by the Neo-Kantian tradition, such as Rickert and Windelband, is methodologically influenced by these two thinkers. Traces of other romantic Neo-Kantians from the late 19th century, like Dilthey and Jaspers, can also be seen in Weber's methodology. However, it can be said that Rickert, as a thinker who opposed positivism and emphasized the necessity of understanding the meaning of the actor's intention rather than merely explaining its external forms, has had a significant impact on Weber's methodology. As we observe, for Weber, the element of Verstehen in his methodology is considered very important.

Weber, influenced by his intellectual and scientific ancestors, knew that in human sciences, knowledge has an internal nature that cannot be approached generally and collectively from a macro perspective for its measurement. Therefore, it must be measured and understood in its individuality and uniqueness. From this perspective, in Weberian methodology, the element of empathy becomes important for understanding the intentions of actors.

Another important factor that Weber owes to his ancestors is the existence and role of values, which is an important factor in distinguishing natural sciences from social sciences. As mentioned, the difference that Weber's ancestors made between natural sciences and human sciences was, in fact, methodological rather than merely topical. If it were not so, it would seem that a group of experimental psychologists could also study a part of human behavior, in which case it would have to be concluded that the entire realm of human activities cannot be known through understanding the meaning of action of actors, and it can be said that individual thoughts are distinct in this respect.

On this basis, one can interpret the line of thought of the believers of the two groups as follows: nomothetic sciences, such as natural sciences, always try to generalize laws and scientific findings to other aspects of itself. On the other hand, idiographic sciences pursue the mission of only describing and interpreting specific historical conditions and the actions of actors. Based on this, it can be stated that the more a social scientist can understand the actions of actors in social science phenomena, the closer he has come to knowledge.

Weber believes that understanding action can change the subject of knowledge and consequently links it to intentionality, and as a result, history becomes the knowledge of particular, individual

determination (individuality). It is obvious that in this case, the social scientist examines social phenomena with the assumption of historical Verstehen. (Mohammadi Asl 2011, p. 19).

An important point that should be considered regarding Weber's methodology (given his influence from Rickert) is that for Weber, values not only has a close relationship with individuality, but they are also able to play an important role in shaping historical concepts. Weber, following Rickert's thesis on this matter, is well aware that not everything that is considered as an individual necessarily fits as a subject of cultural sciences. Because not every individual can be considered as a "historical individual". In fact, what makes the difference in this regard is their dependence on values.

According to Rickert, the characteristic of historical individuals is their indivisibility. From Rickert's point of view, the important component that leads to the indivisibility of individuals is the value that has been attached to it in the process of interpretation and meaning-making for the scientist, in order to explain a social phenomenon. A famous example in this regard, according to Rickert, is the example of the Koh-i-Noor diamond. For example: a piece of stone is just an ordinary piece of stone, but if, for instance, an aesthetic value is loaded onto it, it will be the subject of social and historical interpretations and analyses in a meaningful way for scientists. For example, given that there are many diamonds in the world, only a diamond like the Koh-i-Noor has historical value. It can be said that the Koh-i-Noor diamond, because it has been in the royal crown of the Queen and King of England for a long time, has a special symbol and value among other diamonds in the world. Or that it has a special value due to its historical background. Accordingly, it should be said that the Koh-i-Noor is considered a historical individual. In fact, this feature, according to Rickert, causes us to be unable or unwilling to break it apart or separate it (the Koh-i-Noor diamond). (Alasti 2023, p. 7)

In the article "The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics," Weber refers to the importance of Verstehen (understanding the intentions and purposes of actors), the mind, as the foundation and reference of knowledge in social sciences. According to Weber, all sciences related to social and psychological phenomena ultimately return to human behavior, which includes all different and varied thoughts and attitudes. The distinguishing aspect of these sciences in relation to other sciences such as natural sciences is that they seek to understand (Verstehen) actions. This understanding in the explanations of social scientists will ultimately lead to interpretation.

The approach that Weber always pursues in his methodology is based on a particular type of understanding of actors that leads to rational interpretations by social scientists (Weber 2020, "The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics," pp. 73-74).

