

**Max Weber**

Carol Dixon

SOCL 401-01: Sociological Theory

Dr. Pederson

3/15/24

## Max Weber

Max Weber was a prominent sociologist. Many of his theories are still being used now in the 21st century. To give background about Max Weber's life, he was born in 1865 in Germany. During his lifetime he married Marianne Weber, who was not only his wife but was also a founder of theories and scholastics that Weber published. Just like other theorists, Weber's career was excelling until he hit a rough patch in his life dealing with childhood trauma, which affected his adult life. Weber's mom was very religious in her faith, while his dad was political, and these two different ideologies at home, Weber could see the feud and turmoil both of these things have done in their household, which also influenced his studies and career. Once his father passed away, this put Weber into a deep depression, and since he was not working and publishing due to depression his family began struggling because of the lack of resources coming in. His wife, Marianne, began publishing their works and presenting their research and theoretical ideas to the world. Luckily, Marianne had family members pass, and she was awarded a lot of money from the estate. This gave the Webers a different perspective on how you can be broke one day and rich the next day. Marianne made a big contribution to society, and in past years have not received the credit that she deserves like Max Weber. Marianne's not receiving recognition in sociology classes was primarily because she was an educated woman, and during the late 1800s, neither women nor African Americans were given recognition for their contributions to sociology. Although it is unknown if Weber recognized Marianne for her contributions to the sociology discipline, he recognized W.E.B Dubois for his contributions to race and inequality happening in the world( Hughey & Goss, 2018). After Weber's depression went away, Weber was back to producing scholastics, and publishing which contributed to society and sociology.

Some theories that will be discussed in this paper are ideal types, rationalization, capitalism, and religious ethics and social actions.

Max Weber was very passionate about the design of inequalities in the world, and capitalism happening in the world. He was also curious about different cultures and religions in the world. Due to these curiosities of Weber, he began his research and studies. Through this, he developed the term of social action. Before Weber, sociologists did not emphasize the effects of how their values may have influenced their work and research, and Weber figured that out. He figured out that cultures and values would be present since humans are the study's main subjects. Human actions were being studied during this time to see why certain things happen the way they do and the meaning behind the actions. This means a meaningful way of acting towards something or someone. This does not describe why people act in certain ways, but a term he used, "Verstehen," which is a German term that means understanding the world in a deeper meaning. This explains why people act in certain ways, and how to understand society. He focused more on wanting to understand why people do the things they do. Through this, he was able to conduct research in qualitative works in the sociological field.

The first contribution by Max Weber is the method of the ideal type. This methodology means that people's desires does not exist in the real world, but it is an idea( Allan &Daynes, 2017,p.158). We can measure differences in the surrounding social worlds using this method. In this method, there are two different types, historical and classificatory. The historical ideal type is analyzing the history of what interests them. Classificatory is the way of logically asking questions about things to see if they are true or not. Both of these ideals primarily are used to be a comparison point for the world. Another methodology that Weber uses is a framework that

sociologist uses while conducting qualitative research to ensure non-judgemental tactics while dealing with the correspondents in your research.

Another contribution that Weber provided during his studies was his book on religion and capitalism. He called it the protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism, which explains how the teachings of capitalism is shown through everything in the world. It is shown in different ways in the Christian religion. This is shown through the different concepts of Christianity which Weber used in his research to show these changes in the church. Capitalism is shown through religion by what people decide to buy, actions people do, and changes things that people usually do in the social world. Weber divided it into two groups to help decipher the values of these different religions. The two are known as this-worldly and otherworldly. This worldly is when the amount of wealth became more important than the act of the religion, compared to other-worldly that is what the religious belief in all forms varying from the salvation of the people and the afterlife of the people. An example would be Catholics following in the this-worldly mindset compared to the protestants who were more seen as the other-worldly. Back in the Catholics believed they needed to pay to receive salvation from their priest, unlike the protestants who received salvation from God. Protestants believed that hard workers were seen as good in the eyes of God, which is where the idea of capitalism starts to come into play (Scheler, n.a.). Following Weber analyzed Lutheranism and Calvinism and viewed the similarities and differences in the studies. These had different values from each other and occurred in two different periods. Lutheranism was between the years of 1483 and 1546 when they rejected Catholic ideas and understood that money did not equate to salvation. Later emerging is Calvinism, which the religion's main purpose was to work and honor God throughout your life. This turned into people believing that their salvation was predetermined by God, which in actuality is shown through social status and class. Some people

believed that poor people were poor because “they wanted to be poor,” or because they did not “work hard enough,” which is absurd thinking back to the 1500s-1600’s. Since they were seen as “unfavored by God” because of their class status, people began trying to rationalize everything. This rationalization is the steps you can take to receive salvation because of the works you have done for the Lord. If anything interjected in your works for God, then you must eliminate it to receive salvation. In today’s Christian society, people promote having only Christian friends, so they can help you grow in your works from God rather than pull you away from God.

