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Max Weber Essay

Max Weber believed that society is formed as a result of rational and goal-oriented actions of human beings. Weber argued that general laws cannot be used to study social reality as a whole but also advocated to rationally analyze human society. He believed that research in social sciences requires specific consideration. The social sciences methodologies should be able to address the question of values, judgments, and empirical knowledge. Webber differentiated between the concept of value freedom and value relevance. The main purpose of the essay is to analyze Weber’s statement, “It cannot be our purpose to replace a one-sided materialist causal interpretation of culture and history with an equally one-sided spiritual one.” It is significant for a one-sided materialist understanding of history and society. The statement was given after the analysis of influence of ascetic rationalism on social and historical development of the people.

Webber assumed that at the beginning of the research, the values of the researchers are depicted by the selection of investigation topics but suggested that, “While making analysis, the social sciences should become value-free.” Objectivity, for Webber, constituted to be the moral commitment for the sake of knowledge. He explained the term objectivity in such a way that the social researchers themselves seem responsible for being conscious of their own perspectives and observations shaped by their ideologies and individual beliefs. He believed that research should be committed to the cause of knowledge and truth. He also stressed that research in social sciences includes the moral choices of the researcher and the sociologists should explain those moral choices. Furthermore, in the presence of infinite kinds of realities, without the formulation of proper presuppositions, chaos of judgment will be created. The consideration of meaningful findings is always a cultural construct for a researcher in social sciences and the development of the judgment about relevant and meaningful accords with cultural values.

Webber stated that “it cannot be our purpose to replace a one-sided materialist causal interpretation of culture and history with an equally one-sided spiritual one.” By this statement, he meant that while criticizing the one-sided materialistic interpretations of culture and history, we cannot advocate a one-sided idealist or positivist approach of spiritual interpretation of the human culture and history. Instead, we need to formulate a method that involves both objective as well as subjective interpretation (Bratton and Denham). Culture helps to change the economic conditions whereas, Marx assumed that it is the economic conditions that are manifested in the culture of human society. The method of historical analysis of Marx where individuals differed in their perception of the process which involved the development of history. He advocated for a theoretical understanding of history which is also for social contextual. He does not support a methodology that aims to make strong predictive claims, rather suggested a more descriptive approach of history and social realities which included objective and subjective interpretations of the phenomenon. He looks for subjective meanings by means of observation of the objective reality. The sociological approach of Weber was existentialist in nature. He stressed the need to understand social reality as it actually exists and considers theories as tools that help us understand the world.

Weber learned that in order to understand the social sciences, the motivations of the people involved in the research process should also be considered. The historical context should be taken under investigation. He also rejected the idea of the formulation of universal laws because according to his thought, free will of the people exists, which prohibit the formulation of any kind of universal social structures (Bratton and Denham). It is important to examine the empirical data selected and interpreted carefully. By this process, the researcher develops out of empirical data, sociologists’ developed concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical processes. Webber did not support the idea of making laws to understand social phenomenon, rather he endorsed the complexity of human society and the possible difficulties for understanding society as a whole. He did not develop a single theoretical model to understand society rather based his concepts and methods more specifically and less generally, applicable to a wide range of social issues.

Max Weber proposed two basic types of understanding which include the subjective as well as the objective nature of the social subject being studied. Firstly, he discussed the direct understanding which according to him can help us to understand the meaning of the social phenomenon by interpretation and observation of the physical and symbolic characteristics. Whereas, the explanatory kind of understanding helps us to interpret the unobservable, non-physical and subjective processes as he emphasized for an explanatory and rational understanding. The first and second types of understanding represent the direct information, which means understand the meanings of social action through symbolic and physical characteristics for example; the facial expressions and movements of the body. These kinds of understandings have evidence which is directly observable and enough for interpretation.

Webber believed that for the interpretation of the subjective actions of an individual, a methodology will be needed which could assess interpretive hypothesis as causes. The methodology of the explanatory kind of understanding is not correct normatively rather it requires the researcher to think profound to the context where the researched and the researcher is positioned. Explanatory understanding is different from direct understanding because it requires many intellectual efforts. Within a context, it aims to comprehend the social actions based on relevant experiences, facts, and involvement of judgment.

The methodology of Weber is concerned about conceptualizing and generation of meaningful selections among the infinite social realities. He developed the concept of “ideal type” which he defined as an emphasis, which is one-sided with intensifying or more aspects of a given event. The abstraction of ideal-types recommends itself not as an end but as a means where ideal types serve three main functions in theorizing social reality. Firstly, they help to conceptualize the thinking patterns of modernity. Secondly, they help in the formulation of the empirical research queries along with with with suggestion possible casual relationships. Finally, the ideal types help social research by underscoring the role of the researcher for the interpretation of social action. Webber believed that social sciences can accomplish the subjective understanding of the individual actions of our subject, which is not achievable in natural sciences. Human society is considered to be too complex to be comprehended because of the complex nature of the human activity. He struggles to change this fact into an advantage for the social sciences.

Analysis of Marx Weber enables to fill the gap between the large social structures and the individual level of social action and interaction. He argued that sociologists can develop an understanding of the actions of individuals and groups, and hence become able to develop an understanding of human history as well. He described this as “Verstehen” or understanding, which meant that the researcher feels empathetic to the individual being studied, developing an understanding of the meaning that individuals attach to various courses of action. Comprehension and formulation of meanings are the basic components of methodological approach of him. For Weber, these are not just intuition or sympathies for the individuals being studied, but a product of systematic and rigorous research.

**Work Cited:**

Bratton, John, and David Denham. “Capitalism and Classical Social Theory, Second Edition.” *SOCIAL THEORY*, p. 441.