Weber was well aware that the mission of social sciences was not to find or discover a series of general laws like natural sciences. In fact, from Weber's perspective, a social scientist is always constructing different stories from the world of social phenomena. As a result, as mentioned earlier, this leads to the emergence of various rational interpretations among social scientists. According to Weber, wanting to invent a series of general laws and ultimately generalize them is neither the duty nor the mission of social sciences or the scientist in this field. Weber believes that the duty of a social scientist is to understand particular events and ultimately explain them (interpret them).

The society that Weber envisions is composed of individuals. For Weber, every individual truth takes precedence over structure, and he is considered an individualist who does not believe in collective entities such as classes (like Marx). As a result, it can be said that the subject of Weberian sociology is understanding meaningful individual actions. (Benton and Craib 2022, p. 156).

However, when discussing actions and behaviors in Weber's methodology, what meanings and concepts should these be considered as? In fact, it should be said that the meaning of action and behavior from Weber's perspective, given his methodological system, is different. In short, it should be said that action or meaningful action from Weber's point of view is considered as purposeful rational behavior, but behavior is not so. For example: sneezing, which in Weber's methodology is not worth spending time to understand and study rationally.

### **The Issue of Verstehen in Weber's Philosophy of Social Sciences:**

It must be said that the discussion of Verstehen in the philosophy of social sciences is central to debates and controversies among interpreters in this field. In examining the theories used in the philosophy of science and the literature employed by natural scientists, one can discern that philosophers of science and natural scientists consider understanding to be closely related to the concept of explanation. This is while thinkers in the humanities believe that these two concepts should be separated. On this basis, sometimes to defamiliarize and distinguish this concept in social sciences, different meanings such as empathy have been considered. In Weber's methodology, he attempts to show firstly what he means by the word understanding (Verstehen) that is used in common English literature and social sciences, and what characteristics it possesses. Weber tries to explain the common inadequacies of understanding in the prevalent literature of social sciences by presenting understanding from his own perspective. In this regard (in order for the audience to grasp the meaning of understanding that he has in mind), he also mentions interpretation as a necessary condition for achieving it. Although in the views of other interpreters, this interpretation may also be considered independently as a type of understanding from the perspective of thinkers in this field. (Alasti and Saatchifard 2023, p. 94).

Weber considered sociology as a science that had the task of interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at causal explanation. Social action, from Weber's point of view, was the practical meaning from individuals participating in social relationships. According to Weber, interpretive sociology considers the individual and their actions as the fundamental social unit, and he said that the task of sociology is to reduce certain categories of human interaction to understandable action. Social action in the Weberian sense is distinguished from mere behaviors. For example, an action directed towards inanimate objects does not qualify. Action is only social if it takes into account the behavior of another person. Moreover, action goes beyond mere contact between individuals. According to Weber, people jostling in a crowded department store does not constitute social action. The action of a social personality is limited to cases where the actor's behavior is meaningfully based on the behavior of others. In short, behavior that is intentional and oriented towards the behavior of other humans can be described as social behavior. It can be said that, in Weber's overall methodology, intentional behavior, meaningful behavior, and subjectively understandable behavior are all synonymous with Verstehen. (Tucker 1965, p. 157).

However, when these terms are used for the concept of understanding in English, it causes a lot of confusion. This seems to be the result of Weber's critics' failure to consider that this concept is not a methodological tool for explaining all behaviors, but rather a mature social behavior. This eliminates all behaviors that are purely reflexive, such as mystical behaviors, and practically all behaviors of individuals who are severely mentally disturbed. Weber notes in this regard:

"In many psychic processes, meaningful action, that is, subjectively understandable, is not found at all. In others, it can only be detected by a specialist psychologist. Many mystical experiences that cannot be adequately expressed in words are completely incomprehensible to those who are not susceptible to such experiences." On the other hand, Weber continues: "At the same time, the ability to imagine oneself performing a similar action is not a necessary condition for understanding. To understand Caesar, it is not necessary to be Caesar. The understandable and non-understandable components in a process are often intertwined and interconnected." (Tucker 1965, p. 158). Weber, using the tool of Verstehen influenced by his intellectual tradition, tries to

implement the clarity and function he envisions for it in his methodology by intertwining the role of interpretation with it.

