

## “Historical Sociology and the Comparative Method: Re-examining Weber’s ‘Means of Coercion’ as an Ideal Type Model”

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### ABSTRACT

Practically every day the mass media report on terrorism and violence, including war and insurgency. It is very difficult to be objective about current world problems, but an understanding of the past can help put today’s social problems of terrorism and violence in perspective. To apply a reflexive, “web approach” (Phillips 1999) to the understanding of “terror” and “terrorism” it is useful to examine intellectual problems in a rigorous fashion. I utilize the insights represented by a Neo-Weberian version of the Comparative-Historical Sociological (CHS) approach to sociology (Gerth and Mills 1958, Roth and Wittich 1978), particularly the idea of “Means of Coercion” (Weber 1978: 313, 445, 447, 466). However, I broaden the notion of the Means of Coercion to extra-legal factors. The “coercive apparatus” does not always include military or administrative considerations. The goal of all terrorism is to acquire “legitimate authority” and at least a degree of political power (Weber 1978). Oscillations of state and ideological “terror” with outsider “terrorism” are intrinsic to many forms of social change through much of human history. A case study example is briefly presented to illustrate the Neo-Weberian approach and brief mention is made of Hegel’s phenomenology, Peirce’s theory of signs and Ragin’s emphasis on fuzzy sets. Those insightful arguments are relevant to the epistemological underpinnings of the ITM approach.

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## I. The Problem:

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich **Hegel** can be viewed as the founder of the comparative and historical approach to the study of human societies (Forster 1998: 126-192). While we tend to credit Auguste Comte with founding the discipline of *sociologie* viewed from a Positivist Meta-Paradigmatic Theoretical Perspective, we neglect Hegel and his "student" Wilhelm **Dilthey** (Bakker 1999) to our peril. The Phenomenological Meta-Paradigm – in the Hegelian rather than the Husserlian sense – is at least as important to contemporary sociology as the Positivist Approach. One of the outgrowths of a Hegelian-Diltheyian Phenomenological understanding of Worldviews ( *Weltanschauungen* ) is the **Weberian** approach to the study of what used to be called "social change and economic development". One aspect of that has been world systems theory (WST) and a renewed interest in Comparative-Historical Sociology (CHS).

There has been much interest in "globalization" among sociologists in the 1990s, although the precise meaning of the term is much disputed (Ritzer 2003). The current globalization literature leans in part on "World Systems Theory" (WST) as articulated by the Neo-Marxist theorist Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970s (1976, 1979, 1980). Various students and followers of Wallerstein's WST have continued to work on various aspects of world history using his Methodological approach. The more recent globalization literature, however, is not limited to Neo-Marxism generally or to Wallerstein's WST in particular. Indeed, there are many advocates of the study of globalization within the discipline of sociology (including Neo-Marxian ideas) or in Marxist political circles (where the discipline of sociology is often disdained) who reject one or more aspects of Wallerstein's Methodology in general (Wallerstein 1979). Moreover, outside of sociology and Marxism there are many semi-popular works on globalization, some of which present a particular ideological position.

In addition to heightened awareness of the general processes of globalization there has also, especially since September 11, 2001, been a deluge of work on "terrorism". The popularity of "9/11" as an explanation of anything and everything has been commented on by many popular writers, some of whom are opposed to certain aspects of American foreign policy and military action. Nevertheless, "9/11" has also prompted many nuanced intellectual approaches.

What has not been done in any thorough manner, however, is to put the two ideas together in a meaningful way within the discipline of sociology. That is, no one seems to have considered the inter-relationship between "globalization" and "terrorism". In particular, the comparative-historical study of "world systems" (in the general sense) has not linked up very well with the study of recent examples of terrorism.

This paper is an attempt at a preliminary statement of directions such an analysis might take. The general idea is to utilize a Neo-Weberian Comparative-Historical Sociological Methodology to study the kinds of violence which most people have in mind when they discuss terrorism. The CHS approach allows us to look at "eras" (i.e. sets of times, t-n) and "areas" (i.e. sets of places, spaces and political collectivities, s-n). The Neo-Weberian approach to such eras

and areas helps to make it possible to broaden the analysis of terrorism in the context of the study of social change in the last five hundred years. Social change has been characterized by broadening “networks” of inter-relationships among political and military actors. That globalization has increasingly involved more and more systemic kinds of patterns of inter-dependence. But rather than “world peace” we have experienced many “wars” and undeclared military conflicts and struggles of various kinds.

