

**Exorcising the Spectres: Weber's Interpretive Sociology  
as the Solution to Key Problems in Sociological Theory**

By:

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Preface. In this paper there is no attempt to recount the history of academic life in Germany during the latter part of the nineteenth century in any detail (1). Instead, the concern is with clarifying the basic question posed by the debate over methods between the economists (the Marginalists) and the historians (the Historicists) (2). In essence, the question is: "Can social science include explicit recognition of human meaning as part of its foundation?" Weber's answer is: "Yes, social science requires explanations which are adequate at both the level of causality and the level of human meaning." The purpose here is to clarify why rural sociologists cannot afford to neglect Weberian interpretive sociology.

Let me also add that John Stuart Mill's role in all of this needs to be examined. Mill's System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive (1843, 1974 edition) was widely read and appreciated in Germany in the late nineteenth century and all of the leaders in the philosophy of social science show acquaintance with his work, including Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, who were very influential in shaping Weber's thinking. It is very likely that Weber read J.S. Mill's Logic, but even if he did not (3), he might have picked up many of Mill's insights from Dilthey (1883), Windelband (1894) and Rickert (1902), whom he cites profusely. Mill broke away from many of the assumptions of classical political economy long before the Marginalists took up these axioms and carried them through to their methodologically fruitful extreme. At a broad theoretical level, then, much of what is said about Weber's methodology can also be said about Mill's methodology for the general social science.

Understanding Meanings. In the late nineteenth century in Western Europe, particularly in Germany, there was a complex debate on the nature of "social science." The natural sciences, it was assumed, largely with reference to the science of mechanics (physics), had provided researchers with a way to discover certain facts. Could a science of human behaviour be developed? Auguste Comte has stated programmatically that it was possible but his own attempt at developing such a science, which he called "sociology", was largely discredited (4).

Some writers had compared society to an organism and developed theories about this "organism" which ran parallel in many ways to biological theories, particularly theories concerning evolution. Other writers thought of society as something not at all like an organism, evolving and changing; they thought of society as an historic entity, uniquely fixed in time. According to the Historical School, each society must be examined in terms of its specific attributes, and cannot be compared to others without

loss of some of the essential features. Writers in France were particularly drawn to the Organismic School and writers in Germany were particularly interested in the Historical School.

To say that it was "writers" who held these views is somewhat of a simplification. Most of them were academics who had a prestige somewhat like that of the President of a liberal arts college in the U.S. today. They determined what kind of research a host of researchers would be doing. Moreover, their opinions often had an impact on their national governments. The ties between governments and universities were often very close, partially because university education was limited to the same elite that eventually assumed power. (Somewhat the same connection exists today in North America, as, for example in the careers of such colorful academics as Henry Kissinger and Arthur Schlesinger, John Kenneth Galbraith and Daniel Moynihan). These opposing "Schools" of thought were very important.

The questions raised by those who were trying to formulate a social science came to a head among the writers of what is sometimes called "the generation of the 1890's", that is, those men (women were largely unrepresented) who were in their most productive years during the 1890's and early 1900's. In Germany the issues took the form of a conflict over methods. That Methodenstreit concerned the issue of whether or not social science should follow the methodology of classical political economy. The Austrian "Marginalists", Carl Menger (1840 - 1921, Professor at Vienna University from 1873 to 1903), Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk (1851 - 1914, also Professor at Vienna, after Menger), and others, assumed that individual decisions in the market place could be considered discrete, atomistic units. Their assumptions allowed them to develop sophisticated and impressive mathematical statements of economic regularities.

Other writers opposed the Marginalists' methods and the assumption that people are best conceived of, for the purposes of social science, as atomistic individuals. The battle of methods focused particularly on the manner in which historical monographs should be used in social science. As one famous historian of economics (and social science) said: "The basic and distinctive article of the historical school's methodological faith was that the organon (i.e. the body) of scientific economics should mainly, at first it was held that it should exclusively, consist in the results of, and in the generalizations from, historical monographs" (Schumpeter, 1954: 807). That, of course, is true. What we have to ask, however, is why the Historical School was so adamant about use of historical materials. Why not adopt the mathematical techniques made possible by the Marginalists' assumptions? The answer can be found in that the Historical School assumed that each society is largely unique and that therefore it is not possible to generalize about societies except with very careful reference to historical details. Member of the Historical School, like Wilhelm Roscher, Karl Knies, Gustav von Schmoller, (1838-1917), and Lujo Brentano, stressed the way in which economic phenomena in particular, and sociological phenomena in general, are historically-specific. They could not accept the Marginalists' tendency to speak of universal "laws". In North America many of the same arguments were discussed under the rubric of the "Institutionalist" controversy. Thorstein Veblen, W.C. Mitchell and John Commons are key American Institutionalists.