**Verstehen in Weber's Methodology and Its Influence from a Long-standing Tradition: Verstehen from Dilthey's Perspective:**

It should be noted that Dilthey distinguishes between Verstehen and explanation. In fact, from his point of view, explanation belongs to the natural sciences, while Verstehen belongs to the humanities and social sciences. However, what might lead to misunderstanding in this regard is the issue in the history of philosophy that explanation, since Aristotle's time, has been considered a process that ultimately leads to understanding. Dilthey attempts to show that the definitions of these concepts in his view are not fundamentally different from the Aristotelian tradition. In fact, the issue of Verstehen in both approaches (Diltheyan and Aristotelian) is the relationship between the scientist's mind and other minds. From this perspective, it must be said that the scientist tries to bring other minds to understanding through explanation. On this basis, explanation is always a process that results in understanding. (Alasti 2013, p. 88)

The word Verstehen in the interpretive tradition influenced by Dilthey actually refers to the practical meaning in which the interpreter of action (social scientist) tries to understand and comprehend the mind of the actor. Therefore, it can be said that the social scientist attempts to significantly understand what goes on in the mind of an actor in a social event. This conception (Verstehen) more accurately means understanding that moment in which the actor has understood that moment and also had a specific meaning for it. According to the interpretivist tradition, of which Dilthey is also a pioneer, it should be said that Verstehen is like a rediscovery, time and time again, of the meaning of an actor's action by the social scientist. (Palmer 2022, p. 127)

From Dilthey's perspective, Verstehen in social sciences is the basis of separation or perhaps the basis of superiority over natural sciences. It is a tool specific to the social scientist through which they can correctly interpret social phenomena. Verstehen can provide the social scientist with a view that can align the phenomena of the actors' inner world with the outer world. Dilthey believes that Verstehen can understand individual existence. In fact, it can realize what intention the actor had when engaging in a meaningful social action. Dilthey emphasizes that the social scientist should seek the kind of understanding that can be useful in bringing social science phenomena closer to objectivity. (Palmer 2022, p. 117)

Dilthey was of the opinion that mere inner experience is not sufficient to validate and guarantee objective views of other actors for interpreting social phenomena. This is why the social scientist needs Verstehen to understand social science phenomena. He emphasized that social scientists can only complete the understanding of inner experience through the process of recreating matters that are accessible to the senses. It is clear that everything must be transferred from our understanding of life as consciousness, but the problem is how can a consciousness with an individual and specific structure to one person have the ability to recognize an external and alien different individuality through recreation?

Therefore, Dilthey becomes ambivalent and doubtful in facing this challenge. In fact, he tries to consider the role of Verstehen in response to such challenges, in order to clarify its meaning, under the guise of the description process. On the other hand, in Dilthey's theoretical system, the meaning of Verstehen should be considered a kind of knowledge, or a cognitive process that a scientist is engaged in, which is directed towards specific signs and symbols. In fact, it seems that Verstehen is placed as a subset of the cognitive process that is supposed to provide the scientist with an epistemological result in interpreting a phenomenon. Despite the inadequacies that exist in the category of Verstehen, which Dilthey also acknowledges, he nevertheless believes that Verstehen is an appropriate method for explaining social science phenomena and is the distinguishing aspect of social sciences from natural sciences. He believes that Verstehen is used as an essential tool for all other functions of the humanities. Dilthey frequently speaks of Verstehen under the titles of transference, recreation, and re-experiencing. (Mantzavinos 2021, p. 28 and 29)

**The Empathetic Method and Its Relationship with Verstehen:**

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According to Weber, to achieve Verstehen, the social scientist must adopt an empathetic method in Weberian methodology. In fact, the empathetic method depends on the emotional and compassionate participation of a researcher towards an actor, in order to understand and comprehend their action. It can be said that being directly and immediately understandable, in a way that is comprehensible to everyone and free from any ambiguity, as addressed in mathematics and mathematical proofs, can be considered an excellent and prominent example of rational understanding.

