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How are Social-Scientific Concepts Formed?
A Reconstruction of Max Weber's
Theory of Concept Formation*

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Recent interpretations of Weber's theory of concept formation have concluded that it is seriously defective and therefore of questionable use in social science. Oakes and Burger have argued that Weber's ideas depend upon Rickert's epistemology, whose arguments Oakes finds to be invalid; by implication, Weber's theory fails. An attempt is made to reconstruct Weber's theory on the basis of his 1904 essay on objectivity. Pivotal to Weber's theory is his distinction between concept and judgment (hypothesis), where the former is the interpretive means to the formation of explanatory accounts (judgments). His theory includes criteria of abstraction and synthesis in the construction of ideal-type concepts as well as criteria for their evaluation. Weber provides a reasonably coherent, if incomplete, theory of concept formation which does not depend on Rickert's epistemological arguments.

Recent trends in the interpretation of Max Weber's social-scientific writings present us with a nettlesome paradox. Taken as a whole, Weber's work, long accorded "classic" status, continues to rise in the sociological pantheon[1]; on the other hand, several critical studies have found his methodology to be obsolete and flawed or, even worse, untenable.[2] To be sure, Weber's ideas continue to be taken seriously in methodological discourse; indeed, Oakes asserts that "it is not an exaggeration to claim that the philosophy of social science remains a critique of Weber's methodology" (Oakes 1988:5) Yet he concludes that Weber's theory of concept formation—the core of his methodology—rests on an untenable foundation derived from the philosophy of Heinrich Rickert (1988:8–9).[3]

To the extent that Weber's work rests on his methodology of ideal-type concepts, and that this methodology depends, as Oakes argues, on Rickert's flawed philosophy of science, we are left with what could be called the *paradox of a methodologically untenable classic*. Although the primary purpose of this essay is to re-examine the structure of Weber's theory

[1] Kalberg remarks that "Weber's reputation as the seminal sociologist of our time has continued to grow" (1994:1). Although he focuses on Weber's comparative-historical sociology, Kalberg also documents the general "Weber renaissance" (15–19).

[2] Among the most important recent critical studies are: Burger (1976), Outhwaite (1983), Tenbruck (1986), and Oakes (1988). The anthology edited by Wagner and Zipprian (1994), which includes over two dozen recent analyses of Weber's methodology from a variety of standpoints, indicates the present salience of methodological topics in the assessment of Weber's work.

[3] Weber's colleague, who eventually became the chief representative of the southwest or Baden school of neo-Kantianism, Rickert sought to develop logical and epistemological foundations for the methodological autonomy of the historically oriented "cultural sciences" from the natural sciences. Oakes has translated an abridgement of the fifth edition (1929) of Rickert's major work (Rickert [1929] 1986). The first edition of *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* was published in 1902.

of concept formation, we must also determine whether it is possible to disentangle his methodology from the question of the validity of Rickert's philosophy of science.

THE QUESTION OF WEBER'S DEPENDENCE ON RICKERT

The question of Weber's relation to Rickert is not a new one. In emphasizing the connections between Weber and Rickert, Oakes stands within a tradition of interpretation stemming from two studies by von Schelting (1922, 1934), which presented Weber's methodology as a coherent body of ideas framed around Rickert's philosophy of science. Von Schelting argued that Rickert's notion of *value-relevance,* which served as a principle of selection in the construction of concepts in the historical sciences, performed a similar function for Weber's ideal-type concepts. Von Schelting's comprehensive analysis appeared to be supported by Weber's own deferential references to Rickert as well as by Marianne Weber's biographical study of her husband (Marianne Weber [1926] 1988).

Weber himself, as is well known, made a number of favorable references to Rickert's philosophy of cultural science. At the outset of his 1904 "Objectivity" essay, for instance, Weber acknowledged the special importance of Rickert's work, along with that of Windelband and Simmel ([1904] 1949/1973:50/146; the former date and page number refer to the translation). In his earlier essay ([1903] 1975) on Roscher, Weber had sketched Rickert's ideas and in a footnote stated that "it is one of the purposes of this study to try out the usefulness of the ideas of this author [Rickert] for the methodology of our discipline [economics]" (Weber 1975/1973:213 n.9/7 n.1; translation altered). The interpretation of such statements is not made easier by what we know of the biographical context. The friendship between the Webers and the Rickerts may account for some of the expressions of mutual support found in their respective writings. Marianne Weber was particularly enthusiastic about the philosophy of Rickert, who had been her mentor. In the biography Marianne paints a portrait of a harmony of ideas and mutual admiration between the two scholars. Given these personal relations and predispositions, caution is required in interpreting Weber's various favorable comments about Rickert.[4]

The difficulty with accepting at face value Weber's remarks about Rickert is shown by the fact that Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Jaspers, both of whom knew Weber well, expressed skepticism about the depth of Rickert's influence.[5] Thus, although there is no doubt that Rickert wished to convey the impression that Weber was his protégé,[6] and Marianne Weber supported the image of congruence, it seems impossible to decide the question of Weber's dependence on Rickert on the basis of the available biographical and contextual evidence.

Yet attempts to resolve the question by textual analysis and comparison have so far proved indeterminate. Weber certainly seems to have had in mind Rickert's idea of *relevance to values* as he wrote those parts of his "Objectivity" essay which present "cultural

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[4] Much has been made of a remark which Max wrote to Marianne in a 1902 letter from Florence. The remark, which would have especially pleased Marianne, conveyed his reaction to the second volume of Rickert's major epistemological study on concept formation: "I have finished Rickert. It is *very* good" (Marianne Weber [1926] 1988:260; translation altered). This comment can be used to support the view that Weber found at least some of Rickert's ideas congenial; but Weber stops short of acknowledging priority, much less influence, continuing, "in large part I find in it thoughts which I myself have had, even if not in logically finished form" ([1926] 1988:260; translation altered). For use of this remark to support the thesis of Weber's dependence on Rickert, cf. Burger (1976:10) and Oakes (1988:6).

