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## PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF WEBER'S THEORY OF SOCIAL ACTION AND MEANING: ALFRED SCHUTZ PERSPECTIVE

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### Introduction

Max Weber's sociological theory remains the explorative vision to study society in the preview of social action and meaning. His provocative theoretical orientation, in fact, challenged the basic approaches of the collective paradigm that existed in his era. For him, interpretative understanding about the social action carried by the individual action provides societal reality that is missed in the various sociological lens consisting of structural and functional ingredients. But his perspective created some social spaces unexamined to deal with the orientation arrived through individual interactive processes. This gap, Alfred Schutz, problematised to extend Weber theoretical understanding more critically. Thus, Schutz began his intellectual scholarship in understanding social action and meaning, profoundly shaping ideas for further enquiries. This paradigm shift from Weber is a more methodological move to examine Weber's study of social action under the domain of subjective and objective meaning. Departing from the old framework of social, philosophical appreciation influenced by Edmund Husserl, Max Weber and Bergson instigated to absorb the Max Weber methodological structure in a serious manner reflected in his lecture delivered in 1918 at Vienna. However, he realised Weber's work rested on tacit, unexamined prepositions, consequently lacking interest in fundamental epistemological problems and not having any direct attitude on his peculiar sociological issues. He utilised Bergson's philosophical tool of consciousness to clarify certain concepts consisting of meaning, action and inter-subjectivity, but dissatisfaction occurred in his analysis; Schutz diverted his attention towards Edmund Husserl, the relevance of phenomenology of consciousness of inner time that produced marvellous work on 'The Phenomenology of the Social World' (1980). He has been labelled as an 'earnest and profound phenomenologist who instigated to develop unfinished project of Weber.

As per the Schutz, German intellectual history often controversy the scientific approach in the sociology discipline, including the quest for meaning in relation to social action. The social scientist perceived social phenomena in the preview of natural phenomena cause to determine physical events. The examination of these two phenomena reveals the sharp contrast in treating the social phenomena. His preoccupied idea is associated with meaning enraged to

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theorize Weber perspective. To resolve the social problem, he emphasised to monitor the principles of understanding and description of facts with ethical neutrality and must be classified the facts in an honest and logical manner (Schutz; 1980: 4). Grounding it as the guiding objective of social research, possibly, become a crucial tool for any scientific study to initiate it. Taking George Simmel's idea of exploring the modes of individual behaviour, Schutz consider it as an useful category to examine the social action of individual (Turner; 2012: 61). Here, it is noted that individual behaviour in the context of social phenomena must be absorbed in both subjective and objective way to perceive the holistic picture of social reality. Therefore, Max Weber's interpretative sociology, for the Alfred Schutz, seemed to be fascinating idea and appreciate several contribution in his contemporary age and think to be an his work as an 'astonishing genius' (Schutz; 1980: 4). It shows how Weber's critical endowment of radical project resonating the notion of an objectivity mind applying its own logic to display interpretative sociology in the sociology stream as a science of human behaviour. The objectification of social reality always arrived through the empiricism but require proper explanation of any societal phenomena. This comprehension, Weber, in fact avoided the drawbacks of crude empiricism and more emphasised on the interpret actions of individual. It amplify that human action are not behaviour but conditioned through qualitative inner element or meaning of human life. It offers impression that Weber carried some prepositions that were not made explicit for further enquiry.

### **Schutz on Weber's Meaningful Understanding and Social Action**

Schutz appreciated weber's marvellous contribution in the field sociology shaped political and moral ideologies critically to liberate social sciences from the criteria of value judgment. Sociology framed to be philosophy of human existences which rejected by weber in perspective that it is peculiar science to study the human behaviour and its impact on society. He has agreement with weber understanding about formation of logical structure of sociological understanding initiating a base of social action and social relationship. As per the concerned of structure, cultural objectification and arena of mind, weber narrow down at the core of individual behaviour. From this, it clarifies that the structure and social world endowed with meaningful interpretation only if the actor accurately attach meaning to his/her action and feelings. Weber often emphasised on social science study rely on the individual social behaviour in regard to subjective meaning that could be found in the intention of behaviour. In this context, the objective of interpretation of individual action and how the actor attaches the meaning in social world consider to be social phenomena. To achieve the purpose of objectification, the behaviour of actor or statistics of actor's behaviour is not enough but required specific method to formulate certain theoretical framework contemplate as 'Ideal types' and must be aim of sociological philosophy. Thus, to study the intelligible intentional meaning existed in structure of social world, it is imperative

to debunk the subjective intended meaning of human action within the sphere of ideal types which often formulated by the individual prior to his/her action.

