

Ideal Type and Verstehen

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Introduction:-

One of the most important concept given by Weber to sociology is the concept of ideal type. This concept occupies a very important place in his methodology. In methodology it is known as 'typological analysis'. Ideal types are concerned with categorising process enabling the scientist to contrast "actual types" with their common ideals. Whereas the former types were limited to historical circumstances, "the ideal type was," explains Larson, "an attempt to deal with the problem of the historical relativity of conceptual types by means of the construction of a limited number of terms which could be used as constant generalizable abstractions.

According to Weber sociology is concerned with social action and social behaviour. Every social action has an ideal. The 'ideal type' of social action is in our mind. For example, we say that a particular man is a materialist. The term materialist is an idea and how can we call a man materialist? How can we apply an idea to a concrete man? It is only because we have conception about the meaning of the term materialist and this conception is an idea of the ideal type. It is because of these theoretical or rational concepts that we are able to judge a man as materialist, idealist or pragmatist. This proves that every man has in him certain ideas about perfect social action or behaviour and this ideal type is subjective, that is, it is in the mind of man. By the ideal type, the sociologist "is able to measure the gap between the ideal-typical objectively possible action and the empirical action, and ascertain the part played by irrationality and chance or by the intrusion of accidental, emotional and other elements."

Concept:-

The concept of ideal type explains organic approach to sociology. As Weber pointed out, "Organic sociology attempts to understand social interaction by using as a point of departure the 'whole' within which the individual acts. His action and behaviour are then interpreted somewhat in the way that a physiologist would treat the role of an organ of the

body in the ‘economy of the organism, that is from the point of view of the survival of the latter...This functional frame of reference is convenient for purposes of practical illustration and for provisional orientation. In these respects it is not only useful but indispensable. But at the same time if its cognitive value is overestimated and its concepts illegitimately ‘reified’, it can be highly dangerous ...in certain circumstances this is the only available way of determining just what process of social action it is important to understand in order to explain a given phenomenon. But this is only the beginning of sociological analysis as here understood.”

Characteristics of Ideal types

The above discussion of the concept of ideal types points out the following three characteristics:

1. Ideal types are subjective. The ideal types are subjective in character. The subjective nature of these types marks them off from the physical laws. The physical events or processes are objective, whereas social laws cannot be objective. This is because these social laws pertain to human actions and behaviour and human behaviour is characterized by subjective motive, intention and goal. Man is a creature of free-will and his actions are not quite predictable on the basis of causal laws. Weber wanted to make sociology fully objective but full objectivity is not possible in human affairs because man's actions are not determined in the manner of physical events. However, with the help of the concept like ideal types it should be possible to achieve a great deal of objectivity.

2. Ideal Types are Emotional.

The ideal types are emotive in content, they pertain to our affections and reside in our imagination. The ideal types are not concrete but abstract in nature. Even the physical laws like Newton's gravitation and motion are also abstract very much like ideal types in this aspect, as concepts like economic, religious, man etc are also abstract and no existing man fully answers to these concepts.

3. The Ideal Types are changeable.

According to Max Weber the ideal types are purely human constructions and therefore subject to the consideration of time and place. These are affected by the current thinking and social atmosphere. Naturally, therefore the ideal types are changeable. They cannot be eternal or permanent in this respect, they are altogether unlike Plato's ideals which are standard forms and extra-human that is they are conserved by human reason and not fabricated by it. On the other hand Max Weber's conception of ideal types is that these are changeable and non-eternal. The ideal types are subject to modification in response to

change in social realities. According to social action scientifically and this the hem reality in themselves.

Kinds of ideal types

According to level of abstraction Weber developed the following three kinds of ideal types “ideal types of historical particulars which refer to specific historical realities such as western city, protestant ethic, or modern capitalism such (b) ideal types which refer to historical and cultural contexts, reality that are observable in a variety of historical and cultural contexts, such bureaucracy or feudalism (c) ideal types that constitute rationalising reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour “all propositions in economic may be said to fall in this category since they are merely ideal typical reconstruction of the ways men would behave if they were pure economic subjects” .

Explaining the nature of Weber's concept of ideal type Francis Abraham and John Henry Morgan have written, the ideal types concept grew out of a creative convenience of two of Weber's other key concepts contrary to what German metaphysicians would have liked it to be a purely analytical concept rather than an ideal classification for the former concept is reached by “abstraction “form a wide range of the phenomena with differing individual characteristics whereas the latter is intended “illuminate what is peculiar to a given cultural phenomenon, thus ideal types provide a milieu of precise language and procedure in the analysis of specific behaviour. It helps in the formulation of theoretical explanation of behaviour. In the end it is fundamentally a model of what an agent would do if he were to act completely rationally according to the criteria of rationality involved in his behaviour's sense

Martindale's' view

An ideal type is simply a mental construct of the theoretically conceivable and the empirically probable. Martindale assumes that a scientific theory is a logically inter-related body of empirical laws. It is the ideal type of theory? It is said that the ideal type has the character of a theoretical mode. But, according to Martindale's requisites for a theory, namely one of a theoretical function on which can be drawn out to produce hypothesis, the ideal types are not theories because they are not logically inter-related bodies of empirical laws.