[5] Troeltsch appears to have believed that politeness motivated Weber to refer deferentially to Rickert; Troeltsch discussed Rickert's ideas and their relatively limited impact on Weber in his essay on neo-Kantianism (1919) and in his work on historicism (1922). Jaspers recalls in his autobiography (1977) a confrontation with Rickert just days after Weber's death. According to Jaspers, Rickert claimed Weber as his "pupil," a claim which provoked Jaspers to disparage Rickert's philosophy and its influence (Jaspers 1977:35–40)

[6] Soon after Weber's death Rickert wrote that Weber's methodological works "remain the most splendid result of my efforts to reach enlightenment concerning the logical nature of all history" (Rickert [1929] 1986:9).

significance" as a basis for selecting aspects of reality for investigation in the historical disciplines.[7] The question is whether terminological affinity equals theoretical dependence: Does the fact that Weber adopted some of Rickert's terms and formulations mean that his methodology is to be understood as a derivative of Rickert's philosophy of science? In view of the difficulties of assessing the weight of Rickert's impact on Weber, it is hardly surprising that ever since the pioneering study by von Schelting interpreters can be sorted into two camps: those who agree with von Schelting that there is a significant convergence in the methodological ideas of Weber with the epistemological ideas of Rickert or, even more strongly, argue for the dependence of Weber on Rickert; and those who, like Troeltsch and Jaspers, are skeptical of Rickert's impact or deny its significance.[8]

Although Henrich, whose main theme was the unity and coherence of Weber's methodology, conceded that there was considerable convergence, he insisted that Weber had developed his views independently (1952). Tenbruck (1965, 1959) broke entirely with the tradition begun by von Schelting by arguing that Rickert's influence on Weber's thought was superficial: "Indeed, Weber's thought has, at best, a thin veneer of Rickert's philosophy; and Rickert himself, in spite of his efforts to show Weber's dependence on his philosophy, was forced to admit it eventually" (Tenbruck 1965:88–89). In his essay on the genesis of Weber's methodology (1959) Tenbruck argued that "Rickert's only real contribution to Weber's methodology [was] the tenet of theoretical value-relevance" (1959:629). He concluded with the severe judgment that Weber's methodological thought was a "highly contradictory structure" (Tenbruck 1959:626) and had become obsolete: "There is no doubt that a world separates us from Weber. . . . Max Weber's methodology as a whole has really nothing to say to us" (625).

The tendency to emphasize Rickert's influence was resumed by Burger (1976), who attempted to prove the thesis of a far-reaching convergence of Weber's methodological thought with the epistemology of Rickert. Contrary to Tenbruck, Burger claimed that "Weber believed to have found, in Rickert, an already formulated theory capable of solving the most pressing problems. . . . Tenbruck is wrong . . . in declaring that Weber, when he wrote his essays, was not in possession of a coherent and systematic methodological theory. He was, but this theory was not his own; it was taken over from Heinrich Rickert" (1976:6–7).

Oakes (1988) has pushed the Rickertian interpretation to its virtual limit by claiming that Weber's dependence on Rickert in crucial respects is a matter of logic; that is, Weber's arguments *require* the philosophical presuppositions supplied by Rickert. Concentrating on Weber's 1904 essay on objectivity, the *locus classicus* of debate on Weber's methodology, Oakes constructs an argument with five steps.

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[7] One of Weber's best-known formulations is his characterization of culture: "The concept of culture is a *value-concept*. Empirical reality is for us 'culture' because and insofar as we relate it to value-ideas. It includes those, and only those, elements of reality which become *significant* to us because of this relation" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:76/175; translation altered; emphasis is Weber's). The affinity between Weber's formulation and Rickert's is unmistakable. See, e.g., Rickert's statement: "By 'culture' everyone understands those realities that have an intelligible meaning for us because of their value-relevance. . . . Culture is a *value* concept. . . . The content of [historical] meaning can be interpreted only with reference to values" (Rickert 1986:147). Was Weber merely repeating these propositions of Rickert? This is not possible; the quoted statements of Rickert, among his clearest on the subject, were not to be found in the 1902 edition which Weber used; in fact, Rickert only added them in the third and fourth edition of 1921, the year following Weber's death. One might well ask whether Rickert's formulation owed something to Weber! Each author went on to assert that cultural significance (Weber [1904] 1949:78, 80) or value-relevance (Rickert [1921] 1986:100 ff.) governs concept formation in the sociocultural sciences.

[8] It is beyond the scope of this essay to detail or assess the arguments of all the interpreters who have taken positions on the question of Rickert's influence. Among those who asserted or argued Weber's convergence with, or dependence on, Rickert are Bruun (1972), Burger (1976), Hekman (1983), and Schluchter (1981). Among those who have taken a skeptical view of Rickert's real influence on Weber are Tenbruck (1959, 1965, 1986), Runciman (1972), and, with respect to the crucial notion of value, Turner and Factor (1994).

First, the central problem of Weber's methodology, that of the objectivity of social-scientific knowledge, refers to the relation of concepts to experience, of knowledge to reality. Given Weber's view of reality as infinitely complex, the question is "under what conditions can objects of knowledge in the social sciences be constituted?" (Oakes 1988:8). From the standpoint of the knower, the question is that of the relation between knowledge and cognitive interests, and between concept formation and values. Given the subjective element in the determination of relevant values, Oakes restates the fundamental question: "Under what conditions can subjective values provide the basis for the conceptualization of social phenomena as objects of knowledge?" (1988:9).

Second, not finding the answer in Weber's essay, Oakes (1988:8) turns to Rickert "with a view to discovering whether it provides a satisfactory solution to the main issue of Weber's methodology."

Third, Rickert, Oakes finds, "argues that the objectivity of concept formation depends upon the objectivity of the values in terms of which these concepts are defined" (1988:9).

Fourth, Oakes concludes that "Rickert fails to solve the problem of the objectivity of values. Since the objectivity of concept formation rests on the objectivity of values, this means that he fails to solve the former problem as well" (1988:9).

Fifth, the ineluctable conclusion: "To the extent that Weber's methodology depends upon these elements of Rickert's thought, the critique of Rickert also destroys the basis of Weber's methodology" (Oakes 1988:9).

The import of Oakes's argument is clear. As a body of ideas authorizing ideal-type conceptualization, Weber's methodology is judged to be invalid. If this judgment is taken as correct, then the question must be raised: what is the status of Weber's entire work insofar as it was based on the use of ideal types? If Weber's mode of conceptualization can be justified only by untenable methodological arguments, then the "classic" status of his work based on this methodology would have to be questioned. Also at issue, Weber's work aside, would be the soundness of the methodology and use of ideal types in social-cultural and historical research.

How, then, are we to confront what we have called the *paradox of the methodologically untenable classic*? There would appear to be only a few options. Apart from an immediate acceptance of Oakes's dire judgment, we could: (a) re-examine Weber's methodology with a view to determining its constituent elements, including the purposes, presuppositions, and implications as acknowledged by Weber; (b) compare Weber's methodological ideas and prescriptions to his own research practices as disclosed in his substantive scholarship (e.g., his many ideal types); (c) reconsider the philosophical foundations of Weber's methodology (e.g., a reassessment of "influences" or sources, Rickert among others), including its unacknowledged epistemological presuppositions and implications; and (d) re-examine the validity of the arguments of interpreters (Oakes, Burger, Tenbruck et al.) concerning the foundations, implications, and usefulness of Weber's methodological ideas and practices.[9] Although the pursuit of all these paths of inquiry would be desirable, this essay explores only an aspect of the first of these four avenues. Despite the fact that the terrain of Weber's methodological writings has been searched many times over, we still lack a clear statement of his methodology centered on the use of ideal-type concepts.