It is very clear that the U.S. is a “hegemonic” power today. Some people even discuss the U.S. as entering an “Imperial” phase. Others claim the U.S. has been imperial in some respects for a long time, at least since the Mexican-American War or the Spanish American War. There can be little doubt that the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) under General John Pershing in The Great War was symbolic of increased American involvement in European affairs. When World War I formally ended in November 1918 and a peace treaty was signed in 1919 there were very few who anticipated the events of 1933-1945 which we now call the Second World War. After WWII there was a period of “Cold War” between the two former allies, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. But in 1989-90-91 the Cold War ended and the U.S. became a dominant military super-power. But now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is far from clear to what extent the U.S. can maintain its economic hegemony on the basis of deficit spending and extensive military commitments. The Dollar is shrinking with respect to the Euro and the long term consequences of that economic shift have not yet been felt.

To fully understand the situation in the world today it is necessary to have a clear conceptualization of how the world has changed since 1500. Most political commentators and journalists take a very short-term view of world affairs. Even the situation during and after World War II is often not fully comprehended. For example, few people remember the way in which the political boundaries of the Ukrainian, Polish and German nation-states of today were redrawn by Churchill “on the back of an envelope” in his discussions with Stalin and Roosevelt at Yalta. Yet millions of people were affected by the complex decisions that ultimately stemmed from the Yalta Conference. Yalta, in turn, cannot be understood without a grasp of what happened between 1550 and 1950! No one can do justice to four hundred and fifty years of world history or even European history in one paper, but in this analysis I will attempt to sketch some major landmarks. That requires a certain amount of theorizing.

## II. Theory:

It is very difficult to be objective about current world problems, but an understanding of the past can help put today’s processes of globalization and the social problem of terrorism in perspective.

Theoretically speaking, a “web approach” based on “the sociological imagination” requires “reflexivity” (Phillips 1999). That is, we cannot fully grasp the inter-disciplinary linkages between such sub-disciplinary research fields as Reformation History and Weberian CHS without attempting to take a certain amount of distance from the problems one encounters in what is sometimes called “normal science” ( Kuhn 1960). At the same time, one ignores the careful use of technical terms in any sub-disciplinary research field at one’s peril.

The theory used here is explicitly a comparative-historical approach to contemporary

questions, utilizing what I take to be a Neo-Weberian Ideal Type Model (ITM) approach. The Theory and the Methodology are closely inter-linked. For example, if we take a “crisp set” approach rather than a “fuzzy set” approach we come up with quite different answers (Ragin 2000). Similarly, a Cartesian epistemology is likely to lead to a much different Methodology than a Peircian epistemology (Peirce 1998). But in this analysis the emphasis is on the less difficult question of Weber’s ITM of the “Means of Coercion”.

### III. Methodology and method:

The Methodology (or, Logic of Method) used here involves such Neo-Weberian Ideal Type Models (ITMs) as “modern capitalism” versus “pariah capitalism” and “modern bureaucracy” versus “pre-capitalist patrimonial-prebendal bureaucracies”. Such ITMs are the basis of much of the work presented by Weber in his largely unfinished magnum opus, Economy and Society. The English translation of all of the German fourth edition of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Weber 1956) by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich in 1968 makes it possible to see the whole in a way that previous translations of portions of Weber’s complex work did not. In the full English translation of Volumes I and II, now easily available in paperback (Weber 1978), all of the previous English translations are subsumed and incorporated. Thus, for example, it is surprising that scholars still cite Parsons’ translation of a portion of Volume I when all of Volume I and Volume II are fully translated and Parsons’ misleading translations of key words have been corrected.