Mckinney, Walkins and Parsons conceive ideal types as theories. Martindale agrees with Weber, Maclver and Merton that ideal types are not theories but simply mental constructs. Scientific method consists in the systematic processes that institute an empirical proof. There are three general kinds of systematic procedures for instituting a proof

1. Experimental method,
2. Statistical method, and
3. Comparative method.

The “logic of method” is the same in all the three methods. These sub distinctions arise in terms of the degree of precision of the theory and the amount and kind of control possible over the data to which a theory is addressed. The oldest procedure of science is comparison.

Comparison is an act intended to establish an item of empirical knowledge about which one is uncertain. Some ideas guide the comparisons and there is some idea, however crude in the background,

Martindale’s fundamental position taken in his essay is that ideal types are neither experimental mathematical models, nor theories, but devices intended to institute comparisons as precise as the stage of one’s theory of precision of his instruments will allow. Comparative procedure occurs most frequently in new sciences. The evolution of the ideal type in sociology was determined by the attempts to transform comparative method into a more precise procedure. The place occupied by ideal types in current sociological analysis is the testimony to the amount of sociological data still remaining on comparative level.

Thinkers who have made basic use of the concept of ‘social action’ for the analysis of social life have been not only most sympathetic to the use of ideal types but have consciously attempted to improve them.

Ideal types are not stereo-typed averages, or abstract concepts. To quote Martindale, “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 diffused, discrete individual phenomena which are arranged according to these one sided emphasisedview points into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found anywhere in reality.

Verstehen-

Verstehen is the key concept or approach of Weber’s methodology .verstehen is a German word which means understanding ‘ .The verstehen thesis is based on the idea that meaning precedes action in fact ,we cannot act unless we knew the meaning of other acts .This meaning , Weber thought , constitutes a positive basis .To make distinction between the nature and social science. Weber used the term in the context of a theory of social action Weber believed that sociologists had an advantage over Natural scientist. In the

natural sciences, we can only observe uniformities and deduce generalisations about the natural world and the other states of things. By contrast the social sciences are subjectifying, in that they concern themselves with the “ inner states of actors who act on their understanding, (verstehen) of the acts of other and on their interpretation of social environment. Therefore, the advantage resided in the sociologist's ability to understand social phenomena. In this context, Dilthey's philosophical perspective is very much related to Weber's method, Coser stated, Dilthey opposed positivism by constructing the outline of an approach to the data of human culture and human history, which though meant to be scientific, was wholly at variance with the approach of the natural science knowledge of the world of man, Dilthey claimed, could only be attained through an internal process, through experience (erlebau) and understanding (verstehen) rather than through merely external knowledge ...

The natural science (Naturwissenschaften) can do no more than explain (eklaeren) observed events by relating them to natural laws. In the humanistic disciplines the Geisteswissenschaften knowledge is not external but internal. Men are intelligible to us in their uniqueness and individuality.

Through this passage, we can say that Weber's methodological concept verstehen is based on the real experience of the individual in a social situation. Hence, Weberian approach is very much related to the fact that natural scientists understand the natural phenomena from outside the situation while social scientists understand the social phenomena through participation in the situation.

Conclusion:-

German born sociologist and philosopher Max Weber used to introduce himself as a political economist. He opposed with Marx on the idea of historical materialism and defining social system in a new way by combining the factors of economy and religion.

His major contributions to sociology are methodological approach, capitalism, sociology of religion, social stratification and rationality. However, Weber himself was opposed to creation of professorship in sociology. He tries to find out the solution of any problem from the contextual viewpoint. Weber's methodological approach to sociology was directly related to Methodenstreit or the German debate about the use of proper method in the social sciences.

Verstehen, interpretive understanding, subjective meaning and ideal type construction are central to Weber's methodological orientation. From entire analysis, I find that Weber mainly focuses on the way in which social reality can be understood and explained. In this

sense, he tries to see social situation or problem or phenomena on the basis of contextual reality. And hence causal functional relation can be traced out on the basis of concentrating on particular situation. At the same time, he evaluates any social phenomena from the actor's point of view. Weber applied his methodological approach in the analysis of social action, religion and capitalism, bureaucracy, class, status and party and so on. Here, he tried to study meaningful human actions in relation to society through a proper perspective.

Although Max Weber tried to present sociology a scientific look but he has also been subjected to a good deal of criticism. He has been charged of being weak towards Functionalism. In this in text, Weber has been criticized of giving more emphasis on individualistic and subjective understanding of social phenomenon. analysis of relationship between religion and capitalism has been attacked. In this respect, Sorokin has quoted examples of where no progress worth the name was made in the field of but it had miraculous progress in the economic, political.

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