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[9] The important studies by Burger (1976) and Oakes (1988) focus on Rickert as Weber's main source and influence. Studies which have considered other influences on Weber's methodology are Albrow (1990), who includes Nietzsche and Goethe as significant points of reference; Eliaeson (1990), who includes Dilthey, Schmoller, and Menger, in addition to Rickert, as significant influences; and Turner and Factor (1994), who emphasize Ihering and the tradition of historical jurisprudence in which Weber was steeped. Outhwaite (1983) acknowledges several influences on Weber.

TOWARD A RECONSTRUCTION OF WEBER'S THEORY OF
CONCEPT FORMATION

The following analysis focuses primarily on Weber's 1904 essay on objectivity (Weber 1949), the site of his main attempt to explicate his methodological ideas, with the aim of eliciting Weber's answers to the question: How are social-scientific concepts formed?[10] This is an attempt to reexamine and, where necessary, to reconstruct the basic outline of Weber's theory of concept formation, while suspending judgment on the question of its philosophical foundations. Only when such a reconstruction has been done can we return to specific claims about the logical dependence of Weber's ideas upon those of Rickert or any one else.

To reflect Weber's emphases, I examine, in turn, his ideas concerning the necessity of methodological reflection on concept formation, differences between the social and the natural sciences, and—our central concern—the nature of concept formation as a process and stage of scholarly inquiry.

Why Is a Theory of Conceptualization Necessary?

If a social science discipline had at its disposal a fixed arsenal of concepts, a kind of permanent "tool box," to which a social scientist could turn each time he or she conducted research, then a theory of conceptualization would be superfluous. That is, if concepts could be taken for granted, along with the relations of concepts to the "reality" which they are supposed to "represent," then a theory of concept formation, as well as the cognitive self-consciousness which such a theory indicates, would be unnecessary. Weber explicitly condemned the view that the goal of the cultural sciences should be "to construct a closed system of concepts, in which reality is synthesized in some sort of *permanently* and *universally* valid classification and from which it can again be deduced" ([1904] 1949/1973:84/184).

Weber gives three reasons, which can be stated as theses, why the conditions of permanence and universality can never be met. The first two have to do with the temporality of sociocultural reality and knowledge. First, the "objects" to be conceptualized are always changing (e.g., "capitalism," "church," "household") and thus require ever new attempts to conceptualize them. Second, the cognitive standpoints from which the changing "reality" is surveyed, being themselves part and parcel of the changing reality, are also always changing. Third, even apart from the changing nature of both the "object" and "subject" of knowledge, the possibilities of conceptualization of any given "slice of reality" at any given moment are manifold, perhaps logically infinite. Whether regarded temporally or structurally, diachronically or synchronically, reality always and everywhere outreaches the potential of the human mind for cognitive mastery.[11]

The lesson Weber draws from these three ontological and epistemological beliefs or theses, which derived from both historicism and neo-Kantianism, is a kind of intellectual humility in the face of the vastness of reality. The social scientist needs to be aware that

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[10] This question appears to be among the most salient of those addressed in the "Objectivity" essay. Weber frames the question in this way: "What is the logical function and structure of the *concepts* which our science, like all others, uses?" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:85/185). Although much of the essay is devoted to justifying the methodology of the historically oriented sciences, Weber gives substantial attention to methodological questions at the level of research practice. This practical interest differentiates his approach from the philosophical level on which Rickert worked.

[11] Weber describes the effects of temporality at the end of his "Objectivity" essay: "Eventually the light will fade. The significance of those problematics that were unreflectively employed becomes dubious. We lose our way in the twilight. The light that illuminates the great cultural problems shifts. When this happens, the sciences also prepare to alter their status and change their conceptual apparatus" ([1904] 1973:214; translated by G. Oakes 1988:37).

any given concept "grasps" only a limited segment or aspect of an object, is only one of many possible versions of conceptualizing the same "slice of reality," and at best grasps its object for only a fleeting moment in the span of cultural history.

Weber appears to have believed that there was a special urgency about these questions in his own generation. Although nineteenth-century positivism had never gained as strong a following in Germany as it had in either France or England, Weber perceived among some of his contemporaries a tendency to believe that the social sciences could attain a set of timeless and universal concepts, which could represent reality isomorphically and exhaustively. Weber was overtly critical of any attempt to import uncritically into the sociocultural sciences the methodology, including the modes of conceptualization,[12] of the natural sciences. Although Weber called this tendency "naturalism," we recognize it as an approximation to "positivism."

Weber understands "naturalism"[13] to include three premises: First, the primary, perhaps sole, function of concepts is to classify phenomena; second, phenomena, once classified, are to be explained in terms of "laws" ("nomological regularities") which relate various "classes" of phenomena; third, the structure of explanation, which consists essentially of the application of laws, is deductive. Although this is possibly a coherent theory of scientific explanation, and one associated with the successful natural sciences, it is, Weber believed, inappropriate to the sociocultural sciences, which, by virtue of their distinctive aims and cognitive interests, orient themselves differently to what he calls "concrete reality." Whereas the natural sciences are interested in "particulars" only as instances of classes of phenomena, the sociocultural sciences are often interested in the particulars as "individuals" possessing features which are unique but significant (Napoleon, the Punic Wars, Calvinism, and the like). Largely on account of this intrinsic interest in particulars, Weber, following Simmel and Rickert, referred to the sociocultural sciences as *Wirklichkeitswissenschaften,* "sciences of concrete reality."[14] However, of the three "naturalistic" theses it was the first that Weber found most pernicious.

The problem with the classificatory view of concepts is not that classification is in itself invalid or has no place in the social sciences. Rather, the cognitive interest which is implicit in classification—namely, the interest in generality as opposed to particularity—often fails to capture what is most significant about a given phenomenon from the standpoint of the cultural sciences. Perhaps worse, however, is the dogmatism which often accompanies the use of classificatory concepts—the illusory belief that a classificatory concept captures the "real" object or those of its qualities which are "essential" in a metaphysical sense. Such a belief is illusory because it fails to recognize that all concepts, including classificatory ones, capture only a very limited aspect of the object or phenomenon. This belief is dogmatic to the extent that it assumes a one-to-one relation between concept and object ("reality"). It implies a forgetting of the fact that a concept is only a mental construct created from the standpoint of particular cognitive interests. Given these limitations, no concept can be regarded as anything more than a very partial, limited, and context-bound representation of any given "phenomenon." The relation between concept and reality is always problematic.[15] A theory of conceptualization is necessary primarily in order to counter the "naturalistic

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[12] Weber calls the belief "that every concept in the cultural sciences should be similar to those in the exact natural sciences" a "naturalistic prejudice" ([1904] 1949/1973:88/188).