It is obvious that when an individual engages in the act of proof for the correctness of a mathematical hypothesis, this leads others to be able to connect with the meanings that the actor had in mind, and ultimately, to be able to understand and comprehend it well. This excellent and distinguished example of understanding can be considered an ideal from Weber's perspective for social sciences. In such a way that if one can understand the actions of an actor who is trying to achieve a certain goal with certain means in the same manner, then one can provide an interpretation that is considered rational (purposeful) for it (Weber 2021, p. 35).

From Weber's point of view, Verstehen is based on the internal and imaginative reproduction of the meaning of a human action. Therefore, it is related to the empathetic transfer of oneself to the intentions of another. In fact, a social scientist empathizes with the actor to understand the meaning and concept of their intended purpose. However, it should be noted that this is not considered intuition and should not be confused with direct intuition. Because if there is certainly a sense in which human interests can be intuited and reproduced in inner experience, it is a sense that cannot be said with natural processes. But it should be said that the empathy of a social scientist is not merely a simple intuition either. According to Weber, inner experience and inner judgment can be transferred, and shared understanding becomes impossible unless there is an inner aspect of the content that can be understood as it exists. (Aragona 2019, p. 7).

Weber assigns a role to empathetic intuition but believes that understanding is not just an act of intuition. Rather, it is like a tool for formulating interpretive hypotheses that await empirical confirmation. Due to this interference between intuition and interpretation, Weber sometimes uses the words "Verstehen" and "interpretation". Weber's understanding is mainly conceived as an explanation of meaningful actions. Here it should be said that understanding as a causal interpretation of a third person's action is defined with a mixture of explanation and understanding that needs analysis. Weber uses what happens in a court trial as a model, a place where the judge and jury must consider the facts presented by the parties. There, the problem is not the deduction of the defendant's behavior from nomological laws, but what should be important in the scientist's view is the issue of attribution. In such a way that historians' causal knowledge is of the attribution of objective effects to objective causes.

To further explain, given the historical understanding of meaningful actions, the scientist's work process is as follows: First, the scientist selects from the set of facts before them those that are considered important for their historical research interests. In the next stage: They try to provide an acceptable causal explanation. In fact, the scientist is looking for a causal explanation that relates the selected events to probable motives that they imagine originate from them. In the third stage: It can be said that this concrete explanation takes on an attributive form, because the third person wanted to do A, they did A. Therefore, it should be said that motives should be seen in court. That is, the specific reasons that motivated the accused to commit a particular crime, for example. It should be said that like a trial, this is a hypothesis that must be confirmed by objective evidence, and explanation is considered causally sufficient when it is objectively possible. That is, when it does not contradict what was expected to happen in similar circumstances. From Weber's point of view, this model of human actions is considered as rational actions (Aragona 2019, p. 7).

From Weber's perspective, it can be stated that the superiority of a social science researcher in understanding phenomena, compared to a natural science scientist, is manifested in the category of Verstehen. The German word "Verstehen" is one of Weber's most controversial achievements in contemporary social sciences. According to some thinkers, Verstehen is considered an important and practical tool that Weber borrowed from the German hermeneutic tradition and

implemented in his own methodology in social sciences. It should be said that from Weber's point of view, the correct meaning of Verstehen is a combination of intuition and empathetic participation. Verstehen has many applications for Weber both in individual studies and in studies of macro dimensions, which is one of the important and key elements of his rational study in interpreting social phenomena. (Ritzer 2021, p. 169).

It must be seriously stated that the issue of Verstehen and its comprehension has always been one of the important and significant issues among neo-Kantian sociologists. For instance, whether the Verstehen or personal social and biological experience of an actor, given its understanding by the social scientist for the purpose of cognition, is considered identical or not? Another controversial challenge raised in this field is how a scientist is able and based on which set of rules and regulations, can understand the thoughts of another? Weber, in his methodological framework, tries to answer such controversial discussions through explaining the correct understanding.