The Methodenstreit was never settled in a conclusive manner. Some economists today basically continue to scorn research into historical or

contemporaneous questions, except when undertaken by historians of economics and economic historians, they prefer formal, mathematical and especially econometric statements of problems and of "solutions". Such economists have accepted the basic views of the Marginalists, Austrian as well as English and French, often without being explicitly aware of the battle between the Marginalists and Historicists.

In many respects sociology has been the brain child of the Historical School. Max Weber, a member of the so-called "Youngest Historical School", along with J.A.S. Spiethoff, Werner Sombart and others, became a sociologist reluctantly. Trained as an historian, economic historian, jurist and authority on Roman and Germanic law, Weber called himself a "sociologist" at the end of his career precisely because he felt that label would help to distinguish his methodological and theoretical position in the context of the debate on methods. In some respects Weber leaned more toward the Historical School View, the "Youngest Historical School" (Schumpeter, 1954: 815-20), but as Schwartz and Jacobs (1979: 17) correctly point out: "Max Weber...is one of the few major figures of sociology whose ideas permeate the work of both quantitative and qualitative sociologists. ...a major thrust of Weber's methodology was to link the scientific concepts of general laws and causal analysis (as stressed by the Marginalists) with the purportedly unique subject matter of social science - human beings" (as stressed by the Historicists).

Whereas the Marginalists, and various types of Positivists, Empiricists, Behaviourists and Quantitative Social Scientists, have stressed the importance of the "causal adequacy" of a scientific proposition, the Historicists, and various types of Phenomenologists, Ethnomethodologists, Symbolic Interactionists and Quantitative Social Scientists, have stressed the importance of "meaning adequacy" of any statement concerning a pattern or a regularity. Weber insisted on the importance of retaining both adequacy at the level of meaning and adequacy at the level of (deterministic or probabilistic) causality. Simply, Weber wanted to have scientific propositions which included understanding of meaning (s). That is the basis of his notion of the use of Verstehen.

However, very few academics in sociology, economics or any other of the social sciences accept Weber's interpretive sociology as a possible solution to the dilemma of meaning versus causation, interpretation versus analysis. Very few scholars would accept Weber's version of sociology as the general social science, under which all other social science disciplines would, in terms of their intellectual context, albeit not necessarily their position in the university structure, properly be placed. Even within sociology, few writers are willing to accept Weber's definition of sociology as a program for research or a guideline for theorizing. As Schwartz and Jacobs state (1979: 17) "one would expect that his (m.w.'s) definition of the discipline would have been very influential. That it was (and is) not, reflects the fact that it contained something for everybody". Weber has not been accepted, even today, more than sixty years after his death, because his version of sociology is a radically synthesizing one. To accept Weber's verstehende Soziologie, in its methodological and theoretical outline, requires maintaining an extremely broad, general perspective on the nature of social science. Essentially, then, Weber provided an answer, perhaps the answer, to the questions raised

by the debate on methods, but his answer was so far ahead of his time that we have not fully grasped it even yet.

We can best understand Weber's solution to the questions posed during the Methodenstreit by examining in some detail Weber's concepts of 1) Verstehen, 2) the Ideal Type, and 3) causation.

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Verstehen. There<sup>^</sup> those extreme "Positivists" like George Lundberg (1939) who argue that Verstehen has no place in social science. There is no methodological difference, Lundberg argues, between interpreting the motions of a leaf flying before the wind and scientifically analysing the behaviour of a person fleeing from an angry crowd. In psychology B.F. Skinner has become famous as the proponent of this hard line "Positivism".

At the other extreme are "Ethnoscience" like Aaron Cicourel and Harold Garfinkel who, at least in their early work, seem to be arguing that social science is nothing but Verstehen, and that any kind of rigorous attempt at determining causation and general patterns that go beyond the particular, culturally-specific (and historically-specific) situation is not likely to be successful.

Somewhere between the two extremes, most sociologists would agree, we can make use of Verstehen. What do we mean by Verstehen? Theodore Abel wrote a widely quoted article in 1948 (Truzzi, 1974: 40-55) in which he identified Verstehen with the interpretation of subjective meaning, particularly with regard to the motivations and intentions of individual actors. That delimitation of the term Verstehen to a technical term for motivational analysis is misplaced, however (see Abel in Truzzi, 1974: 83-86). It is probably more fruitful, and closer to Weber's intended usage, to expand, rather than constrict, the meaning of the term Verstehen as a "technical" term in social science.