[13] In relation to naturalism, Weber refers to "naturalistic monism," the "naturalistic viewpoint," and the "naturalistic prejudice" at several points. Cf. Weber ([1904] 1949/1973:86/186, 88/188, 94/195, 101/203).

[14] "The social science which we wish to pursue is a *science of concrete reality [Wirklichkeitswissenschaft]*" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:72/170).

[15] Weber says that concepts "are pure mental constructs, the relationships of which to the empirical reality of the immediately given is problematical in every individual case" Weber ([1904] 1949/1973:103/205).

prejudice" that concepts correspond to reality and thereby represent their objects accurately and exhaustively.

How Are Social-Scientific Concepts Different from Those of the Natural Sciences?

There are certain general properties and functions of concepts used in all scientific disciplines. For instance, a concept is used in some sense, no matter how limited, to refer to an object, a phenomenon. It is this reference to "reality," this limited grasp or apprehension of some object or range of phenomena, which represents in all disciplines the gateway on the path of scientific investigation leading to knowledge. Concepts, once formed, function as indispensable "instruments" in the service of observation, description, interpretation, and explanation ([1904] 1949/1973:89–112/189–214).

Furthermore, it is a common feature of concepts in all sciences that, as mental constructs, they are formed by an "idealization" of phenomena. Moreover, this idealization is conducted necessarily from some particular standpoint or perspective, with some particular cognitive interest. This can be inferred from Weber's many statements about the "problematic" relation between a concept and its "object." Because of idealization the concept never corresponds to the phenomenal object.[16] Although one can argue that in some sense both idealization and perspective occur in the natural sciences, these factors assume a greater significance in the sociocultural sciences.

Conceptualization in the two realms of science differs, moreover, in fundamental ways which are traceable to differences in the aspects of reality which are the subject of investigation, as well as to differences in the cognitive interests which govern inquiry. The subject matter of the sociocultural sciences differs in two important respects, which require a special approach to conceptualization.

In the first place, the subject matter of the social sciences, in Weber's view, always has a *historical* dimension. Even when, for certain purposes of an investigation, a phenomenon is viewed synchronically, or lifted out of its historical context, it must be remembered that the phenomenon (e.g., "wages," "prices," or "exchange") is not a timeless entity. The historical dimension of the phenomena which are the focus of social-scientific inquiry is never irrelevant; it is, rather, a constitutive feature of the phenomena as objects of social-scientific study.

Second, the subject matter of the social sciences is defined as *culture*, which is to say that, in addition to any specific material attributes, the objects of study carry the aspect of *meaning (Sinn)* and *significance (Bedeutung)*. "Culture," Weber says, "is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which *human beings* confer meaning and significance" ([1904] 1949/1973:81/180).

The methodological implications of the inclusion of meaning are complex. On the one hand, meaning and significance can be attributed by the scientist to the phenomena under study. In fact, such attribution is unavoidable. However, the mere fact of attribution of meaning or significance does not differentiate the cultural from the natural sciences. On the other hand, the factor which is more important as a "demarcation" criterion[17] is the fact that the cultural, unlike the natural, scientist, presupposes that the objects of study already,

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[16] Implicitly Weber works with a distinction between the "conceptual object," on the one hand, and the "phenomenal" or "real" object, on the other. Concept formation results in the forming or "constituting" of an object, which as a *conceptual* object is never to be presumed, according to Weber, to be identical with the putatively real object or phenomenon. "Capitalism," for instance, as a particular concept is a conceptual object that refers to, but is never identical with or exhaustive of, a range of putatively real economic phenomena designated by the concept.

[17] For a detailed analysis of criteria of "demarcation" of the boundaries between the natural and cultural sciences in the thought of both Rickert and Weber, cf. Oakes (1988:27–32, 66–73).

by virtue of their cultural status, carry an inherent or preformed meaning and significance, which may or may not conform to that attributed by the social scientist. Furthermore, the social scientist shares a common cultural status with the objects of study. The fact that "we," both as human beings and as cultural scientists, are *cultural beings,* endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it *meaning* [*Sinn*]" Weber calls the "transcendental presupposition" of cultural science ([1904] 1949/1973:81/180). Thus, "cultural" objects have a level of complexity not found in "natural" objects. These distinctions are not intended by Weber as metaphysical claims. Rather, they are methodological or, as he says, "heuristic"; we treat certain phenomena "as if" they were "cultural" and others "as if" they were "natural," without committing ourselves to any particular metaphysical position.

The historical and cultural nature of the objects of study in the sociocultural sciences introduces some special requirements on the way in which such objects are conceptualized. Beyond all those features which may require conceptualization in the natural sciences, the inherently meaningful nature of cultural objects must be reflected in the concepts of the sociocultural sciences. In other words, sociocultural concepts carry a double burden: Besides meeting all formal criteria of scientific conceptualization, they must carry in their content some reference to the historical and cultural (meaningful) "nature" of the phenomena which in some limited sense, they represent. Anthony Giddens has conceptualized this dual aspect of social-scientific conceptualization as a "double hermeneutic." The phenomena are, so to speak, twice interpreted—once by the participants in the original context, and then by the social scientist (on the notion of a "double hermeneutic," see Giddens 1976:162).

On the basis of the above we can see that in Weber's view the two realms of science, natural and sociocultural, are neither fully continuous, as the positivists ("naturalists") and methodological monists believed, nor wholly discontinuous, as the strict methodological dualists believed. In certain respects scientific inquiry is governed by "universal" norms, rules of thought, inquiry, and exposition. In other respects important differences in cognitive goals or subject matter dictate differential approaches and modes of conceptualization. Thus, Weber's perspective is far more nuanced than the labels often applied to him suggest. Although it is clear from his critique of "naturalism" that he was not a "positivist," neither does the term "antipositivism" do his position justice. Rather, by distancing himself from certain elements of positivist philosophy of science as well as from subjectivist and intuitionist objections to positivism, Weber might more accurately be regarded as the first "postpositivist" (for one interpretation of "postpositivism," cf. Alexander 1982).

How Are Social-Scientific Concepts ("Ideal-Types") Formed?

One of the problems facing any interpreter of the "Objectivity" essay is that Weber expresses his ideas without regard for the construction of a comprehensive theory of concept formation. Therefore, anyone who attempts to "reconstruct" Weber's "theory" must resort to a strategy of idealization to cope with the incompleteness of his arguments. This strategy runs several risks, not the least of which is attributing to his theory a greater coherence than is justified. There is, however, no alternative within a reconstructive interpretation. Whether the risks have been satisfactorily met in what follows is for the reader to decide.