In the excellent preface and introduction by Roth and Wittich (1978: xxix-cx) a host of contextual factors that Parsons does not elucidate are clarified. For example, Part I of Economy and Society (Weber 1978: 1 - 307 ) was written after Part II (Weber 1978: 309 - 1469 ). In the first three hundred pages Weber tightens his arguments on the basis of material he has developed at greater length in more than a thousand pages of previous “draft” material! The terminology in Part II is not entirely consistent with the terminology in Part I. Very few sociologists have struggled to read the complete text utilizing careful hermeneutic principles of textual exegesis. When Weber attempted to present his “casuistry” ( Kategorienlehre ) in lectures at Vienna in 1918 and at Munich in 1919-1920 his “sober” approach was not always appreciated. The difficulty of Weber’s Part II and Part I analysis, with its “casuistic” approach, has not been reduced. As time has gone by the average reader of Weber’s final work is even less prepared for many of his generalizations that the classically educated audiences of 1918-1920. Moreover, the political and military context of 1918-1920 is largely forgotten by all but a handful of scholars.

But the context is that Germany had lost the Great War and the Versailles Treaty had created a system that eventually led to the political and economic realities of the 1920s and 1930s. Those, in turn, helped to contribute to the rise of fascist political parties and the eventual emergence of Hitler as a “charismatic leader”. In 1918-1920 Weber wanted to turn the Versailles Treaty into “a scrap of paper”. For Weber the “rebellion against foreign domination” would have to wait until another day (Roth and Wittich 1978:C- CI footnote 114). He probably could not have guessed that his liberal nationalism would take the ugly form of national socialism. But he fully understood the link between Imperial Germany and the Roman Empire.

Comparative-Historical Sociology (CHS) is only one sub-set of the web approach in

general. The CHS of terror can utilize many different general Methodologies. Here I choose not to rely on Wallerstein's (1979) Methodology. Instead, I will use the Methodology of Neo-Weberian analysis as it applies to CHS (Gerth and Mills 1958, Roth and Wittich 1968, Collins 1986, Turner and Factor 1994, Kalberg 1994). Neo-Weberian research is merely a sub-set of CHS. But it has a great deal of heuristic value for complex Methodological reasons (Bakker 1995, 1999).

One key aspect of the Logic of Method of Neo-Weberian Methodology is the acceptance of an epistemological view of "Ideal" versus "Real" Types and Models. Hence, I will refer to Ideal Type Models (ITMs). In most Marxist and Neo-Marxian academic work there is no clear distinction between Marx's more "Positivistic" Methodology as applied to the Political Economy of the Capitalist Mode of Production and his more "Interpretive" Methodology as applied to English, French, Indian and Chinese history. Wallerstein's Neo-Marxist Methodology tends to be highly Positivistic in its promotion of epistemological "realism" rather than "idealism". But, without arguing the details here, it is possible to point out that the study of processes in historical time cannot easily be regarded as providing a Methodology that will result in research methods and techniques based on a nomothetic, exact science approach.

Those groups which do not have an *ecclesia* or an administrative state apparatus supported by a strong military are often forced to submit. If they do not submit then their activities are labelled terrorism. They fight utilizing techniques of "terrorism" that are often defined by the "legitimate authorities" as quite different from theological terror or state terror. The only logical outcome of the exercise of terrorism by those out of power, especially when they cannot win allegiance through a theology (or other form of ideology), on the one hand, or a "state" (or other form of administrative system), on the other, is to submit to the recognized authorities. Continued terrorism, however, is never the end goal; it is always just a means to an end. The end goal of all terror is to win some form of complete or partial "legitimate authority" (Weber 1968). Indeed, in circumstances where there is no other means and where the only alternative is submission, there will always be forms of terrorism.

The goal of all terrorism is to acquire "legitimate authority" (Weber 1978). It will continue until it has been totally and completely crushed and eradicated in all its aspects or accepted in some way that makes it possible for the adherents to compromise or feel that they have triumphed. Oscillations of state and ideological terror with "terrorism" are intrinsic to many forms of social change through much of human history.

#### IV. Empirical Material:

The empirical materials for this analysis come from selected aspects of the Renaissance, Reformation and early modern capitalist period in European history, particularly in the Low Countries, Saxony and England. Particularly important is the question of why the hero of Holland's Independence, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was executed in 1619 and the King of England and Scotland, Charles I, was executed in 1649. A few aspects of the life of Martin Luther as interpreted by Erikson (2000) are also very instructive.