Murray Wax (1967, in Truzzi, 1974: 70-82) identifies four meanings of the term Verstehen:

1. Extra-cultural Verstehen: The understanding we have of others from totally alien cultures (Wax also includes "extra-species" understanding).
2. Intra-cultural Verstehen: The understanding we have of others who share with us a commonly understandable symbol system (or, language).
3. Pattern Analysis type of Verstehen: The understanding we have of patterns, or, more exactly, since "Intra-cultural Verstehen" already refers to patterns, "Patterns of patterns". (for example, a linguistic mapping of language structures or an ethnographic mapping of variations in kinship terminology, burial rites or religious belief systems). This type of Verstehen is sometimes referred to, particularly in the Continental literature, as hermeneutics, although the term hermeneutics is not always used in that sense (5).
4. Verstehen as Interpersonal Intuition: The understanding we have of others who share with us a commonly understandable symbol system (or, language) which is "taken-for-granted". This type of verstehen is "common sense" knowledge of human behaviour and action. It is usually implicit, but it is sometimes made explicit. The thrust of the Ethnomethodological "project" seems to be the explication of common sense patterns (values, mores,

norms, folkway, motives, beliefs, expectations, rules and o on). Ethnomethodologists are particularly interested in common understanding in sub-groups that have been labelled deviant or that are unusual in some way. Alfred Schutz's phenomenological sociology is also deeply concerned with interpersonal intuition in the everyday Life-Worlds.

In defining the four types of Verstehen the term "we" refers to anyone attempting to use the faculty of human understanding and empathetic reconstruction. In most cases "we" will mean academic sociologists or other scholars but it can also mean lawyers disputing the motives behind a crime, linguists discussing language patterns and usages, or non-academic, non-professional people in everyday life trying to understand why Europeans eat with knives and forks while Chinese eat with chopsticks.

Another way to use "we" is to refer to the observing-interpreting individual as the "subject". The "subject" interprets an "object". That "object" may be "reified" or not "reified". The four types of Verstehen then refer to four types of subject-object relations, each of which can be reified or not. That gives us the table below (see Table 1).

Note that in listing those types of Verstehen for situations where the "object" (reified or not reified) is either an "other" or "ego" herself, the intention is not necessarily to list precise or accurate "definitions" of the terms. If the researcher thinks of the persons he is studying as "farmers" he may have in mind any number of stereotypes, scholarly and non-scholarly. The point is that Verstehen can take many forms. Some of those possible forms are here presented by way of example.

In general, researchers understand what is going on by reference to cultural meanings. To fully understand a human action it is necessary, according to Weber, to be able to have empathetic understanding of the ideological and general cultural constraints which serve to define the situation for the actor. That does not always involve imputing motives, although it often does. (When we do impute motives, it may not be the motives which we are most interested in).

Now, when we do studies within our own cultural context we are able to assume many features of the context. We share the same definition of the situation with the "objects" of our study. Since the Verstehen is largely a matter of commonly shared meanings, the analysis and interpretation of meaning does not necessarily represent an important part of the research. What we all know already is taken as merely "background", "exogenous variables". Verstehen does not seem to be important to the study because we did not have to emphasize those aspects of social reality which most readily require interpretive understanding in order to be "seen" at all. The point is made eloquently by Wax, who writes (Truzzi, 1974: 74):

"...much of the sociological audience... is accustomed to conducting...research within (their) own cultural milieu...(and therefore do) not perceive the vast background of shared meanings assumed by the sophisticated (and quantitative) research techniques...Verstehen, then, is not an operation or instrument, it is a pre-condition of research."

The researcher working within her own culture has already been socialized into that definition of the situation and therefore can think of Verstehen as merely a pre-condition for future research. As soon as she steps out of

her own culture into another sub-culture, or a totally strange culture, then the same background assumptions cannot be made, and a certain amount of re-socialization is necessary.

Thus, one of the arguments in favour of a separate program in rural sociology, as distinct from sociology, is that someone who earns a Ph.D. in sociology is not likely to be socialized into the cultural norms and assumptions of rural society. Typically, in North America at least, a graduate program in sociology is urban oriented, unless effort is made to include rural phenomena. The background assumptions made by urban residents, however, are not necessarily the most appropriate assumptions to make when studying agricultural production. At the very least, someone trained in sociology would have to undergo a certain amount of re-socialization to begin to understand the situation as perceived by rural farm (and rural non-farm) people. It is always possible to do a sample survey; but the interpretation of results from such a survey are likely to be biased by the researchers' lack of socialization into rural life. As Wax points out (Truzzi, 1974: 76): "...while the sample survey is a highly precise instrument for research within a culturally homogeneous society, it is a very blunt instrument for the perception and interpretation of cultural homogeneity." That is, unless the researcher is well socialized into the sub-cultural group he is studying.