In his methodological framework, Weber attempts to distinguish between two types of understanding. One is immediate observational understanding and the other is explanatory understanding. (Parkin 2005, p. 25)

In explanatory understanding, which plays a very important and key role in Weber's sociological methodology, it is conceived as the social scientist's understanding of the meanings of actors' actions in social science phenomena. To understand the phenomenon in question, the scientist must interpret and select from the mass of data those that are appropriate and conducive to a better and more suitable explanation of the event in question. Hence, it is obvious that the social scientist makes every effort to understand the inner motivations of the actor in relation to the occurrence of a particular social phenomenon. In fact, his interpretation of the actor's action, in Weber's view, means that the scientist has taken a step closer to illuminating and clarifying the matter. Understanding why the actor has undertaken that particular action? Or what specific conditions or causes have influenced the actor's action? These can be said to be among the important and significant factors of interpretation for the social scientist. (Weber 2021, p. 40)

It can be said that the mission of a social scientist in examining social science phenomena is primarily based on understanding them. From this perspective, all guiding and assisting tools in social sciences, such as statistical research, field studies, questionnaires, etc., should be at the service of the social scientist's understanding, in order to achieve his rational interpretation. (Quivy and Van Campenhout 2006, p. 30)

Weber's methodology can perhaps be summarized as a methodology based on understanding the intentions of actors. Therefore, Weber's methodology can be briefly called interpretive understanding. The term Verstehen that Weber refers to is sometimes also referred to as empathy. In fact, a scientist tries to understand the meaning of that action under study to the same extent and degree that the actor has understood and based on which he has performed an action. (Benton and Craib 2022, p. 154)

Throughout Weber's methodology, the spirit governing the analysis of social and cultural phenomena is the existence of an objective prescriptive approach to the methodology of social scientists. From this perspective, it should be noted that Weber always emphasized the clarity of the method of empathy. In Weber's methodology, the method of empathy for understanding an actor's action is not considered psychological, but what is important for Weber is the rational understanding of an action. (Paya 2019, p. 32)

Another issue that is currently raised among Weberian interpreters regarding understanding is that the access and the degree of understanding that a scientist is trying to grasp the intention of an actor is not so easily possible. In fact, the degree of understanding that the scientist understands about the actor's intended action may not be as complete and pure as the meaning of understanding in the back of the actor's mind. However, Weber's methodology conveys that we should accept this tool (understanding) as it currently is, even with the inadequacies it may have. Because for now, it can largely meet the needs of a scientist.

According to Weber, the individual is the upper limit and the only carrier of meaningful behavior. Concepts that define sets or categories of human interaction, such as class, association,

organization, state, etc. (to understandable action) that is, without exception, are reducible to the actions of individual participants. In Tucker's view, the term "participating" is a key word in Weber's view. Its inclusion indicates the necessity of engaging conditions in which individual action occurs in any meaningful explanation of action. Although individual action is the basic unit of analysis, it cannot be logically analyzed socially without regard to the nature of the social relationship in which it was performed.

For example: An adult man who is kneeling on the ground and showing hideous faces, hitting his nose with his thumb and also making growling sounds from himself. Based on the information provided, it can be reasonably judged by the observer as insane. And this would be the most acceptable explanation if the person we are referring to is alone in a room. However, if we add a small child to this scene sitting on the ground in front of the man and intensely watching his ridiculous games and reacting with loud laughter, the judgment about the man's insanity will be completely reversed. On the contrary, we call him a normal, healthy, good father or a man who loves children. However, only the second case is considered a sociological interpretation for Weber and can be said to be usable, and the first case mentioned is one that belongs to the field of psychology. In fact, in the second case, we are dealing with meaningfulness and consequently with comprehensibility. (Tucker 1965, p. 159)

From these aspects, it should be said that the understanding Weber has in mind in his methodological system has rational depth and therefore can be helpful and practical in traversing the scientific path of social sciences.

**Verstehen akin to the principle of causality in natural sciences:**

Weber contends that interpretive research centered on individuals, in which Verstehen plays a crucial and unique role, occupies the same position in social sciences as the principle of causality does in natural sciences. Based on this, Weber argues that the objects' nature and events' significance cannot be derived from nomological laws, as they generate a different logic of conceptual formation. Weber maintains that theoretical abstractions and conceptual generalizations of nomological causal laws tend to suppress any reference to meaning, significance, and contextual specifics in historical study. In Weber's view, explanation involves connecting causes and effects - specifically, linking subjective motives with objective social actions, where explanation does not entail a naturalistic reduction of individuals to general laws. Historical interpretation is not about our capacity to classify (facts) under abstract concepts and formulas as their instances. Instead, it pertains to the Verstehen of objective human action in terms of its motives. (McCarthy 2019, p. 176).