The "era" studied is the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (1500-1700) and the "area" is certain regions of Western Europe. The dogmas of the [Holy] Roman Catholic Church (HRCC)

and the Protestant reformers and denominations are viewed as one theological element of “terror” (Erikson 2000: 306), here called “ideological terror”. The military and juridical capacities of the Holy Roman [Catholic] Empire (HRCE) and of the emerging nation-states (e.g. the Republic of the Netherlands, Great Britain) are the military and political power element of terror, easily understood as “state terror”

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If it is true that Yalta is more or less forgotten by most ordinary citizens in North America and Europe, particularly those born after 1945-46, it is even more true that hardly anyone remembers why Hitler referred to a “Third Reich”. Hitler believed that the Third Reich would last a long time. It might even have lasted a thousand years! But when the Allies defeated the Axis powers that “dream” was shattered. The Great Powers formed the United Nations and there was no Third Reich. Yet, the German word Reich simply refers to Empire. The Second Reich was the Holy Roman [Catholic] Empire of various “Germanic-Italic” rulers since Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse, Charles the Great in 800) or Otto the Great in 900. It lasted until Napoleon’s “French” army conquered the “German” armies of various German-speaking Electorates, principedoms, dukedoms and “Free Cities”, and the Austro-Hungarians. The last Holy Roman Emperor of the Second Reich was the King of Austro-Hungary, who then became the Emperor of Austro-Hungary in 1809. When Napoleon’s armies were defeated at Waterloo and Napoleon was sent into exile the Congress of Vienna created a system of nation-states in Europe and the Second Reich was not re-established. Hitler’s notion of re-activating the Holy Roman Empire again in Central Europe came close to realization at great cost in human lives and suffering.

But the Second Reich did not really end with the French Empire of Napoleon. In a very important sense the Second Reich had already been dismantled as a result of the Protestant Reformation. The rise of England (and later Great Britain) as a modern nation-state is closely linked to the defeat of the Hapsburg “Spanish” ruler King Philip II by combined French, Netherlandic and English forces, leading to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. In a sense Napoleon’s dreams of conquest were not altogether different from Hitler’s in that both had as their root basis an awareness of a Pan-European empire.

In the Middle Ages that Empire was very real. When the Pope and the Emperor struggled for political power in the Middle Ages they were struggling to be able to control the Second Reich. The Holy Roman Empire was based in many ways on the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, that becomes almost tautological if we express the two terms in a more complete fashion. The Holy Roman [Catholic] Empire fit hand in glove with the [Holy] Roman Catholic Church. Emperor and Pope were two sides of the same coin.

To repeat, the empirical materials for this analysis come from selected aspects of the history of what is commonly called the Renaissance and the Reformation. What is at stake is a CHS understanding of the late feudal and early modern capitalist period in European history, particularly in the Low Countries, Saxony and England. The question of why the hero of

Holland's Independence, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was executed in 1619 serves as a key symbol of the importance of the Means of Coercion for social change. When the King of England and Scotland, Charles I, was executed in 1649 and when King Louis XVI was beheaded in 1789, a similar symbolic process was followed. A few aspects of the life of Martin Luther as interpreted by Erikson (2000) are also very instructive.

#### V. Off With His Head!

Johan van Oldenbarnevelt provides a very interesting historical example of the importance of the Means of Coercion for the exercise of power. There are many reasons why Oldenbarnevelt should not have been executed. He was already old and he did not pose any kind of immediate threat. But there was one major reason why he had to be made an example. The balance of power in the fragile new political unit we call the United Netherlands was threatened. The Stadhouder was the main political ruler. Even though not formally a King he was, nevertheless, attempting to assert certain kingly, royal prerogatives. If the Province of Holland was too strong and if the emphasis on toleration was carried too far then the political unification of the fledgling new nation would easily dissipate. The Means of Coercion had to be used in a dramatic and public manner to make it very clear who was in charge. Anyone who thought that perhaps the theological and ideological dogmas could be dismissed in an off hand manner was shown in a very clear and direct manner that such was not the case!

The disputes between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants can be viewed as strictly a matter of theological hair-splitting. It may seem to students of history today that arguing about such ontological questions as "how many angels can dance on the head of a pin" is the height of folly. But in fact all major theological disputes have had significant implications for political power and legitimate authority. To separate theology from political economy is attractive in some ways, but it requires ignoring historical context and cultural, "spatial" context. Without a full understanding of context there is no such thing as a complete understanding.