Weber’s theory of action is another contribution that uses people's actions to give meaning to them. It is easier to understand actions rather than just reflecting on the actions you have completed. There are different typologies of actions that Weber lists to explain why certain actions have different meanings. According to Allan & Daynes(2017), instrumental rational action is the actions in which you make decisions in life. Like when you are trying to see which job might be better because of location, pay, and benefits. The value of rational action is using your values to help you make certain decisions in life. If you were thinking about robbing a bank, but you were taught stealing was wrong you were more likely to act on the thoughts because of the lack of values. Traditional actions are something that you do because you are used to doing it. Like the action of sleeping at night and being awake during the day. Lastly, the affective action is the action where the feelings of the individual's emotions take over in situations. This is like when you have a lot of work due, and instead of doing the work, you cry because you are overwhelmed (pg. 165).

During the time of post-modernity, Weber began thinking realistically about things and how the future would be using his studies and theories. Although things that happened during Weber’s life are different, we still see similarities in his methods and comparisons of studies he

provided to the sociology discipline. For example, Weber talked about ideals and how those are used to be the best form of the social world. This is commonly seen when people compare different country's welfare states to the United States. Specifically, if you compare the social democratic welfare states like Sweden's maternity leave vs the United States maternity leave is completely different (Spakes, 1992). These differences prove Weber's methods of ideals in the social world. Another example of Weber giving sociology a basic framework is whenever we conduct qualitative research, we are focused on the data, but also receptive to the answers that the correspondents provide during the interviews. An example to represent the theory of religion Weber studied is how the protestant words of work hard, reflect on our everyday life while we are in the workforce. Many times when we are asked what our top qualities for employment are, most people say they are "hard-working," or something that matters to build them up in the capitalist world. Ever since the 1500s-1600s, people have been judgemental towards people of lower class statuses and mostly blamed them for being poor. This does not include the social barriers and other disadvantages that people face, placing them into that status. In society, there are many examples of times when people's judgments about things overtake the reality of the situation. The time of the formation of the welfare system was created to help the poor Americans who needed extra assistance to survive. Former president Ronald Reagan was against people of color receiving this assistance and created the term "welfare queen," to describe them (Baekgaard & Moynihan, 2023). This term used to be a stereotype that people on welfare did not want to work, but they wanted to receive handouts and not work for what they had.

Weber was a great scholar who studied a lot of things that related to human cultures and values, which in the end made him create great theories and thoughts that heavily influence society today. All of Weber's works are not discussed in this paper, but this paper includes

important ideologies and ideas of Weber to give a better understanding of how Weber's mind worked. Since he was a theorist and sociologist, he has many great works, which this paper is unable to discuss as a whole, but a few of the theories and methods that Weber used helped increase my understanding of his works. Future careers in sociology will show the clear distinctions in things that Weber studies, and hopefully, there are more extensions to be done to his work to learn more about religion and capitalism, ideal phenomena, and social actions done by humans.

### References

- Allan, K., Daynes, S. (2017). Explanations in classical sociological theory: Seeing the social world. (4th ed.).Sage.
- Baekgaard, M., Herd, P., & Moynihan, D. P. (2023). Of ‘welfare queens’ and ‘poor carinas’: social constructions, deservingness messaging and the mental health of welfare clients. *British Journal of Political Science*, 53(2), 594–612.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342200031X>
- Spakes, P. (1992). National family policy: Sweden versus the United States. *Affilia*, 7(2), 44-60.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/088610999200700204>
- Stark, W. (1964). The Thomist Ethic arid the spirit of capitalism. *Sociological Analysis*, 25(1), 4–19.
- Toteff, C. A.,(2016). Max Weber's sociology of religion. Mohr Siebeck.  
<https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-154430-9>