### **Weber's Concept of Meaningful Action**

The defining approach of sociology to catch the interpretative understanding of social action primary based to comprehend the social world. Here, as per the Schutz, the conceptualising meaningful action of Weber in the context of meaning attached by the individual while carrying his action, in fact proceeded by absorbing the account of others. Here, Weber perceived the sociology as a science of interpretative understanding of social action that provides the causal explanation of its course and consequences (Bauman; 1978: 70). The discussion on social action related to individual subjectivity in the form of meaning to his behaviour be it internal or external agreement. It must be noted that social action of individual proceeds with subjective meaning of the behaviour of others that decide the course of orientation. This perspective of Weber, Schutz initiated his critique in the milieu of individual meaningful action. For him, individual action becomes meaningful only when person acts. In this regard, it is tough to explore the social reference meaning of individual action; instead it could locate within the sphere of actor subjective understanding. The action in any form directed towards the object exists in the meaningful form like tearing paper or turning the chair in other direction. Schutz find problematic in Weber's concept of meaning only when it extended to the social sphere. On this background, Schutz begin his enquiry with following questions on the Weber's concept of interpretative understanding.

The first question about the Weber's definition of social action that is subjective meaning of individual actually based on the behaviour of another human being but Schutz scrutinize the meaning at the different level of human consciousness. For him, meaning occurred within the individual without any social involvement and other one, it form at enter into social relationship. The pertinent question which meaning actor attach to his action? Weber displayed about the action oriented towards the others but Schutz endeavour to explore the meaning of this aspect. On other side, the individual engaged in social action beyond the experiences of other. The question is in what manner other self provide something meaningful to itself and other is an anonymous like economy for instance or any personalised entity like leader?. The question is what manner the individual ego understand the behaviour of other in general and in terms of the others own subjective meaning? The structure of meaning, as involvement of individual' comprehend by the social actor. Thus, how does one explain in a sociological interpretative manner and how could locate the difference between them? This line of action emerged in the Schutz perspective from the critique of Weber in the preview of social action and meaning.

### **Realms of Schutz's Critic on Weber**

Schutz critic revolves around the source of meaning associated to social action of individual. Here the Schutz depart from Weber in the realm of meaning and stress the philosophical question that actor attaches the meaning, as per the Weber' but unable to conceptualise what attaching meant to it even if one distinguished between action and behaviour of individual. Further enquiry, he proposed the Weber whether actions made by individual enable to separate progress and complete act of individual or really Weber able to differentiate the meaning of producer of culturally object and meaning produce by Individual. This issue of understanding the meaning, Schutz provided the discourse on the issue of subjective and objective meaning. In other words, the social action could not be completely picturize without taking into consideration these two meaning. This interpretation of meaning rooted into the self- interpretation and other interpretations. In fact, the ambiguities rested on one's own action and action of others, individual own experiences and some one's else, individual self-understanding and individual understanding of others which the Weber did not address. The Schutz stated that the Weber's formulation of meaning under the domain of enquiry in regard to constituting or modification of meaning in the social world or through the non-participating observe. This fundamental and unique question of social action remains under scrutiny existed in self and other self. While examine the social action and meaning, Schutz realised that Weber took the meaningful phenomena of social world as the matter of inter- subjectivity agreement in the interactive or end process of two individuals. Hence, to absorb clarity, Schutz utilised the alter ego, self-interpretation versus other's interpretation and inter-subjectivity in the realm of social science to understand the behaviour and action of individual. Taking the mental approach of human mind, it is found that person spontaneous and routines activities provide the meaning through his/her interpretation of his life world and its various aspects. The life world in other sense often made of natural attitude where the human beings perceive the things in granted form. In the social world, the individual experiences become meaningful act of lifeworld only when it is natural in nature and within the same world, the individual endeavour to interpret meaning of action of other in natural and valid form. Although, Weber constantly question how the meaningful behaviour should be distinguish from the meaningless behaviour.