In the twenty-first century the acceptance of the findings of natural science has somewhat the same function as the acceptance of theological "science" had in the seventeenth century. In fact, the emergence of "natural philosophy" and Protestant "hermeneutics" went hand in hand. The Protestant universities of the United Provinces of the Northern Netherlands ( Leiden, Franeker, Groningen, Utrecht, Deventer) were first and foremost training schools for future Protestant ministers and theologians. But they always also had a "humanistic" component that provided for at least some degree of the study of "humane letters" (e.g Hebrew, Arabic), "liberal arts" (e.g. philosophy, natural philosophy) and "geometry" (meaning various branches of pure mathematics).

The execution of Kings and other prominent political leaders occurred many times in the sixteenth, seventeenth and later centuries. When the King of England and Scotland, Charles I, was executed in 1649 and when King Louis XVI was beheaded in 1789, the reasons were not altogether dissimilar from the context of Oldenbarnevelt's beheading. In each case a similar symbolic process was followed. The historical necessity of such executions always had a great deal to do with the ownership of the Means of Coercion.

Political leaders who in some manner manage to get in the way cannot be tolerated since

the delicate “legal tender” of legitimate domination is easily lost. If there are those who can oppose with impunity then “the Emperor has no clothes”. But if toleration of dissent has not been regularized within any collectivity then “honor” demands that dissenters be executed in such a way that they will be made an example of.

#### VI. Medieval Roman Catholic Hegemony:

It is very difficult for most of us today to fully grasp the ways in which the Roman Catholic Church of Medieval Europe was a far different institutional structure than the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) of Postmodern Europe. Moreover, in North America the RCC is far more of a “denomination” than a truly hegemonic *ecclesia*. We recognize many churches. Roman Catholics often refer to themselves as “Catholic”, in part for the sake of brevity but also in part because it is assumed that there really is only one “catholic” church in the world. (The Eastern Orthodox Catholic churches are often not viewed as “Catholic” or even “catholic”!) Catholics in North America also often speak of “The Church”, as if there is only one. But the fact is there are many churches and in everyday language it is perfectly acceptable to even speak of the Mormon Church (Church of Latter Day Saints) or the Church of Scientology. (Sociologically speaking these organizations can be considered denominations or even sects.) When John Fitzgerald Kennedy ran for President of the U.S. the fact that he was raised an Irish Catholic was not considered important by most voters. The reason Kennedy could compartmentalize his Catholicism and his Americanism had as much to do with the “denominational” nature of the RCC in North America as it had to do with JFK’s own personality and private beliefs.

In the Middle Ages there was only one Roman Catholic Church in most of the Holy Roman Empire and anyone who did not accept the dogma of the RCC was likely to be excommunicated, especially if their opinion mattered in any political or military way. It is very difficult today to imagine a situation where there is literally only ONE CHURCH. All opinions which differed from the accepted RCC dogma were heretical. Heresies were often tolerated if they did not really pose a threat, but as soon as a heresy seemed to pose a significant threat to the legitimate authority of the King-Emperor or Pope it was quickly snuffed out, often at great cost in human life. The full impact of the Protestant Reformation was not felt until the “second Reformation” symbolized by Calvin’s theology in Geneva and that was not until the 1560s and 1570s. Long after Luther’s ideas were well known and certain pockets of Germanic rulership were “Lutheran” there really was not yet a European-wide Protestant Reformation. Between the fourth and the early sixteenth centuries the influence of the RCC waxed and waned as various political leaders and rulers tried to capture power, but no one could deny the importance of The Church. Only during the seventeenth century is it possible to speak of truly Protestant nation-states in Europe. The diverse political units within the Holy Roman Empire were not nation-states and their allegiance to various forms of Protestantism was problematic enough to make it very difficult to tolerate various forms of religious belief, including open avowal of Catholic ideas. It was only outside of the “Germano-Italian” Holy Roman Empire proper that, in the seventeenth century, a certain degree of tolerance was possible. But the seventeenth century Protestant nation-states were hardly twentieth century “open societies”. The role of Catholics was severely circumscribed in Great Britain until the 1930s, a fact that must be kept in mind when we

speak of

Anti-Semitism. Protestants were often as intolerant of Catholics as they were of Jews and Muslims.