That implies that part of a Ph.D. program in rural sociology should be geared to socializing those students who do not already have a largely rural background into rural norms and values, an educational goal which is probably best accomplished through a total immersion program somewhat similar to the total immersion anthropologists are traditionally expected to get as a result of intensive, participant observer field study. It also implies that rural sociologists who already have a background in rural society's norms and values might benefit from total immersion in another sub-cultural group, even an urban one, even though we would not normally think that it would be valuable for a future rural sociologist to spend time "in the field" in a metropolitan center! Finally, this view of the significance of Verstehen, broadly defined, implies that the essential thing is knowledge about all of the humanly significant aspects of a particular sub-culture or culture; knowledge of specific research operations, techniques and instruments is secondary, albeit important. Learning about other sub-cultural definitions of the situation is, one suspects, a cumulative process, much like learning other languages. Someone who has never mastered a "foreign" language is likely to spend much more time at it than someone who already speaks (reads and writes) four other related languages.

Ideal Types. One short-cut to the learning process is to be able to form some new rough ideas, some global notions, that represent initial patterns. When we know very little about another sub-culture or culture we usually have some vague ideas which we properly speak of as "stereotypes", an over-simplified, standardized mental picture. As our ideas begin to become more nuanced, we move away from stereotypes and begin to see "alien" definitions of the situation in terms of what Weber called Ideal Types. They are "ideal" in the sense of not being "real". That is, they are not considered to be "real" epistemologically; they are not the things themselves, but images of those objects. The mental images we have are no

longer merely stereotypes because they do not necessarily represent a totally uncritical, naive view. Nevertheless, they are only part of the picture.

To begin to understand to "foreign" sub-culture of "rural society" we must develop Ideal Types and, eventually, Ideal Typic models. In contemporary North American society that involves specifying in what ways rural agricultural and rural non-farm people define their situations, usually through some form of contrast with non-rural people. That, in turn, requires developing some Ideal Type notions about the nature of "community", the "city", the "region" and so on. There is no need to list all of the manifold theoretical concepts that can be included, as long as we recognize that all such concepts will start out in effect as Ideal Types. If they are further refined theoretically as "variables" that have been "operationalized" and are then quantified and used in some form of statistical operation (like path analysis or factor analysis), they still remain embedded in a theoretical framework which has its roots in an Ideal Typic set of images.

Sophisticated quantitative research techniques are only as good as the Ideal-typic thinking that provides their foundation because social science does not merely deal with axioms (as, for example, in pure logic or mathematical physics). A certain amount of purely mathematical speculation in social science may be helpful but the results of such speculation are not the same as the results of quantitative studies which purport to provide true pictures of social reality. The most "ideal" (i.e. the best) form of research would be research which shows a full and complete grasp of the shared cultural meanings held by members of the sub-culture or culture in question, a good awareness of the cross-cultural variations in those definitions of the situation, and a sophisticated application of quantitative variable analysis. Each aspect of theorizing and research should be given equal weight: (1) the initial breaking down of stereotypes and formulation of Ideal Types, (2) the investigation of inter-relationships among operationalized, quantified variables and (3) the cross-cultural (or cross sub-cultural) comparison of different definitions of the situations. Hence the argument between "quantitative" and "qualitative" sociologists is a sham argument; there is no inherent conflict of interest between the two groups.

Causation. Parallel to the discussion above of the processes of socialization involved in Verstehen and the importance of the Ideal Type to both qualitative and quantitative studies, we need to discuss Weber's views on "causation".

The problem of "causation" has puzzled philosophers for ages because the interpretation one has of the causes of human behaviour and action touches on such problems as "free will versus determinism" and "individualism versus natural law". Most sociologists treat cause in explanation of human behaviour and action under the rubric of a common action. If, for example, a man kills a woman, then we are left at a loss. As soon as we know that the man and the woman were married and that the woman committed adultery, then we feel that we have an adequate explanation. Our explanation may be false, but we are content to consider it adequate, at least for private purposes. Our explanation has no moral evaluation appended to it; the fact that the man murdered his wife

"because" she committed adultery does not, in and of itself, condone either murder or adultery; but, the ethical and moral judgement is not our main interest, at least as social scientists. (This point is related to Weber's Wertfreiheit; see Schumpeter, 1954: 804-07). The main thing to consider is that "causal adequacy" is relatively superficial, even when, as in this case, meaning adequacy is also included in the explanation. The action, "murder", is relatively straight-forward: "subject" (husband) kills "object" (wife).