### **Action and Behaviour**

The above repeated statement of Weber examines through the types of action and realised the fluctuating boundaries that assist to distinguish from the meaningful behaviour. The pure affectual behaviour orient towards the particular line of action but reacted formulated into busted state indicate realise of conscious emotional tension, would not be consider to be rational action. It

signify affectual action share with selected values of action arrive at the rational state of action. The weber analysed meaning of behaviour in-relation to discrete goal or end of individual action. This classifies the behaviour in different stream of stages in which meaning of action is indistinguishable to the motives of action. But Schutz disagree on the issues that meaning of action arrived from the motives of the individual and perceive it as major weakness of weber understanding. The Schutz categorically explained the emergence of meaning if the individual's flux of experience separated from the individual itself and observe minutely to absorb meaning in it. Adding to this, it is very much clarifies that not only social action have meaning but every action existed in the social relationship underlie meaning whether it is traditional action or affectual action. The placement of this pertinent question provides the space to differentiate meaning of action and meaning of behaviour. The other exploration of Schutz reveals that weber missed orientation of other self in proportionate to given meaningful by them. Further elaboration, he found various gaps in weber's definition through some conceptualizations like Alter ego (Schutz; 1980: 15). Schutz, hypothetically, speaking about investigation of intended meaning carried by individual must be understood the subjective meaning of another person's behaviour might not be identical to the meaning perceived external behaviour for an observer (Schutz; 1980:20). Deep in stream of consciousness, Schutz stated that meaning of external event for the observer need not be identical with individual who produce meaning in his/her mind. Therefore, the subjective meaning on the basis of individual expression is not enough nor able to express why the particular action done. For example, the person was angry and burst out his anger indicate that he is angry but it has possibility that individual maybe pretending to express his anger emotion. Thus, indication could not be criteria to comprehend subjective meaning of Individual. For instance, physically bodily changes could be interpreted as subject matter of consciousness but hardly provide any indication about the intention in the preview of action and meaning. It means that subjective meaning occur based on surface attitude exhibited by other person who directly involved in attitudinal process. Such ambiguities proposed the questions like why other person is exhibit his behaviour? Whether he/she really wants to provoke through physical behaviour in the form of threat?. These might encourage the researcher to investigate how the subjective meaning revealed to the observer and made it realise that the intuition unable to contributed to reveal the subjective meaning of individual. This whole ambit of interpretation of meaning explain by individual himself and others develop the dichotomy position in understanding real picture of individual social action.

### **Dichotomy Between Self-interpretation and Interpretation of Other**

While observing the social action, weber followed the monolithic approach to comprehend the meaning of social action but not focused on the interpretation of other in the arena of individual

performing the action. For further understanding, it exposed to certain meaning structure involved into the interactive process and become the object of observation inherently intelligible to open up for further scientific interpretation. This meaning structure actually associated with specific elements or events. The meaning structure assists to develop the process of interpretation of behaviour of other people or individual and self-interpretation of individual itself. Rather resolving the issues of existed in the interpretation, it often covered with different layers of ideas perceived in the continuous process and end process. It implies that meaning attached with action of actor or individual may not be same after epoch. While examining the complicity of meaning, Alfred Schutz stated that grasping the meaning is question of time rather summing around the physical one which is divisible and measurable but real problem still lies in the historical time (Schutz; 1980: 12). It is imperative to understand the duration of time in which individual gain his own experiences that constituted for him as lives experiences. This experiences, in the concrete, have the deepest stratum of self-consciousness and also accessible to reflection for analysis become the source of the phenomenology of meaning and understanding. In this regard, Schutz provided the critical framework of weber's concept of subjective and objective meaning.