#### IV. Tentative Generalizations:

This brief essay has merely touched upon a host of important ideas related to the Neo-Weberian CHS conceptualization of the Means of Coercion. The notion of "state terror" needs to be placed within the broader sociological understanding of the importance of coercion for the maintenance of all forms of political legitimacy. The delicate balance that constitutes legitimate authority can easily be disrupted. The whole political edifice can fall like a house of cards, as was evident in Germany in 1918-19, after the war. Usually the extent to which any political rulership depends on the ultimate control of coercion and potential use of violent means to obtain its ends is veiled. On a day to day basis the average "middle class" American, Canadian or German does not need to worry about the FBI, RCMP or national *Polizei*. But the fascination with "law and order" and with crime has much to do with the importance of making it clear that transgressions against the state are punished severely.

Studying the sociology of domination and legitimate authority is useful in many ways. For example, it provides an intellectual framework for a deeper and fuller conceptualization of what is meant by "terrorism" today. The term terrorism is not used in an entirely value-neutral and analytical manner. Most political commentators use the word as if it only has one meaning. That meaning is the one pre-determined by the government. There is no reference to terrorism in the U.S. Constitution or the Canadian Constitution. But most journalists quickly adopt the standard way of defining the term. Terrorists are discussed as "them" and not "us". They are the "bad guys" and we are the "good guys". Such common sense language greatly obscures the sociological insights found through the application of Neo-Weberian CHS. There is more than one way to define the concept of "terror", especially if the term is used to mean various forms of violent intimidation and killing.

Even war is often practiced as a kind of terrorization of the enemy. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not important military targets, although there was a small military component. But they were destroyed as a means to an end. That goal was to make the Japanese Imperial leadership aware of the extent to which the American military possessed a "weapon of mass murder". But the end goal was not the complete annihilation of the Japanese population. The use of the atomic bomb was justified as a means to the end. Involved was a calculus of "American lives" versus "Japanese lives". The number of American soldiers who had already died simply to capture Iwo Jima and other islands in the Pacific made it likely that an all-out war to the death on Japanese territory would cost many more American, British, Australian and New Zealand lives, not to mention the British Indian soldiers in Burma and Dutch POWs in the Netherlands East Indies and other places, etc. It was a difficult decision. But Harry Truman apparently did not have any sleepless nights about it. For him the decision was clear.

The same kind of logical process occurs in the mind of anyone who uses the means of coercion. The goal is formulated and then the means to achieve that goal is considered in terms of a rational cost/benefit analysis or some other calculus which may be somewhat less rational (in

the strict sense). The Roman Catholic authorities who practiced torture during the Inquisition may at times have succumbed to human failings such as a sadistic pleasure in suffering, but the continuation of Inquisitorial techniques was part of the prevailing Catholic Worldview. After all, the demise of The Church would mean the downfall of everything that was dear and sacred. Something approaching the same underlying logic probably occurs in many situations where an agent or groups of agents assume that the end justifies the means.

The goal of all terrorism is to acquire "legitimate authority" and at least a degree of political power (Weber 1978). Oscillations of state and ideological "terror" with outsider "terrorism" are intrinsic to many forms of social change through much of human history. There are many parallels with the situation in the seventeenth century and today, but there are also major differences. The death of Oldenbarnevelt was viewed by the members of the decision-making elite in the United Provinces as a necessary act. In a situation of uncertainty it was deemed very important to sacrifice the old man, even though in many ways his effectiveness had already been greatly diminished by his captivity in a period of old age. As long as he was alive he remained a symbol of a different way of organizing society and a different theological dogma. The dogma of the Remonstrants had to be checked so the dogma of the Counter-Remonstrants held sway and the Stadhouder maintained the Means of Coercion. Given that renewed military hostilities soon took place it may be a decision that parallels many other decisions made on the basis of *Realpolitik* in the past. What was ethically abhorrent when considered from the perspective of Oldenbarnevelt and his family was also politically and militarily useful. We will never know if it was truly necessary.

