

## Pages 125-137; 159-175 (Max Weber)

### A Biographical Sketch

- Born in Erfurt, Germany in 1864 as Max Weber Jr.
  - o Oldest of 8 children, but only 6 survived to adulthood
  - o Had serious meningitis when 4 years old → long term anxiety
  - o Wrote 2 historical essays before 14 years old
  - o Loved reading, but paid poor attention in school
- Went to University of Heidelberg for three semesters, then completed year of military service in Strasbourg
  - o Then enrolled in University of Berlin
  - o Lived with parents for next 8 years
- In 1886, began working as full-time legal apprentice
  - o Earned PhD in economic and legal history in 1889.
  - o Took position as lecturer at University of Berlin
- Father abusively treated Weber's mother
  - o Admired mother's devotion to her family; but also admired his father's intellectual achievements.
- Became a lawyer and joined same organizations as his father at University of Heidelberg.
  - o Elected to Reichstag (national legislature); member of National Liberal Party; appointed Chancellor Bismarck to Prussian House of Deputies.
- Sense of moral duty quite similar to that of his mothers
- In 1893 (29 years old), married Marianne Schnitger, a distant cousin
  - o Today, she represents an important feminist, intellectual, and sociologist.
    - Examined feminist issues and the reform of marriage.
    - She wrote a biography of her husband
- In 1894, Weber joined the faculty at Freiburg University as a professor of economics.
- In 1896, accepted position as chair of economics at University of Heidelberg.
- In 1897, suffered from significant breakdown

- o Triggered by guilt Weber experienced after his father's death.
- o 7 weeks before his death, Weber scolded his father for his mistreatment of his mother.
- Continued to experience anxiety and insomnia; started taking opiates to sleep
  - o Anxiety still remained, but still had spurts of intellectual activity, still wrote as an independent scholar
- 1904, went to United States to write *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- Returned to Europe to resume intellectual activity.
  - o Helped establish Heidelberg Academy of Sciences in 1909 and Sociological Society in 1910.
  - o Gave 1<sup>st</sup> university lectures in 19 years at University of Vienna.
- In 1920 (56 years old), died of pneumonia.
  - o Marianne completed several important unfinished manuscripts of Weber after his death.

## **Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas**

### **Science of Sociology**

- **Sociology** = science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects.
  - o Interpretive understanding (Verstehen)
  - o Looked more at the **subjective dimension** of social life – understanding states of minds/motivations that guide behavior of individuals.
- **Social Action** = by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual(s), it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in this course.
  - o Action can be observable or internal to the actor's imagination.
  - o Four types of social action:
    - **Instrumental-Rational Action**

- The efficient pursuit of goals by calculating the advantages/disadvantages.
  - Ex: rehearse job interview
  - **Value-Rational Action**
    - Strategic selection of means that are capable of effectively achieving one's goals.
    - Involves commands/demands that compel individual to follow line of conduct
    - Ex: refraining from cheating on exams
  - **Traditional Action**
    - Behaviors determined by habit/long-standing custom
    - Conduct shaped by already established routines.
    - Ex: national anthem at sporting events, eating turkey on Thanksgiving
  - **Affective Action**
    - Impulsiveness/unchecked emotions
    - Ex: player yelling at referees' call, crying at wedding
- Weber's categories of *social action* = **ideal types**, analytical constructs
- o His focus on sociology as interpretive science based on understanding and his focus on constructing ideal types were relevant to debates in Germany.
  - o **Immanuel Kant** = individuals create meaning and freely choose their course of action, therefore cannot construct universal laws on human behavior.
  - o **Wilhelm Dilthey** = historical studies & social sciences should understand particular events and their relationship to the specific contexts in which they occur.
    - History – interpret subjective meanings actors assign to their conduct.
    - Social sciences look to understand internal states of actors and their relationship to behaviors.
    - \*\*But Weber believed the only different between science and non-science was not subject matter, but how the studies are carried out by methods.