In all such subject-object relationships the question of causal adequacy is relatively straight-forward and simple. Of course, we can also talk about complex actions, composed of many unit actions. For example, we can say that Allies won World War II. However, as soon as we make statements about complex actions (and, even more, complexes of complex actions, like wars) then we enter into the realm of adequacy at the level of human meaning again. In other words, mere observation, in and of itself, will not do. If we had a witness then we could claim that we had adequately described that unit action.

The mistake that many positivists (empiricists, behaviorists) make is that they assume they can make the jump from observations and analyses of unit acts to analyses of complex actions (and action complexes) on the basis of logical grounds alone. However, there is many a slip twix't cup and lip, as any demographer who has predicted birth rates can tell you. All that can be done at the level of causal adequacy is to report what "scenarios" one might expect given X, Y and Z assumptions about the direction things are heading in. There is an "emergent" quality in which the complex actions of human beings (like "raising a child" or "conducting an orchestra" or "winning a war") have a quality that is greater than the sum of the parts.

Weber, Schutz and Piaget. Two intellectuals who have taken Weber's theoretical and methodological insights further are Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) and Jean Piaget (1971).

Schutz basically accepts Weber's methodological perspective. The first chapter of Schutz's The Phenomenology of the Social World (1967: 3-44) is an analysis of "Max Weber's Basic Methodological Concepts". Schutz formulates a concept of meaning which draws on Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl and which, in essence, draws on the social construction of meaning by individuals in the course of their everyday life. Meaning, for Schutz, is not merely a methodological device upon which to build a social science; it is the basis of inter-subjectivity and interaction, the foundation of the Life-World. Even as capable a theorist as Parsons did not fully grasp the manner in which Schutz intended to, and finally did, "deepen" Weber's insights concerning Verstehen, typification and causal interdependence (i.e. the construction of rules behind the rules), as Parsons' exchange of letters with Schutz clearly indicates (Schutz, 1978).

While Schutz was able to "deepen" Weber's insights by accepting Weber's initial starting point as basically correct, Piaget seems to have developed his conceptual scheme and research project complete independently of Weber (6). What Piaget's research on "the construction of reality in the child" indicates is that the process of recognizing the external world occurs in a series of relatively clear stages. Basically there are, according to Piaget's research, four stages of cognition in the child: 1) intuitive

thinking, 2) primitive realism, 3) recognition of patterns, and 4) recognition of patterns of patterns. (The labels used are my own; Piaget has many different schema in his various books; see for example Piaget, 1971). Those stages are meant to demarcate "natural divisions within an apparently continuous evolution" (Piaget, 1943: 3). It is not possible to "skip" stages.

A loose analogy may be made between Stage Four thinking (i.e. the recognition of "flexibility" in the patterns underlying, or overlaying, patterns) on the one hand, and Verstehen-Ideal Type analysis of patterns of humanly meaningful causation, on the other. If we assume that Piaget's research conclusions are correct, the highest form of cognition in human beings is also the "best" methodological and theoretical approach in social science, particularly for the development of general social scientific understanding. (That may also be true in the sciences which deal with "objects" other than human beings, the so-called "natural" and "physical" sciences). While certain branches of social science proper may wish to limit their methodological assumptions for heuristic purposes (e.g. Affect-Control Theory within sociology, where one only looks at the "rules", not the rules behind, and above, etc., the rules or econometrics, where one assumes atomistic, economically-rational actors), a general social science ("sociology" in the general sense of Geistes-wissenschaft, as Weber understood it) will not gain from such limitations on conceptualization and research. To state the point polemically, and therefore somewhat simplistically, sociology is a construct about human constructs; social science in general is a series of constructs about human actors who continually construct social reality. No matter what branch or sub-discipline we are concerned with in social science (including rural sociology) the fullest, most accurate and complete theory will be one which involves Stage Four thinking as an explicit and integral component. French Structuralism versus Weberian Sociology. The French Structuralist completely reject the position that has been accepted here. (Other schools do too, of course, including the Neo-Classical economics of Friedman and associates at Chicago of the Behaviorism of B.F. Skinner at Harvard).