In Weber's methodology, understanding that an individual acts in a particular way in a specific situation to achieve a certain goal constitutes comprehending their motives. This, however, is entirely distinct from values. The difference between what an actor labels as external and internal motivation is crucial here. When an individual is compelled or motivated to act in a specific manner due to internal tensions, their action results from internal motivation. However, it's important to note that only external motivation can be subject to sociological interpretation. Internal motivation must be referred to biology or psychology for interpretation. This doesn't imply that a sociologist doesn't need knowledge of biology and psychology to aid their understanding of human action. In fact, basic knowledge of both is essential for sociologists to distinguish externally motivated behavior from internally motivated behavior. (Tucker 1965, p. 161).

**The Verstehen approach: A meaning-seeking approach in Weber's interpretive methodology:**

What is clear about Verstehen from Weber's perspective is that interpretive understanding takes a meaning-seeking and meaning-exploring approach. It should also be noted that the element of Verstehen in Weber's methodology is influenced by the cultural and geographical context of the actor. The social scientist strives to achieve a more accurate and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study by comprehending the cultural elements of the society in question.

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From the perspective of some, like Charles Taylor, the approach that social sciences should pursue is an interpretive one, which is tied to a correct and clear understanding of social phenomena. He argues that if sociology were to be indebted to any other approach, it would ultimately be unable to progress and provide correct explanation and interpretation of social science phenomena.

In general, the pillars of interpretive sociology can be expressed as follows: if a social scientist is to provide a correct and epistemological explanation of action and actors in social phenomena, this lofty ideal in sociology is only possible through interpretation and interpretive understanding (Verstehen). The task of a good interpreter in relation to explaining the social phenomenon in question is to correctly determine the meaning of those actions.

Secondly, in examining social phenomena, social scientists may encounter inadequacies in the category of understanding, based on not receiving accurate meanings of concepts. It should be said that the differences arising from concepts are entirely dependent on the culture in which an actor lives within the framework of that culture and society. From this perspective, it should be said that culture is a very influential element in the construction of social concepts. In fact, according to Weber, the task of a good scientist is to try to correctly identify the meanings of those concepts in the cultural context of their study. The task of a good social interpreter is, in fact, to trace concepts in the cultural and historical context of their study.

Thirdly, as stated, the meaning of social actions in social sciences depends on and is influenced by the meanings that actors refer to in their actions.

Finally, it can be said that in social sciences, the scientist should not seek to find a brute fact. Because it is impossible for reality to be affected and separate from the cultural and social context of the actor. (Little 2019, p. 114)

In Weber's methodology, Zmuck (purpose) is something separate from the act and can only be understood in a broader situational context. While Sinn (meaning) is something inherent in the act itself. It is a characteristic of the action rather than a cause or purpose of it. Thus, one can understand the situation that a person performs (in terms of intention), without knowing why they do it.

According to MacIver: The facts that we can fully know are always facts that are only known from the outside. While the things we can understand are known from within. This does not mean that to understand social action we must go inside the individual's psyche, but to understand it we must go inside social settings. We must project ourselves into the situations we are examining. We must learn the values and goals of people acting in a particular situation. There is no inner story about why a meteorite falls or why a liquid freezes. Therefore, to understand a social action or actions, it is not necessary to search the mind of the individual actor or actors in the same way that psychologists or psychiatrists search. But with sufficient knowledge of the nature of the situation in which the action occurs, we can infer the external motivation.

Given the above views, it is obvious that Weber's conceptual scheme of interpretation, which is based on the process of Verstehen, applies only in social situations, and any knowledge gained using this scheme is primary. (Tucker 1965, p. 162)

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## **CONCLUSION**

One of the major and controversial challenges in Weber's methodology is how an observer (social scientist), as an interpreter of a social phenomenon, is able to understand the behavior of an actor (whose action they are studying). This question has always been a subject of debate and numerous criticisms of Weber's methodology. For instance: What will be the criteria for the researcher's understanding of the social phenomenon in question? And how can a social scientist understand the thoughts of others (actions other than their own)?