Weber recommends what he calls "ideal types" (*Idealtypen*) as the sort of concepts which are particularly suited to the tasks of the sociocultural sciences and to the criteria discussed above. He presents his ideas concerning ideal types in the 1904 essay on objectivity as a reconstruction of previous research practices rather than as an innovation. Indeed, although he had not discussed ideal types in his published work before 1904, he used a similar term, *Idealbild* (ideal concept/image), as early as 1891 in his habilitation thesis ([1891]

1986:266). The context of his brief discussion in 1891 shows that he was already aware of the role of idealization in the formation of concepts.

Weber makes the construction, uses, and significance of ideal types the major theme of the final third of "Objectivity." The immediate context for his approach to the subject is the nature of abstract economic theory, which is based on an "ideal picture" (*Idealbild*) of events on the commodity market, a model which presupposes conditions of free competition and rational conduct in an exchange economy ([1904] 1949/1973:89–90/190). These conditions are never experienced in their purity. Their ideality, or their "utopian," fictive quality, in no way diminishes their usefulness in economic theory. One could as easily say that their purity and clarity are integral to their usefulness as theoretical elements. By inference, the element of ideality is present in greater or lesser degree in all the sociocultural sciences.

Implicit in Weber's treatment and use of concepts is the notion that, in logical terms, a dual distinction exists between concepts and judgments. First, concepts are *means* in the service of the *end* of hypothesis construction. That Weber saw discrete logical functions of concepts, on the one hand, and of judgments in the form of hypotheses, on the other, is shown by his strong claim about the ideal-type concept: "it *is* no 'hypothesis' but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses" ([1904] 1949/1973:90/190). Second, concepts are *elements* out of which judgments, in the form of hypothetical propositions, are constructed. As such, they can be thought of as the "atoms" out of which "molecular" hypotheses are formed. Thus, Weber conceives the logical structure of scientific knowledge in terms of two elements or "moments": concept and judgment. Figure 1 below shows some of the distinctions between these two moments.

The sharpest distinction is to be found in the fact that a concept makes no predicative claims regarding the object to which it refers (e.g., Bismarck, feudalism). A concept simply identifies, designates, or refers to an object in terms of specific qualities, traits, or attributes.

Figure 1. Weber's Conception of the Logical Structure of Scientific Knowledge

Features	Moment 1 CONCEPT	Moment 2 JUDGMENT
	Moments in the Construction of Knowledge	
Complexity of Structure:	SIMPLE	COMPLEX
Predicative Claims:	NO	YES (as an hypothesis)
Means/End:	MEANS	END
Function:	INTERPRETATION (identifies relevant traits of phenomena)	EXPLANATION (CAUSAL) (claims empirical/historical, factual status)
Criteria:	ADEQUACY (in terms of meaning, significance, use)	VALIDITY (accuracy as a truth claim)
Analogues:		
Logical:	WORD	PROPOSITION
Sociological:	SOCIAL ACTION	SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Note: The terms "simple" and "complex" are used in a relative sense. Thus, a concept may represent a *complex* of elements, just as an object (e.g., Bismarck) has many traits; yet in relation to a judgment, the concept, regardless of its compositional complexity, is only a simple element.

It is not intended to make any claims about the object; even existential claims which, from a logician's point of view, may be implicit in the use of the concept are "bracketed" for the purpose of inquiry—i.e., such claims are not relevant. The hypothesis which may be formed by incorporating one or more concepts, however, is by its very nature a predicative judgment. That is, unlike the concept (e.g., capitalism), the hypothesis serves to make a claim (empirical, historical) about reality which is subject to validation. In Weber's usage, such a claim is usually causal, rather than simply existential.

When we understand the designative, nonpredicative nature of the concept as a moment in a process leading to the formation of a hypothetical judgment, we can see better the meaning of Weber's characterization of ideal-type concepts as a means rather than as an end.[18] For the ideal-type concept is related to the hypothesis as a means to an end. Elsewhere Weber refers to ideal types as a "heuristic means" [*heuristisches Mittel*] (e.g., [1904] 1949/1973:102/203) to refer to their usefulness within the context of scientific inquiry.

The distinction between the nonpredicative concept and the predicative judgment finds a close analogue in the distinction between word and proposition. Indeed, according to one of the more influential logicians of Weber's time, Christoph Sigwart, the proposition is the expression of the judgment, just as the word is the expression of the concept.[19] Given their limited, designative function, words, like concepts, cannot be judged true or false; only the proposition expressing a predicative judgment makes a truth claim. Such distinctions were common currency in Weber's context and could be taken for granted in his circle.

Concept and judgment likewise serve complementary logical functions. It is clear that for Weber the judgment (thesis, hypothesis) is oriented to the cognitive goal of causal explanation, the central goal of every scientific discipline ([1904] 1949/1973:78–79/177–79). The concept, on the other hand, even as it is a means toward the formation of hypotheses, represents a deliberate, constructive *interpretation* of reality. In the hands of its author, the concept interprets phenomena through selection (*Auswahl*) of certain traits which will then constitute the "conceptual object." These traits (whether of Bismarck or capitalism, for example) will be those which, among other things, are judged relevant to the research at hand. Although Weber is explicit about the explanatory function of hypotheses, he is less so about the interpretive function of concepts. The notion of interpretation in this sense was known to him, however, through contemporary writings about hermeneutics, especially those of Dilthey, Simmel, and Gottl. And although in "Objectivity" he does not use the term "interpretation" (*Deutung*) for this logical function of concepts, he repeatedly refers to the operations of selection and abstraction which constitute such interpretation ([1904] 1949/1973:90–91ff.). This appears to justify the inference that, for Weber, the primary proximate function of concepts is interpretation.

The difference in the respective functions of concept and judgment calls for correspondingly different criteria for judging them. For concepts it is primarily a question of *adequacy* in terms of meaning, significance, and use. For judgments it is a question of *validity* (*Geltung*) of the predicative claims. A concept can be judged as more or less useful, apt, or appropriate to grasp the relevant meaning of the phenomena under study. Only a judgment, on the other hand, can be evaluated in terms of the accuracy of its truth claims.[20]

The failure to see Weber's distinction between concept and judgment has misled many

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[18] "The construction of abstract ideal-types recommends itself not as an end [*Ziel*] but as a *means* [*Mittel*]" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:92/193). Weber also characterizes concepts as "means of thought ["*gedankliche Mittel*"] for the intellectual mastery of empirical data" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:106/208).