By French Structuralism for a fuller discussion see Turner, 1977, on which the present comments are partly based) is meant the work of Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, Nicos Poulantzas and others, which is based on the epistemological views of Canguilhem, Bachelard and Althusser (Turner, 1977: 1). The French Structuralist are Marxists and, as politically-convinced Marxists, they reject "sociology" as a "bourgeois ideology", i.e. they think that sociology helps to provide the ideological underpinnings for the bourgeois state and capitalist order generally, and that it is therefore necessarily non-progressive in its essential thrust.(7) If they do something that may appear very much like "sociology" it is because they attempt to provide an ideology which will serve the working class in its struggle against capitalist exploitation. However, they do not see their efforts as ideological. They view Marxism as a guide to praxis (i.e. a set of true ideas which will aid the revolutionary struggle) not as a "scientific discipline" (i.e. a body of tentative ideal types and propositions, models and research strategies, which are subject to further refinement). Their's is the science, the only politically correct set of ideas. Weberian interpretive sociology, or any other paradigm of sociology

or social science, is "pre-scientific". Weber, for example, is caught in the "problematic of the subject".

The French Structuralists reject the notion of an "actor" who "constructs" a "meaningful" social order on the basis of motives, goals, insights and so on. Instead, they propose the notion of an "agent" who behaves according to the dictates of determinate structures and processes.

Now, if Weber were a Utilitarian with an atomistic notion of individuals, like Bentham or James Mill, then the criticisms of the French Structuralists against Weber's "pre-scientific" thinking would be valuable. However, Weber's methodological individualism does not involve such atomistic thinking. At the same time, Weber does not jump from rejecting the notion of atomistic individuals to accepting the opposite extreme of reified structures, the error of the Organicists, some Historicists, and, now, the French Structuralists. "Weber cannot be easily and unambiguously slotted into the ideological problematic of the subject" (Turner, 1977: 2).

Nor can Weber be accused of an "empiricist problematic". That is to say, Weber does not merely believe in a purely inductive approach. The thrust of the Ideal Type approach is "hypothetico-deductive" and "empirical-inductive"; Weber does not simply abstract the essential from the real, nor does he propose deducing the real from the abstract! In that way he stands mid-way between the opposite extremes of "Positivism" ("abstracted empiricism") and "Idealism" ("grandiose theorizing"); his view could be labelled "Methodological Triangulation" (induction, deduction and J.S. Mill's "inverse deduction"). Such a methodological view seems to require the inclusion of human meaning (See Appendix A) in a manner unacceptable to the French Structuralists. The rejection of Weber's methodology reflects the deep-seated "anti-humanism" of the French Structuralist's brand of Marxism.

Weber...appears to be committed to humanism which centers on individual action (i.e. within a theoretical view consistent with methodological individualism, not atomistic individualism) as the object of sociological investigation. Weber's definition of the nature of sociology would appear to be a clear statement of his concern for the subjective meaning of actions from the perspective of the individual (i.e. the individual's socialized and constructed consciousness). Weber was hostile to "collectivist concepts" (reified "structures") and sought to establish a radical methodological individualism as the basis of his sociological approach. Weber's attempt to exorcise collectivist conceptions cannot be divorced from his ethical and theological interests... Weber's interests in neo-Kantian, humanistic individualism runs counter to the structuralist conception of a determinist science of structure in which "individuals" are "Trager" (i.e. mere vehicles, agents, not free actors).

The French Structuralists, like many ideologically committed writers before them who have claimed to have the true version of Marxism, seem to have produced a one-sided materialistic and deterministic explanation and to have taken Weber's views as a straw man, a convenient foil. Weber's views are not that simple; and, probably, Marx's views are not that simple

either. (As Lukacs points out, Marx "ascertains very complex interactions in concrete social phenomena"; Lukacs, 1972: 388, cited by Turner, 1977: 8) (8).

Weber was committed to an ideal of "sociology" as the general social science which would "exorcise" all of the "spectres" which still continued to float around and influence theorist's work. He sought to get rid of all of the ghosts, all of the remaining partial truths. In the process he created a general social scientific theory of social action which provides the basis for a causally and meaningfully adequate series of accounts of structures ("systems") and processes ("change"), without being one-sidedly materialistic or spiritualistic. (Again, see Appendix A). Schutz extended that framework, as did many others, some of whom, like Piaget, may never have read Weber himself.

Conclusion. Rural sociologists have not been able to decide whether rural sociology is basically a sub-discipline of sociology proper or a separate but equal discipline in its own right. Rural sociology is not all that different, in terms of its theoretical and methodological uniqueness, from urban sociology, or any other "ecologically-oriented" sociological sub-discipline. It clearly is not, however, a unified paradigm akin to "Ethnomethodology" or "Structural Functionalism". There are as many theoretical paradigms accepted by different rural sociologists as there are paradigms accepted by sociologists generally, although Structural Functionalism seems to have had a somewhat longer life expectancy among rural sociologists than among the rest.