### **Critique of Weber's Concept of Subjective and Objective Meaning**

Alfred Schutz critically explains his position in regard to weber understanding of subjectivity and objectivity of meaning. He further theoretically elaborate the example by posing, if 'M1' is the meaning to his/her action given by the actor X, 'M2' is the meaning provided by the an observer F and 'M3' is the meaning display by the social scientist S who is observing the action of actor. For the weber, meaning 'M2' and 'M3' given by F and S to the action of X basically is the objective meaning. In period of time, 'M1' is subjective or intended meaning for the action provided by the actor, in fact, is only the subjective meaning for the himself or herself. But Schutz argues here 'M2' and 'M3' may not be referred to be objective meaning as preceded by the weber. The rationality behind is objective meaning attributed to ideal objectivities consist of sign and symbols that motivated to conceptualise inter-subjective understanding if possible. This above discourse open the new paradigm suggested by Schutz in association of understanding the action in the landscape of subjectivity and objectivity of meaning. Thus, the Susan Hekman also approved the argument provided by the Schutz. It made clear that neither of these conception identical to positivist definition of the subjective as 'private' and hence, is accessible to observation. The Schutz, endeavour to pull the attention that both these concept are 'inter-subjective' consist of shared meaning of the social realm. The objectivity in this, departs from positivist conception and bracketing the experiences assist to objectify at some degree in the realm of 'Subjective' meaning. Thus, it leads to assert the social scientist that studying the meaningful action in the social world is nothing but an objectification of subjective meaning

(Hekman; 1983: 69). Here Schutz codified the subjective concept of social actor and objective concepts of social scientist arrive in the field of 'inter-subjectivity'. Thus, the Hekman stated that such type of conceptualisation not only debunk the positivist distinction between objectivity and subjectivity but also defines the activities of social sciences as inherently subjective in nature (Hekman; 1983: 77).

### **Two Types of Understanding**

Introspecting the Weberian observation and motivational of understanding, Alfred Schutz claims, the viewpoint placed by Weber is limited and unable provide perfect meaning while analysing the social action. In the Weber's perspective, the meaning could be perceived at the two level of understanding. Firstly, in the direct observation, for example  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , the meaning could observe and verify directly to understand it. This case is derive directly from the rational understanding of ideas but another aspect like facial expression, exclamation or irrational movements are the part of direct observational understanding of irrational emotional reaction. Such similar observation, one could identify woodcutter or somebody who reaches for the knob to shut a door or who aims to gun at animal. This is rational observational understanding of action. Secondly, explanatory understanding included not only observation of individual but motive become prominent behind its social action (Weber; 1978: 8). Without it, the intelligible act of individual that resided into the rational understanding of motivation provides the more inclusive context of meaning in it. The understanding of chopping of wood or aiming of gun with motives in addition to direct observation if we know that the wood chopper is working for wage or chopping a supply of fire wood for his own use or possibly is doing it for recreation. There is possibility, as per the Schutz, that he might also be 'working off a fit of rage an irrational case. In all the above case the particular act has been placed in an understandable sequence of motivation and such away Weber conceptualizes motivational understanding.

### **Critique on 'Observation' and 'Motivation'**

The eminent two types of understanding placed by Weber, is oriented towards the meaning examination. Firstly, The direct observation of action referred as the observational understanding and the term explanatory understanding proceed to grasp the meaning context of action attached to individual. Weber's views prescribe subjective meaning could be understood in observational criteria that arrive through the direct observation of event or action. Secondly, interpretation to achieve meaning should be considered into the broader framework to catch the motivational or clarifying understanding of social action. The difficulty resides in these circumstances, Schutz pinpointed that observational understanding could not completely understand the subjective meaning, just merely direct observation. It reflects that direct observation is not enough to achieve the 'intended meaning of the actor. For instances, the Weber