[19] In *The Judgment, Concept, and Inference,* the first volume of *Logic* ([1873] 1895), Sigwart declares: "The Proposition, in which something is stated about something, is the verbal expression of the Judgment" (25). Later in the same work he speaks of the concept as "an element of the judgment, more especially a predicate" (245).

[20] This interpretation appears consistent with Weber's distinction in the following statement: "In the *method of*

interpreters. Oakes, for example, has claimed that the neo-Kantianism of the Southwest German school includes the belief that conceptualization is equivalent to knowledge:

> For the Southwest German school, knowledge is concept formation. The conditions for the possibility of knowledge of an object are the conditions for forming concepts of that object. An item becomes an object of knowledge when it is brought under concepts, or when concepts are formed that represent the item. Valid concept formation, therefore, constitutes knowledge. (Oakes 1988:49)

Leaving aside the question of whether all the neo-Kantian philosophers believed this extreme view,[21] it is important to note that there is no basis in Weber's writings for a claim that Weber equated conceptualization with knowledge. On the contrary, he distanced himself from this view through his treatment of concept formation as one step among several in the disciplined process of inquiry (see, e.g., Weber [1904] 1949/1973:90/190, on the distinction between ideal types and hypotheses). Clearly, conceptualization for Weber "precedes" other steps in inquiry, including the formulation of hypotheses.

Burger has also failed to distinguish consistently between concept and judgment: "It is an obvious implication of Weber's theory that a concept is logically equivalent to a (set of) judgment(s). For a concept is a particular organization, or formation, of facts, and facts in turn are judgments" (1976:69). Yet neither Burger nor Oakes has cited a single statement of Weber's which claims or implies that concepts are judgments.[22]

What, then, is involved in the formation of an ideal-type concept? First, the formation of a concept is a matter of construction. Weber refers to ideal types as "conceptual constructs" (*Gedankengebilde*) ([1904] 1949/1973:96/197). The construction or formation of the concept (*Begriffsbildung*) is a self-conscious and deliberate "procedure" undertaken by the scientist. All of the stages of concept formation are the work of the theoretical imagination (for which Weber uses the term "*Phantasie*" rather than the more customary term "*Einbildung*"; see [1904] 1949/1973:92/192, 93/194). The constructive nature of ideal-type concepts does not, however, entail arbitrariness or unbridled invention. As we shall see, several factors constrain the constructive process.

Second, the deliberate construction of concepts focuses on the idealization of an object, which consists of two stages or moments: abstraction and synthesis. (See Figure 2.) *Abstraction* refers to the selection (*Auswahl*) (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:91/192) of particular traits of concrete phenomena. Abstraction makes the resulting concept only a very partial "representation" of the object.

Abstraction, in turn, is associated with a deliberate "mental accentuation" (*gedankliche Steigerung*) (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:90/190) of certain traits or elements of reality. Weber

investigation, the guiding 'point of view' is of great importance for the *construction* of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation. In the mode of their *use,* however, the investigator is obviously bound by the norms of our thought just as much here as elsewhere" (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:84/184).

[21] For a contrary view, cf. Burger (1986:15), who claims that, for Rickert, "Only *assertions* can be true or false, and ideas alone do not assert anything. Rickert, therefore, concludes that knowledge consists in asserting something of an idea." Cf. Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* (1915:354), where he says: "Since having ideas is not the same as having knowledge, the contents of consciousness become objects of knowledge only through 'thinking,' i.e., judging [i.e., asserting something of the ideas of those experiences]."

[22] At least Burger tries to make the case on citations of Weber's methodological essays. He quotes Weber's statement from the Roscher essay: A concept is "any thought-construct, no matter how individual, which originates through logical treatment of a concrete multiplicity for the purpose of acquiring *knowledge of that* which is essential" (Weber [1903] 1975/1973:213, n.8/6, n.6). Burger construes this statement as meaning that concepts, for Weber, represent the end of the selective process, leading to this conclusion: "Concepts in this sense *are* what scientists want to know, not *means* to what they want to know. Knowledge consists in having such concepts" (1986:68). This is a strange inference from Weber's statement. Weber's phrase "for the purpose of" once again expresses his view of concepts as means toward knowledge, precisely contrary to Burger's reading.

Figure 2. The Structure of the Process of Ideal-Type Concept Formation

	Process of the Idealization of the Object	
	Moment 1 ABSTRACTION	Moment 2 SYNTHESIS
Action:	SELECTION OF TRAITS ACCENTUATION OF TRAITS	SYNTHESIS OF TRAITS
Criteria:	1. CONFORMITY TO THE OBJECT (including "objective possibility")	1. CONFORMITY TO THE OBJECT (including "objective possibility")
	2. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE	2. UNITY, COHERENCE AS AN OBJECT
	3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE-RELEVANCE (adequacy at the level of meaning)	3. LOGICAL CONSISTENCY
Result:	CONSTRUCTION OF AN "IDEAL TYPE" (an idealized, conceptual object)	

packs most of the important features of ideal-type concept formation into a single dense characterization:

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *conceptual* construct [*Gedankenbild*]. ([1904] 1949/1973:90/190)

Regarding accentuation, two points seem clear. On the one hand, the traits/elements accentuated are not invented; they are "found" in reality ([1904] 1949/1973:90–91/191). Where they are not actually found *together* in concrete reality, they are at least "objectively possible."[23]

On the other hand, the accentuated traits are understood as "characteristic" of the phenomenon in its distinctiveness (*Eigenart* ([1904] 1949/1973:91/192). Both of these features represent real constraints on what might otherwise be an arbitrary exercise in conceptual invention. Weber's immediate example was the question of whether the economic structure of any particular city could (on the basis of evidence) be identified by the ideal-type concept, "city-economy" ([1904] 1949/1973:90/190). Weber apparently expected that the *empirical* (or historical) status of the conceptualized attributes, as well as their significance in identifying *characteristic* features of the phenomena, could become matters of evidential debate.[24] These constraints, normally associated with conceptual realism, and

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[23] Weber's most extensive discussion of the concept of "objective possibility" occurs in the second part of his essay on the "logic of the cultural sciences" ([1906] 1949/1973). However, he mentions it as well in the "Objectivity" essay ([1904] 1949/1973:92/192). Cf. Wagner and Zipprian (1986) for a provocative analysis of the idea of objective possibility in relation to causal explanation.

[24] Normally, however, such questions, especially their philosophical aspects, are bracketed or suspended for the purposes of the research for which the concepts were devised (e.g., causal explanations).

heretofore little noted among Weber's interpreters, discipline the constructivist and nominalist features of his theory of concept formation.