Now there is a good deal of interest in the "new rural sociology" or "political economy" perspective. This new political economy is based on one key intellectual giant who devoted much of his intellectual work to a refutation, on its own terms, of the conclusions of classical political economy: Karl Marx. The new rural sociology is largely "Marxist". However, Marxism has become watered down in the last few decades and many persons who would previously not have thought of themselves as Marxists are now claiming allegiance to Marx's views.

As has been briefly argued elsewhere (Bakker, 1981a) there is some danger in accepting a purely dichotomous view of the matter: "old" versus "new", "Structural Functionalist" versus "Political Economist", Parsonian versus Marxian, consensus versus conflict, status versus class. The Weberian view, it has sometimes been argued, (e.g. Zeitlin, 1981) is a deepening and extension of Marxian insights, particularly with respect to the notion of "proletarianization". Weber extended Marx's notion of proletarianization to all working classes. For Weber the proletarians are not just the blue collar workers, but all wage-earners, even those who work in "bureaucratic" settings. The general "proletarianization" of the population is aided by the decline of the peasantry as more and more peasants are driven off the land and come to the cities to "earn a living". All of this adds up to progressive "bureaucratization" of society; more and more people work in factory-like "bureaus" or offices. Everything that Marx wrote about the alienation of the manual workers becomes equally applicable to the non-manual skilled and unskilled workers, even though those workers themselves do not necessarily recognize it (they have "false consciousness").

Weber subsumed the proletarianization that he saw in the Western European countries under the more general process of "rationalization", a process he assessed in world historical terms. He went far beyond Marx in his general assessment and understanding of that historical process of rationalization. Weber's sociology of religion is a detailed assessment of the influence of religious ideology on rationalization. His famous essays on the protestant ethic are an attempt at understanding the relatively unique position of certain Western European nations as the first nations to undergo the initial stages of rationalization in its more advanced forms, a process which helps us understand the nature of what Marx called "capitalism".

Now, the significance of all that to rural sociologists interested in such questions as the environment, the decline of the family farm, the development of the third world, and poverty seems rather obvious. It would certainly be worthwhile to discuss the relative value of Weberian and Marxian assumptions in the interpretation of any particular problem which rural sociologists are attempting to understand. Therefore, this essay has attempted to bring out some key features of Weber's answer to the questions posed by the Methodenstreit, a struggle over the most heuristic and objective methodology of the social sciences which was in many ways initiated by German scholars' confrontation with the British tradition of classical political economy, a confrontation in which J.S. Mill, Karl Marx, and the Liberal German academics, particularly Weber, played important roles.

## Endnotes

Originally, that was the intention. See Schutz, 1967, introduction by George Walsh, for a brief overview.

That debate is taken as a representative debate which shows in microcosm a number of other continuing theoretical and epistemological, as well as methodological, debates in social science. It was, of course, the historical context in which Weber wrote.

The Logic is not cited in Economy and Society, (Weber, 1978).

Comte's later religious turn may have been the straw that broke the camel's back in his relationship with J.S. Mill. Mill's humanism was not spiritualistic and therefore Mill rejected Comte's spiritualistic turn.

Often, for example, it refers to an interpretation of a text; that interpretation may have more to do with what Wax calls "Intra-cultural Verstehen" than with an analysis of "patterns of patterns".

I owe the insight that Piaget deepens and extends the Weberian perspective to Professor Thomas Condon. Weber, as Schutz points out (1967: 3-15) does not, for various reasons, consider the "logic" behind the process of typification in everyday life. Piaget does. Furthermore, Piaget puts the theory into an empirically-based developmental framework that supplements both Weber and Schutz. That is recognized by Berger and Luckmann (1967: 197, 201, 203, 205, 208); but they do not make it explicit.

The designation "Structuralist" refers to various schools and paradigms, of course. Piaget's theory is "Structural Functionalism". Here the term "French Structuralism" refers only to those Marxist writers specifically mentioned. Explicitly excluded from that group is, of course, the French anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss, who is non-Marxist in his political orientation.

For examples of Marx's ability to juxtapose many viewpoints (i.e. Stage Four thinking) see Marx, 1975, where Marx disassociates himself from the Neo-Hegelian thought of Brune Bauer, Max Stirner, and others. In the Theses on Feuerbach Marx makes it clear that he holds with a view of "man" that is fundamentally "social", but Marx does not make it explicitly clear whether he would side with Althusser or Weber on the question of "methodological individualism".