These questions become more potent when the subject of study for explanation has a vast historical distance from the scientist's time. Similarly, understanding the social and cultural context of each historical period is not easy when the scientist has a significant time gap with them. (Ashtiani 2014, p. 255)

According to interpreters, given that a social scientist, unlike a natural scientist, does not have the ability to experiment on all social science phenomena, their work in examining and explaining social phenomena becomes particularly difficult. Imagine what laboratory tools a scientist has to understand why Alexander the Great set fire to Persepolis? Or if another world war occurs, will the atomic bomb explosion again be able to change political and social equations or not? It should be said that the process of experimentation for a social scientist is very different from that of a scientist in natural sciences who is busy calculating, testing, and repeating in the laboratory.

Apart from the fact that a social scientist cannot, for example, easily create a certain chemical element like a natural scientist or increase or decrease the amount and constituent materials of that element and change them, it should be said that they cannot even re-experiment all small and large phenomena. As a result, they are forced to understand through mental imaging. This is where the concept and color of values and interests, as a set of influential elements and parameters, become prominent in examining a social phenomenon.

Of course, it should be noted that the interpretation based on understanding (Verstehen) that a social scientist tries to present in the best and most complete way to explain a part of reality always has complexities that Weber has not tried to provide much explanation about these problems and their solutions. Imagine how possible it would be for a current social scientist, who has a century-long distance from the event, to examine Napoleon's war defeat? This is where the examination of the issue becomes very complex. It should be said that bringing social knowledge to the destination of objectivity is an extremely difficult task and may even be considered impossible by some critics.

Weber, in his methodology, has tried to keep the elements of understanding (Verstehen) as the building blocks and drivers of social science research away from any misunderstandings. In response to the criticism raised, it should be said that Weber's role is to express the tools for reaching a correct and acceptable interpretation with scientific objectivity. Although he may not have used these tools well, his role in explaining and highlighting the importance of understanding for a social scientist is very important.

Given the discussions presented, it should be said that it is on this basis that he emphasizes and spends a lot of time explaining the category of understanding (Verstehen). He also tries to clearly distinguish its meaning from understanding in the field of natural sciences. This semantic difference in these two areas depends on the methodological differences of these two models (Natural sciences methodology and social and cultural sciences methodology). It seems that Weber, given his interpretive methodological approach, tries to show that when we implement understanding (Verstehen) in it, the scientist is able to achieve relatively accurate and correct explanations that have criteria of objectivity.

According to Weber, motivation can carry a significant semantic weight that an actor attributes to their own action. Given Weber's views, we know that an actor can or may load many meanings into their action within their mind, and the role of the scientist in extracting the correct meaning intended by the actor becomes clearly apparent. Through this, the scientist can arrive at a rational and acceptable interpretation. (Weber 2021, p. 45)

From Weber's perspective, a social scientist is capable of providing a correct and acceptable interpretation of an actor's action in examining a social phenomenon when they have been able to thoroughly examine the actor's behaviors and have understood and comprehended them. The

important point in Weber's methodology is that an acceptable interpretation, according to Weber, is one where the actor has attributed a meaning to that particular action. (Weber 2021, p. 46)

It should be said that interpretation or exegesis is an important condition for achieving Verstehen. Although from the perspective of some Weberian interpreters, this interpretation might independently be considered a type of understanding in itself. However, it should be noted that the social and cultural scientist cannot ignore its role.

Finally, it should be said that Verstehen, which is based on the interpretive methodological model, is a combination of intuition and empathetic participation for the purpose of understanding and explaining social and cultural phenomena. It is an important tool that plays a key and significant role in Weber's methodology in pursuing the criteria of objectivity in social sciences.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my doctoral dissertation supervisor (Dr. Keyvan Alasti) for his guidance and helpful explanations regarding Max Weber. This text is derived from sections of my doctoral dissertation titled "Methodological Explanation of Social Sciences with Emphasis on Max Weber's Views."

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