Thus, conformity to the object can be regarded as the first criterion of both moments of idealization of the object: abstraction and synthesis. The remaining criteria are specific to each moment. The process of abstraction is further governed by the criteria of cultural significance and scientific value-relevance. Although these criteria are related, certain distinctions appear to be possible on the basis not only of Weber's discussion but also his use of them in his studies.

The criterion of cultural significance (*Kulturbedeutung*) appears to have a dual reference. First is the role it plays with respect to the selection and formulation of research topics or problems and eventually to the abstractive process of concept formation. In this respect, the criterion of cultural significance appears to operate essentially as a filter or screen in selecting for focus those phenomena or aspects of phenomena which can be regarded as culturally significant within the scholar's own cultural situation. Weber says that "knowledge of *cultural* events is inconceivable except on a basis of the *significance* which the concrete constellations of reality have for us in certain *individual* concrete situations" ([1904] 1949/1973:80/180).

An examination of his works shows that Weber appears to use the criterion of significance also with respect to the cultural situation within which the research phenomenon (i.e., conceptual object) is found. For example, when in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber focuses on the phenomenon of "inner-worldly asceticism," it is not only a question of the relevance of the phenomenon to the cultural situation of Weber and his audience in 1904–05; the phenomenon also was, arguably, highly significant within the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, mainly English, Dutch, and American, cultural context which was the focus of his study. The abstractive moment of the idealization of the conceptual object, inner-worldly asceticism, then, must respect both aspects or "directions" of this criterion (i.e., the "subjective" reference to the scientist's culture and the "objective" reference to the cultural context within which the object of inquiry was found).

As a criterion of abstraction, scientific value-relevance (*Wertbeziehung*) is closely related to the criterion of cultural significance in the first sense: the "subjective" direction, which refers to the situation within which the scientist works. According to Weber, "only a *part* of concrete reality is interesting and *significant* to us, because only it is related to the *cultural values* [*Kulturwertideen*] with which we approach reality" ([1904] 1949/1973:78/178). In a passage which connects cultural significance, value-relevance, and conceptualization, Weber asserts that

> the choice of the object of investigation and the extent or depth to which this investigation attempts to penetrate into the infinite causal web, are determined by the evaluative ideas which dominate the investigator and his age. In the *method* of investigation, the guiding "point of view" is of great importance for the *construction* of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation. ([1904] 1949/1973:84/184)

The role of values through the criterion of value-relevance is subjective, Weber says, in a particular sense. Value-ideas are themselves subjective in the sense that they are culturally and historically relative; in short, they lack any absolute or objective status. Furthermore, their relation to research (the selectivity of cognitive interest in particular phenomena or aspects) is a matter of interpretation, which is likewise variable among individual scientists. Yet the subjectivity of value-relevance is also constrained by the fact that science is practiced within "scientific communities." Thus scientific communication presupposes a certain level of agreement in the determination of value-ideas and their relation to research.

The greater the agreement, the greater the constraints on individual variations or idiosyncratic value-interpretations.[25]

Although there are linkages between Weber's term "cultural significance" and Rickert's term "value-relevance," clearly Weber prefers the former term, judging by its preponderance in "Objectivity." And the difference indicates more than a semantic preference. First, as discussed above, cultural significance, for Weber, refers not only to the scientist's own culture, but to the culture under study. This bidirectional reference is absent in Rickert's notion of "value-relevance," which refers only to the scientist's culture.

Second, although Weber's notion of value-relevance performs a role in his methodology which is formally consistent with Rickert's—that is, in the identification of "relevant" features of objects—their respective notions of values are neither similar nor even compatible. For Weber, the values in terms of which value-relevance is determined are historically variable and culturally relative; they are part of the flux of historical reality.[26] For Rickert, on the other hand, value does not "exist" as aspects of historical or cultural reality; they merely "subsist." Rickert's values are conceived as invariant, timeless, objective, and "valid," yet "nonreal" (Rickert [1902] 1986:141 ff.). Contrary to Weber, Rickert argued that the objectivity of the cultural sciences depended on the objectivity of values (Rickert [1902] 1986:105; Oakes 1988:91–110). The fact that Weber worked with a notion of values which differs in important respects from Rickert's means that the nature and extent of Weber's "dependence" on Rickert with regard to value-relevance has been exaggerated in the secondary literature (cf. especially Burger 1976 and Oakes 1988) and is, despite protracted discussion, still an open question.[27]

As a moment in the formation of concepts, the synthesis of traits has its own specific criteria. These include the unity of the traits as a coherent configuration with reference to the object. Finally, the resulting narrative description must be logically consistent, or at least free from contradiction. Although Weber provides little elaboration of his views of synthesis as opposed to abstraction, he speaks several times of ideal types as syntheses or synthetic constructs (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:96–97/198, 105–106/207–208)

With the synthesis of traits in a unified construct, an "ideal type" is complete. This

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[25] Weber refers to "the naive self-deception of the specialist who is unaware . . . [of] the evaluative ideas [*Wertideen*] with which he unconsciously approaches his subject matter, that he has selected from an absolute infinity a tiny portion with the study of which he *concerns* himself" ([1904] 1949/1973:82/181). Yet from the subjectivity of values and value-interpretation "it obviously does not follow . . . that research in the cultural sciences can only have results which are 'subjective' in the sense that they are *valid* for one person and not for others" ([1904] 1949/1973:84/184). This can be the case only because the impact of the subjectivity of values is limited to the first moment of the logical structure of scientific research, concept formation. Validity arises as a criterion only with the second moment, the formation and testing of the hypothetical judgment. See Figure 2 above.

[26] In explaining the "eternal youth" of the historically oriented social sciences, Weber states that "the eternally onward flowing stream of culture perpetually brings new problems" ([1904] 1949/1973:104/206). He also speaks of "the incessant changefulness of the concrete viewpoints from which empirical reality gets its significance" (111/213). Furthermore, he continues, in spite of our personal *belief* in values which we like to think of as "ultimate" and "valid," "life with its irrational reality and its store of possible meanings is inexhaustible. The *concrete* form in which value-relevance occurs remains perpetually in flux, ever subject to change in the dimly seen future of human culture" (111/213).