Table 1

**Hypothetical Examples of Types of Verstehen,  
Reified and Non-Reified**

| REIFIED<br>(usually "labels")                                     | NOT-REIFIED<br>(often "operationalized")  |
|---|---|
| .....   |   |
| I. Subject = Ego;<br>Object = Other                               | I. Subject = Ego;<br>Object = Other   |
| 1. Extra-cultural<br>Verstehen<br>R; "Aborigine"                  | 1. Extra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "The people across<br>the river"  |
| 2. Intra-cultural<br>Verstehen<br>R; "Farmer"                     | 2. Intra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "People who make their<br>living growing food for<br>market"                  |
| 3. Pattern analysis<br>Verstehen<br>R; "Structure of Agriculture" | 3. Pattern analysis Verstehen<br>R; "Decisions made by govt.<br>on freight rates, 1951-71"                      |
| 4. Interpersonal Intuition<br>Verstehen<br>R; "S.O.B."            | 4. Interpersonal Intuition<br>Verstehen<br>R; "Mr. Jones promised to<br>deliver the goods today, but<br>didn't" |
| .....   |   |
| II. Subject = Ego;<br>Object = Ego                                | II. Subject = Ego;<br>Object = Ego  |
| 1. Extra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "Libido"                        | 1. Extra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "sexual urges"  |
| 2. Intra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "Character Structure"           | 2. Intra-cultural Verstehen<br>R; "I like to be on time"  |
| 3. Pattern analysis Verstehen<br>R; "Personality Stages"          | 3. Pattern analysis Verstehen<br>R; "I make decisions more<br>easily now than before"                           |
| 4. Interpersonal Intuition<br>Verstehen<br>R; "Good Father"       | 4. Interpersonal Intuition<br>Verstehen<br>R; "I enjoy playing with my<br>son and daughter at night"            |

.....  
Where: "R" = hypothetical "researcher", observer, interpreter,  
scientist, theoretician, philosopher, writer, scholar,  
and so on.

Note: Each example is subject to interpretation in various ways,  
naturally.

## Appendix A

### Weber's Synthesizing, Intermediate Position

Three basic questions must be answered by all social scientists. Those questions are fundamental to theoretical and methodological positions. Those social scientists who do not answer these questions explicitly will nevertheless answer them implicitly in the way they do research and in the way they theorize.

1. Which is the most basic unit of analysis: individuals, actions or groups?

|                |                 |               |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| "Utilitarians" | "Social Action" | "Organicists" |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|

.....

|                |               |                      |
|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Jeremy Bentham | Max Weber     | Herbert Spencer      |
| James Mill     | Karl Mannheim | Emile Durkheim       |
| George Homans  | Alfred Schutz | French Structuralism |
|                | George Simmel |                      |

2. To what extent should human meaning be emphasized: totally, partially, not at all?

|             |                                   |               |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| "Idealists" | "Methodological<br>Triangulation" | "Positivists" |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|

.....

|  |                              |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| German Historical<br>School, and<br>certain<br>Phenomenologists and<br>Ethnomethodologists | Max Weber<br>Paul Lazarsfeld | Emile Durkheim<br>George Lundberg<br>"New Causal<br>Analysis" |
|--|------------------------------|---|

3. What is the best methodological procedure?: (i.e. the methodological procedure that will be either: (a) "most heuristic", or (b) "most objective"?)

|             |                                   |               |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| "Idealists" | "Methodological<br>Triangulation" | "Positivists" |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|

|               |                             |   |   |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Utilitarians  | Thomas Malthus?             | J.S. Mill                                   | J. Bentham and<br>B.F. Skinner<br>James Mill and<br>George Homans |
| Social Action | George Simmel<br>F. Tonnies | Max Weber<br>Karl Mannheim<br>Alfred Schutz | Talcott Parsons<br>Emile Durkheim                                 |
| Organicists   | "Economic<br>Determinists"  | Paul Lazarsfeld<br>Lazarsfeld?              | Spencer   |

A researcher can be sophisticated about his/her answers to the three questions. That is, while any particular researcher may acknowledge that sociological theory should take into account the notion of "social action" (i.e. "methodological individualism"), she/he may still use "individuals"

as the conceptually-relevant unit of analysis (e.g. in questionnaire data, or experimental research observations). Similarly, a "Positivist" may acknowledge the value of "methodological triangulation" (c.f. Smith, 1981), yet only include human meaning as an assumed (exogenous) variable which is not actually operationalized in any particular study.

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