#### V. Cartesian Epistemology versus Peircian Epistemology:

In the epistemology established by Rene Descartes there is a fundamental split between the subject and the object. The subject examines the object as an aspect of phenomenal awareness using sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. This is the heart of the epistemology of the scientific method as it has been thought of since the seventeenth century. The Cartesian-Newtonian approach to epistemology has dominated all scientific thinking in the physical and biological sciences and has also been central to Positivism in social science. Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim thought in terms of Cartesian dualism, as did Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill. All later sociology has been dualistic in terms of the notion of a subjective awareness on the part of a researcher who is "seeing" the phenomenal world.

Weber's notion of an Ideal Type Model (ITM) does not entirely get beyond the dualism in epistemology that is commonly associated with Descartes' cogito, ergo sum. However, the stress that Weber places on the heuristic nature of ITMs does not run counter to a radically different epistemology. Charles Sanders Peirce (1966, 1998) stresses an epistemology of "threeness" rather than "twoness". Rather than think of subject and object it is possible to conceive of subject - sign - object. Moreover, rather than think of one "subject" or "interpreter" it is possible to think of a "community of scientists" or the "Interpretant". No one author's view is totally correct apart from the aspects of the research that simply repeat what all recognized "scientists" or scholars agree to be correct, at least for now. The key to the Peircian system is the "sign". He uses the term as an umbrella term to mean: icons, indexes, and symbols. It is possible to conceive of

Weber's notion of heuristic ITMs as "signs" rather than straight-forward labels for "objects".

Another aspect of the same problem – related ultimately to epistemological concerns – is the very clear elaboration of the importance of the logic of use of "fuzzy sets" for CHS, particularly aspects of quantitative modellings (Ragin 1999). There are at least three benefits to the fuzzy set approach. First, it is possible to get a better sense of the homogeneity of cases. With "crisp sets" it is possible to think in black and white terms. A sub category gets a score of 0 or 1 and then researchers proceed with utilizing the data as if it were measured at the interval or even ratio level. But as Ragin's discussion clearly shows, a nation-state is not necessarily either one thing or another (e.g. democratic or not democratic). That would certainly be the situation in the case of the Netherlands in the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries. Second, a fuzzy set approach is more nuanced with respect to the evaluation of the distribution of outcomes. One way to say that is that in the crisp set approach everything fits neatly into boxes but in the fuzzy set approach the way in which cases may be classified is subject to further investigation. That is true of the ITM approach as well. A specific historical case rarely conforms to an ITM in all details and part of the value of employing ITMs is precisely to be able to visualize and articulate such nuances and slippages. Third, the fuzzy set approach allows for possibilities that extend beyond the crisp set approach to variable analysis. In the case of the study of different kinds of terrorism it is possible to use a crisp set approach and get a limited range of answers; but, a fuzzy set approach will allow for greater flexibility in re-examining the problem with slightly different classifications. This is not the place to go into the details of Ragin's intricately argued 350 page book, but I would like to submit as a suggestion that there is a certain parallel between what Ragin is arguing about fuzzy versus crisp set logic and what Weber was arguing about the usefulness of Ideal Type Models as opposed to either Pure Idiographic or Pure Nomothetic Models.

The case study briefly examined here in terms of Max Weber's ITM of the "Means of Coercion" is merely one example of the complexity of state violence and state terrorism. Similar situations occurred throughout Western Europe and other regions in the seventeenth century. Hundreds of years later the use of violence in order to maintain the Means of Coercion has not diminished. Some political leaders have argued for non-violence (Bakker 1993) but very few nation-states follow the teachings of a Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, Junior, or a Nelson Mandela. The nation-state of South Africa has used the Truth Commissions to solve a problem which otherwise could easily have led to extremes of collective retribution. But that example is relatively rare in human affairs. In the next hundred years the problems of "terror" and "terrorism" are not likely to diminish. Perhaps we can analyze such problems from a Neo-Weberian perspective, keeping in mind the epistemological considerations raised by Peirce and the emphasis on fuzzy set method argued by Ragin. The study of the Mean of Coercion is certainly a worthwhile endeavor for sociologists interested in the CHS approach in general, regardless of whether the specific Methodological and "methodist" points mentioned in this paper are accepted or not.

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