[27] The variability of values no more deters Weber from arguing for the "objectivity" of the social sciences than does the fact of difference among possible and actual cognitive interests and scientific standpoints. He simply resorts to an "if . . . then" form of argument. That is, *if* you accept, for example, the specificity of the standpoint of my discipline (e.g., "national economics"), my cognitive interest (e.g., a "genetic" or comparative one), and my ideal-type concepts (e.g., of "rational capitalism"), *then* we can proceed to investigate a specific range of phenomena (e.g., the development of capitalism in Germany in contrast to England) on the basis of certain hypotheses as explanations for differences in economic development in the two cases (e.g., based on the role of differences stemming from religious ideas and practices). The results of the investigation will support or refute the hypotheses, the validity of which does not depend on the "validity of values" (as in Rickert) in terms of which both the research problem and the concepts were chosen. If a hypothesis is not supported, then alternative or counterhypotheses using the *same* (or different) concepts can be tried.

concept represents a cognitive instrument, both an element and a means with which to move to the stage of hypothesis formation and, beyond that, to the process of validation. In this manner, conceptualization plays an essential role at the early stages of scientific inquiry. Formed through the *interpretation* of culturally significant elements identified in relation to specific values, the ideal type is now ready to play its constitutive role in causal *explanation* as an element in the crafting of hypotheses.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to reconstruct some essential aspects of Weber's theory of concept formation from elements found in the 1904 "Objectivity" essay. Contrary to the interpretations of Burger, Oakes, and others, I have argued that Weber theorized and practiced a notion of conceptualization as essentially judgment-free, where judgment is understood in a cognitive, as opposed to an evaluative, sense.[28] That is, in Weber's view the concept neither contains nor entails a thesis. The concept *enables* the process of investigation and exposition; it implies no stance toward the conceptual object which would inappropriately constrict the range of alternative hypotheses. To conceptualize an object at the outset of an investigation is part of the establishment of the research agenda; it announces, so to speak, a focus. Although agenda setting in all its senses can be viewed as value-laden in its implications, an ideal-type concept leaves open both the nature of hypotheses and the potential findings of the investigation.

I do not argue here that logical or methodological procedures are free from either presuppositions or ontological implications. For to form a concept of something presupposes that there *is* something to which the concept refers: for Weber, any particular act of concept formation also presupposes the possession of empirical, historical knowledge about a concrete phenomenon. The point is simply that the status of such knowledge (descriptive or nomological) and philosophical presuppositions is not, for Weber, at issue within the parameters of the research for which given concepts are employed.

At the outset of this essay I called attention to the import of Oakes's conclusion that Weber's arguments concerning objectivity, insofar as they are logically dependent on Rickert's epistemology, are defective. My analysis indicates, to the contrary, that although Weber and Rickert deployed *formally* similar notions of "value-relevance," their respective notions of "value" differed substantially. The formal similarity in their concepts of value-relevance is insufficient to sustain the view that Weber's theory of concept formation logically depends on Rickert's value-theory. Therefore, although Rickert's arguments concerning the objectivity of values may be invalid, as claimed by Oakes, Weber's theory of concept formation cannot be faulted on the same grounds.

In contrast to the richness of Weber's methodological discourse, with its labyrinthine paths of argument and allusion, the analysis presented here is necessarily schematic, and several questions remain to be resolved. First, in view of the fact that it has been possible to cite only a limited range of Weber's statements, the question is whether the analysis here is consistent with what Weber says about these questions in his various methodological writings. One of the perennial sources of confusion in Weber's own discussion of ideal types is that on occasion he appears to use the term in a nonliteral, almost metaphorical sense—as when he recommends that so-called laws, Marxian "laws" or "developmental

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[28] Although it is beyond the scope of the present essay, it is possible to argue on the basis of distinctions developed here that Weber's notion of (cognitive) judgment-free concepts, developed in the middle of the first decade of this century, anticipated and grounded his later ideas about value-freedom in the social sciences.

sequences," are best understood as ideal types (Weber [1904] 1949/1973:100–104/202–206). Yet it seems clear that he is only warning against reification resulting from "naturalistic prejudices."

A second question is whether this reconstruction "fits" Weber's work: Does it help us to understand his substantive research? Does it illuminate the relation of his theory to his practice? Although this complex question requires close study, I believe that Weber's *Economy and Society*, for example, is better understood on the basis of the distinctions developed here. The subtitle, "An Outline of Interpretive Sociology" ("*Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*") has been understood as referring to the interpretation of *meaningful social action* (Weber [1921] 1978). However, there is an important second sense in which we can now see the nature of Weber's project. The *interpretive* function refers not only to the focus on social action, but is also carried out precisely through the *method* of the study, the *typological* approach which dominates the work. Not only social action, but domination, patriarchy, feudalism, prophecy, the city, and all the rest are *interpreted* as meaningful phenomena (culturally significant and value-relevant) through specific ideal types, usually in a logically open-ended typology. They are interpreted from a base of historical and empirical knowledge which grounds and contextualizes the ideal types. Thus, we need to recognize the dual sense of the interpretive side of Weber's project: on the one hand, the attempt to ground the sociocultural universe in *understandable* social action; on the other, the application of an *interpretive method* of typification. It is also clear from the context that the ideal types yielded by interpretation are intended as instruments in the further step of causal explanation.

Finally, several philosophical implications deserve further exploration. One of these concerns the distinction I have drawn between "cultural significance" and "value-relevance": The former, given its bidirectional orientation, is more amenable to the concern of conceptual realism with adequate representation of the "object." Weber's approach to the tensions between realism and nominalism needs to be reconsidered in this light. More important is the question of the complementarity of the methodological functions of interpretation and explanation insofar as these are manifest in the distinction between concepts and hypotheses.

The complementarity of interpretation and explanation may be the key to Weber's methodological position as a postpositivist. Weber used ideal types as interpretive instruments to identify relevant, meaningful aspects of sociocultural phenomena. In so doing, Weber was—to use one of his own favored expressions—a "carrier" of a hermeneutic tradition extending from Vico to Burckhardt to Dilthey. Through his ideal-type methodology he extended the scope of interpretation beyond texts and actions to include social structures and cultural phenomena. On the other hand, while rejecting the nomological approach to explanation, Weber maintained a stolid commitment to the principles of causal explanation as they were generally understood in his day. His position as a postpositivist consists in the development and use of a methodology in which interpretation and explanation are preserved as complementary functions. *Interpretation without explanation is not yet knowledge; but explanation without interpretation is reification.*

If the analysis presented above is correct, Tenbruck could not have been more wrong when he claimed that Weber's methodology no longer has anything to say to us. Weber showed us in practice as well as in theory both sides, the interpretive and the explanatory, of social-scientific work. Of the two sides, Weber's notions of explanation may be relatively dated; on the other hand, his theory and, above all, his practice of interpretation remain the most innovative and challenging aspects of his classic methodological legacy. Interpretation is also the side of our work as social scientists which is responsible for our "eternal youth"; the interpretive work (or is it play?) of conceptualization never reaches completion.

Weber's constant point was to remember the difference and the distance between concept and reality. It was essentially a warning against reification. Who today is willing to say that the need for self-consciousness regarding conceptualization—a self-consciousness implied in both Weber's theory and practice of concept formation—is less urgent in our time than in his?

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