statement of  $2 \times 2 = 4$  could be recognized through the direct observation, unless we are aware about the epistemic attitude of the actor when he/she is giving the proposition of such calculation and nor able to know how the certain individuals actually perceiving this proposition. Here, the context is imperative to understand the value of the statement in the context of belief or casual given it. Thus, Schutz completely rejected the mere observation of someone's behaviour or action could not reveal the subjective meaning because the motive of individual action is complex state to comprehend the meaning. It seems that actor or observer himself have an adequate ground for the conduct in question. Here the Weber unable to acknowledge the difference between the actors understanding of his/her motives and observer notion related to actor's motives. To catch the meaning of social action in the context of explanatory understanding needs the certain amount of knowledge of the actor's past and future. Schutz took two examples of Weber; one is mathematical equation and other one is woodcutting. In this regard, the knowledge of actor's past is essential to grasp the action of context meaning which applied to knowledge of future. Finally, conditioning present by past experiences and its orientation of present action to future are different set of motives failed the Weber to differentiate. The Andrew stated that Schutz call 'determination by past' in the context of 'because motive' with reference to the past and indicated 'in order motives' to the future (Andrew; 1975: 86). Even if the observer is aware of the past and future motives, Schutz posed the question whether the motive of an action arrived at by the observer by delineating its meaning context is identical to the intended meaning by the actor. In short, the critical question is whether motive (observers understanding of action) and meaning (the actors' intention) are identical. (ibid). The answer remains no because, unlike for the observer, the meaning of an action is self-evident for the actor. This perception Schutz explained in the form of 'In-order-motives' and 'Because-motives'. A sociologist tries to simplify motives in terms of solitary action. For example, in the initial performance of an action, only the actor knows his in-order-to-motives. The actor is simultaneously unaware of this because motive influences the ongoing action.

On the other hand, the observer may know because of motive even during the performance of an action, although motive refers to the past. As the action is completed, the actor may reflect on the past act from an epistemological position similar to that of an observer. In this way, the actor knows his past act objectively, which can be known as his 'because of motive'. 'Because of motive', these are not known by the actor as directly or immediately as he knows his in-order-motive.

Similarly, when action is in progress or going on, the observer does not know the in-order motives of the actor. He learns of the in-order-to motive from the actor who knows it directly, or he can attribute such a motive to the actor. Even if the observer knows the in-order-to motive during or subsequently to the action, he knows it only in its future perfect tense, i.e., the past, with an understanding of the action itself. This means that the actor's act has past influence (motive)



to which acting only his in-order-to motive constitutes the project, which is an essential action component. After the action is completed, the actor may reflect on the past, which influences the actor indirectly, i.e., through the project that he intends to do and only after he chooses a project. He further says that the actor knows his action; therefore, it is straightforward to start his action along with motive but difficult for an observer as he lacks in that and has started with the objective meaning of the act as if it were without questioning the intended meaning of the actor. Therefore, the motivational understanding is not directly fixed to the world of directly experienced social reality (Schutz; 1980: 30). The knowledge by the observer does not take its starting point as an ongoing action; instead, its object is the accomplished act. This may be considered something completed in the past or whose future completed form is now being envisaged. According to Schutz, it should be noted that motivational understanding begins with a basis of an established objective meaning as merely an indication of the existence of a subjective meaning (Schutz; 1980: 31). The interpretive understanding, which is definitive of interpretative sociology, cannot be observational. It is a scientific method of establishing subjective meaning, which is motivational understanding where such understanding proper to everyday life is observational.

## **Conclusion**

Schutz's theory defines the concepts of social scientists as determined by both the inter-subjective understanding of the everyday world and the inter-subjective understanding of the scientific community. They must conform to both requirements to qualify as appropriate social scientific concepts. Schutz's position on interpretation is apparent. For him, interpretation by sociologists is superior to that of social actors only in that it is done more consciously and methodically. Although Schutz made a fabulous contribution in conceptualising the notion of inter-subjectivity, he could have explained how inter-subjectivity mediates between the scientific community and social actors. Here, inter-subjectivity between the scientist and social actors seems ambiguous and does not draw any relationship between this two domain in elaborating the question of meaning. Critics of Schutz's approach have noted that although he accurately conceptualises the difference between the concepts, he fails to supply examples of how social scientific analysis, predicated on this understanding, would proceed. This criticism is undeniably correct. So, to complete the argument for Schutz's knowledge of this relationship, an example of this kind of analysis should be supplied, although Schutz does not offer examples.

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